

Mental Health and Youth Work Toolkit



ECYC

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Introduction

The Project

This manual is the result of the international training *Mental Health and Youth Work*, organized in Valencia in September 2025 as part of ECYC's broader effort to strengthen the well-being and participation of youth workers across Europe.

Funded through the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, the training gathered youth workers, educators, mental health advocates, and young leaders from 13 different countries to explore a critical question:

"How can we sustain mental health and motivation in youth work, in times when burnout and precarity are increasingly the norm?"

The project combined participatory methods, reflective tools, peer learning, and embodied practices, inviting participants to explore their own role in fostering resilience, boundaries, and sustainability, both for themselves and the young people they support.

The Organisation: ECYC

The **European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC)** represents nearly 1.2 million young people, youth workers, and volunteers across Europe.

For over 45 years, ECYC has been committed to:

- Strengthening open youth work
- Empowering youth clubs as spaces of participation and belonging
- Supporting youth workers with tools, policies, and training grounded in dialogue and accessibility

The Trainers: Matteo & Ceyda

The training was designed and facilitated by:

Ceyda Özdemir Ertan (Turkey), Freelance trainer, facilitator, Gestalt coach and Lewis Deep Democracy Instructor with youth work and project management background. By blending frameworks like Lewis Deep Democracy and Nonviolent Communication with experiential learning design, her work is driven on the core principle that fostering authentic participation and inclusive processes is fundamental to building healthier teams and organizations, with a profound positive impact on collective mental well-being.

Matteo Sisto (Italy) Youth worker, facilitator, and programme coordinator at ECYC. Passionate about participatory democracy, mental health, and designing learning environments that feel like community, not classrooms.

The Manual - What Is This For?

This manual is a **practical companion** for youth workers, trainers, and anyone who designs or hosts spaces for young people, especially in contexts where emotional well-being, resilience, and participation must go hand-in-hand.

It captures the **essence of what we practiced and learned in Valencia**: not just the content of sessions, but the spirit of collaboration, openness, and care that made the experience meaningful. It's not here to tell you what to do, it's here to give you inspiration and tools for doing it your own way.

You'll find:

- Clear explanations of **core facilitation approaches**
- **Session outlines** you can replicate or adapt, with objectives, flow, and materials
- **Participant-led practices** from Ukraine, Belgium, Portugal, and beyond
- *Mindful prompts, energisers, and reflection tools* for group care and inner grounding
- Ideas and insights on integrating **mental health awareness into youth work**, without clinical jargon

This is a hands-on, pick-up-and-try manual.

Whether you're hosting a local workshop, planning a national project, or offering emotional support informally in your youth group, may you find something here to **ground your practice, spark your creativity, or remind you you're not alone** in this work.



Approaches to Facilitation and Participation

Working with young people today means working in complex environments: they're navigating burnout, activism fatigue, emotional overload, precarious futures, and rapidly changing realities. As youth workers, facilitators, and educators, we often need something beyond the classic "workshop format", we need **spaces that are alive, participatory, and emotionally intelligent**.

This chapter presents the main **participatory and transformative approaches** we used during our training in Valencia. These are not abstract theories. They are **living practices**, used globally in movements, organisations, and communities where holding meaningful conversations is essential for shifting culture, improving mental health, and sparking agency.

Why approaches like the Art of Hosting, Liberating Structures, Non-Violent Communication, or Lewis Deep Democracy?

Because they:

- Decentralize power and foster real participation
- Design spaces of trust and safety, essential for psychological resilience
- Nurture collective intelligence, shifting focus from "fixing problems" to "hearing truths"
- Remind us that holding space is a form of care, and a political act

These frameworks help us shift from "mobilising" young people to **working with them as equal partners**, enabling co-creation, emotional courage, and community leadership.

Each section in this chapter offers:

- A short explanation of the approach and its core philosophy
- A list of common tools or practices
- Tips on when it can support your work
- Links or resources for going deeper

Tip: You don't need to be an expert to start experimenting. These approaches grow through practice, reflection, and relationships, just like youth work itself.

The Art of Hosting: Facilitating Conversations That Matter

The Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations That Matter (AoH) is not a single technique, it's a practice of participatory leadership rooted in living systems thinking. It invites us to move beyond "delivering workshops" and into **hosting spaces where collective intelligence can emerge**.



AoH shows up when we believe:

- People support what they help create
- Leadership is a practice, not a role
- Every voice matters, and has something to contribute

Instead of asking, “How do I get this group to do what’s expected?”, AoH invites a deeper question: **“How do I create the best conditions for this group to explore what’s possible together?”**

WHY WE USED IT IN THIS TRAINING

We brought the Art of Hosting into our training in Valencia because we wanted participants to feel that:

- Their voice and experience truly mattered
- They were co-creators of the learning process
- What they explored together could ripple into their own youth work
- With AoH, people weren’t “attending a training” , they were building it, moment by moment

CORE ELEMENTS OF THE AOH APPROACH

Grounded in Living Systems Theory AoH views organisations and communities as interconnected, adaptive systems, not machines to be controlled. It works especially well in times of complexity, change, and uncertainty.

Meaningful Conversations as Strategy Conversations are not just a step in a programme, they are the core practice of leadership and change.

Harvesting for Wise Action AoH doesn’t stop at dialogue. It emphasises harvesting, capturing and making sense of insights so learning becomes action, not just talk.

A FEW AOH PRACTICES YOU MIGHT RECOGNIZE

These aren't just "methods", they're structured invitations for groups to step into deeper reflection, creativity, and shared ownership. Here are some that we used or referenced during the training:

Circle Practice An ancient, simple form of dialogue where everyone gathers in a circle and speaks one at a time, often with the help of a talking piece. It creates an atmosphere of equality, listening, and mutual respect, everyone sees and is seen. Perfect for check-ins, emotional processing, and grounding the group's energy.

World Café A conversational process organised into rounds of small-group discussions. Participants rotate tables, cross-pollinate ideas, and contribute to a growing shared understanding. It helps generate collective insights across different perspectives and identities, ideal for policy work, values exploration, and big-picture thinking in youth work settings.

Open Space Technology A self-organising process where participants create their own agenda around a central question. People move where they feel they can learn or contribute most. It shifts ownership to participants. Great when you want groups (especially young people) to lead the conversation and take charge of what matters to them.

Collective Story Harvesting A storytelling practice where a person or group shares a story, and others "harvest" insights based on specific lenses such as emotions, turning points, patterns, or principles. It turns lived experience into collective learning, powerful for topics like mental health, identity, or leadership, where stories carry the wisdom.

Pro Action Café A participatory format (part café, part peer consultation circle) that supports idea development through rounds of meaningful questions and feedback.

It's a prototyping space: perfect for helping participants refine a project or idea in a supportive, structured format.

These practices help groups move from many perspectives toward **shared wisdom and next steps**.

THE INVISIBLE ART: HOW WE SHOW UP MATTERS

The real "host" in Art of Hosting is not the agenda, but *the quality of presence* in the room.

Good hosting means:

- Curiosity over control
- Presence over perfection
- Caring for the group and for ourselves
- Welcoming silence and emergence
- Holding emotional space with intention

When youth workers adopt this mindset, they stop being "organisers of activities", and become **weavers of connection**.

WHEN TO USE AOH

Use AoH when...

- You're facing complex challenges with no easy answer
- You want shared ownership instead of token participation
- You're working with 15-100+ people across backgrounds
- You want clarity and action that comes through the group, not to the group

READY TO EXPLORE MORE?

- Website: <https://artofhosting.org>
- PDF: [Chris Corrigan et al. \(2019\). The Art of Hosting: Field Guide](#)

Liberating Structures: Everyday Tools for Collective Participation

Liberating Structures (LS) are a set of simple, powerful group interaction formats designed to free the potential of everyone in a group, not just the vocal few. Created by Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz, they invite us to **reshape the way we meet, collaborate, reflect, and decide**, using structures that are surprisingly easy to learn and impossible to unsee.

Where Art of Hosting helps us shift mindset and open space, LS equips us with **ready-made, flexible patterns** that can be deployed in any context, from classroom to boardroom to grassroots gathering, often with no more than pen, paper, time, and curiosity.

LS are often described as: "Tiny methods with massive effect."

They are free, open-source, and designed to disrupt unproductive habits like long presentations, passive listening, and the domination of group dynamics by a few voices.

WHY WE USED IT IN THIS TRAINING

We used Liberating Structures in Valencia because they allowed us to:

- Hear every voice in the room with little prep time
- Generate ideas and insights quickly, with collective energy
- Balance emotional depth with playfulness
- Help youth workers discover **new ways of facilitating** they could bring home right away

With LS, the group didn't wait for permission to contribute, they stepped in effortlessly, because the structure invited them in.

A FEW LS YOU MIGHT RECOGNIZE

1-2-4-All Participants reflect individually, then in pairs, then in groups of four, before gathering insights in plenary. It lets every person think, speak, and be heard. Excellent for brainstorming or sense-making in big groups.

Impromptu Networking Short, rapid-fire rounds of paired conversations around a powerful question. Builds instant connection and shared purpose, without icebreaker awkwardness.

TRIZ Participants imagine the “worst possible version” of their situation, then identify elements of that nightmare already present, and how to stop them. Makes self-sabotaging behaviours visible and fixable through laughter and honesty.

What, So What, Now What? Moves groups from raw observation to meaning-making and next actions. Perfect for debriefing emotional or complex experiences.

Wise Crowds One person presents a challenge, and the group offers feedback in structured rounds. It’s like peer consulting with boundaries, someone is heard, supported, and equipped with real next steps.

WHAT MAKES LS SO LIBERATING?

- No expert is needed to run them, anyone can host one
- They work with small or large groups, online or offline
- They respect both introverted and extroverted people
- They use constraints (structure, time, roles) to open up creativity and fairness
- They are made to **shift power, spark intelligence, and deepen engagement**

WHEN TO USE LIBERATING STRUCTURES

Use LS when...

- You want fast, democratic participation
- You’re limited on time but don’t want surface-level outcomes
- Your group feels stuck or silent
- You need to balance emotional depth with playfulness
- You want to turn attendees into co-creators (even in a 1-hour session)

READY TO EXPLORE MORE?

- Official website: <https://www.liberatingstructures.com>
- Book: Lipmanowicz, H., & McCandless, K. (2014). *The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures: Simple Rules to Unleash A Culture of Innovation*

Lewis Deep Democracy: Working With Conflict and Quiet Voices

Lewis Deep Democracy (LDD) is a facilitation approach developed in post-apartheid South Africa to help groups work with difference, conflict, and emotionally charged dynamics in a constructive way. It starts from a simple insight: in every group there is a conversation that happens “on the surface” and another that lives underneath—in doubts, side comments, silence, hesitation, or subtle resistance.

When those quieter voices are not heard, they don’t disappear. They resurface later as tension, disengagement, or blocked decisions.

LDD works by creating conditions where all perspectives can be expressed and integrated, rather than pushing the group into premature agreement.

CORE PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:

- Every voice has value, even if it is uncomfortable to hear
- Conflict is information, not a sign of failure
- Groups make better decisions when minority perspectives are included
- Emotions matter and need a legitimate place in group process
- Neutral facilitation enables greater honesty and shared responsibility

This approach is particularly relevant for youth work, where power differences (age, confidence, social position, role) are always present. Inclusion depends not only on giving the floor, but on creating the safety needed for less-heard voices to emerge.

WHY WE USED IT IN THIS TRAINING

We used LDD in this training because mental health, identity, and youth work often bring strong emotions and hidden tensions into the room. The approach helped participants recognise these dynamics safely, listen to minority perspectives, and move toward more honest and inclusive group decisions.



A LIST OF COMMON TOOLS OR PRACTICES

Rather than a single method, LDD is a bundle of interconnected practices for reading group dynamics, facilitating honesty, and transforming resistance into contribution.

The most widely used include:

Reading the room (“above” and “below” the waterline) - Paying attention not only to what is said, but also to silence, body language, hesitation, side comments, or emotional cues. These signals often reveal underlying concerns or minority views that need space.

The Resistance Line - A way of understanding how disagreement shows up over time from subtle withdrawal to overt conflict. It helps facilitators recognise when someone is not aligned with the group and to create safe moments for that voice to emerge.

The Four Steps - A structured conversational flow that guides groups from surfacing different views, to exploring disagreements, to naming emotions, and finally checking if anything remains unsaid. It supports clarity and prevents premature consensus.

Metaskills - The attitudes facilitators bring to the process: especially neutrality, curiosity, patience, and the ability to stay open when tension or emotion arise. In Deep Democracy, the metaskill shapes the safety of the process as much as the technique itself.

These practices can be used together or individually. Each supports groups in creating the conditions where differences can be voiced and integrated rather than avoided or suppressed.

WHEN LEWIS DEEP DEMOCRACY SUPPORTS YOUR WORK

Youth workers and facilitators may find LDD particularly useful when:

- A group avoids conflict or “keeps the peace” at the cost of honesty
- Decisions require **real** ownership, not formal agreement
- Quieter participants or minority viewpoints are not being voiced
- A discussion feels stuck, tense, or dominated by a few
- Emotions are present and influencing behaviour more than content
- Cultural, ideological, or generational differences create friction
- You need to balance participation with accountability

In these moments, LDD offers both mindset and method for transforming tension into clarity, connection, and wiser decisions.

READY TO EXPLORE MORE?

- Official website and resources: <https://www.lewisdeepdemocracy.com>



Non-Violent Communication: Speaking Honestly, Listening with Empathy

Non-Violent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is a practical approach for communicating with honesty while maintaining connection. Its purpose is not “being nice”, but creating a quality of dialogue where everyone’s needs can be seen and considered, even when the topic is difficult, emotional, or conflictual.

NVC starts from a simple insight: when communication breaks down, we usually fall into automatic patterns that create distance (judgments, blame, defensiveness, assumptions, or demands). These reactions may be understandable, but they make it harder to express what is truly happening inside us or to hear what matters to others.

NVC offers a different route: slowing down, naming what we observe, connecting with our feelings and needs, and expressing requests that open space for cooperation rather than tension. It is both a communication method and a mindset of compassion, for ourselves and for others.

In youth work and mental-health contexts, this shift is crucial. Many young people struggle to name emotions, ask for support, or handle disagreement. NVC provides a shared language to speak from the heart, listen with curiosity, and build safer, more sustainable group cultures.

WHY WE USED IT IN THIS TRAINING

We integrated NVC into the Valencia programme because conversations around mental health, identity, boundaries, and participation naturally evoke strong emotions. We needed a framework that would help participants:

- Recognise their own emotional responses
- Connect feelings to deeper needs and values
- Give feedback without judgment or blame
- Listen in ways that support understanding rather than defensiveness
- Set boundaries respectfully and ask for support clearly
- Speak truthfully without breaking connection

NVC helped the group stay grounded when intensity rose. It offered tools for self-awareness, emotional literacy, and relational care, all essential when working with young people's wellbeing.

A LIST OF COMMON TOOLS OR PRACTICES

NVC is structured around four components that is simple on paper, transformative in practice:

- **Observations** - describing what happened without judgments ("When I heard the comment...")
- **Feelings** - naming the emotion we experience ("I feel frustrated / worried / excited...")
- **Needs** - identifying the unmet values beneath the feeling (safety, clarity, connection, rest...)
- **Requests** - expressing a clear, doable action that could improve the situation

These are supported by additional practices:

- **Empathic Listening** - listening to understand feelings and needs, not to judge or fix
- **Self-Empathy** - checking in with yourself before reacting, especially under stress
- **Translating Judgments** - turning blame ("They don't care") into underlying needs ("I need reliability")
- **Feelings & Needs Vocabulary** - developing emotional literacy for yourself and for young people

These practices bring clarity where conversations often get tangled, and create a shared emotional language that helps groups move together more gently and clearly.

WHEN NVC SUPPORTS YOUR WORK

Use NVC when...

- Emotions rise quickly and you need to prevent escalation
- A young person expresses distress through anger, withdrawal, or sarcasm
- Misunderstandings or defensive loops keep repeating
- You need to give feedback with compassion and clarity
- Groups are exploring sensitive issues (identity, discrimination, mental health)
- Team communication feels rushed, tense, or indirect
- Young people need support naming what they feel and what they need
- Boundaries must be set without blame

NVC does not remove conflict. it helps transform it into honesty, agency, and connection.

READY TO EXPLORE MORE?

- Official website: <https://www.cnvc.org/>
- Book: Marshall B. Rosenberg (1999). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*

Research Insights: Youth Mental Health and the Role of Youth Work

A Rising Tide: Youth Mental Health in Europe

Across Europe, youth mental health has become impossible to ignore. Before the pandemic, one in five young people were already at risk of mental health issues, and after years of isolation, interrupted education, uncertainty, and loss, the numbers have gone up. Anxiety, depression, loneliness, stress, and burnout are no longer individual struggles: they've become collective facts shaping a generation.

Yet even amid systemic pressure, precarious jobs, shrinking democratic space, climate grief, young people are still showing up, still caring for each other, still creating. What they need are spaces where **being human doesn't cost extra**, where being overwhelmed isn't a flaw, where asking for help isn't shameful, where emotions don't have to be managed alone.

That's where youth work becomes essential.

Where Mental Health Meets Participation

Youth mental health and social participation aren't separate topics, they're inseparable. A young person who feels excluded, unseen, or unsafe is more likely to struggle emotionally; and a young person who's struggling internally is more likely to withdraw from school, public life, and even relationships.

This creates a dangerous cycle: **isolation deepens distress, and distress deepens isolation**. But it can also be a place of intervention, because trust, belonging, and community aren't "extras" in youth work; they're the medicine.

Youth work stands uniquely at this crossroads: not clinical, not formal, not transactional, but relational. When we create environments of belonging, informal, playful, peer-led, community-centered, we don't just support participation; we enable well-being. And when we accept well-being as central, participation becomes a space of healing, not pressure.

What Youth Workers Already Know, and Research Confirms

Over the last decade, from Scandinavia to the Balkans and across the UK, youth centres and youth workers have been quietly innovating on mental health support. Not by becoming therapists, but by:

- **Bringing support into everyday places:** inviting psychologists or trained listeners into youth club settings, so that support becomes visible and normal, not clinical or shameful

- **Creating warm, peer-hosted environments:** from after-school clubs in cities to rural mentoring programmes, young people are being empowered to lead, reflect, and care for each other, breaking stigmas around emotional struggle before they settle in
- **Organising emotional education without exams:** skills like self-awareness, boundaries, emotional literacy, and stress regulation are being taught through art, sport, storytelling, and community action, not worksheets

In one programme in the UK, for example, youth workers teamed up with mental health practitioners who simply showed up in youth spaces over time, sitting in circles, joining games, chatting one-on-one. This was not a programme of “therapy”, it was an invitation to trust again. Over time, young men who had never sought help began using words like grief, anger, belief. **It was the space, not the diagnosis, that shifted something.**

What Works, Principles for Practice

Whether you work in a school, youth association, solidarity project, or community space, here are some key practices that came out strong from research and lived experience alike:

- **Start where young people already are:** youth spaces are “safe” not because they’re silent, but because they’re relational. If help feels like a place you already belong, it becomes easier to ask for it
- **Embrace collective rhythms:** emotions are contagious. So are safety and joy. Use circles, check-ins, rituals, humour, co-created rules, whatever helps foster shared care
- **Build emotional literacy early and often:** helping someone name their reality (“tension in my chest,” “I don’t know who to talk to”) can be a first gateway to resilience
- **Let youth co-lead:** peer support, youth-led content, and participatory design make mental health something done with young people, not to them
- **Work in ecosystems, not silos:** youth workers aren’t therapists, nor should they be, but they are bridges. The most effective mental health support is a web: families, schools, community organisations, experts, friends

The Hidden Story: Youth Workers Need Care Too

It’s impossible to talk about youth mental health without talking about youth workers’ well-being. Research shows that one in five youth workers deal with poor mental health due to emotional overload, unpaid or underpaid labour, and a lack of supportive structures.

Burnout is not a personal failure. It’s a systemic outcome.

If youth workers are expected to support resilience, build relationships, and hold emotional space, then their organisations, and funders, must prioritise care and co-regulation as part of the work: debrief loops, supervision, trauma literacy, co-facilitation, and boundaries around availability.

Care doesn’t trickle down if it doesn’t exist upstream.

Ready to Use Sessions

Practical session plans tested during the training

These sessions were delivered and refined during the international training in Valencia. They are meant to be used as templates you can adapt in your own context, for youth workers, volunteers, or young people themselves.

Each session includes:



Purpose



Duration



Participants



Materials



Step-by-step flow



Slides/resources (if available)

Boundaries & Real Self-Care



Purpose To explore real self-care as a practice of values and boundaries rather than consumption or productivity. Participants reflect on their personal and professional limits, identify key values that sustain their work, and practice formulating and communicating compassionate boundaries.



Duration 60-75 minutes



Participants 10-30



Materials

- Slide deck: *Real Self-Care - Boundaries & Well-being*
- Printed list of values (from slides)
- Flipchart and markers
- Paper and pens for journaling
- Optional: calm background music



Slides/resources: [2. Real Self-Care - Boundaries & Well-being](#)



Step-by-step Flow

1. FRAMING & INTRODUCTION (10 MIN)

Introduce the idea of Real Self-Care (Dr. Pooja Lakshmin): "Self-care isn't something you buy - it's the set of choices that protect your well-being."

Present briefly the **four pillars**:

- Boundaries - saying no to protect what matters
- Compassion - treating yourself with kindness
- Values - acting according to what you truly care about
- Power - recognising systemic limits and collective responsibility

Prompt a short exchange: "Where do we, as youth workers, risk crossing our own boundaries in the name of helping others?"

2. VALUES REFLECTION (10 MIN)

Distribute the printed values list (15+ options from the slides). Ask participants to circle the 2-3 values that matter most in their life right now.

In pairs: “Why these values? How do they show up in your daily practice?”

Encourage attentive listening, not discussion or justification.

3. Individual Journaling (10 min)

Invite participants to reflect silently and write:

- Where do I say yes when I want to say *no*?
- Which of my values gets compromised when I do this?
- What small change could bring me closer to alignment with that value?



4. PRACTICING BOUNDARIES IN PAIRS (15 MIN)

Each participant formulates a boundary using this structure: "I will no longer ____ because it goes against my value of ____."

Examples:

- "I will no longer check my phone after 9 p.m. because it goes against my value of rest."
- "I will no longer accept extra shifts when I'm exhausted because it goes against my value of health."

Partner instructions:

- Listen fully - no interrupting
- Reflect back what you heard ("So you're protecting your evenings to honour rest")
- Ask one supportive question ("What would help you keep this boundary?")

Then swap roles.

5. GROUP SHARING (10-15 MIN)

Gather the group in a circle and debrief collectively:

- How did it feel to speak a boundary aloud?
- What kind of support helps you respect your limits?
- What connections do you see between self-care and community care?

Key message: "Boundaries are not barriers - they're bridges that protect the conditions for care."

6. CLOSING (5 MIN)

Ask participants to write one simple commitment: "A boundary I want to honour in the next month is..."

Invite them to fold it and keep it as a reminder. End with one deep collective breath or a moment of gratitude.

Designing Local Multiplier Activities

 **Purpose** To support participants in designing a realistic, meaningful, and well-being-oriented *local follow-up activity* that multiplies the impact of a training or other activity. Participants leave with a clear, sketched plan for their own initiative, inspired by peers and grounded in feasibility.

 **Duration** 90 minutes

 **Participants** 15-50

 **Materials**

- Flipcharts and markers
- Post-its
- Printed or digital "Local Activity Canvas" (6 boxes)
- Wall space for gallery walk

Step-by-step Flow

1. FRAMING THE TASK (10 MIN)

Introduce the idea of *multiplier activities* as the bridge between training and local action. Explain that the goal is not to plan a perfect event, but to turn learning into concrete small-scale pilots.

“Small is fine — think pilots, think doable. What matters is testing ideas in your real context.”

Present the guiding questions on the slide:

- Who is my target group?
- What is my message or goal?
- What simple format can I use?
- What resources or tools from this training can I leverage?

2. INSPIRATION CAROUSEL (15 MIN)

Set up **3-4 thematic stations** around the room (e.g. *Workshop, Peer support activity, Awareness campaign, Creative expression*). Participants move in small groups, rotating every 5 minutes. At each station, they brainstorm “mini-ideas” on flipcharts — no ownership yet, just warm-up creativity.

3. PERSONAL DESIGN TIME (15 MIN)

Each participant (or pair from the same organisation) works individually to design their own local activity using the **6-box canvas**:

- Target group
- Need or focus area
- Goal or key message
- Format and activities
- Resources needed
- First step back home

Remind them to stay grounded: “If it can’t happen in the next 3 months, make it smaller.”

4. PEER CLINICS IN TRIADS (30 MIN)

Participants form groups of three. Each person presents their idea (max. 5 minutes). The other two act as **critical friends**:

- 2 minutes of clarifying questions
- 2 minutes of constructive feedback

Rotate until everyone has presented.

5. GALLERY WALK & COMMITMENT (15 MIN)

Participants post their canvases on the wall for a quick exhibition.

Everyone moves around, reads the plans, and leaves sticky notes with words of encouragement, questions, or new ideas.

End with a short **closing circle**: “The first step I’ll take to make this happen is...”

Encourage participants to take a photo of their canvas before leaving.

Art of Hosting - Triads

 **Purpose** To support deep listening, honest sharing, and reflective inquiry in small groups. Triads help participants explore a question or story in a focused, spacious way by rotating through the roles of **speaker, listener, and witness**. The structure builds trust, strengthens attention skills, and enables insights to emerge naturally through storytelling.

 **Duration** 30–45 minutes (10 minutes per role)

 **Participants** Any group size (ideal: 9–30). Works with groups of 3; if numbers are uneven, one group of four or several pairs can be formed.

Materials

- Chairs arranged for small-group conversation
- Printed guiding questions (optional)
- Timer or bell



Step-by-Step Flow

1. INTRODUCE THE PRACTICE (5 MIN)

Explain that Triads are a simple yet powerful structure widely used in the Art of Hosting for storytelling, reflection, and appreciative inquiry. Clarify that the purpose is not to debate or analyse, but to *listen deeply* and *speak honestly*.

Offer 1 guiding questions relevant to your session. Examples:

- "What do you most care about that brings you to this project/meeting?"
- "Share a story of a moment when you felt proud in your work with young people."
- "What question or challenge are you currently carrying?"

2. FORM GROUPS OF THREE (2 MIN)

Invite participants to form groups of three. If you have an even number, you can:

- Form one group of four, which will have two witnesses
- If you have pairs, They will rotate only between speaker and listener

Ask each triad to sit close enough to speak comfortably.

3. EXPLAIN THE THREE ROLES (5 MIN)

Speaker - Shares their response to the question. They choose what and how much to share. Speaking from one's own experience builds authenticity and trust.

Listener - Listens without interruption, judgment, or preparing answers. The focus is on presence, curiosity, and receiving the story.

Witness / Observer - Holds the space for both speaker and listener. They watch body language, tone, and energy, paying attention to what lies beyond words. They also help keep time. At the end of the round, they offer a short reflection of what they noticed, not an interpretation, but an observation.

Emphasise that each role is meaningful. The power of Triads comes from experiencing all three.

4. SET TIMING & ROTATION (1 MIN)

Recommend **10 minutes per round**, rotating roles so that everyone becomes speaker, listener, and witness once.

5. BEGIN THE PRACTICE (30 MIN)

Invite groups to start their first round. Give a gentle time warning after 9 minutes. Invite rotation, and begin the next round. Keep the atmosphere quiet and spacious.

6. HARVEST IN PLENARY (5-10 MIN)

Return to the circle and invite reflections such as:

- "What did you notice about listening or being listened to?"
- "What surprised you in being a witness?"
- "What shifted when you had uninterrupted time to speak?"

Harvest themes, not personal stories.

Art of Hosting - Open Space Technology

 **Purpose** To create a self-organised space where participants identify the issues that matter most to them, propose topics they genuinely care about, and engage in conversations driven by passion and responsibility. Open Space Technology (OST) allows groups to work with complexity, invite diverse perspectives, and generate collective intelligence without a pre-set agenda.

 **Duration** Minimum 1.5 hours for a "mini" Open Space. Ideal: 3-4 hours with multiple breakout rounds (Larger groups require more time)

 **Participants** 10-200+ (OST can scale to hundreds or thousands)

Materials

- Large room with open wall space
- Sticky notes or paper + markers (for proposing topics)
- A "marketplace" wall for the agenda
- Several breakout spaces (corners of room, other rooms, outdoors)
- Flipcharts for notes/harvest
- Timer or bell

Step-by-Step Flow

1. WELCOME & FRAMING (10 MIN)

Introduce Open Space as a method that enables groups to work on what matters most **without a pre-designed agenda**. Explain that OST is ideal when there is:

- A real issue of concern
- Diversity of participants
- Complexity
- Strong feelings (passion or conflict)
- And a need for fast, creative results

Key message: "We will build the agenda together in the next few minutes, based on what you care about."

Present the **Four Principles**:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- When it's over, it's over

And the **Law of Two Feet**: "If you are not learning or contributing where you are, use your two feet and go somewhere else."

2. SETTING THE THEME (5 MIN)

Offer a clear guiding question or central topic. Examples:

- "How can we strengthen young people's well-being in our communities?"
- "What do youth workers need to thrive in the next year?"
- "What are we not talking about that we need to talk about?"

Keep the question broad enough to invite many entry points.

3. OPENING THE CIRCLE & PROPOSING TOPICS (10-15 MIN)

Invite participants to:

- i. Step into the circle when they feel ready
- ii. Say their name
- iii. State the topic they want to discuss
- iv. Write it on a piece of paper
- v. Choose a time slot and breakout space
- vi. Post it on the Marketplace wall

Important: A topic proposer becomes the **convener** of that session. They do *not* need to be an expert, only to care about the question.

Once all topics are posted, you have a full self-organised agenda.

4. MARKETPLACE WALK & START OF BREAKOUTS (5 MIN)

Invite everyone to walk by the Marketplace, choose a session, and move to its location.

Remind participants of the Law of Two Feet: "Move where your contribution or learning is highest. Don't apologise for changing groups."

5. BREAKOUT SESSIONS (30-60 MIN EACH, 1-3 ROUNDS)

In each breakout:

- The **convener** welcomes the group
- A **harvester** takes notes (flipchart)
- Conversation flows naturally following passion, curiosity, and the principles of OST

Harvest sheets typically include:

- Title/topic
- Key insights
- Ideas or recommendations
- Next steps (if any)

You may run several consecutive rounds if time allows.

6. RETURN TO PLENARY & HARVEST (10-20 MIN)

Invite conveners or harvesters to share 1-2 main insights from each session.

Questions to guide the harvest:

- "What ideas emerged across sessions?"
- "What surprised you?"
- "What possibilities are we now seeing more clearly?"

7. CLOSING (5 MIN)

Acknowledge participants for their initiative, courage, and responsibility. Close with a simple question: "What is one idea or action you want to take forward from today?"



Lewis Deep Democracy - The Resistance Line

Purpose To help participants recognise how resistance shows up in themselves and others during disagreement or conflict, and to build awareness of the “hidden” dynamics that influence teamwork, group decision-making, and youth participation. The session supports young people or youth workers in naming their position on the resistance continuum and understanding how to shift toward more open, constructive communication.

Duration 45-60 minutes

Participants 8-25

Materials

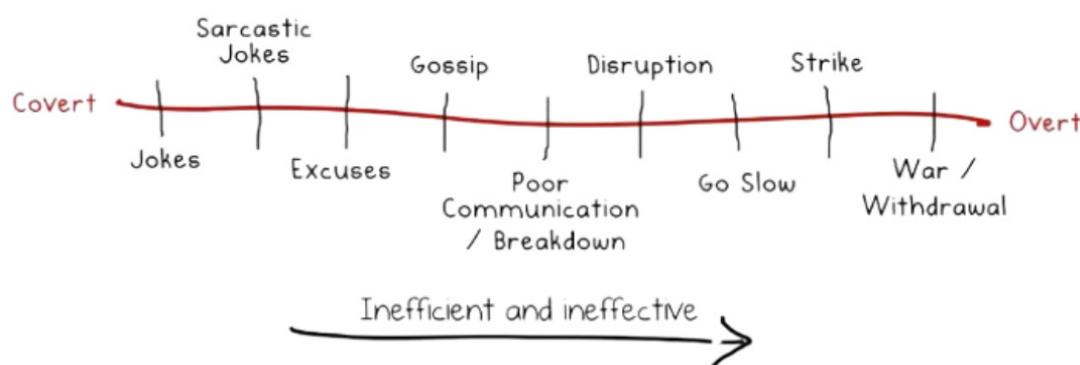
- Flipchart or large paper
- Markers
- Printed or drawn Resistance Line (optional)
- Sticky notes
- Space for people to move along a line on the floor (optional embodiment variation)

Step-by-step flow

1. INTRODUCTION (5 MIN)

Explain that resistance is a natural and intelligent response when people feel unheard, unsafe, or in disagreement. Introduce the Resistance Line as a tool to *make invisible resistance visible*.

Key message: “Resistance is information. It’s telling us what is not being said.”



2. PRESENT THE RESISTANCE LINE (10 MIN)

Show or draw the continuum exactly as in **Lewis Deep Democracy**.

Explain:

- These behaviours may occur in any order
- The longer resistance stays underground, the more intense it often become
- None of these behaviours make someone “bad”, they signal unmet needs, disagreement, or emotional pressure

3. PERSONAL REFLECTION: “WHERE DO I USUALLY SHOW UP?” (10 MIN)

Invite participants to think about a recent moment of disagreement.

Ask them to mark (with sticky notes or by standing in the room): “Which behaviour on the line best represents how you tend to express resistance?”

Small-group or pair discussion:

- Why do you think this is your first reaction?
- When is it helpful? When is it unhelpful?
- What is the need or emotion behind it?

4. GROUP DIALOGUE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN RESISTANCE STAYS HIDDEN? (10 MIN)

Facilitate a short discussion:

- “What do jokes or sarcasm usually hide?”
- “What happens in teams when communication breaks down?”
- “Why might people prefer covert resistance instead of speaking openly?”

Capture insights on a flipchart.

5. PRACTICE: MOVING FROM COVERT TO HONEST EXPRESSION (10-15 MIN)

Participants practice turning a resistance behaviour into a simple, honest statement.

Examples:

- **Jokes:** “I’m masking my discomfort; I don’t fully agree.”
- **Sarcasm:** “This doesn’t feel right to me; can I explain why?”
- **Gossip:** “I have concerns but didn’t feel comfortable raising them.”
- **Go slow:** “I’m not convinced by this plan; I need clarity.”

Prompt: “What would help you express disagreement earlier and more openly?”

6. CLOSING (5 MIN)

Invite participants to share one insight:

- “One thing I learned about my resistance...”
- “One thing I will try in future group work...”

Reinforce: “Resistance is not the problem, unspoken resistance is.”



Non Violent Communication - Four Steps

 **Purpose** To introduce and practice the **Four Steps of Nonviolent Communication** as a practical framework to improve communication, reduce conflict, and support emotional well-being in youth work contexts. The session helps participants express themselves clearly while staying connected to others' needs.

 **Duration** 60-75 minutes

 **Participants** 8-25

 **Materials**

- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Markers
- Printed handouts with the Four Steps (optional)
- Prepared example statements (optional)

 **Step-by-step flow**

1. INTRODUCTION TO NVC (10 MINUTES)

The facilitator introduces Nonviolent Communication, developed by Marshall Rosenberg, as a tool for building understanding and connection, especially in emotionally charged situations. The Four Steps are briefly presented:

- Observation
- Feelings
- Needs
- Requests

Emphasis is placed on NVC as a **practice**, not a technique to “fix” others.

2. CLARIFYING THE FOUR STEPS (15 MINUTES)

Participants are presented with common communication statements from youth work contexts (e.g. “You never listen”, “This group is not motivated”).

Together, the group analyses:

- Where judgments replace observations
- Where feelings are confused with interpretations
- Which needs are hidden or unspoken

The facilitator supports participants in rephrasing statements following the Four Steps.

3. SMALL-GROUP PRACTICE (25 MINUTES)

Participants work in small groups (3–4 people). Each group:

- Chooses a real or realistic situation from their practice
- Rewrites it using the Four Steps of NVC
- Shares the reformulated version within the group

Peer feedback focuses on clarity, authenticity, and feasibility rather than “correctness”.

4. REFLECTION AND TRANSFER (15–25 MINUTES)

In plenary, participants reflect on:

- Which step felt most difficult and why
- How NVC could improve relationships and emotional safety in their contexts
- One concrete situation where they could try this approach

The facilitator links insights to mental well-being, conflict prevention, and inclusive participation.

Non Violent Communication - The 4 Ds of Disconnection

 **Purpose** To help participants recognise four common communication patterns that signal disconnection, especially in moments of tension or emotional activation. The session supports awareness of how these patterns express unmet needs, and how shifting language can reopen space for connection, responsibility, and choice.

 **Duration** 60-75 minutes

 **Participants** 8-25

 **Materials**

- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Markers
- Printed handout of the 4 Ds (optional)
- Prepared example statements (optional)

Step-by-step flow

1. FRAMING DISCONNECTION (10 MINUTES)

The facilitator introduces the idea that **disconnection in communication is not a failure**, but often a tragic expression of an unmet need. Participants are presented with the **4 Ds of Disconnection**, explained as language patterns that reduce connection, responsibility, and autonomy:

- **Diagnosis (Judging / Labeling)**
- **Demands**
- **Denial of Personal Responsibility**
- **Deserve Thinking (Punishment / Reward logic)**

The facilitator highlights that these patterns often emerge automatically under stress.

2. EXPLORING THE 4 DS (25 MINUTES)

Each “D” is introduced with examples and a short reflection.

i. Diagnosis

Language that judges, labels, or compares people as right/wrong or good/bad.

What it sounds like: “You’re so rude.” “That’s stupid.” “You should know better.” “You never listen.”

Why it’s unhelpful: It shifts attention from specific actions or needs to a person’s character, often triggering defensiveness.

ii. Demands

Language that removes choice and undermines autonomy.

What it sounds like: “You must do this.” “You have to listen to me.” “Do as I say.”

Why it’s unhelpful: It provokes rebellion or forced compliance, eroding trust and cooperation.

iii. Denial of Personal Responsibility

Language that presents actions or feelings as unavoidable or externally imposed.

What it sounds like: “I had to.” “That’s just the way it is.” “They make me feel this way.” “It’s company policy.”

Why it’s unhelpful: It removes agency, reinforces a victim mindset, and blocks conscious choice.

iv. Deserve Thinking

Language based on punishment and reward logic.

What it sounds like: “They deserve to be punished.” “After all this work, I deserve a reward.”

Why it’s unhelpful: It relies on external motivation instead of connecting to underlying needs such as fairness, appreciation, or contribution.

v. **Small-Group Practice (20 minutes)**

Participants work in groups of 3-4. Each group:

- Chooses one “D”
- Identifies examples from youth work or group life
- Reflects on which **unmet needs** might sit underneath that language

Groups write keywords or examples on flipchart paper.

vi. **Reconnecting Through Awareness (10–20 minutes)**

In plenary, participants reflect on:

- Which “D” they recognise most easily in themselves
- How recognising these patterns earlier could change group dynamics

Micro-Practices for Reconnection & Reflection

Tools for grounding, re-energising, and making meaning in youth work settings

Sometimes, it's the small things, a shared breath, a playful moment, an honest question, that turn a good session into a transformative space. These micro-practices were used throughout our training in Valencia to support participants' emotional presence, regulate group energy, and stimulate deeper learning.

They can stand alone or be layered into larger workshops or rituals. Use them intentionally, with care, consent, and flexibility.

Grounding Practices

Anchor the body and breath before or after intense or cognitive work.

BOX-TO-BOX BREATHING

A structured breathing pattern: inhale (4), hold (4), exhale (4), hold (4). Repeat slowly.

Try it like this: “We’re going to breathe together in a silent rhythm. If you like, place a hand on your belly or chest to feel your breath.”

Why it works: Calms the nervous system and builds collective presence.

Variation: Ask young people to “draw” the box with their fingers in the air.

5-4-3-2-1 SENSES SCAN

A five-step process that shifts attention outward:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Use it when: A group comes in overstimulated, tired, or anxious.

Ask afterward: “What shifted for you as you noticed your environment more carefully?”

GUIDED IMAGERY - SAFE PLACE

Invite the group to close their eyes and visualise a place, real, imagined, or symbolic, where they feel absolutely safe.

“What colors are present? Sounds? Temperature? Is anyone with you?”

Invite reflection:

- What qualities did your safe place have?
- How can you recall that image in a difficult moment?
- How might this work with young people under stress?

Check-ins

A **check-in** is a short, intentional moment where participants are invited to **arrive consciously** in a space by sharing how they are, what they bring with them, or what is alive for them in that moment.

Used widely in facilitation approaches such as Art of Hosting, check-ins are not icebreakers or updates. Their purpose is not to “warm people up” or exchange information, but to **build presence, trust, and relational awareness**.

In youth work and mental well-being contexts, check-ins function as a **micro-practice of reconnection**: they reconnect people to themselves, to the group, and to the shared space.



HOW TO USE CHECK-INS

1. Frame it clearly Always name the intention in one sentence: “Let’s take two minutes to arrive and hear how everyone is coming in.” This protects the practice from becoming vague or awkward.

2. Ask one simple prompt Good check-in questions are:

- Open
- Answerable in one sentence
- Focused on the present moment

Examples:

- “How are you arriving right now?”
- “What’s one word that describes your state?”
- “What do you need to be present today?”

Avoid multi-part or abstract questions.

3. Set a clear structure

- One person speaks at a time
- Everyone has the same amount of time
- Passing is always allowed

4. Hold the silence

After someone speaks, do not respond. Silence is part of the practice. It allows words to land and prevents comparison or evaluation.

5. Close and move on

End the check-in deliberately and transition into the activity. There is no need to summarise or comment on what was shared.

WHEN CHECK-INS ARE MOST USEFUL

Check-ins are particularly effective:

- At the beginning of a session
- After breaks or transitions
- Before sensitive or reflective work
- When energy feels scattered or tense

They can also be used mid-process as a **reset**, without interrupting the flow.

Reflective Practices

Help the group digest experience, connect emotion and insight, and build intentionality.

Collective Debrief Questions

- What moment today felt most alive? Why?
- One thing I learned (head), one thing I felt (heart), one thing I want to do (hands).
- What did I notice about power, voice, and inclusion today?
- What is one thing I'm unlearning?
- What question will I sleep on?
- A word, image, or metaphor that captures my day.

Walking in Pairs (7-15 min)

Let people walk together while exploring one prompt:

- "When did you first realise youth well-being mattered to you?"
- "A mistake that taught you something essential in youth work."
- "What gives you energy? What drains it?"
- "If resources weren't a constraint, what would you build for youth?"

Why it works: Walking side-by-side lowers defensiveness and increases openness. Useful after tough dialogue or before action planning.