

Acceptance and Commitment Support Group: guidelines for youth workers and young parents having special educational needs children



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Introduction

The Innovative "Acceptance and Commitment" Support Group Guidelines and Methodology is a tool meant to improve the knowledge, skills and competences of supporting youth workers and young parents, working and having disabled or SEN children. It has the role to empower, support and encourage parents having disabled or SEN children, as well as trainers and support teachers working with SEN children by providing guidelines for facilitating 21 sessions of support group already piloted and fine-tuned and translated into 5 languages: English, Lithuanian, Romanian, Dutch, Slovenian, Greek.

The Innovative "Acceptance and Commitment" Support Group Guidelines and methodology is the first result of the Erasmus+ Cooperation project in Youth field "The Burnout Blueprint: A Guide for Youth and Youth Workers - Burnout Blueprint", 2023-2-LTo2-KA220-YOU-000175329. The project is coordinated by Klaipėdos miesto pedagogų švietimo ir kultūros centras, Klaipėda, Lithuania and it involves another 5 partners ASOCIACIJA KURYBINES ATEITIES IDEJOS, Lithuania, Asociatia Demetrius, Romania, Vision Tree Psychology and Technology Education Center, Belgium, Entaxis - Action for inclusion and education, Greece, Univerzitetni Rehabilitacijski Institut Republike Slovenije - SOCA.

The project approaches an urgent and important topic for European countries, the increasing number of families with disabled children or with special educational needs (SEN) children and their lack of support, and how to cope with this situation. The project also addresses youth trainers and support teachers who are also overwhelmed and under-skilled and who are far from a state of well-being in the given situation.

Statistical data show that 258 million adolescents and young people, respectively 17% of the global total, have a disability (UNESCO, 2020). Their families, parents go through a series of negative emotions, such as: disappointment; sadness or depression; loneliness; fear of anger; frustration shock devastation; numbness; uncertainty; and feeling trapped and bad for the child (Blaska, 1998, Anclair, 2017). Kubler-Ross (1969) first identified a model of grief, the stages being denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Recently, there is talk of cyclical mourning, i.e. negative emotions reappear intermittently throughout the child's life, triggered by certain factors (Blaska, 1998).

From the experience of previous projects that partner organisations have run, we have noticed that the families, non-formal work and education has a very important role in the social inclusion of disabled children or with SEN, but also how little support the parents and youth workers receive for themselves. They feel stigmatised, blamed by others, they go through moments of isolation, denial, depression, which the circumstances of Covid19 and the stressful context of the Russia - Ukraine, in some partner countries (RO, LT) have amplified.

Burnout is a very real issue for youth workers and parents of disabled or with SEN children. It can be difficult to cope with the demands of caring for a child, and it is easy to become overwhelmed.

In many cases they do not possess the awareness and knowledge needed for preventing and recovering from chronic physical and emotional exhaustion or knowledge about efficient self-care so that they fully function in their role as parents.

The Innovative “Acceptance and Commitment” Support Group Guidelines and Methodology is an innovative support programme based on the “Acceptance and Commitment Theory” and mindfulness techniques aiming to improve the social integration, resilience, well-being and empowerment of young parents and youth workers, working with disabled or SEN children.

The Guidelines include:

- a presentation of the mindfulness-based, values-directed behavioural therapy ACT: contact with the present moment, values, acceptance, defusion, committed action, self as context
- an introduction about benefits and rules of conducting support groups,
- how to create and facilitate peer support,
- possible risks of peer support groups,
- topics and concrete guidelines for 21 sessions of support target group,
- evaluation methods of the activities.

The elaboration and piloting of the innovative ACT Support Group Guidelines and methodology highly contributes to empowering, supporting and encouraging target groups through an efficient methodology and set of tools. It will also raise awareness on the importance and benefits of support groups for the target group` good mental health, for experiencing new emotions, for connecting with peers in similar situations, for discovering ways of releasing negative emotions, residual feelings, worries, fears, guilt, for overcoming depression and burnout and reconnecting with their children and their social network, for better co-working with the children educational system , thus increasing their wellbeing social inclusion.

The guidelines are piloted within an international training and 6 local peer support groups which helped project partners reach the optimal format to improve the knowledge, skills and competences of parents and youth trainers and workers.

What are special educational needs and how to manage them?

In some ways, everyone is like all the others, in some ways like some others, in some ways like no one else. (H. Murray)

The scientific literature describes children with disabilities by several terms – special needs, special children, children with disabilities, children with disabilities. Special needs persons are children and adults who, because of congenital or acquired disabilities, have limited opportunities to participate in education and society.

The framework of the special education system defines special needs as a characteristic, a complex of relationships, a disability, an impairment, an underdevelopment or overdevelopment of general or special abilities. Anything that distinguishes a child from the majority of his or her peers is conventionally referred to as specialness. Exceptionalism, in whatever form it may take (lameness, handicap, disability, giftedness, etc.), invariably leads to a conflict between the child's potential and the standard requirements of pre-school or school education.

Special Educational Needs (further – SEN) is the need for support and services in the educational process, resulting from a person's special abilities, congenital or acquired disabilities, or adverse environmental factors. In the scientific literature (Hallahan, Kauffman, 2003), children with special needs are defined as those who require special education and additional services to fully realise their human potential.

Children with special needs can be described in three aspects (Vilkeliene, 2003):

- **Biological aspect**, children with special needs are characterised by outwardly visible or predictable signs, behaviour, and ways of communicating that show the difference between a normal person and a person with special needs.
- **The pedagogic aspect** emphasises that children with special needs require special teaching that is appropriate to their distinctive thinking, psychomotor and physical characteristics, sensory communication skills, social behaviour, and the nature of their impairments.
- **In sociocultural aspects**, the term 'special needs children' implies that the family interacts with these children in a different way (the child is pampered or, on the contrary, rejected). The educational process is organised according to the characteristics of the child's disability, and the social status resulting from the disability is viewed differently. The socialisation of children with special needs is complex and different from that of children growing up in normal conditions. Many of them do not start their life journey in the family, as is normal and natural, but in the baby's home, when their parents abandon them. From the orphanage, the child moves on to foster homes and special education institutions. Often this is due to various developmental disorders.

It is problematic to link biological, pedagogical and sociocultural assessments of the development of children with disabilities because, as Ališauskas (2001) points out,

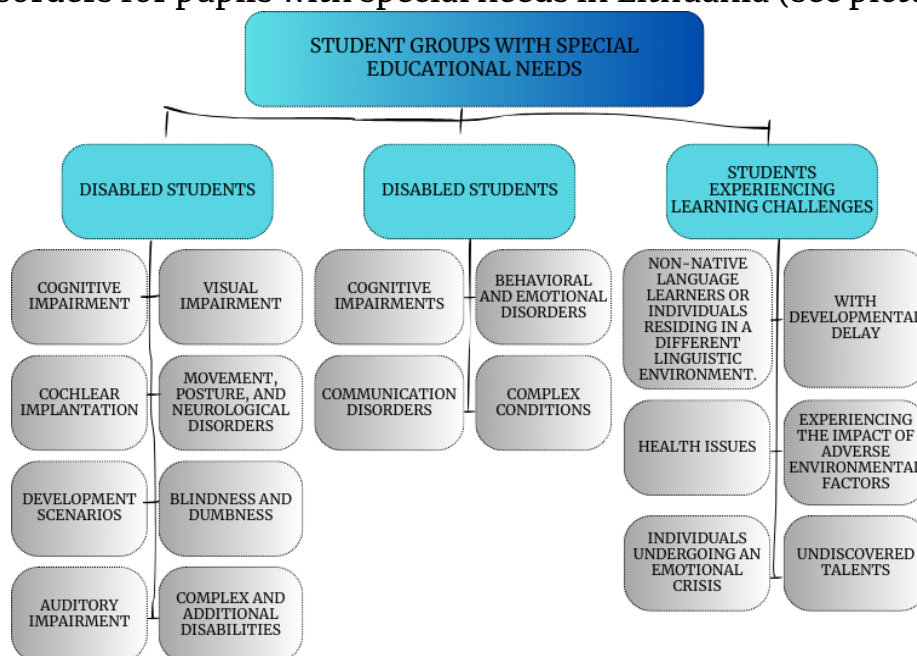
the same disorder can be described differently from a psychological and pedagogical point of view at certain ages.

Special education – the purpose of education for children with special educational needs is to help the child to develop, to learn according to his/her abilities, to acquire education and qualifications, by recognising and developing his/her abilities and capacities (*according to Lithuanian law documents*).

These children need special education because they differ from most children in one or more of the following ways:

- they may be mentally retarded;
- learning disabilities;
- emotional and behavioural disabilities;
- physical disabilities;
- hearing or visual impairments;
- have a special ability or talent.

In 2011, the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania issued Regulation (*according to Lithuanian law documents*) on the procedure for determining the disorders and levels of disorders of persons with special needs and assigning persons with special needs to a group of special educational needs, which regulates the classification of children with special needs into groups of disorders and levels of disorders according to their impairment of mental or physical functions, and distinguishes between three groups of disorders, each of which, according to the criteria and assessments of its components, requires individualised education. According to this regulation, there are 3 groups of disorders for pupils with special needs in Lithuania (see picture 1).



Picture 1. Groups of pupils with special needs (*according to Lithuanian law documents*)

Children with special educational needs are unique and special, requiring care and special listening. Regardless of the type, specificity and complexity of their disability, these children have the right to participate in education on the same basis as able-bodied, non-disabled children with normal development. Inclusive education requires preschool communities to care for their education and to enable them to develop in an environment where disability is not perceived as a handicap, and where the aim is not exclusion but inclusion in the overall educational process, where each child's strengths and abilities are valued and developed, eliminating or minimising all other causes that hinder the child's normal development (Galkiene, Monkevičienė, 2021).

The aim of special education is to ensure that the content of education is individualised according to the needs of the child by selecting forms, methods and techniques of education. Teachers differentiate and individualise tasks in educational activities, considering the child's needs and real abilities. When providing special assistance, it is important that the child assimilates the content of the education and develops impaired functions.

Children's special educational needs are assessed pedagogically, psychologically, medically and socially, and are divided into **4 groups: low, medium, high and very high.**

Obviously, society is largely unaware that children with neither intellectual nor other disabilities can have an SEN and, conversely, children with disabilities will not always have an SEN. Researchers point out that SUP arises when the demands of education and self-education do not match the student's capabilities. Considering children's SUP can reduce or eliminate this conflict, as anyone can have SUP if we make demands that are not in line with their capabilities (Kišonienė, Dudzinskienė, 2007).

Today, a competent specialist who works with children with SUP recognises the importance of the family (Hallahan, Kauffman, 2003). It is now understood that the parents of a child with SUP can support professionals in the education of the child. As D. P. Hallahan and J. M. Kauffman (2003) observed, it is now recognised that it is extremely important to take parental concerns into account when designing curricula for children with SUP. Although it is desirable for parents to play an active role in their child's education, it is sometimes difficult for them to do so because of their responsibilities in other family functions. Ališauskas (1998) recognises the importance of active parental involvement in identifying and discussing the difficulties of a child with SUP and in planning ways and forms of support. The child can only be examined if the parents wish and are involved. Any recommendations for the child's education should be discussed and agreed with the parents. Only consistent and open communication between the school and the parents, and mutual trust, can result in positive results.

Parents raising a child with special needs (**physical disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional difficulties or developmental disorders**) may need to learn specific skills and invest a lot of time and energy, which can endanger their careers, marriages, and relationships with other children. Although each child's specific needs may be different, the expert advice to parents is the same: don't let your own physical

and mental well-being deteriorate. Anyone who has a caring life, including parents of children with special needs, is exposed to risks that could jeopardise their own well-being and that of the people they care for. Failure to manage one's own stress in caring for others can lead to emotional burnout and feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and paralysis. Experts advise parents to find a practice that works for them – therapy, exercise, mindfulness or another method. This may cause guilt, but caring parents need to channel some of their energy into looking after themselves and remind themselves that this effort will directly benefit their child (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/basics/parenting/parenting-children-special-needs>).

When professionals inform parents about the reality of the situation and encourage their optimism, they need to let them simply be parents. Daukšaitė (2007) identifies the following basic principles of cooperation between professionals and parents:

- The essential elements of successful cooperation are: objectivity, concreteness, empathy, and a clear position of the educator in relation to the information he or she provides.
- The following points are necessary to foster cooperation: clear boundaries between the responsibilities of educators and parents in different situations, sharing of responsibilities, seeking dialogue and encouragement.,
- In trying to cooperate, it is important to create the conditions for parents to feel respected as individuals, to be invited to be active, and to gain confidence in their own abilities and capacities. It is therefore important to establish a cordial relationship and mutual trust.
- When working with parents, it is important to remember that parents care most about their child and are therefore always the ones who need to be part of the relationship and who need the well-being of both parents and the institution to be built together.

Short review about SEN children's data in Belgium, Lithuania, Slovenia, Greece.

Here is a summary of the situation and developments regarding children with special needs in Belgium, Greece, Slovenia, Romania, and Lithuania between 2019 and 2024:

1. **Belgium.** Belgium, particularly Flanders, has struggled with fully integrating children with special needs into mainstream education. Despite the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the implementation of the M-decree aimed at promoting inclusive education has faced significant challenges. Teachers have expressed concerns and discomfort with inclusive practices, leading to a continuous increase in the number of students in special education. The strong historical separation between regular and special education in Flanders has made the transition toward inclusion difficult, with many educators still viewing special education as the optimal solution for children with special needs.

2. **Lithuania.** Lithuania has made considerable strides towards inclusive education. By 2024, a law will require every child, including those with disabilities, to

study at their nearest educational institution. This is a significant shift from the previous system where a large proportion of children with disabilities were educated in segregated special schools. The government has been actively adapting schools to meet diverse needs, including making facilities accessible and providing specialised training for teachers. The goal is to have 65% of children with disabilities attending general education facilities by 2024, with further increases targeted for subsequent years. According to data from the Lithuanian Education Management Information System, the number and percentage of pupils with levels III-IV (high or very high) SUP in mainstream pre-primary schools is increasing. In 2018 there were 17 053 such children in pre-primary schools and in 2022 there will be 17 572 such children, accounting for 16.7% of the total. Education in the country and regions 2023 of all children in pre-school education. In general education schools, the number of pupils with level III-IV SUP increased from 9,676 to 10,573, and the percentage of all pupils with SUP increased by 2.7 percentage points from 22.1% to 24.8%. The conclusion is that schools have been more successful in preparing for, and their staff are more inclusive in educating, the higher numbers of pupils with SUP.

3. **Slovenia.** Slovenia's education system has a single-structure model where children with special needs are integrated into regular schools. The country emphasises inclusive education, but like other regions, it faces challenges in fully realising this goal. The education system is structured to support children with various needs, but detailed data on the outcomes and specific integration measures during the period are limited.

4. **Greece and Romania.** Information on these countries is less detailed, but both have been working within the broader European framework to improve inclusive education. Greece has been gradually implementing policies to support the integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms, though significant obstacles remain. Romania has faced criticism for its slower progress in this area, with many children with disabilities still attending segregated institutions.

These summaries reflect ongoing efforts and the varying levels of success in promoting inclusive education across these countries. Each nation faces unique challenges, with progress being uneven across the region. The overall trend, however, is toward greater inclusion and support for children with special needs in mainstream education systems.

Acceptance and Commitment Theory

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a type of psychotherapy that is tied in with complete psychological flexibility and adjustment. In its most basic form, ACT therapy is rooted in helping people accept their difficulties and move on, leaving negativity behind. Many practitioners associate ACT with mindfulness and cognitive restructuring, considering the way it allows us to develop positive thoughts and stick to goal-oriented actions. The principal goal of ACT is to teach the necessary skills to overcome painful thoughts and emotions and gain meaningful insight into what truly matters to us. ACT is goal oriented, solution focused and follows a systematic step-by-step approach in helping clients reach their target in life. ACT was developed in the 1980s by psychologist Steven C. Hayes, a professor at the University of Nevada. The ideas that coalesced into ACT emerged from Hayes’s own experience, particularly his history of panic attacks. Eventually, he vowed that he would no longer run from himself—he would accept himself and his experiences. ACT aims to develop and expand psychological flexibility that encompasses emotional openness and the ability to adapt your thoughts and behaviours to better align with your values and goals.

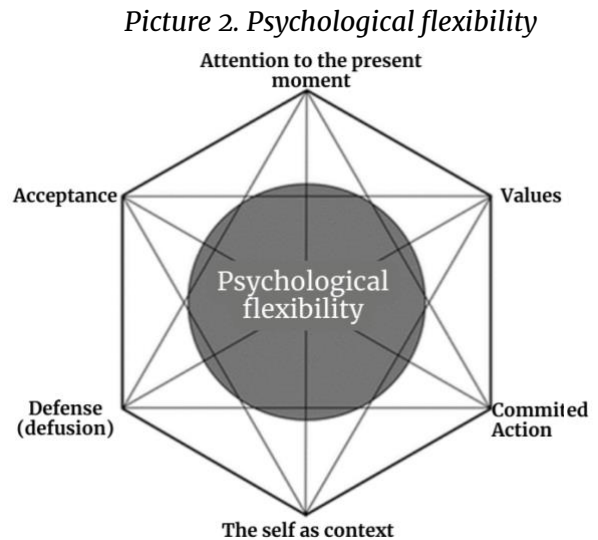
The six core processes that promote psychological flexibility are:

1. **Acceptance.** Acceptance involves acknowledging and embracing the full range of your thoughts and emotions rather than trying to avoid, deny, or alter them.

2. **Cognitive Defusion.** Cognitive defusion involves distancing yourself from and changing the way you react to distressing thoughts and feelings, which will mitigate their harmful effects. Techniques for cognitive defusion include observing a thought without judgement, singing the thought, and labelling the automatic response that you have.

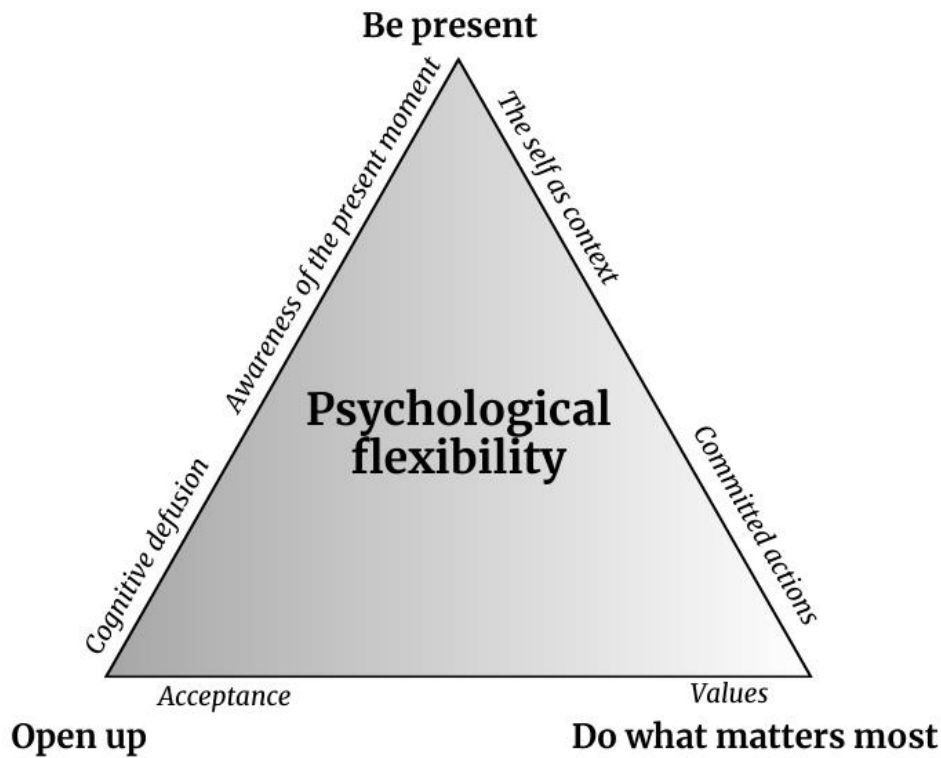
3. **Being present.** Being present involves being mindful in the present moment and observing your thoughts and feelings without judging them or trying to change them; experiencing events clearly and directly can help promote behaviour change.

4. **Self as Context.** Self as context is an idea that expands the notion of self and identity; it purports that people are more than their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.



5. **Values.** Values encompass choosing personal values in different domains and striving to live according to those principles. This stands in contrast to actions driven by the desire to avoid distress or adhere to other people’s expectations, for example.

6. **Committed Action.** Committed action involves taking concrete steps to incorporate changes that will align with your values and lead to positive change. This may involve goal setting, exposure to difficult thoughts or experiences, and skill development.



Picture 3. Psychological flexibility

The six core processes of ACT aren’t separate and can be lumped together into three functional units, as shown in the figure below.

They’re like six facets of a diamond, and the diamond itself is psychological flexibility: the ability to act mindfully, guided by our values. The greater our psychological flexibility—our capacity to be fully conscious, to open to our experience, and to act guided by our values—the greater our quality of life.

References:

Harris, R. and Hayes, S. C. (2019). ACT Made Simple. Second Edition, Revised. New Harbinger Publications.

Peer Support Groups. Benefits. Facilitation guidelines. Risks

Peer Support groups – often referred to as self-help groups – are groups of people who gather to share common problems and experiences associated with a particular problem, condition, illness, or personal circumstance. In a support group, people can talk with other folks who are like themselves – people who truly understand what they're going through and can share the type of practical insights that can only come from firsthand experience.

Benefits to peer support groups:

- When someone doesn't know many – or any – other people who are going through what he is coping with, he can feel isolated and stigmatised. Support groups help people with a problem or illness feel less alone and more understood.
 - Support groups don't cost much to run – advertising for the group and maybe some refreshments are all you'll probably need to pay for. Another cost might be meeting space, but you can usually get someone to donate it.
 - Support groups empower people to work to solve their own problems.
 - Members can share information, keeping one another up to date on news of interest to them.
 - Among people who are experiencing similar problems, there is a unique emotional identification that is different from the type of support that can be gotten from professionals.
 - Members act as role models for each other. Seeing others who are contending with the same adversity and making progress in their lives is inspiring and encouraging.
 - A support group is a safe place for someone who needs to talk about intensely personal issues, experiences, struggles, and thoughts.
 - Talking to a counsellor or doctor can be very intimidating for some people, because those relationships tend to place more power with the professional. In a support group, members are equals; this can make people feel much more comfortable opening up about their problems.
 - Talking to others in support groups reduces anxiety, improves self-esteem, and helps members' sense of well-being overall.

Facilitation guidelines

Guidelines for running group support meetings.

1. Consider beginning with a Grounding Activity
2. Starting the Meeting: The Welcome Facilitators may want to start the meeting by welcoming the members and introducing themselves.
3. Confidentiality and its Limitations Facilitators should explain the meaning of confidentiality within a group setting and discuss what will happen if confidentiality is breached.

4. Establish/Review Group Guidelines Every support group must have guidelines for individual and group expectations. It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that everyone in the group understands and adheres to them. Guidelines generally include and address group etiquette and boundaries.

5. Guiding the Flow of the Conversation Facilitator should guide the conversation and make sure it stays focused. The discussion should have a natural, conversational flow

6. Managing Disruptive Members: Sometimes, participants may dominate a group or raise issues in a manner that is disruptive to the overall group. It is important for facilitators to address behaviour that is disruptive and counterproductive to the support group. Initially, facilitators may want to simply pose the correction to the entire group without singling out a specific participant. Referring to the group's pre-established can be helpful. However, if a participant's disruptive behaviour continues, the facilitator may need to directly address the issue in the group setting.

7. Handling Difficult Situations: Being able to recognize a difficult or crisis is critical and may require immediate support, regardless of what was planned for the group. (e.g. a member in distress, disclosure of abuse, medical concerns, etc). Timely assistance by facilitators to connect members to resources offered by the IMF/World Bank can prevent issues from progressing further and will build stronger trust within the group. A quick reference list of key resources to refer/connect members to has been provided on the Resource section.

8. Closing the Meeting

Facilitators also bring closure to the meetings. Suggestions for ending a meeting include Providing a 10-15-minute notification before the discussion is scheduled to end. Announcing the date and time of the next meeting. Concluding the meeting by expressing appreciation to the group for their presence and participation

Group Rules and Principles of Support

1. Start and stop on time.
2. Time limit for Check In.
3. Absolute confidentiality.
4. Be respectful.
5. Be mindful of others; no monopolising or cross talk.
6. Keep it in the here and now.
7. Empathise with each other's situation.

The Risks of Support Groups

1. You will be around struggling people and need to account for that. They're people who are struggling with their lives, their problems, their emotions, and their actions. That's typically what people go to support groups for.

The problem is that being around struggling people can destabilise you, particularly if it's not a well-run support group. Certain topics need to be discussed in a particular way to not trigger others

2. A support group is not a lonely-hearts club.

It is bad to date people you connect with at a support group. It's against the rules in any quality group.

A support group is supposed to be a safe place for vulnerability and healing, not hooking up.

3. A support group may be spiritual but shouldn't be religious.

People often equate spirituality with religion. They aren't the same thing and aren't supposed to be the same. Sometimes people try to find a "higher power" and believe that will help them recover.

4. Online support groups and spaces can destroy your mental health.

Online support groups and social media communities can really be hit or miss in their quality. The problem with online communities is that they need to be tightly managed to ensure the quality does not drop. The more people you attract, the harder the group gets to moderate. The admin needs to find help and moderators that are people with good judgement who can help enforce the rules. That's not always easy.

Acceptance and Commitment Support Guidelines Sessions

Session 1. Main challenges in parenting a SEN child

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Welcome participants and make a short introduction about the objectives of this session. Then, ask participants to say their names and to share 1-2 expectations, thoughts or motives related to this session.

Then, ask participants to write on post its 1-2 group rules to be respected during this session and the entire program and to stick them on a wall or flipchart (For example: confidentiality, respect for each other, to be on time and to respect the time when speaking etc.). Discuss the group rules with participants and point out their importance.

Objectives of the session:

- Participants will identify their problematic thoughts, feelings and actions related to their main challenges in parenting their SEN child.
- Participants will understand how focusing on their values and goals related to parenting can reduce suffering and enrich this experience.

Activity description (35 minutes):

Briefly explain the role of this exercise in overcoming challenges related to parenting and distribute *The Problems and Values Worksheet* to the participants. Give them 10 minutes to complete the worksheet.

Split the participants in small groups of 3-4 persons and ask them to discuss their answers with each other for 15 minutes, so that each person can share their ideas.

At the end, ask the participants who wish to share their answers with the large group (10 minutes).





Activity: The Problems and Values Worksheet

This exercise aims to reduce suffering and enrich your parenting experience, as shown in the diagram below. To help in this process, there are four lots of information that are particularly important. These are represented in the four columns below. Write down your answer thinking on the main challenges that you face when parenting your SEN child.

STRUGGLE & SUFFERING		RICH & MEANINGFUL PARENTING EXPERIENCE	
<p>Problematic Thoughts and Feelings: What memories, worries, fears, self-criticisms, or other thoughts do you get “caught up” in when parenting your SEN child? What emotions, feelings, urges, or sensations do you struggle with?</p>	<p>Problematic Actions: What are you doing related to parenting that makes your life worse in the long run: that keeps you stuck; wastes your time or money; drains your energy; impacts negatively on your health, your relationships or your parenting experience; or leads to you “missing out” on life?</p>	<p>Values: What matters to you in the “big picture”? What do you want to stand for? What personal qualities and strengths do you want to develop? How do you want to enrich or improve your parenting experience? How would you like to “grow” or develop, through addressing your issue(s) or problem(s)?</p>	<p>Goals & Actions: What are you currently doing related to parenting that improves your life in the long run? What do you want to start or do more of? What parenting-enriching goals do you want to achieve? What parenting-enhancing actions do you want to take? What parenting-improving skills would you like to develop?</p>

(Adapted after: Russ Harris 2009 www.actmadesimple.com)

Questions for debriefing (5 minutes)

- How was this exercise for you?
- What did you notice that was common in your answers?
- Listening to the experience of others, have you found new ideas to add to the last two columns?
- What sort of parent would you like to be?
- What sort of qualities would you like to have?
- How would you behave if you were the ‘ideal you’ and what actions can you do in this direction?
- Did you find solutions or ideas to overcome your challenges?

Activity: The 3 - Minutes Breathing Space (4 minutes)

Explain to the participants that this exercise is a mindfulness technique aiming to help them to stay present and to relax. Instruct them as following:

Keeping a quiet mind can be rather challenging, and thoughts will often pop up. The idea is not to block them, but rather to let them come into your mind and then disappear again. Try to just observe them. The exercise is broken into three sections, one per minute:

a. The first minute is spent on answering the question “how am I doing right now?” while focusing on the feelings, thoughts, and sensations that arise, and trying to give these words and phrases.

b. The second minute is spent on keeping awareness of the breath.

c. The last minute is used for an expansion of attention outward from the breath, feeling the ways in which your breathing affects the rest of the body.

Guide participants through this exercise for 3 minutes.

(Adapted after: [positivepsychology.com](https://www.positivepsychology.com))

Questions for debriefing (3 minutes)

- How are you feeling after this exercise?
- What have you noticed during the exercise?
- How hard or easy has it been for you to remain focused on your breathing and body?

Closing activity (3 minutes)

Ask each participant to say 1-2 words to define their feelings or their state at the end of this session.



Session 2. Fulfilled and unfulfilled needs

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Welcome participants and ask them to split in pairs, after announcing the subject of this session and its objectives.

Distribute bingo cards with various needs (e.g., love, security, recognition). Participants mingle to find others who can sign off on needs they also prioritise. First person to complete a row yells “Bingo!” and shares a bit about their needs.

Parenting	Personal Growth	Leisure	Spirituality

Health	Work	Community & Environment	Family Relationships

Objectives of the session:

Intimate Relationships	Social Relationships	Education & Training	Emotions

- Participants will identify their fulfilled and unfulfilled needs in different areas of their lives.
- Participants will recognize the fulfilled and unfulfilled needs of their SEN children so that they can act to improve parent-child communication and relationships.

Activity description (25 minutes):

1. The role of this exercise is to help parents to recognize and understand their own fulfilled and unfulfilled needs as well as their SEN children. Please explain this to the participants and give them the following instructions.

Distribute among *My needs & My child's needs Worksheet* and allow 10 minutes for individual reflection and writing.

Ask participants to pair up and share their reflections for 10 minutes.

Discuss in the large group how understanding these needs can improve their parenting approach (5 minutes).

Activity: My needs & My child's needs Worksheet

In each box, write a few key words about your needs in this area of your life. Then decide and write down if the need is fulfilled or unfulfilled and mark on a scale of 0-10 how important these needs are to you, at this point in your life: 0 = no importance, 10 = extremely important. Several needs can have the same score. (Adapted after: Russ Harris, 2009, www.actmadesimple.com)

My needs

Write down the answers to the following questions:

1. What are my top three needs currently being met?

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Points
-------------------	--------

2. What are my top three unmet needs?

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Points
-------------------	--------

3. How do I feel when my needs are unmet?

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Points
-------------------	--------

My child's needs

Write down the answers to the following questions:

1. What needs do I think my child has that are being met?

_____ _____	Points
----------------	--------

2. What needs might be unfulfilled for my child?

_____ _____	Points
----------------	--------

3. How does my child express their unmet needs?

_____ _____	Points
----------------	--------

Questions for debriefing (15 minutes)

- What insights did you have?
- What common fulfilled and unfulfilled needs have you found?
- What commonalities and differences are between your needs and your SEN children?
 - Provide examples of specific actions to address your unfulfilled needs.
 - Provide examples of specific actions to address your child's unfulfilled needs.

Activity: Body Scan Relaxation (5 minutes)

Encourage participants to find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, and to close their eyes if they feel comfortable doing so.

Step 1: Instruct participants to bring their attention to their feet. Notice any sensations, tension, or relaxation:

Feel the weight of your feet on the ground. Notice any sensations. Allow your feet to relax.

Step 2: Gradually guide their attention up through their body, focusing on each part for a few seconds:

Move your attention to your legs... feel them relax.

Now, your hips... let go of any tension.

Bring your awareness to your lower back... relaxing any tightness.

Move up to your upper back and shoulders... feel them soften and relax.

Now, your neck... letting go of any tension.

Finally, bring your attention to your head and face... relaxing your jaw, your forehead, and letting your whole face soften.

Encourage participants to take a deep breath and feel the relaxation spread through their entire body.

Gently guide participants to bring their awareness back to the room.

Suggest that they wiggle their fingers and toes and stretch if they need to.

Invite them to open their eyes when they are ready, bringing with them a sense of calm and relaxation.

Questions for debriefing (2 minutes)

- Did you manage to relax each part of your body?
- When do you find this exercise useful?

Closing activity (3 minutes)

Open the floor for any questions and summarise key takeaways. Thank participants for their engagement.

Session 3. Understand yourself and your child

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (5 minutes):

- Welcome participants and overview of the workshop objectives and schedule.
- For the Icebreaker activity, allow participants to move around and mingle, asking each other questions to find matches for the statements on their handout.
- Encourage participants to interact with as many different people as possible.
- After 3 minutes, ask everyone to return to their seats.
- Before the workshop, prepare a handout with a list of statements. Each statement should describe a characteristic, experience, or interest that might apply to the participants.

Example statements:

- Find someone who has visited a country you've never been to.
- Find someone who can play a musical instrument.
- Find someone who has read a book you've never read.
- Find someone who has the same favourite colour as you.
- Find someone who has run a marathon.
- Print enough copies of the handout for each participant and provide pens or pencils.

Objectives of the session:

- Participants will identify their own strengths, values, qualities and communication styles for being able to manage better their own behaviours and emotions.
- Participants will gain deeper self-awareness and better understand their SEN children, fostering improved communication and stronger relationships.

Activity description (30 minutes):

1. Distribute among participants *Knowing Myself and My Child Worksheet* and allow 10 minutes for individual reflection and writing.

Discuss in small groups of 3-4 persons on common insights and themes (10 minutes).

On a flip chart, create two columns: one for parents' traits and one for children's traits.

Parents write their traits on sticky notes and place them on the chart. Do the same for children's traits.

Discuss as a group how similarities and differences can be navigated to improve communication and relationships (10 minutes).



Activity: Knowing Myself and My Child Worksheet

Write down answers about yourself and your SUP child next to the prepared questions, or use a Google or Microsoft form to create an interactive questionnaire based on the prepared sample ([sample questionnaire](#)).

- What are my core values?

- Which life experiences have shaped my values the most?

- What are my strengths?

- What are my weaknesses?

- How would I describe my personality in three words?

- What are some common reactions I have to stressful situations?

- How do I express my emotions, and how does this affect my interactions with my SEN child?

- How do I usually resolve conflicts in my relationships?

- How do I ensure that my child feels heard and understood during conversations?

- What do I believe is the most important role of a parent?

- How do I balance discipline and nurturing in my parenting?

- What are my hopes and dreams for my child's future?

- How do I take care of my mental and emotional well-being?

- What activities or hobbies bring me joy and fulfilment?

- How do I recharge and practice self-care?



- What are my child's strengths and interests?

- How does my child express emotions?

- What motivates my child?

- How does my child handle challenges?

- How do I encourage and support my child's talents and interests?

- What situations or events tend to upset or stress my child the most?

- How do you help my child cope with difficult emotions?

- What is my child's preferred way of communicating (e.g., talking, drawing, writing)?

- How does my child let me know when they need help or support?

- Who are my child's closest friends or peers?

- How does my child interact with others in social settings (e.g., school, family gatherings)?

- What social skills does my child excel in, and which ones could they improve?

- What role does my child typically play in the family (e.g., peacemaker, leader, joker)?

- How does my child contribute to the family's daily routines and responsibilities?

- What family activities does my child enjoy the most?

Questions for debriefing (10 minutes)

- How do your traits and values influence your parenting style?
- How can your understanding of your SEN child's personality improve your parenting approach?
- What specific actions can you take to apply what you've learned about yourself and your child?

Activity: 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise (7 minutes)

Ask participants to find a comfortable sitting position with their feet flat on the floor and hands resting on their lap. Invite them to close their eyes or soften their gaze if they feel comfortable.

Guide participants through the exercise with a calm, soothing voice:

Step 1: 5 Things You Can See

Take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes, looking around the room. Silently observe five things you can see. Focus on each item for a few seconds, noticing its colour, shape, and texture.

Step 2: 4 Things You Can Feel

Close your eyes again. Now, bring your attention to four things you can feel. It could be the pressure of the chair against your back, the texture of your clothing, the warmth of your hands, or your feet touching the ground.

Step 3: 3 Things You Can Hear

Listen for three sounds in your environment. It might be the hum of a computer, the distant sound of traffic, or your own breath. Just listen and notice these sounds without judgement.

Step 4: 2 Things You Can Smell

Now, focus on two things you can smell. If you can't smell anything right now, think of two smells you enjoy, like fresh-cut grass or baking bread.

Step 5: 1 Thing You Can Taste

Finally, notice one thing you can taste. It might be the lingering taste of your last meal, a sip of water, or simply your breath. If you can't taste anything, think of a favourite taste you enjoy.

Encourage participants to take one last deep breath in and slowly exhale. Gently guide them to bring their awareness back to the room:

When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and take a moment to notice how you feel. Remember, you can use this 5-4-3-2-1 exercise anytime you need to feel more grounded and present.

Questions for debriefing (3 minutes)

- How did you feel before starting the exercise compared to how you feel now?
- Which of the senses was easiest for you to focus on? Why do you think that was?
- Which sense was the most challenging to engage with? What made it difficult?
- Did you notice any changes in your thoughts or emotions during the exercise?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how effective do you feel this exercise was in helping you feel more grounded and present?
- What aspect of the exercise did you find most beneficial?

Closing activity (5 minutes)

Ask participants to take a moment to reflect on one key insight or take away from the workshop. Encourage them to think about a specific action they can take to apply what they've learned about themselves or their child.

Have participants write down one concrete goal or commitment they are willing to make, such as improving communication with their child, setting aside dedicated time for family activities, or applying a new parenting strategy.

Invite volunteer participants to share their commitment with the whole group, and briefly state their goal.

Session 4. Deal with your emotions

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Welcome participants and make a short introduction about the objectives of this session. Then, ask participants to share 1-2 expectations, thoughts or motives related to this session. Appreciate the participants for following the rules in the group. If there are difficulties with the arrangements, then we discuss them. Invite participants to name the emotion as a weather forecast.

Objectives of the session

- Participants will recognize and will become aware of their feelings related to their main challenges in parenting their SEN child.
- Participants will understand more about functions of different emotions.
- Participants will have the opportunity to expand the vocabulary of emotions and explore attitudes related to feelings.
- Participants will learn some possibilities of how they can deal with difficult feelings.

Activity description (35 minutes):

Include minimum on exercise/techniques of mindfulness or relaxation

Session 4 Worksheets

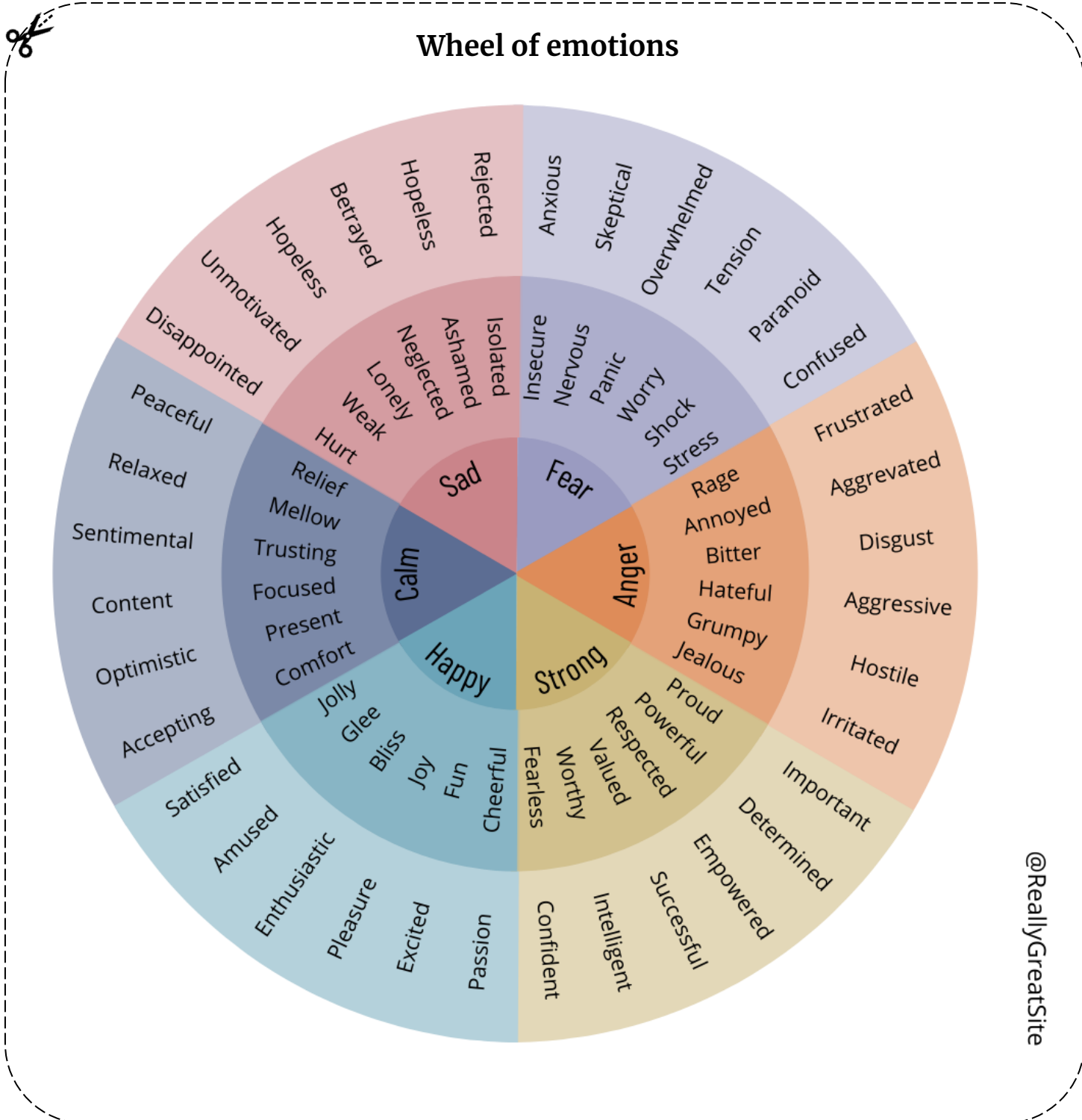
Parenting is an inherently emotional task. For example, child behaviours and parents' responses to child behaviours routinely elicit feelings of pride, joy, and love but also embarrassment, anger, and sadness. Individual differences in the nature and intensity of parents' emotions and their ability to regulate emotions are highly likely to influence the quality of parenting and parent-child relationships.

Sometimes parents think it's bad to feel unpleasant feelings and avoid them, prefer not to feel them or try to avoid them, but this doesn't help them and makes the situation or event even more complicated. Feelings are not right or wrong. It is what we do with our feelings that can be helpful or hurtful. What's most important is that we tune in to and own our feelings so that we can make a conscious decision—versus a knee-jerk reaction—about how best to respond.

So, at first it is important to recognize and become aware of feelings related to the main challenges in parenting a SEN child.

Activity: Wheel of emotions ([download](#))

Invite participants to use the “Wheel of Emotions” to identify strong emotions or feelings that you have struggled with in parenting. The facilitator may show the circle on the screen or participants may have a printed circle in the handout. Participants can reflect on the emotions they experience in parenting.



@ReallyGreatSite

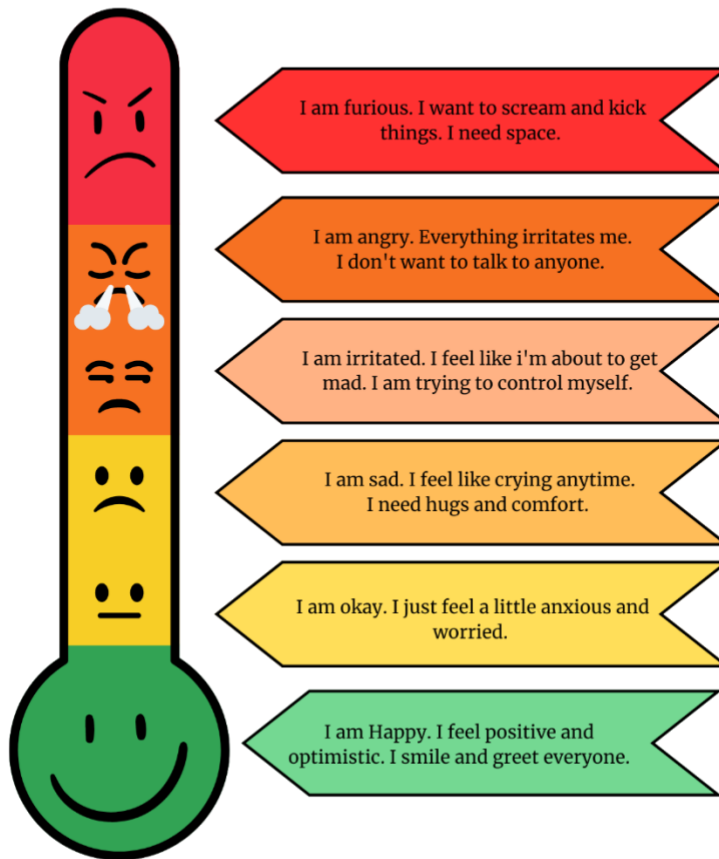
Activity: Feelings Thermometer ([download](#))

The Feelings Thermometer is a visual tool that helps participants measure how they are doing emotionally and what steps they can take to shift their mood when things are getting tough.

Like a temperature thermometer, the Feelings Thermometer shows us when our emotional temperature is getting warmer and then hotter, to potentially dangerous degrees. Green zone – the calm zone and goes to red – the furious zone. Throughout the zones it lists activities to feel less angry, frustrated, anxious, and sad. Research shows that just identifying a calming activity can reduce anxiety. Being aware of your feelings is the first step!

FEELINGS THERMOMETER

How are you feeling today?



If you're in the yellow, orange and red zone, don't hesitate to approach your teacher.

- Which zone are you in right now? What in your body tells you that you are in that zone?

- What works for you when you are in the red zone?

- Name another activity that works to move you from the orange zone to the blue zone.

- Would there be a good time of day for the whole family to check their Feelings reading?

- Which activities would help others in the family to stay in the green, calm zone?



Activity: Functions of Emotions

Emotions are rapid information-processing systems that help us act with minimal thinking (Tooby & Cosmides, 2008). Emotions play a critical role in how we live our lives, from influencing how we engage with others in our day to day lives to affecting the decisions we make. By understanding some of the different types of emotions, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these emotions are expressed and the impact they have on our behaviour.

Participants are invited to name several basic emotions and are asked to write what functions they might perform.

Emotions	Functions
Anger	
Fear	
Sadness	
Disgust	
Surprise	



As an aid, the descriptions of the functions of emotions in the table can be used for group leaders.

Emotions	Functions
Anger	Anger can be constructive in helping clarify our needs in a relationship, and it can also motivate us to act and find solutions to things that are bothering us. Anger can become a problem, however, when it is excessive or expressed in ways that are unhealthy, dangerous, or harmful to others. Unchecked anger can make it difficult to make rational decisions and can even have an impact on our physical health.
Fear	Fear is a powerful emotion that can also play an important role in survival. Fear helps us protect ourselves from danger. This response helps ensure that we are prepared to effectively deal with threats in our environment.
Sadness	Sadness is an emotion that organises our behavioural responses to losses of someone or something important, and/or to something not attained. Sadness reminds us of what matters to us. It can focus our attention on pursuing values, important goals, and communicating to others that we need support.
Disgust	This sense of revulsion can originate from several things, including an unpleasant taste, sight, or smell. This emotion evolved as a reaction to foods that might be harmful or fatal. When people smell or taste foods that have gone bad, for example, disgust is a typical reaction.
Surprise	Surprise is another type of emotion that can trigger the fight or flight response. When startled, people may experience a burst of adrenaline that helps prepare the body to either fight or flee. Research has also found that people tend to be more swayed by surprising arguments and learn more from surprising information.

Activity: Awaking emotions in body

When our child is showing reactive behaviours, such as screaming, threatening, or lashing out, any parent will feel challenged, and a natural response is to do everything we can to immediately stop both our child's behaviour and the emotional discomfort we're going through.

Participants are invited to look at the most difficult emotions they encounter in their parenting job.

- *Let's sit up straight, but do not strain and prepare for exercise.*
- *For a couple of moments, think about a difficult situation you had with your child this past week. Close your eyes if that helps you remember. Do your best to imagine that memory as vividly as possible; notice the specifics of that moment between the two of you and hold this image in your mind for a couple of minutes.*
 - *Take a couple of minutes to scan your body from head to toe and pay attention to some common areas, such as your tummy, chest, shoulders, throat, or jaws. How intense is this physical experience? Let's allow yourself to accept the sensations of the body, whatever they may be, without trying to change anything.*
 - *Can you name this emotion? You can name the emotion by simply saying "Here is a feeling of...". Naming the emotion like this is very important because telling yourself things like "I'm angry", or "I'm sad" implies that your personal identity is defined by the emotion, which magnifies the experience. You're certainly more than the emotion you're working on. You can try to observe emotions in your imagination as if from the side, from the audience's chair, acting in a pantomime or silent film actors...*
 - *Can you recognize any impulse associated with this emotion? It's quite natural that in the process of recognizing these impulses you may want to go along with them—but keep in mind that your task here is to simply describe your urges and then go back to focusing on the emotion.*
 - *Are you having any thoughts along with this emotion? Can you simply describe those thoughts and images to yourself? You can say something along the lines of "I'm having the thoughts..."*
 - *Finally, switch the focus of your attention to your breathing, and slowly notice the quality of every breath as you draw it in and let it out.*
 - *After completing this exercise, you may have noticed that emotions have a life of their own, and by simply watching them, without trying to change them, you allow these feelings to follow their natural course.*
 - *Now let's thank yourselves for the effort. When you are ready you can narrow your focus to the breath and body sensations and finish the exercise. You can write your answers in your parenting journal, if you want to.*

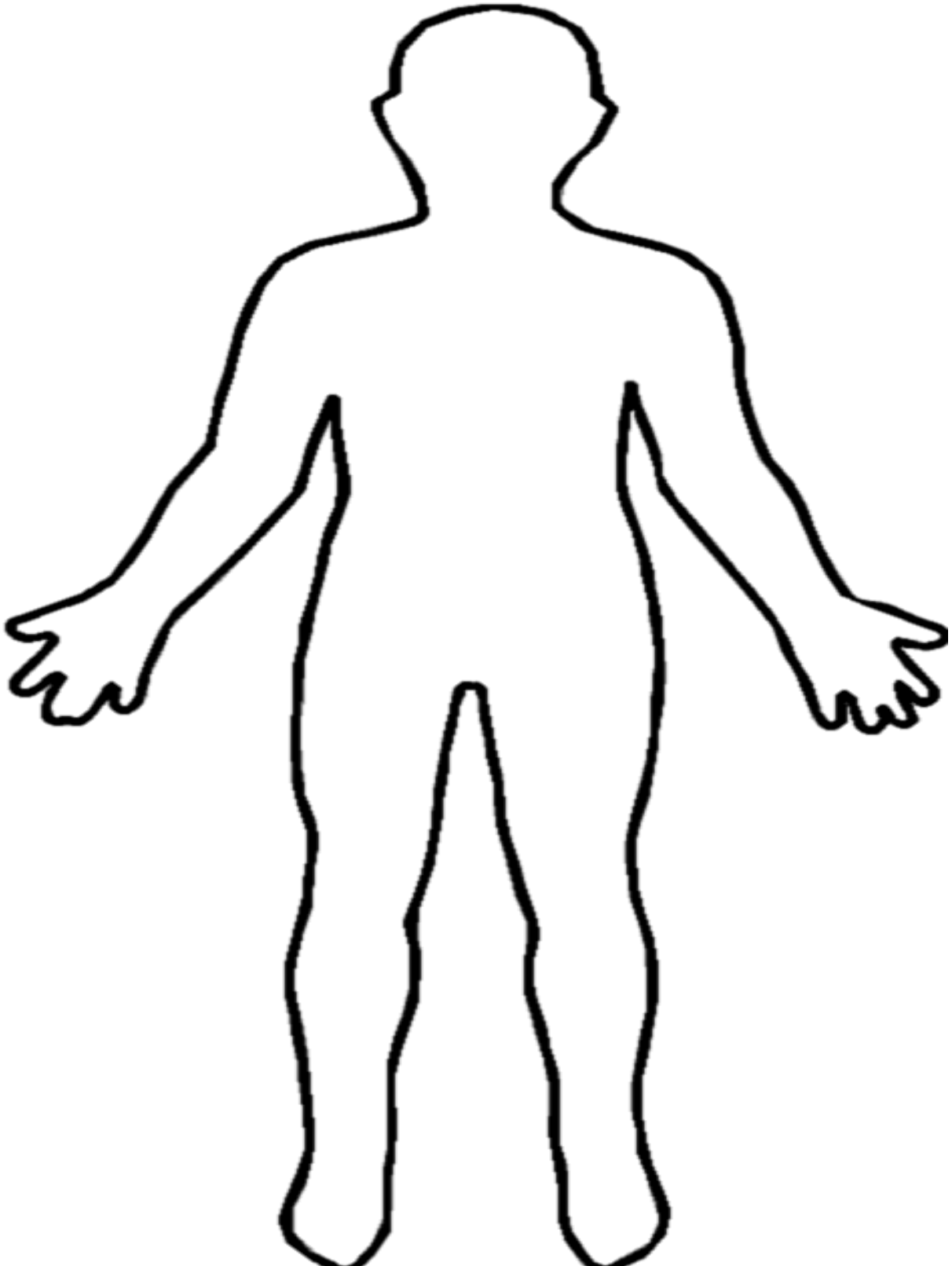
* P.S. The idea is for participants to have **a parenting journal** throughout the program.

Discussion:

- What does our body say it needs?

After this short practice participants are invited to mark colours and symbols on the outline of their body to show how they feel.

Activities "What does our body need?" worksheet



Questions for debriefing (5 minutes)

- How was this exercise for you?
- What did you notice?
- What were your emotions, thoughts and feelings?

* Weekly Practice: Playing Emotion Detective

For the next week, especially when feeling triggered by your child's behaviour, see if you can carefully notice, as an emotion detective, the most intense emotion that you experience, the physical experience of it, the intensity of it, your go-to emotion management strategy, and finally, any impulses to act on it.

Closing activity

Ask each participant to say 1-2 words to define their feelings or their state at the end of this session.

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Session 5. Set your values

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (5 minutes)

After welcoming participants and shortly presenting them the topic and objectives of this session, ask participants to pair up with someone they don't know well.

Instruct each pair to find as many things as possible that they have in common within the next 2 minutes.

Encourage them to think beyond the obvious (e.g., we both have children) and explore interests, hobbies, experiences, and personal preferences.

Examples of commonalities they might discover:

- Both enjoy reading mystery novels.
- Both have travelled to the same country.
- Both loves cooking Italian food.
- Both enjoy hiking on weekends.
- Both have the same favourite movie.
- Signal when the time is up (using a bell or timer).

Ask each pair to share one or two interesting commonalities they discovered with the larger group (3 minutes).

Objectives of the session:

- Participants will understand how their core values influence their behaviour and decision-making, as well as their parenting and relation with their SEN child.
- Participants will be able to set intentions for incorporating these values into their daily lives.

Activity description (40 minutes):

Distribute among participants *My Values Worksheet* and give them 25 minutes to complete the worksheet. Ask participants to pair up and share their conclusion and insights (10 minutes). At the end, ask the participants who wish to share their answers with the whole group (5 minutes).

Activity: My Values

If there is a need to use an electronic version of the questions (Google Forms or Microsoft Forms), the link below offers an e-listening option, where you can copy the questions to make your own personal questionnaire, or you can click on the "Print" button to print the prepared form in a paper format (if it's more comfortable to use virtual questionnaire so instructor of the session can make a copy of [electronical version](#) of questionnaire).

Values are your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are not about what you want to get or achieve; they are about how you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis.

There are literally hundreds of different values, but below you'll find a list of the most common ones. Probably, not all of them will be relevant to you. Keep in mind there are no such things as "right values" or "wrong values". It's a bit like our taste in pizzas. If you prefer ham and pineapple but I prefer salami and olives, that doesn't mean that my taste in pizzas is *right* and yours is *wrong*. It just means we have different tastes. And similarly, we may have different values.



Read through the list below and write a letter next to each value: V = Very important, Q = Quite important, and N = Not so important; and make sure to score at least ten of them as Very important.

1. *Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc.*

(V) (Q) (N)

2. *Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences.*

(V) (Q) (N)

3. *Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want.*

(V) (Q) (N)

4. *Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself.*

(V) (Q) (N)

5. *Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc.*

(V) (Q) (N)

6. *Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc.*

(V) (Q) (N)

7. *Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve.*

(V) (Q) (N)

8. *Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering.*

(V) (Q) (N)

9. *Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing and be fully present with others.*

(V) (Q) (N)

10. *Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others.*

(V) (Q) (N)

11. *Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations.*

(V) (Q) (N)

12. *Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others*

(V) (Q) (N)

13. *Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty.*

(V) (Q) (N)

14. *Creativity: to be creative or innovative.*

(V) (Q) (N)

15. *Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover.*

(V) (Q) (N)

16. *Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others.*

(V) (Q) (N)

17. *Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa.*

(V) (Q) (N)

18. *Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling.*

(V) (Q) (N)

19. *Fairness: to be fair to myself or others.*

(V) (Q) (N)

20. *Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing.*

(V) (Q) (N)



21. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances.
(V) (Q) (N)
22. Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave or help others do likewise.
(V) (Q) (N)
23. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others.
(V) (Q) (N)
24. Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others.
(V) (Q) (N)
25. Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities.
(V) (Q) (N)
26. Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others.
(V) (Q) (N)
27. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life.
(V) (Q) (N)
28. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others.
(V) (Q) (N)
29. Humour: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life.
(V) (Q) (N)
30. Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves.
(V) (Q) (N)
31. Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated.
(V) (Q) (N)
32. Independence: to be self-supportive and choose my own way of doing things.
(V) (Q) (N)
33. Intimacy: to open, reveal, and share myself -- emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships.
(V) (Q) (N)
34. Justice: to uphold justice and fairness.
(V) (Q) (N)
35. Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others.
(V) (Q) (N)
36. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others.
(V) (Q) (N)
37. Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience.
(V) (Q) (N)
38. Order: to be orderly and organized.
(V) (Q) (N)
39. Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from other's points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
(V) (Q) (N)
40. Patience: to wait calmly for what I want.
(V) (Q) (N)
41. Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
(V) (Q) (N)
42. Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others.
(V) (Q) (N)



43. Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing.

(V) (Q) (N)

44. Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking.

(V) (Q) (N)

45. Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard.

(V) (Q) (N)

46. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions.

(V) (Q) (N)

47. Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection.

(V) (Q) (N)

48. Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others.

(V) (Q) (N)

49. Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions.

(V) (Q) (N)

50. Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met.

(V) (Q) (N)

51. Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.

(V) (Q) (N)

52. Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals.

(V) (Q) (N)

53. Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses.

(V) (Q) (N)

54. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality.

(V) (Q) (N)

55. Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself.

(V) (Q) (N)

56. Skilfulness: to continually practise and improve my skills and apply myself fully when using them.

(V) (Q) (N)

57. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others.

(V) (Q) (N)

58. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable.

(V) (Q) (N)

59. Insert your own unlisted value here:

Once you've marked each value as V, Q, N (Very, Quite, or Not so important), go through all the Vs, and select out the top six that are most important to you. Mark each one with a 6, to show it's in your top six. Finally, write those six values out below, to remind yourself this is what you want to stand for as a human being.

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....



Activity: The following are areas of life that are valued by some people.

Think about each area in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals. There may be certain areas that you don't value much; you may skip them if you wish. There may be areas that overlap – e.g. if you value hiking in the mountains, that may come under both physical health and recreation. It is also important that you write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way. *What's important? What do you care about? And what would you like to work towards?*

1. Family relations. What sort of brother/sister, son/daughter, uncle/auntie do you want to be? What personal qualities would you like to bring to those relationships? What sort of relationships would you like to build? How would you interact with others if you were the ideal you in these relationships?

2. Marriage/couples/intimate relations. What sort of partner would you like to be in an intimate relationship? What personal qualities would you like to develop? What sort of relationship would you like to build? How would you interact with your partner if you were the 'ideal you' in this relationship?

3. Parenting. What sort of parent would you like to be? What sort of qualities would you like to have? What sort of relationships would you like to build with your children? How would you behave if you were the 'ideal you'.

4. Friendships/social life. What sort of qualities would you like to bring to your friendships? If you could be the best friend possible, how would you behave towards your friends? What sort of friendships would you like to build?

5. Career/employment. What do you value in your work? What would make it more meaningful? What kind of worker would you like to be? If you were living up to your own ideal standards, what personal qualities would you like to bring to your work? What sort of work relations would you like to build?



6. Education/personal growth and development. What do you value about learning, education, training, or personal growth? What new skills would you like to learn? What knowledge would you like to gain? What further education appeals to you? What sort of student would you like to be? What personal qualities would you like to apply?

7. Recreation/fun/leisure. What sorts of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities do you enjoy? How do you relax and unwind? How do you have fun? What sorts of activities would you like to do?

8. Spirituality. Whatever spirituality means to you is fine. It may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participation in an organised religious group. What is important to you in this area of life?

9. Citizenship/ environment/ community life. How would you like to contribute to your community or environment, e.g. through volunteering, or recycling, or supporting a group/ charity/ political party? What sort of environments would you like to create at home, and at work? What environments would you like to spend more time in?

10. Health/physical well-being. What are your values related to maintaining your physical well-being? How do you want to look after your health, regarding sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc? Why is this important?

(Adapted after: Russ Harris 2009 www.actmadesimple.com)

Questions for debriefing (5 minutes)

- Why are these values important to you?
- How have these values influenced your past decisions and actions?
- Can you share an example of a time when one of these values guided your behaviour as a parent?
- Can you share one specific action you will take to honour each of your top 6 values in your daily life?

Activity: The 4- Minutes Focused Breathing

Duration: (4 minutes)

Briefly explain the purpose of the exercise to help them relax and bring their attention to the present moment.

Ask participants to find a comfortable sitting position with their feet flat on the floor and hands resting on their lap.

Invite them to close their eyes or soften their gaze if they feel comfortable.

Guide participants through the breathing exercise with a calm, soothing voice (4 minutes):

Take a deep breath in through your nose, filling your lungs completely. Hold it for a moment, and then slowly exhale through your mouth. Let's do this together a few times.

Pause briefly to allow participants to follow along.

Now, return to your normal breathing rhythm. Focus your attention on your breath as it flows in and out. Notice the sensation of the air entering your nostrils, filling your lungs, and then gently leaving your body.

If your mind starts to wander, that's okay. Gently bring your focus back to your breath. Imagine each breath as a wave, gently washing over you, bringing calm and peace.

As you inhale, think 'I am breathing in calm.' As you exhale, think 'I am breathing out tension.'

Continue this pattern, breathing in calm and breathing out tension. Allow each breath to bring you deeper into relaxation.

Now, take one more deep breath in, filling your lungs completely. Hold it for a moment, and then exhale slowly. When you're ready, gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to the room.

Questions for debriefing (3 minutes)

- What sensations did you notice in your body as you focused on your breath?
- Were you able to keep your attention on your breathing, or did your mind wander? How did you bring it back?
- Did you notice any changes in your emotional state during the exercise?
- How did thinking "I am breathing in calm" and "I am breathing out tension" affect your relaxation?
- What, if anything, did you find challenging about this exercise?
- What benefits did you experience from the focused breathing exercise?
- How might you incorporate focused breathing into your daily routine?
- Can you think of specific situations in your life where this exercise might be particularly helpful?

Closing activity (3 minutes)

Ask participants to stand in a circle. Hand out sticky notes and markers and ask each participant to write down one value they are committed to focusing on in the upcoming week.

Have each participant stick their note on the flip chart or whiteboard.

Close with a group affirmation, such as, “We commit to living our values every day.”

Session 6. Acceptance versus avoidance of your situation

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Welcome participants and make a short introduction about the objectives of this session. Then, ask participants to introduce themselves through an acquaintance game – liken themselves to an animal/colour/object and explain their choice. We share 1-2 expectations, thoughts or motives related to this session's acceptance vs avoidance. Get to know each other.

Objectives of the session. The aim is to deepen parents and educators in the conditions of acceptance and rejection in the upbringing and education of young people with special needs. We define the terms acceptance vs avoidance and relate them to attitudes and behaviours. The goal is for parents to experience the stages of grief associated with the loss of a positive state and an ideal image.

Finally, the aim is to deepen the relationships between carers and young people with disabilities

Activity description (35 minutes)

We need to understand what leads us to a deeper denial, and questioning.

(10 minutes) We ask them to choose a colour for acceptance and a colour for rejection. We distribute the corresponding colour sticker and ask them to express what is respectively acceptance and rejection. We divide the participants into 2 groups and ask them to make a work of art that expresses acceptance and one rejection with coloured papers for each concept.

(5 minutes) We return to the unified group and discuss the result: symbolisms, feelings, concepts, attitudes, and values that are distinguished.

(10 minutes) Then we ask to create a work of art that includes the concepts of both acceptance and rejection. The parallel coexistence of concepts in human nature.

Questions for debriefing (10 minutes)

What are expectations?

- Questions about what the expectations are: goals-dreams for their/the children
- We ask them to discuss their own expectations, goals, and dreams.
- Discussion in the wider group about common points and differences
- What are their children's positive points, and do they think they can achieve these expectations and goals?

A deeper review of myself (4 minutes)

I'm thinking in 2 minutes how many of the stages we've analysed have I gone through? How much have they changed me? I express myself

Deep focus on words, Mental Empowerment Exercises (4 minutes)

Relaxing music from the background directs our body to a position that pleases us. Guided breathing exercises by the trainer and exclaiming of words related to acceptance and rejection to give their body a specific posture!

(Loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, pessimism, despair, withdrawal from social relationships, decrease in interests, lack of participation in daily activities, dignity, quality of life, love, empathy, gratitude)

Questions for debriefing: 2 minutes

- How are you feeling after this exercise?
- What made it difficult for you?
- What did he experience inside?

Closing activity (3-5 minutes)

Ask each participant to say 1-2 words to define their feelings or their state at the end of this session.

Additional information

Research has shown that the path of acceptance of the new situation followed by a person with a disability or their family is the same as the path taken by a patient with a life-threatening illness. One of the most important scientists who have contributed to the understanding and care of terminally ill people is Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, psychiatrist. The mental process experienced by the individual as he moves towards death consists of the following five stages which will be described in the context of disability and not death:

The mental process experienced by the individual as he moves towards death consists of the following five stages which will be described in the context of disability and not death:

1. Stage of denial ("No! This cannot be happening to my child! A mistake would have been made in the diagnosis...").
2. Stage of anger ("Why? Why should this evil happen to my child?")
3. Stage of negotiation or haggling ("Yes..., but...").
4. Stage of depression ("Yes... My life will change. Can my child stay permanently in a wheelchair").
5. Stage of acceptance ("...").

Kübler-Ross argues that in the above course, the patient retains some hope, the nature of which changes as the conditions and experiences of the individual with the development of his health are modified.

The previous stages do not strictly follow one another but often coexist or reappear in different phases of disability. In essence, what Kübler-Ross claims is that the person is experiencing a stressful situation that evokes strong emotions and uses familiar strategies to cope with reality.

Session 7. Assess Your Need of Control

Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

“Welcome, everyone, to our workshop on assessing your need for control, especially in the context of caring for children with special educational needs. I’m (instructors name), and I’ll be facilitating today’s session. This is a space where we can openly discuss our experiences and challenges, so I appreciate your willingness to share and learn from each other. Let’s start by setting some ground rules to ensure a supportive and respectful environment for all”.

Workshop Rules:

- Confidentiality: What is shared here, stays here.
- Active Listening: Give full attention to the person speaking.
- Respect for Time: Stick to the allotted time for sharing.
- Non-Judgment: All experiences are valid; we are here to support, not judge.
- Presence: Please silence phones and minimise distractions.

Introduction to workshop theme

“Today, we’ll explore how our need for control influences our parenting and caregiving, particularly with children who have special educational needs. It’s natural to want to control situations, especially when caring for children with additional needs, but sometimes, this need can lead to stress and tension—for both you and the child. Our goal today is to reflect on how much control we seek, why we seek it, and how we can find a healthy balance that supports both our well-being and that of our children”.

Understanding the Need for Control. Key Concepts (10 minutes)

What is the Need for Control?

The need for control refers to the desire to manage or direct situations, outcomes, and behaviours—often to reduce uncertainty or avoid negative outcomes.

Parenting. In parenting, especially with children who have SEN, the need for control can manifest as micromanaging, setting rigid routines, or struggling to delegate responsibilities. While structure is essential, an excessive need for control can lead to stress, frustration, and even conflict.

Importance of Balance. Finding a balance between maintaining control and allowing flexibility is crucial for your well-being and your child’s development. It can lead to more positive interactions, reduce stress, and empower your child to develop independence.

Activity: Reflecting on Your Need for Control

Duration: 15 minutes.

Discussion Prompts:

- “Think about a recent situation with your child where you felt the need to control the outcome. What happened, and how did you react?”

- “What emotions did you experience in that situation? Did you feel anxious, frustrated, or perhaps overwhelmed?”
- “How did your child respond to your need for control in that situation? Did it help or hinder the outcome?”

Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to share their experiences in small groups of 3-4. Ensure that each person must have the opportunity to speak.
- Remind participants that this is a judgement-free zone where everyone’s experiences are valued.

Group Sharing:

- After the small group discussions, invite participants to share key insights or reflections with the larger group.

Strategies for Managing the Need for Control (20 minutes)

Present Key Strategies

1. Identify Triggers:

Explanation: Recognize specific situations or behaviours that trigger your need for control. Understanding these triggers can help you prepare and respond more mindfully.

2. Practice Flexibility:

Explanation: Allow yourself to be flexible with routines and expectations. Understand that not everything needs to go according to plan, and that’s okay.

3. Focus on What You Can Control:

Explanation: Shift your focus to what you can realistically control—like your own reactions and the environment you create—rather than trying to control your child’s every move.

4. Set Realistic Expectations:

Explanation: Adjust your expectations based on your child’s needs and abilities. Recognize that every child, especially those with SEN, has a unique pace of development.

5. Empower Your Child:

Explanation: Give your child choices and opportunities to make decisions. This not only helps them develop independence but also reduces your need to control every aspect of their life.

6. Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:

Explanation: Incorporate mindfulness practices like deep breathing, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation to help manage your stress and reduce the urge to control.

7. Seek Support:

Explanation: Don’t hesitate to seek help from support groups, therapists, or other parents in similar situations. Sharing experiences and solutions can provide new perspectives and reduce the pressure to control.

Discussion:

- “Which of these strategies resonate with you? Have you tried any before, and if so, how did they work?”
- “What new strategies might you be willing to try moving forward?”

Practical Activity: Control Reflection (15 minutes)

Objective:

Participants will use a notes or papers to reflect on their need for control in specific situations and develop strategies to manage it more effectively.

Materials Needed:

- Paper / notes
- Pens or pencils

Instructions:

1. Identify a Situation:

Think of a recent situation where you felt a strong need to control the outcome. Write down the details of the situation on your worksheet.

2. Analyse Your Reaction:

Reflect on your emotional and physical reactions during that situation. Write down how you felt and what you did.

3. Explore the Impact:

Consider how your need for control affected the situation, your child, and yourself. Was the outcome positive or negative?

4. Develop a Strategy:

Based on the strategies discussed earlier, write down one or two actions you can take in the future to manage your need for control in similar situations.

Example:

- Situation: My child refused to do homework at the scheduled time.
- Reaction: I felt anxious and insisted they do it immediately, raising my voice.
- Impact: My child became upset and resisted even more, leading to a conflict.
- Strategy: Next time, I will offer a choice of doing homework now or after a short break, respecting their need for a break and my need for structure.

Group Sharing (optional):

Invite participants to share their reflections and strategies with a partner or the group, if they feel comfortable.

Conclusion and Debriefing (10 minutes)

Debrief Questions:

- How did it feel to reflect on your need for control?
- What new insights did you gain about yourself and your interactions with your child?

- Which strategies are you most excited to implement, and how do you think they will impact your relationship with your child?

Closing Remarks: “Thank you all for your participation today. Remember, recognizing and managing your need for control is not about letting go completely, but about finding a balance that allows both you and your child to thrive. It’s a journey of self-awareness and growth, and you’ve taken an important step today.”

Optional Stress-Relief Exercise: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (5 minutes)

“Let’s end our session with a short relaxation exercise to help us unwind. Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing and then slowly releasing each muscle group in the body.”

Start with your feet, tense the muscles for a few seconds, then slowly release. Move up through your legs, abdomen, chest, arms, and finally your face.

As you release the tension, focus on the feeling of relaxation spreading through your body.

Session 8. Fears, worries and exhaustion

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Welcome participants and make a short introduction about the objectives of this session.

We ask participants to refer to the first moment of the day, the time they woke up or started, and the emotion they experienced, and mention it by name. Then, like an activation game, we hand out paper bags and markers and ask them to draw an emotion and use it as a hat.

Objectives of the session:

Speaking of emotion, we need to understand that it is a conscious psychic experience that involves physiological stimulation and its interpretation. It therefore consists of two factors. The degree of arousal and the attempt to categorise it by the person experiencing it.

Some deeper relationships of values that we will explore are:

- How do emotions relate to our worries and fears in raising and educating children?
- Personality and emotion management, a puzzle of self-improvement
- How emotions relate to self-fulfilling prophecy
- How emotions can cause burnout

Participants will also be able to:

- Understand stress and burnout
- Learn how to spot burnout
- Set boundaries
- Seek practical support
- Talk to someone
- Set aside worry time
- Remember the positives

Discussion about:

- Map of emotions and identification
- What is the role of parents' emotional availability?
- Mindfulness: the practice of being intentionally aware and conscious of each present moment.
 - Release
 - Non-attachment
 - Daily tips

What are emotions?

Sometimes they are unconscious information, or they are conscious but not accepted by the person experiencing them and so defensively they do not express them

even to themselves. People tend to place determinations on emotions, such as good or bad emotions (e.g., joy is good, sadness is bad).

In fact, there may be a sign, since some cause a reduced mood, but emotions are not answered with good and bad. All kinds of emotions are there as an update to the body that something pleases it or not, scares it or excites it, and so on.


In this way, emotions are also part of recognizing a person's needs.

Activity: fears, worries, exhaustion (10 minutes for every theme)

Fears (10 minutes): record thoughts in a paper used as personal development diary (fears), optionally we can work with the worksheet: **Tangled feelings.**

Although you don't have much time to dedicate, here's a diary about your personal development, try filling it out by answering some of the following:

- Record thoughts in a personal development diary.
- Although you don't have much time to dedicate, here's a paper to write down your own diary about your personal development. Try filling it out by answering some of the following that we have prepared for you! We share questions like:

- 
1. When a strong negative emotion or fear comes, try saying: STOP at.....
 2. Name the feeling
 3. Take a few deep breaths.
 4. Set an intention about how you want to behave.
 5. Act on your intent
 6. What did I learn today?
 7. What actions boosted my self-esteem and self-confidence?
 8. What made it difficult for me? How could I have done it differently?
 9. What do I need to think about more?
 10. What would I like from tomorrow?
 11. How can I improve my relationship with my loved ones?

After discussing the data, we ask members to follow this exercise on their own by recording thoughts on a paper or agenda as week-by-month calendar:

What gave me the most joy?
What did I do differently and where do I take risks?
What was one important thing I accomplished?
Where did I go? What did I see? What did I think?
What was the biggest challenge that made it difficult for me?
What touched me the most?
My goals for the next period.
How did I do with the goals I had set?
I dare and let me be afraid – I hesitate

10 minutes: storytelling activity for concerns, worries, and anxieties experienced by parents and teachers- youth workers of people with disabilities. Storytelling of an

experience that stigmatised them: e.g. a comment at school/community – buses, market. Positive reframing through discussion in the group, where possible, or else attribution of behaviour to external causes and possible solutions. One of the participants becomes a narrator, a mediator, facilitator.

10 minutes: Exhaustion: Take this 10-question quiz

I feel like I'm in survival mode or autopilot in my role as a parent-youth worker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I'm having more trouble concentrating and focusing (i.e., brain fog) because of parenting.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I feel overwhelmed and exhausted at the end of the day from looking after my- the child/children and juggling other responsibilities.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Even before my morning has started, I feel exhausted by the thought of another day of caring for my- the child/children.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I feel like parenting uses up most, if not all, of my energy. I don't have much time for anything else.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I'm so stressed out due to parenting that I have trouble falling and/or staying asleep.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I find myself increasingly impatient and critical of my- the child/children.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I no longer feel able to show or convey to my- the kid(s) how much I love them.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I find it difficult to enjoy being with my- a child/children.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I don't feel like the good parent, good caregiver that I used to be.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Data analysis in teams in a toolkit like a map or graphic and discussion about the results.

Activity: Think “Rocks, Pebbles, and Sand”

Each partner takes a jar, rocks, pebbles, and sand...

As you define your anchor points and organise your days, don't lose sight of the things you value — and the things that might be taking up more time than they should.

Think of your finite time as a glass jar that can be filled with rocks, pebbles, and sand. The rocks represent the things that you value most in your life, while the pebbles represent things that are important, but that you can do without. The sand represents the small stuff.

Ideally, you want to fill up your jar in this order: rocks, pebbles, then sand. But too often, we fill our jar the other way around. When your jar is full of sand, it's hard to make room for the rocks and pebbles. Daily frustration, stress, and dissatisfaction — all which impact parenting — potentially indicate that the items in your jar are not properly organised.

Take a moment to think about your jar. Is there enough room for the rocks? Have you given too much priority to pebbles and sand? If so, how can you reprioritize so that the rocks always fit first?

Deep focus on words, mental empowerment exercises (4 minutes)

An exercise to help us manage our emotions: Focus solely on the physical aspect of your emotion — for example, if you're afraid, focus on "I have a rapid heartbeat," or if you're sad, "I feel a lump in my chest". And then banish from your mind all the images and memories associated with that feeling. Exile them. Delete them.

Focus solely on the physical sensation and stay that way for a while. You will quickly find, or rather feel, that it is dissolving. With this little mental exercise, you can manage all emotions.

Questions for debriefing (2 minutes)

- Have we understood how certain emotions that normally belong to the past manage to constantly creep into our present?
- Are you focused enough or blocked?
- Did you let the emotion associated with this situation come to the surface to allow it to be perceived even in a milder form?

Closing activity (3–5 minutes)

We ask participants to inflate one or more balloons with concentration, write on it an emotion from which they feel most aroused, and release the balloon...

Additional information. An alternative exercise, depending on the dynamics of the group:

Is to make the effigy of a person, without sex characteristics or facial expressions and to write in it the fears, mental needs and emotions and outside and around it worries and anxieties... The participants draw the sketch on butcher paper and alternately write what they experience or feel, draw, colour!

Emotions were isolated to six in 1970 by P. Eckman, who recognized the universal character of these feelings. These feelings are displayed on a global scale by most people. At the same time, they correspond to the secretion of brain chemicals and the activation of specific areas of the brain. Later, more emotions such as pride, shame, embarrassment and excitement were added to the list of six.

Robert Plutchik later created the wheel of emotions. This wheel works like that of colours. The combination of various emotions happens as in colours. Explanatory, to produce a colour one can combine two of the basic ones. If combined blue with red can result in purple. Similarly, in emotions, if joy and trust are combined, for example, love can be produced.

In the list of basic emotions, scientists from the scientific journal *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences* (2017), suggest adding another 21 different categories of emotions. However, further research shows that these emotions are not so distinct, and people experience them as a gradation, rather than as isolated ones (e.g., anger, rage, etc.).

Talking about parental exhaustion and Burnout of caregivers and trainers, moreover, parents whose children had been diagnosed with ADHD or anxiety were more likely to experience burnout. In addition, parents who were concerned that their child had an undiagnosed mental health condition were also at higher risk of burnout.

Burnout, a syndrome characterised by “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a decrease in self-fulfilment,” is a result of chronic exposure to emotionally draining environments (Rionda, I. S., et al., *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 18, No. 9, 2021).

“Mom burnout” is more common as women continue to be the primary care providers for children. However, fathers are also at risk for burnout when they are involved with parenting. The Ohio State University study found that 68 percent of female parents were burnt out vs. 42 percent of males.

Parental burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. It leaves parents feeling chronically fatigued, often experiencing sleep and concentration problems, and it can lead to depression, chronic anxiety, and illness. We are going to give some tips like:

- **teach them a breathing exercise.** This exercise is a good way to slow the breath or racing thoughts. It is sometimes called the ‘Take 5’ breathing exercise. Explain and practise these steps with your child;
- **get your child to hold out one hand with the fingers apart, like a star** -> Using a finger on their other hand as a pointer, they can slowly trace around the star shape. -> They trace up each finger, then they breathe out as they trace down the other side. -> Your child should trace around their whole hand. -> Repeat this as many times as you like. -> Afterwards, ask your child how they feel.

Activity: Make a mindfulness jar

Pick a selection of mindful activities and write each one on a piece of card or paper. Put them all in a jar or box somewhere you spend time together. Each family member can then choose one at random to do every day. Activities could include:

Breathe. Do the tracing the breath exercise above but keep it going for 60 seconds or longer. Try to focus only on the activity. Each time you notice your mind wandering, gently bring it back to the task.

Notice nature. Look or listen for birds, animals, plants, clouds and anything else. You can do this while sitting in the garden, or while standing at the back door or in front of a window.

Notice each of your senses in turn. What can you see? What do you hear? What can you taste, touch or smell?

Make a gratitude list. What makes you happy or helps you feel safe? Who or what would you like to thank for these things?

Pick a word for the day. Whenever you hear or read that word, take a moment to pay close attention to what you're doing. Are you walking, texting or brushing your teeth? How are you moving? How do you feel?

Teach self-care

Encourage your child to choose at least one activity every day that makes them feel good. For example:

- Read a book, watch a movie or listen to music.
- Bake biscuits or make a favourite cake.
- Put music on and sing or dance around the house.
- Make a collage out of old magazines.
- Call or write to a friend or family member.
- Do something nice for someone else.

For more suggestions, see these activities for toddlers, children and teens.

Have a daily review

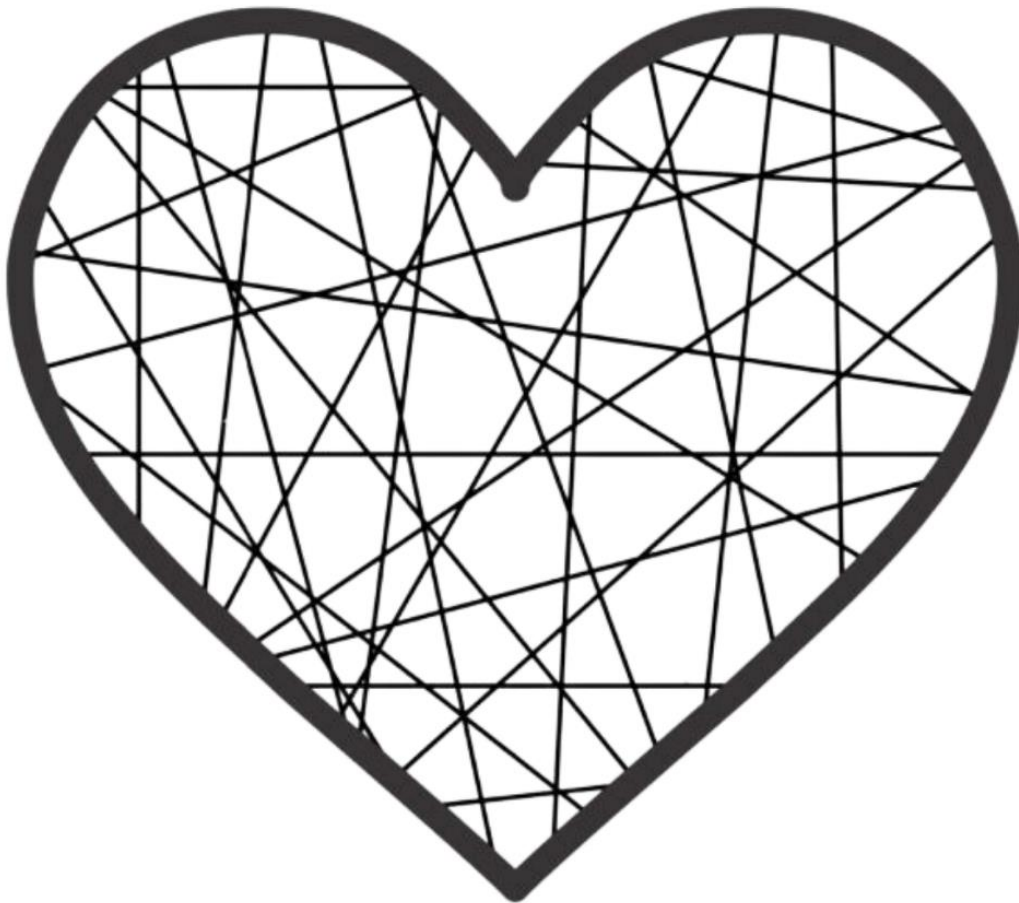
Making this part of your child's bedtime routine is a great way to let go of worries. Ask your child:

- What was good about today?
- What didn't go well?
- What made you smile?
- What are you looking forward to about tomorrow?

Worksheet: Triangled feelings ([download](#))

Tangled Feelings

Emotions are complex: we often feel multiple emotions at once. How have you been feeling lately? Colour the heart below to reflect your feelings today, this week, or this month – whatever feels most meaningful to you.



- | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipation | <input type="checkbox"/> Surprise | <input type="checkbox"/> Calmness | <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness | <input type="checkbox"/> Disgust | <input type="checkbox"/> Joy | <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Trust | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Session 9. Balance family life and professional life

Welcome participants and explain the rules of the workshop in case any of the participants are new. Short introduction.

Special needs parents

For many people, becoming a parent opens the door to new communities. A secret language is unlocked through shared experiences, and you find you have so much in common with these fellow parents that used to be strangers. Your children are different people, but they are doing the same things. You're on the same path. But when you're parenting a child whose brain or body works differently it can feel like the shared language of parenting is a foreign tongue. It feels like you're being forced to walk alone on a more difficult path.

There are several reasons special needs parents can experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. Loneliness is an emotional response to isolation or lack of meaningful companionship. These are on top of the many ways all parents can feel lonely and isolated during stages of parenting.

- Few people are sharing their journey.
- Empathy is different from genuine friendship.
- Special needs parents have many responsibilities.
- Special needs parents often have limited time for social activities.

Feeling lonely and isolated is not pleasant. This can be made worse by societal pressures like FOMO (fear of missing out).

Special needs teachers

Isolation and loneliness among teaching staff reflects the teacher's longing to have support either from the school/headmaster or the colleagues. Isolation refers to the extent to which a teacher believes they belong to the school and whether they feel recognized for their contributions to the school. Colleague isolation, however, reflects how the teacher perceives casual interactions and friendships with their colleagues. Isolated employees often feel that they are neither valued nor recognized by their organisation and/or colleagues, and the literature has shown that workplace isolation has a negative impact on workplace wellbeing, job satisfaction, colleague and supervisor satisfaction, and organisational commitment.

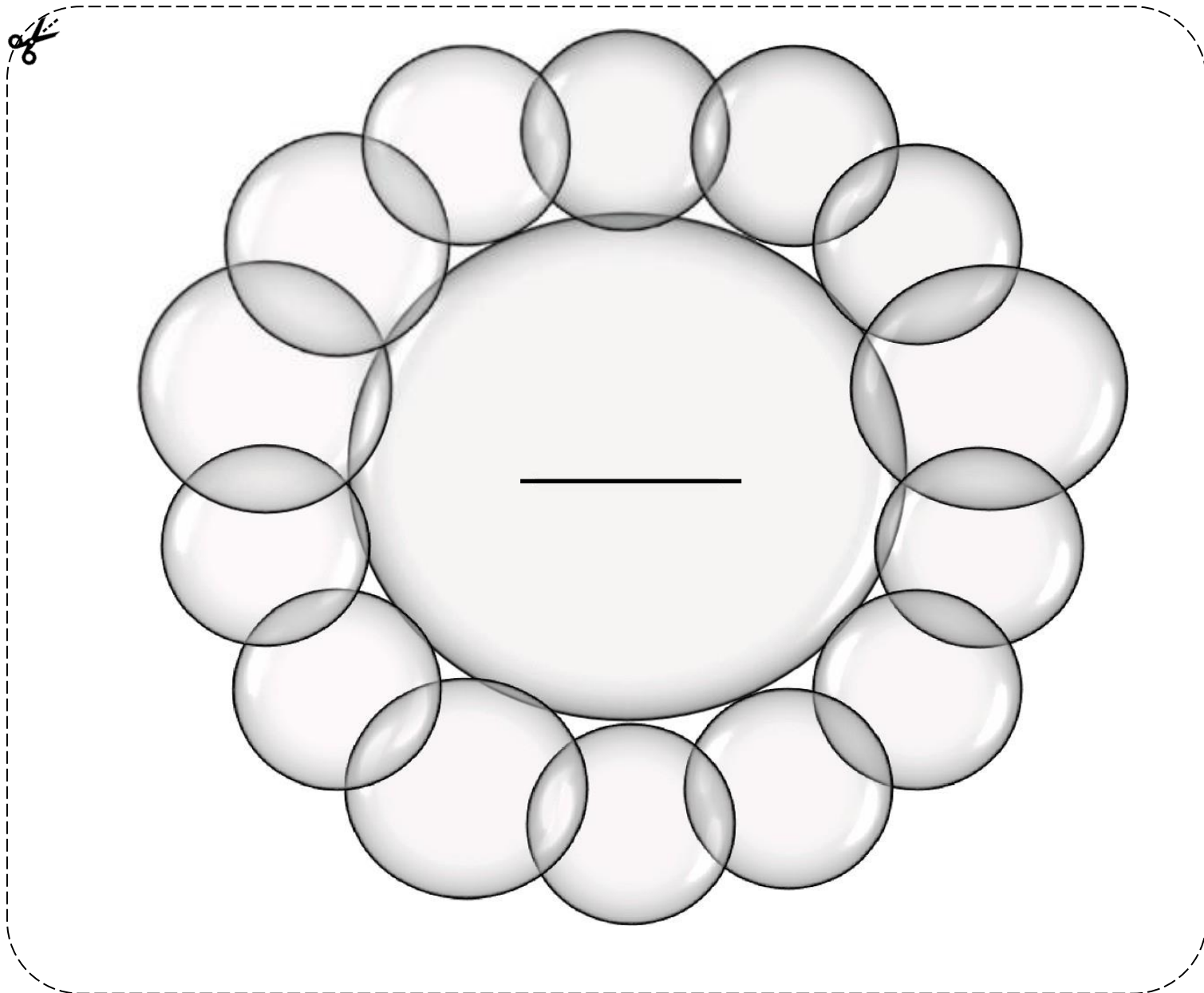
Everyday obstacles will likely take a bigger emotional toll on people who don't have strong social support. Teaching is both a mentally and physically demanding profession, made even more demanding when juggling work, personal and family life. This demand can be a source of occupational stress described as “ongoing stress that is related to the workplace”. When an individual is isolated at work, whether this isolation is physical or perceived, this can result in feelings of loneliness. Workplace loneliness is defined as the distress which arises when an employee believes they do not have adequate interpersonal relationships at work. Research has shown that general loneliness experiences can lead to impaired cognitive performance, increased

depressive symptoms, and reduced cellular immunity. Workplace loneliness is negatively correlated with job satisfaction.

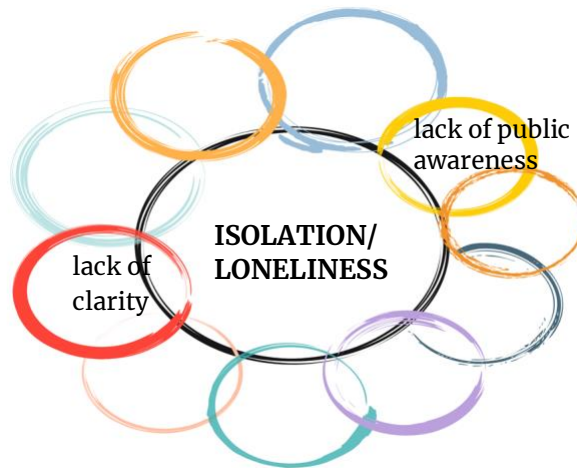
Prolonged stress can lead to burnout. Teachers are exposed to a range of potential stressors daily as they are held to a high and scrupulous standard of daily accountability for not only their own actions but that of each pupil. This constant monitoring alone can be a source of stress. Other recognized stressors include excessive work hours and workload, large class size, changes to curriculum and lack of support.

Activity: Isolation / Loneliness

What contributes to your feelings of feeling alone and isolated? (5 minutes)



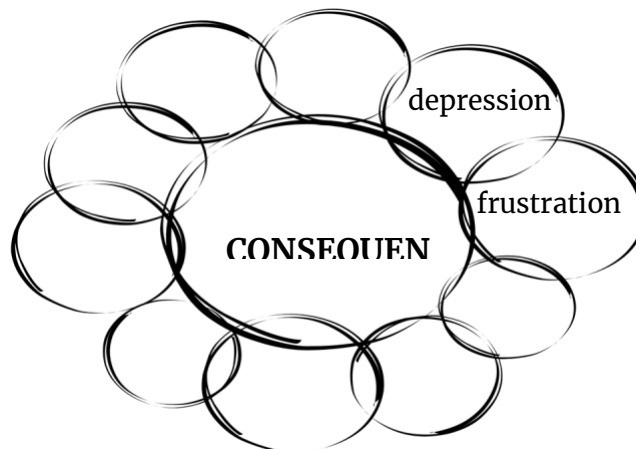
Each workshop participant writes down on his paper the causes that contribute to his/her feelings of isolation/loneliness. If they don't have any ideas, we can help them with suggestions: long work hours, disconnect from other teachers, lack of funding, lack of education, unrealistic expectations, excessive paperwork, out of hours contact, no recognition, multiple roles, lack of guidance and clarity, no communication, lack of public awareness, underappreciated...



The Theme Isolation/Loneliness with some answers

What are the (possible) consequences of the feelings you have described? (5 minutes)

Each workshop participant writes down on his paper the consequences of isolation/loneliness. If they don't have any ideas, we can help them with suggestions: pressure, fear, stress, frustration, health, exhaustion, depression, burnout, desire to leave the profession, family problems, anxiety, parental interference, coworkers' criticism...



The Theme Consequences with some answers

After the participants have finished the activity, we write their answers on a large sheet of paper, that everyone can clearly see. While writing the answers, we discuss their answers and their feelings.

The next step is to think about possible solutions to avoid loneliness and isolation at work.

- Have you any suggestions about what you think should change in your work to reduce the risk of loneliness and isolation?

- What can your organization do better to support staff?
- Is there anything you can do/change to influence those situations/feelings?

Questions for debriefing:

- How was this exercise for you?
- What did you notice that was common in your answers?
- Did you find solutions or ideas to overcome your challenges?

And for the end, just a few small tips: **Learn more about being comfortable in your own company. Try and open to people you know. Try talking to your supervisor. Take it slow. Make new connections. Try not to compare yourself to others. Look after yourself. If you feel that your problems are too big to handle by yourself, try talking to a professional (therapist).**

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Session 10. Communication and connection with special needs child

Introduction, group rules, getting to know each other, warm up (10 min.)

Welcome participants and explain the rules of the workshop in case any of the participants are new.

The ideas and information about what to talk about during introduction. Communication has the main role in human life. A good two-way-communication quality will create a oneness of perception of both communicator and communicant resulting in effective communication. Every child has different traits and aspects that make them different and unique. That does not mean less than or wrong. Some children are born deaf and require a hearing aid or cochlear implant to hear. Some children are diagnosed with non-verbal autism and require a speech generating device to express their wants and needs. Others have difficulty walking and require walking aids or a wheelchair. No matter what the difference that is present, all these children are still children. They deserve to be heard and understood, even when it is difficult. All these children need to be treated with dignity and respect. It is important to always presume competence, which means to approach a child with the thinking that they have the capacity to think, learn, and understand. It is vital that we learn the strengths of these children and communicate in the way that they use.

Objectives of the session:

1. To become aware of the importance of good two-way communication.
2. Learning how to communicate more efficiently so the child with special needs can understand us.
3. To learn or re-remember that every form of communication is communication.

Activities descriptions.

Activity: Telephone

Duration: 10 min.

Split your group into two even lines. At opposite ends of each line, whisper a phrase or short sentence to the person on the end and tell them to pass it on using only whispers, one person at a time. They can only repeat the phrase or sentence once.

While participants are busy passing the message along to the next person in line, they play music or engage them in conversation to create some white noise. This will make it a bit more difficult, but it will mimic real-life conditions, where distractions abound.

When the messages have made it to the end of each line, have the last person to receive the message in each line report out on what they heard. Next, have the first person receive the message in each line report the original message and compare it to the final message received.

This exercise illustrates why listening is such an important skill, and why we shouldn't ignore any opportunities to improve it.

Activity: Pantomime

Duration: 10 min.

Hand each participant a card with a general activity written on it and split them into pairs. Ask them to explain the activity to the other person using only body language. Try to explain it in the shortest time possible, no more than 90 seconds.

Questions for debriefing (5 min.)

- How was this exercise for you? Was it difficult?

This exercise shows communication is not only spoken language and how difficult it is to have a conversation with another person that communicates differently than you do.

Activity: Sharing experiences

Duration: 5 min.

Take a few minutes and discuss their experiences with their students/children. Here are some questions with which you can encourage discussion between the participants:

- Have you ever experienced difficulties communicating with your child/student?
- How did you feel in that situation?
- How did the interaction unfold?
- Did you know how to adapt your approach to your child/student?

Instructions on how to communicate more efficiently:

- **Talk to your child as you would with anyone else.** First of all, always talk to your child normally. We want to directly address the child instead of speaking to another person for them. Use simple and direct language without making the language childish.

- **Understand your child's communication mode.** We want to understand the way in which the child communicates. Different communication methods include gestures, pictures, speech generating devices, sign language, or eye gaze/facial expressions. All communication methods are valid and should be responded to.

- **Think of behavior as a way of communication.** Try to not simply dismiss behaviors as behaviors but try and listen to the behavior to see if the child is trying to communicate using those behaviors. There are a variety of different purposes for each behavior, and it is vital to understand the root need and reason behind it to best support the child.

- **Use Concrete Language.** This eliminates any ambiguity that could be misunderstood. This helps the children know exactly what is being said, leaving nothing up to interpretation.

- **Provide Choices.** Whenever possible, provide choices to your child/student. Giving choices helps the child accurately respond and increase their understanding instead of asking them open-ended questions.

- **Use visuals to support communication and language.** This helps language become concrete and associate language with the appropriate objects or visuals. Visuals can

help decrease frustration and help special needs children to anticipate what is coming next.

- **Utilize expectant waiting.** Give your child time to process and understand what is being asked of them during communication. It may take your child longer than you expect to formulate and provide a response. Pausing for 5–10 seconds allows processing and response time that could support your child in communicating without support.

- **Use yes/no or choice-based questions.** Instead of asking open-ended questions, ask yes/no questions and give choices because the open-ended questions may be difficult for the child to formulate a response to.

- **Above all else, make sure your child/student feels heard and validated.** Our children/students communicate with us and sometimes the noise of the outside world gets in the way. If we slow down, think outside the box, and truly listen with more than just our ears, communicating with our children will become so much more meaningful and foster a connection that is really all anyone needs.

Closing activity: Deep of Diaphragm breathing technique (5 min.)

Loosen or remove all tight clothing to make yourself comfortable. Sit in a comfortable chair that will support your head. If you want, you can also lie down on the floor or bed. Place your hands on the handles or on the floor or bed (place them slightly away from the body, palms up). If you are lying down, stretch your legs and place them slightly apart. Those of you who have chosen a chair do not cross your legs.

Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly and evenly:

- fill your lungs completely with air (do not overdo it). Imagine that you are filling a bottle (your lungs are filling from the bottom to the top);
- inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth;
- inhale slowly and count from one to five (if you can't count to five at first, don't worry);
- then exhale slowly and also count from one to five;
- breathe constantly, without pauses or holding your breath. Do the exercise for three to five minutes, two to three times a day or whenever you feel stressed.

Questions for debriefing (5 min.)

- How was this workshop for you?
- Did you find solutions or ideas to overcome your challenges?
- Did you learn anything new/useful for you?

References

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- *NCSE. (2020). A Total Communication Approach for Children and Young People with Additional Needs.* <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Resource-5-A-Total-Communication-Approach.pdf>
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Session 11. Love, self-love and other rewarding feelings

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Greet participants halfway through the program and upon arrival at the eleventh meeting. Briefly introduce the objectives of this session and ask participants to share their expectations for this session. Remind participants of the group rules and thank them for following them. Invite participants to draw the outline of their hand on a sheet of paper, then tape it to their back. Have the group members mingle and write a nice phrase, thank you or wish on each other's backs.

Objectives of the session

- Participants will learn some possibilities, how to care for themselves through acts of self-love and self-compassion.
- Participants will understand more about self-love, kindness and how to nurture these qualities.
- Participants will practice loving kindness meditation to others and themselves.
- Participants will have the opportunity to explore ways of loving themselves: to write a love letter to themselves and to make their authentic self-love exercises calendar for practice at home.

Activity description (activity duration – 35 minutes).

Activity: Kindness meditation

Intention: mindful cultivation of a kind attitude towards other persons and towards themselves

Beginning: Being present

Sitting down comfortably with relaxed attention... Allowing yourself to arrive in the moment, mindfully welcoming whatever arises... gently allowing the breath to soften and deepen, until a soothing rhythm emerges... Then letting the breath flow by itself...

Sending kind wishes to a dear person (good friend or relative)

Now bring a person to mind who is dear to you, a good friend, partner, parent or grandparent, child or grandchild, a dear colleague or other person who brings a smile on your face and opens your heart. Imagine that the person you chose sits or stands in front of you and you meet their face and eyes... Being aware of how this affects you physically and emotionally... Allowing a wish of kindness toward this good friend coming up from your heart... Then gently repeat this wish on the soothing rhythm of the breath... Perhaps in the words that spontaneously came up or in the words of one of the four traditional wishes... 'May you be safe' ... 'May you feel healthy ... happy ... at ease...'

Inviting a memory of life being kind to you

If you wish you can first connect with the atmosphere of kindness by letting a memory, come to mind of an experience when you felt kindly welcomed and at ease,

and your heart was filled with feelings of joy, contentment and gratitude. Allowing the memory to come alive vividly by inviting all senses involved: What was there to see, hear, smell, feel... How does this affect you now, in your body, heart and mind?

Repeating a kind wish to yourself. Traditional phrases can be examples

From this sense of kindness, you are invited to repeat a wish to yourself. What could be a kind wish that connects well with you? What could be a wish from the heart? Allow yourself to be surprised. Perhaps a wish will spontaneously arise... If not, you can use one of four traditional phrases which are generally deep needs of us all: ‘May I feel safe...’ ‘May I feel healthy...’ ‘May I feel happy...’ or ‘May I feel at ease.’

Allowing a playful attitude and a paradoxical wish

Sometimes, if you notice you are fighting experiences, a paradoxical wish can be just as kind. For instance, ‘Let me feel this tiredness... this anger... this sadness... just as it is.’

Ending

Again, focus on your breathing for a few moments. Just watch your breathing. After the bell sounds, when you are ready, open your eyes.

Questions for debriefing

- What wish(es) connected most with you?
- Which physical sensations did you notice while you practised?
- Which thoughts and feelings did you observe?
- What are you noticing now, while reflecting on the practice?
- What could be a kind wish now?

A love letter for myself ([download](#))

Have you ever heard the phrase “you can’t pour from an empty cup”? This is why self-love matters so much. When we love ourselves, we can better care for and love others.

Raising SEN children is hard, but a practice of self-love enables us to ride the challenges and truly experience the pleasures of parenthood.

Self-love means prioritising ourselves and giving ourselves permission to find and believe in our strengths and gifts. Sometimes it means putting ourselves first. Sometimes it means making space to identify our needs and wants. It involves setting boundaries, and setting boundaries involves self-love. These two concepts work together.



A love letter for myself

Dear _____

→

With Love _____



Self-love is not perfection, nor is it always being happy. It is not based on your achievements and external measurements of success. It is not rooted in shame-based criticism or fear. It does not shame, lie, minimise, or criticise (Megan Logan, 2020). Self-love is treating yourself with respect, prioritising yourself and focusing on your growth and health because you matter to you.

It is also strongly associated with self-compassion; the ability to be patient and understanding of your challenges, to soothe yourself and be there for yourself when you need to regroup or take a break (Preiksa, 2022)

Here are some strategies to give yourself the gift of self-love, first we will try to write a letter.

Writing love letters to oneself involves expressing love, appreciation, and forgiveness. These letters serve as reminders of our worth and the importance of nurturing the relationship with ourselves.

It can also be incredibly therapeutic. It allows us to confront our inner critics, acknowledge our strengths, and express the love and understanding we often reserve for others. When we write these letters, we offer ourselves the emotional support that we so readily provide to our friends, family, and romantic partners.

In this exercise participants are invited to write a love letter to themselves. Reminder to participants that they can include things that they appreciate about themselves. It can be gifts and talents. Invite participants to think about things that others have complimented them on, or how they have overcome challenges. Participants can reread this letter on days when they need a reminder of their awesomeness.

Questions for debriefing (5 minutes)

- How was this exercise for you?
- What did you notice?
- What were your emotions, thoughts and feelings?



Self-love calendar ([download](#))

Participants have already tried different ways of practicing self-love. Planning and consistency are two key elements to help participants on their growth journey. Creating a personalized challenge can help participants consider both short-term and long-term goals while building healthy habits. Participants are now invited to create a self-love calendar and try one exercise per day (28 mini-challenges). They can write their ideas on the blank board or use the example below. The goal is to increase self-love by practicing a self-loving task at least once a day for 30 days. It's helpful to take small steps each day to gradually improve a chosen aspect of self-love.

Self-Love Calendar

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY



Self-Love Calendar

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Re-read and reflect on your letters	Write a love letter to yourself	Practice saying an affirmation	Look in the mirror and give yourself a compliment	Reach out to a long-lost friend	Practice being mindful	Listen to your favourite music playlist
Name five things that you love about yourself	Practice yoga	Focus and repeat this mantra of the day: "I am worthy of love"	Write on your mirror that you are beautiful	Read about your favorite hero	Think about what makes you special	Listen to your favorite candle and do a meditation
Make a decision by thinking of what you want list	Try say "No" today	Reflect on your values and purpose	Pick a visualization activity and practice it	Take a brake and rest today	Take a bubble bath or hot shower	Set boundary with someone
Practice self compassion by thinking how others are like you	ask for help once a day	Move your body and appreciate it with loving thoughts	Pick a self soothing activity and practice it	Find a more helpful thought today	Say kind words about body parts you dislike	Say something kind to yourself



Additional activity: Reflection about self-love

Invite participants describe a time when they recently experienced self-love and reflect the questions.



- What was happening?

.....

.....

- What thoughts did you have about yourself?

.....

.....

- What did it feel like to have these positive feelings toward yourself?

.....

.....

Reflection about hurdles to loving yourself

Invite participants to think and to discuss how they feel after hearing of the faulty messages that they receive from societal false beliefs and perceive standards for parenting SEN children (You may list a few to get them started).

Examples:

- You must be the perfect father
- You must control your child's tantrums
- If you are unable to calm your child down, you are a bad parent....

Additional activity: Weekly practice “Self-love practice in nature”

In this exercise participants are invited, go somewhere in nature at their home and watch the world around them. This exercise will help participants relieve tension, overthinking, self-consciousness and take a minute to themselves.

- “Simply that you are an observer and pay attention to the different colors, shapes, sounds, smells, and sensations you experience.
 - Appreciate the details they might usually be too busy to notice.
 - Notice the sounds and sights and practice being fully present as you hear a bird chirping or feel a soft and gentle breeze. Notice smells, you might want to touch objects in the environment. Allow yourself to explore.
 - Being in nature allows us to stay present in the moment and connect with the world around us. This helps us release overthinking and self-consciousness. Stop and delight in this moment.”

Closing activity

Ask each participant to say 1-2 words to define their feelings or their state at the end of this session.

References:

- Ali Sh. (2022). *The Self-Love Workbook: A Life-Changing Guide to Boost Self-Esteem, Recognize Your Worth and Find Genuine Happiness*
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Session 12. Learning to live in the present (release grief, sufferance, guilt)

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 minutes)

Welcome to the participants at the twelfth meeting. Briefly introduce the objectives of this session and ask participants to share their expectations for this session. Invite participants to name their feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations. Remind participants of the group rules and thank them for following them. If there are difficulties with the arrangements, then discuss them.

Objectives of the session

- Participants will discuss some possibilities, how to live more in the present.
- Participants will learn how to be gentler and kinder to themselves while suffering.
- Participants will understand more about the differences between guilt and shame.
- Participants will have the possibility to give themselves space and gain peace, respite and meaning through grief.

Activity description (duration – 35 minutes)

Activity: The practice of drinking tea / coffee
([download](#))

The process of brewing tea begins with the collection of leaves or herbs, which are then dried and then filled with boiling water. And finally, when left to infuse, you get an elixir that heals when drunk. This whole process is a model of how everyday experiences can be used internally.

After all, don't we make tea from the events of our lives? Isn't this the purpose of sincerity – to shower with the care of the dried remains of our days? Is it not patience that needs to leave to attract a mixture of internal experiences and external events until its lessons are fragrant and soothing to the palate? Isn't it the fervour of our wisdom that helps us learn lessons from life? Isn't it because these lessons are so hot that we sip them slowly, one sip at a time, really feeling the present moment?

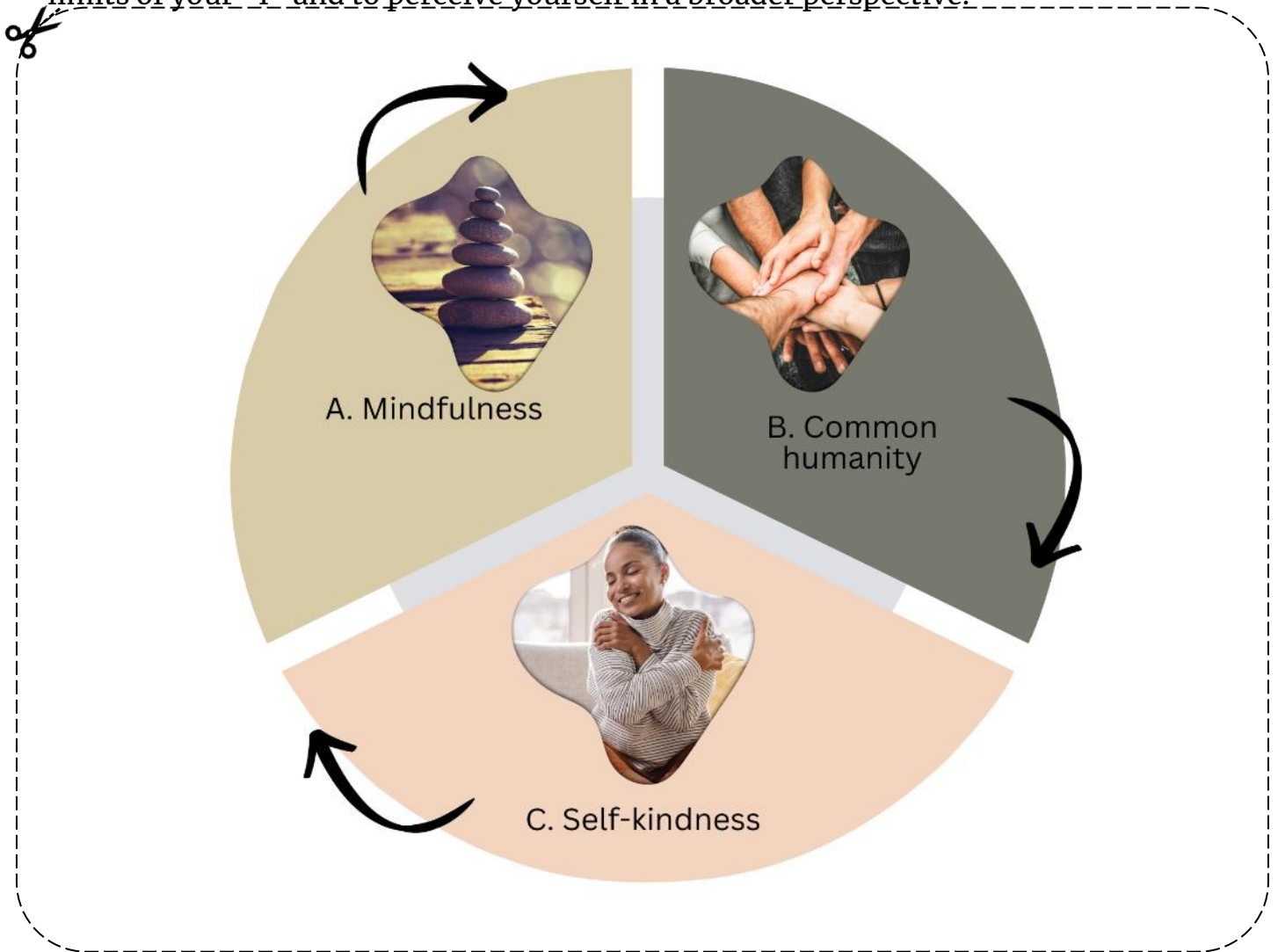
But one thing probably says the most about all of this – one of these elements is not enough to make tea. In the same way, only by putting them all together will we be able to make tea out of our days, our sincerity and our patience. However, even this will not heal if we are not willing and ready to drink the tea of life.



The ABC of self-compassion

([download](#))

Although self-compassion means that it is important to treat yourself as kindly as you would a good friend, it is more than just being kind to yourself, otherwise it is easy to become selfish or narcissistic. That's not enough. It is also important for us to be able to see and admit our failures and look at our experiences from the outside. It is also important to connect your struggles with the struggles of others, to go beyond the limits of your "I" and to perceive yourself in a broader perspective.



According to K. Neff's model, compassion is not a single entity. **Self-compassion has three main elements: mindfulness, humanity, and kindness.** These elements are distinct but interact as a system, and all three elements must be included in a self-compassion practice for it to be healthy and stable.

K.Neff (2003) defined **self-compassion as consisting of 3 main components:**

1. **Self-compassion** is based on the foundations of mindfulness. We learn to be present with whatever is happening. Often, we need courage and strength to do this. Mindfulness gives us the space to step out of our automatic reactions and gain perspective.

2. **Common humanity** - recognition that we are all imperfect and live imperfect lives. This recognition of our humanity can help us feel less isolated and alone and help us connect more deeply with others. Others are also experiencing similar challenges.

3. **Self-kindness**, without harsh judgement, but through motivation to help ourselves and explore what we need. Compassion is the antidote to self-criticism.

Self - compassion break

This practice is based on the three components of self-compassion and can be practised whenever suffering and difficult feelings (for example, shame, guilt, grief...) are experienced in everyday life.

If participants have decided that they want to practise self-compassion now because of difficult emotions (for example, guilt), then they are invited to take a comfortable position and close their eyes. Now participants are invited to simply breathe calmly and notice their body at this moment.

Choosing the right situation

Now I invite you to remember an event in the past or present that caused us suffering (for example, we feel guilt or another unpleasant emotion). It may not be the most powerful experience, but one that you would be ready to explore today. I will give some examples. Maybe something happened to your child at school, and you will be invited to discuss this event. And you feel guilty or think something like that. Or maybe you felt a stronger sense of shame. For example, you are going through a divorce, and you think that it reflects poorly on you: "There is something wrong with me. I'm different." Or maybe I don't have the money to have as much fun with my friends as I would like, and that makes us feel bad. So, it is important to choose the right situation. Pause...

Reproducing experiences

And when you have a situation in your mind, please allow yourself to get into it and kind of see the situation from the outside. Imagine the people there. What was said. But most importantly, allow yourself to remember how you felt at the time.

When we experience a difficulty, we can go through these three steps:

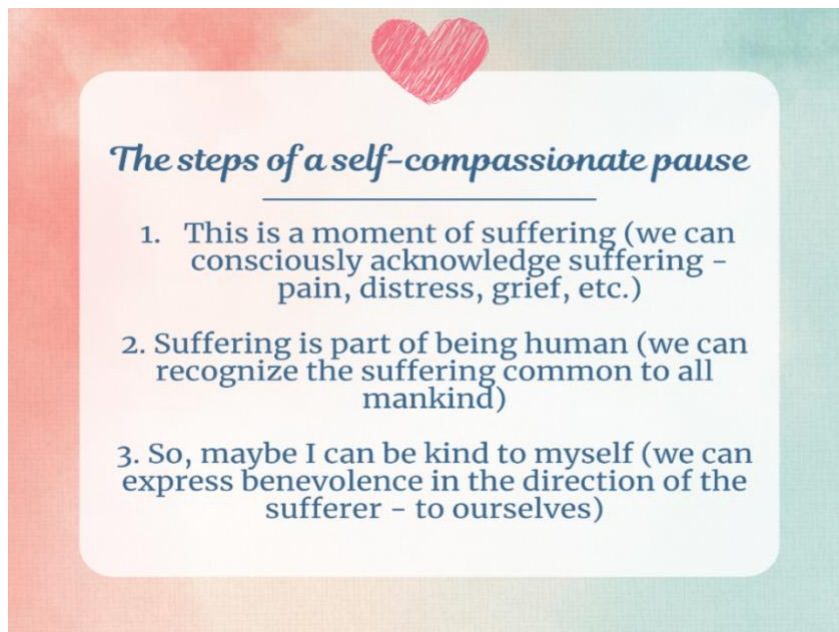
1. **Mindfulness.** I invite you for the first part of the practice - to clearly name yourself, to become aware of an unpleasant experience and memorably related emotions: guilt, sadness, anxiety, etc. ... Let's discover our own phrases that show us the difficulty of a certain moment, for example: "It's really, really hard to bear right now" or "I'm uncomfortable... I'm in pain... I'm worried...". Let's recognize this difficulty, let's name it to ourselves: "This is a moment of suffering." "Yes, I'm uncomfortable in that situation", "Wow, this is stressing me out, I need support...". Let us say and admit it.

2. Common Humanity. Then we slowly move towards the second step. Now maybe we can admit to ourselves that experiencing suffering, discomfort is a common human experience. And maybe we can let the phrase ring out inside us: "Suffering is part of being human"... By saying this, we remind ourselves that suffering has always been around in human history, it's like an inseparable part of our life. In words, I can tell myself that it is, for example, normal to feel that most people agree with similar *problems*... And we can remind ourselves that I am not alone with this experience. It is humane.

3. Self-kindness. And in the third step, maybe we can express kindness by saying, "So, maybe I can be kind to myself" and be as kind to yourself as you can right now. As much as I can, I now give myself the challenge of love, compassion through my difficulties. And when we become aware of our deep need, maybe we can let a phrase emerge, a wish that I can say to myself. For example: "You are not alone, I am with you", "You are loved", "You are important", "I'm here to help myself." Or maybe I can express kindness in some way, like a warm, loving touch. We can put our hand on the heart area, feel the warmth of our hands. We can give ourselves kindness in the way of comfort, in the way we want.

And so, we have travelled the three steps of a self-compassionate pause that we can remind ourselves of at any time in our daily lives when we experience suffering. The first step is to admit to yourself: "This is a moment of suffering", In the second step, I remind myself that my experience is a human experience. In the third step, I express benevolence to myself - maybe I can be benevolent and kind to myself.

Before ending this practice, I invite you to return to observing your breath for a few moments... Slowly shifting your attention to the environment in which we are. And with gratitude for taking the time for self-compassion ([download](#)), we end this practice.



The steps of a self-compassionate pause

1. This is a moment of suffering (we can consciously acknowledge suffering - pain, distress, grief, etc.)
2. Suffering is part of being human (we can recognize the suffering common to all mankind)
3. So, maybe I can be kind to myself (we can express benevolence in the direction of the sufferer - to ourselves)

Questions for debriefing (5 minutes)

- How was this exercise for you?
- What did you notice?
- What were your emotions, thoughts and feelings?

Guilt and shame in parenting

Shame and Guilt – no childhood nor parenthood are safe from these two emotions. As much as we would like to have a smooth sail on the ocean of parenting, we are bound to encounter bad weather, emotional whirlpool, and major storms. And you know what tends to follow behind those storms? Shame and Guilt.

Guilt and shame are close relatives, looking really like each other. However, they are not the same. We, as parents, must have a good understanding of what shame and guilt look like because the effect they have on our kids is crucially different.

Guilt is an important emotion. It's one of those things that we hate the feeling. But it's a very important emotion for our development. One could argue that without guilt, we couldn't raise our kids to be considerate, caring adults.

Take a minute and recall a time when you felt guilty and a time when you felt shame. Try and remember what you were feeling in your body. Was it sweat? Heat in your face. Gnawing feelings in your stomach and the feeling that you just need to disappear?

What is the difference between shame and guilt?

Guilt is generally defined as that painful, uncomfortable feeling you get when you realise that you've done something wrong or hurt someone. You acknowledge that your actions have been hurtful, and there is a sense of remorse. Guilt is often accompanied by a desire to undo or lessen the impact.

Guilt plays an important role in accountability and responsibility. While it can feel like shame, and you might feel ashamed of your actions, guilt is related to how your actions affect others. Acknowledging guilt can help you to be aware and move you forward. When left unresolved, guilt can give way to shame.

Shame, on the other hand, is an inwardly focused emotion. It's an intense, self-conscious emotion arising from negative beliefs and self-perceptions. It comes from feeling inadequate or perceiving not living up to your standards or those of society.

Shame can arise even when you haven't done anything inappropriate. These negative beliefs can make you doubt yourself and your self-worth or feel like you're just a "bad person."

Shame is often shrouded in secrecy. After all, we want social acceptance and don't want people to see our shortcomings, whether they are real or imagined.

If we want meaningful, lasting change we need to get clear on the differences between shame and guilt and call for an end to shame as a tool for change.

Activity: “Differences between shame and guilt” ([download](#))

Fill the gaps by selecting from the list traits that could be related to feelings of shame or guilt. Feel free to make mistakes, we will discuss the correct answers in the group.

- Arises from action.
- Stems from negative beliefs and perceptions of self.
- Implies that you are a good person, who made a mistake.
- Implies that you are a bad person, in general.
- Gives way to self-reflection.
- Triggers self-doubt and self-criticism.
- Can be healthy allowing you to grow.
- Is destructive and can damage your self-esteem.



SHAME	GUILT
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tips for Dealing with Guilt

Here are some effective strategies for managing parental guilt:

- Practice self-compassion: Treat yourself with the same kindness you’d offer a friend. Remember, you’re doing your best in a challenging situation.

- Seek support: Connect with other parents who understand your journey. Support groups, both online and in-person, can be invaluable resources.
- Educate yourself: Knowledge is power. The more you understand about your child's needs, the better equipped you'll be to make informed decisions and feel confident in your choices.
- Challenge negative thoughts: When guilt creeps in, ask yourself: “Is this thought helpful? Is it based on facts or fears?”
- Focus on the present: Mental concentration and focusing exercises could also be employed to prevent you from constantly ruminating about past decisions as well as constantly worrying about the future.

What is grief?

When you first start talking about having children you dream about your life as a parent. A lot of the dreams incorporate sharing your passions with this child. This could include playing sports, an instrument, learning to draw or paint and many other of life's passions. When learning your child has special needs the loss of this dream will trigger strong emotions. These emotions are like learning about any of life's losses and will require the person to go through grief.

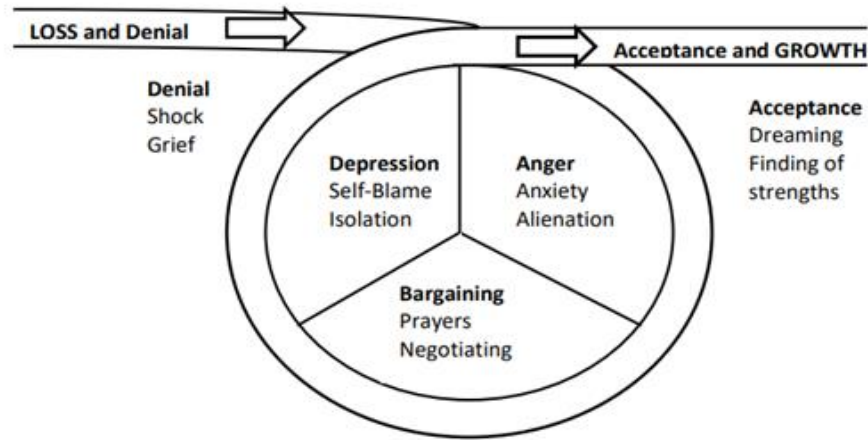
Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away or your dreams, expectations are lost. Often, the pain of loss can feel overwhelming. You may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and profound sadness. The pain of grief can also disrupt your physical health, making it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight. These are normal reactions to loss—and the more significant the loss, the more intense your grief will be. Coping with the loss of someone or something you love is one of life's biggest challenges. You may associate grieving with bereavement, the death of a loved one—which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief—but any loss can cause grief.

The most common sources of grief are: bereavement, death of a pet, divorce or relationship breakup, loss of health, losing a job, loss of financial stability, a miscarriage, retirement, loss of a cherished dream, a loved one's serious illness, loss of a friendship, loss of safety after a trauma, selling the family home. Even subtle losses in life can trigger a sense of grief. For example, you might grieve after moving away from home, graduating from college, or changing jobs.

Whatever your loss, it's personal to you, so don't feel ashamed about how you feel, or believe that it's somehow only appropriate to grieve for certain things. If the person, animal, relationship, or situation was significant to you, it's normal to grieve the loss you're experiencing. Whatever the cause of your grief, though, there are healthy ways to cope with the pain that, in time, can ease your sadness and help you come to terms with your loss, find new meaning, and eventually move on with your life (By Doug Goldberg).



The Stages of Grief in Learning your Child has Special Needs



Activity: Grief Map

In recent years, adult colouring books have become all the rage. They are proven stress relievers and can ultimately serve as a meditative practice. By focusing on colouring, filling in the shapes on a sheet of paper, you allow yourself presence, and thus preoccupations have the opportunity to slip away. Drawing and using your hands to create art is soothing. Corraling your energy into drawing a grief map follows this same idea. Grief maps aren't literal maps of your grief or loss. Nor are they timelines detailing how the process of loss has affected you. Think back to childhood: Remember the word association maps you may have done as school assignments? You'd start off with a word in the centre of a map, inside of a big bubble, and you drew lines connecting that word bubble to other, smaller word bubbles that were secondary. Then you'd draw other lines to word bubbles that were tertiary, and so on. When you were done you had this entire galaxy of seemingly unrelated ideas and concepts that existed within each other. You can do the same thing with your grief.

Worksheet "Creating your own grief map"

Intention of this exercise: to give yourself the space and words for what has been swirling in your mind—to have some semblance of peace, respite, and meaning on path toward wholeness

1. *In the middle of the map, name your loss. Remember, loss in this context can fit a myriad of situations and is not merely limited to loss due to the death of a person. Name your loss; say it out loud and then write it down. Then draw a circle directly around the loss you have named.*

2. *From there, draw associations to your loss. These could be secondary losses—things that you also lost because of your big, primary loss. They could also be feelings or actions that you've taken because of grief. Draw bubbles and use connecting lines in whatever way makes*

sense to you. If you would like, use coloured pencils, markers, or crayons to add colour to the words or shading to the bubbles.

3. **Continue growing and building the map.** Be careful to not limit, tamp down, or censor what words come up organically. When you are done, you'll have a maze of words, thoughts, and feelings that may summarise what this journey through loss has been for you. You've dumped some of those things, released them onto paper, and are now ready to give yourself permission to feel lighter.

* Weekly Practice: poem



Meditation on Love (by Steve Hayes)

I will hold myself gently.
I will hold myself in love.
Not love as something I earn.
Not love as a judgement, nor a conclusion.
Not a plan, a decision, or a hope.
Not love as a manipulation.
Nor wish.
Rather love as a choice.
As an assumption, a gift.
Love as an action, a foundation, an essence.
As an experienced reality.
I am here now.
And lovingly, I care.

Closing activity

Ask each participant to say 1-2 words to define their feelings or their state at the end of this session.

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Session 13. Learn to relax by playing with your child / the child you are caring

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 min.)

The session begins with the warm-up game "Guess Who I Am."

Game instructions:

- Each participant receives a sticker or card with the name of a character or object (e.g., "Superhero," "Cactus," "Lightning," etc.), which they place on their back so they can't see it themselves.
- Participants walk around the room and ask other participants "Yes" or "No" type questions to try to guess what is written on their card.
- For example, a participant might ask, "Am I an animal?" "Am I something that can fly?" etc.
- The game continues until all participants have guessed their character or object.

Goal:

- This warm-up game helps to break the ice, create a fun and relaxed atmosphere, and encourage participant interaction.

After the game, the session rules are explained. The session's topic and objectives are briefly introduced.

Objectives of the session:

1. To help participants understand the importance of children's play for their development and emotional well-being.
2. To teach participants how to observe children's play to better understand their needs and interests.
3. To encourage participants' active involvement in children's play to strengthen the emotional bond and maintain a healthy family atmosphere.
4. To teach relaxation and stress management through playing with children.

Activity description:

The session activity consists of three stages:

1. **Selecting tools according to the child's age and abilities:** Parents/youth workers select appropriate tools according to the child's age and abilities to ensure his/her engagement and development (10 min).
2. **Playing the game:** Parents/youth workers perform activities together with the children (after adapting the activity measures according to age and skills) to develop the child's skills and strengthen the emotional connection.
3. **Filling out observation sheets:** Parents/youth workers observe the children's behaviour during play and fill out observation sheets to better understand the child's needs, skills, and developmental progress. (10 min.).

Stage 1: Selecting tools according to the child's age and abilities

Before starting the activities, it's important to emphasise that each activity should be chosen based on the child's age and abilities. **Why is this important?**

1. **Safe and appropriate environment:** When an activity is tailored to the child's age, it helps ensure that the child feels safe and can fully participate. For example, an activity that is too challenging may lead to frustration, while one that is too simple may cause boredom.

2. **Promoting development:** Each stage of a child's development comes with its own needs and challenges. Appropriately selected activities can help develop specific skills such as motor skills, language, social skills, or creativity. For example, preschool-aged children might enjoy finger painting or building with blocks, while older children might be more interested in complex constructions or strategic board games.

3. **Strengthening the relationship:** When parents or youth workers choose activities that match the child's abilities and interests, they encourage communication and strengthen the emotional bond with the child. For example, if a child enjoys role-playing games, parents or youth workers can engage in this activity, showing the child that their interests are important and valued.

Activity: Game “Collage creation”

- **Duration:** 30 min.
- **Materials:** Scissors, a sheet of paper for each participant, magazines, glue.
- **Description:** Participants are given the materials and create a collage from images and words found in magazines that describe their personality. The creation of the collage helps participants reflect on their personality traits and discuss what they learned about themselves during this activity.
- **Discussion:** Each participant presents their collage and explains what each picture and word represent. The discussion focuses on what this activity reveals about the participants' personal characteristics and how these might relate to their play with children.

**Collage creation is very beneficial for children as it helps develop their creativity. Children could have the opportunity to choose and combine various images and words, thereby expressing their inner world. This activity encourages children to use their imagination and learn to visually express their thoughts and feelings, which is important for their emotional and intellectual development. Additionally, creating a collage allows children to better understand themselves, as they consciously select elements that hold meaning for them or reflect their personality.*

For parents/youth workers, this activity is also very valuable, as the images and words chosen by the children can provide deeper insights into the child's inner world. Adults can observe what is currently important to the child, what their primary emotions, interests, and values are. This can help parents/youth workers identify the child's needs and potential emotional or social issues. Moreover, by observing how children compose their collage, adults can learn about the child's thought processes, problem-solving skills, and decision-making abilities. This provides valuable insights into the child's personality development and helps create a more suitable environment for their further education.

Activity: Game "It Happens - It Doesn't"

- **Duration: 10 min.**
- **Description:** The leader throws a ball to a participant and states a situation, e.g., "Dad goes to work" or "The train flies into the sky." If the situation is realistic, the participant should catch the ball; if not, they should hit it away.
- **Goal:** This game encourages participants to distinguish between reality and fantasy, thus developing their critical thinking and creativity.
- It is very important to select the statements according to the child's age and abilities

**The game "It Happens - It Doesn't" is beneficial for both children and parents/youth workers as it develops important cognitive and social skills. For children, this game helps cultivate critical thinking, the ability to analyse situations, and distinguish reality from fantasy. Children learn to react quickly to presented situations, evaluating whether they are logical and realistic or fictional and impossible. Additionally, this game fosters children's creativity, as they must think about various situations and their realism, which helps them develop their imagination.*

For parents/youth workers, this game provides valuable insights into a child's thought processes and understanding of the world. By observing how a child responds to different situations, teachers or parents can gauge how much the child has learned about the rules of the world and the realities of everyday life. If the child can correctly distinguish between real and fantastical situations, it indicates a good understanding of the surrounding world and a strong grasp of reality. On the other hand, if the child frequently makes mistakes, it may signal that they need more help in understanding certain concepts or the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Moreover, this game allows teachers or parents to observe the child's reaction speed, attention, and ability to concentrate, all of which are important for the child's development.

Filling Out Observation Sheet (20 min)

After playing with the child, the third stage of the activity is filling out the observation sheet. This sheet is a valuable tool that helps youth workers or parents analyse and assess the child's behaviour during play. By filling out the sheet, youth workers/parents can pay attention to how the child participates in group play, how they adapt to the activities of other children, how they solve problems, how emotionally engaged they are in the play, how independent they are, and how well they can concentrate.

**Filling out the sheet allows youth workers/parents to learn many valuable things about the child's social, emotional, and cognitive abilities. For example, they can observe whether the child easily engages in team games, tends to act independently, or needs help solving problems. It is also possible to observe whether the child can manage their emotions and how external distractions affect their concentration.*

This information is very important as it helps youth workers/parents better understand the child's strengths and areas where they may need additional support or attention. It can help parents/youth workers tailor educational strategies and better support the child's development, considering their individual needs and abilities.

Example of Filling Out the Observation Sheet:

Context: In this situation, the child played alone even though there were other children with whom they could have interacted.

Behavioural criterion	Your thoughts
Engaging in shared play In what way does the child get involved in joint play?	The child was reluctant to engage in shared play with other children. Although invited to join, they chose to play alone, ignoring the invitations from other children. This may indicate social difficulties or lack of desire to interact.
Adapting one's actions to another's initiated game activity How does the child combine his activities with the activities of other children?	The child was unable to adapt to the initiatives of other children. They rejected any suggestions to participate in group activities and continued their play separately. This may suggest difficulties in adjusting to group dynamics or a reluctance to cooperate.
Development of game activities How much effort does the child make? Making a game?	The child played alone with a toy, but the storyline of the play was limited. They performed repetitive actions without showing much creativity or engagement in the game. This may indicate a lack of ideas or motivation to expand the play.
Problem solving How does the child solve problems? Concentration	Since the child played alone, problem-solving was not observed. They did not encounter situations requiring conflict resolution or negotiation with other children, as they did not engage in group play. This may suggest that the child avoids social situations where problem-solving is needed.
Emotional involvement in the game As a child is interested in general game and controls emotions	The child appeared emotionally detached and was not strongly engaged in the play. Their facial expression was neutral, showing little enthusiasm or interest. This may indicate that they do not feel comfortable in the social environment or that they do not enjoy the suggested games.
Independence How much does a playing child need an adult's help?	The child was completely independent, but this independence was not positive, as they did not seem to interact or collaborate with other children. This may indicate that the child is isolated or has difficulties forming connections with peers.
Concentration How much is the child's game is disturbed by external interference?	The child's attention was fragmented. Although they stayed with their toy, they often looked around and seemed unable to fully concentrate on the play. This may indicate difficulties in focusing or lack of interest in the activity.

*an example from a teacher's practical experience

Based on this table, parents/youth workers could set the following goals:

- 1. Encourage the child's engagement in group activities with peers:** Help the child feel more confident in group games by gradually involving them in team activities and assisting them in forming social connections.
- 2. Develop the child's ability to adapt to other children's initiatives:** Teach the child to be more flexible and open to the suggestions of other children, promoting collaboration and the ability to work in a group.

3. Enhance the child's emotional involvement in play: Strive to increase the child's interest in play activities, helping them find joy and pleasure in the game, and fostering positive emotions while playing with others.

4. Improve the child's concentration during play: Work with the child to help them better concentrate and maintain attention during play, reducing external distractions and creating an appropriate environment.

It's important to emphasise that it is best to start with one goal and work on it consistently. **Why is this important?** Focusing on a single specific goal helps concentrate efforts and avoids overwhelming both the child and the adults. For example, if parents or teachers initially focus on encouraging the child's engagement in group activities, they may notice small but significant changes that boost the child's confidence and allow them to pursue other goals. Consistent work on one goal ensures that changes are long-lasting, and that the child has a solid foundation for further development. It also allows adults to better understand how to best support the child and helps avoid excessive stress or pressure that can arise when trying to address multiple issues simultaneously.

Behavioural criterion	Your thoughts
Engaging in shared play In what way does the child get involved in joint play?	
Adapting one's actions to another's initiated game activity How does the child combine his activities with the activities of other children?	
Development of game activities How much effort does the child make? making a game?	
Problem solving How does the child solve problems? Concentration	
Emotional involvement in the game As a child is interested in general game and controls emotions.	
Independence How much does a playing child need an adult's help?	
Concentration How much the child's game is disturbed external interference?	

*Observation Sheet. Created by John Santer and Carol Griffith's.

Questions for debriefing (20 min.)

After the seminar participants have tried the activities themselves, there should be a discussion where they can share their experiences and decide whether to apply these

activities at home with their children or in school. The discussion could proceed as follows:

Introduction: The facilitator begins the discussion by thanking the participants for their participation and efforts in trying the activities themselves. They emphasize that this discussion is intended to share impressions and decide how these activities can be applied at home with their children or in school.

Reflection Session: The facilitator invites participants to share their experiences, how they felt performing the activities, and their thoughts on the possibility of using them at home or in the classroom.

Reflection questions that could be asked to seminar participants:

1. **How did you feel performing these activities yourself?**

This question helps participants reveal their emotional experience and understand how the activities might have affected them personally.

2. **Do you think this activity will be beneficial for your child?**

This question encourages participants to assess the suitability of the activities for their children, based on their own experience.

3. **Did you notice any difficulties or challenges your child might face while doing this activity?**

This question allows participants to consider possible challenges their children may encounter and helps them prepare for these difficulties.

4. **What did you learn about yourself during these activities, and do you think your child might experience something similar?**

This question encourages participants to connect their experience with possible child reactions and learning opportunities.

5. **Do you think you will be able to apply these activities at home or in school? If so, how do you plan to do it?**

This question helps participants think about the practical application of the activities in the home or school environment and anticipate how they will implement them.

6. **Is there anything you would like to change or adapt to better suit your child's needs?**

This question encourages participants to think creatively about adapting the activities to better meet their children's needs.

7. **What benefits do you think your child could gain from these activities?**

This question helps participants focus on the positive aspects of the activities and understand how they can contribute to the child's development.

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Session 14. Solve daily problems

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 min.)

This session is designed to help youth workers and parents learn how to effectively address everyday challenges using visual tools and strategies. The session will incorporate various methods to help recognize emotional states, understand personal space, and structure problem-solving. The goal is to develop skills that will help both children and adults better manage emotions and situations in daily life.

Group rules:

- Respect each other and each other's experiences.
- Take turns speaking and listening to others.
- Avoid interrupting when others are speaking.
- Be open and honest, but also respect others' privacy.

Objectives of the session:

1. Teach youth workers and parents to recognize different emotional states and choose appropriate strategies to manage them.
2. Introduce youth workers and parents to structured problem-solving methods that can be used both at home and in school.

Activities description (duration 30 min)

Activity: Understanding Emotional Zones

1. Using the "Blue Zone," "Green Zone," "Yellow Zone," and "Red Zone," educators, parents, or youth workers can explain different emotional states to children and young people and how to recognize them. For example, in the "Blue Zone," a child might feel tired or sad, while in the "Red Zone," they might be very angry or scared. Each zone helps better understand the child's emotional state and how to assist them in coping with challenges.
2. **Discussion:** After presenting the zones, each youth worker or parent can share their experience of when they felt they were in a certain zone and the strategies they chose to manage their emotions. This not only helps in better self-understanding but also provides ideas from others on how to act in different situations.
3. **Behavioural Model Suggestions:** Following discussions with youth workers or parents, an updated list of new tips and behavioural models can be created to help children cope with difficulties. For example, if a child is in the "Yellow Zone" and the suggested relaxation method, such as drinking water, does not work for them, another method can be developed together with the child that suits them better. Perhaps the child might say they would prefer to watch a short video or engage in a favourite activity. It's important that the child feels actively involved in managing their emotions and has the opportunity to choose the most suitable way to calm down or regain emotional balance.



	<p>“Green Zone” represents a period when a child feels calm, happy, and ready to learn or work. In this zone, the child is emotionally stable, able to concentrate, and open to new activities and communication. This is the optimal state where the child can achieve the best results and communicate most effectively with others.</p>
	<p>“Blue Zone” reflects an emotional state where the child feels slow, sad, tired, or even unwell. In this zone, the child may be less energetic, less motivated, and may experience apathy. In the Blue Zone, it can be difficult for the child to engage in activities or focus, so appropriate actions might include calming and supportive measures, such as a short break, a quiet conversation, or a relaxing activity to help the child regain energy and focus.</p>
	<p>“Yellow Zone” indicates a state where the child begins to lose control, feeling irritated, nervous, or anxious. In this zone, emotions start to intensify, and the child may become less tolerant or react more impulsively. The Yellow Zone is a warning that action is needed to help the child return to the Green Zone, such as offering a short break, deep breathing exercises, or a calming activity to soothe emotions.</p>
	<p>“Red Zone” is a state where the child loses control, feeling angry, aggressive, or hopeless. In this zone, emotions are very strong, and it may be difficult for the child to think rationally or make appropriate decisions. In the Red Zone, it is important to take actions to ensure the safety of both the child and others, such as providing a time-out, contacting an adult who can help, or offering a safe space where the child can calm down.</p>

*Methodological material by Mark Katz, PhD

**The benefits of this activity are long-lasting, because if you prepare your child well, he or she will be able to use it every time a difficulty arises.*

BLUE ZONE

I WORK SLOWLY

Tired

Sad

Sick

I CAN DO THIS:

Drink water

Talk to an adult

Listen to music

YELLOW ZONE

I FEEL LIKE I'M LOSING CONTROL

Anxious

Angry

Lost

I CAN DO THIS:

Drink water

Talk to an adult

Take a breath

RED ZONE

I LOST CONTROL

Shouting

Angry

Not agreeing with others

I CAN DO THIS:

Drink water

Talk to an adult

Take a breath

GREEN ZONE

I'M READY TO ACT!

Happy

Calm

Energetic

I CAN DO THIS:

To study

Follow schedule

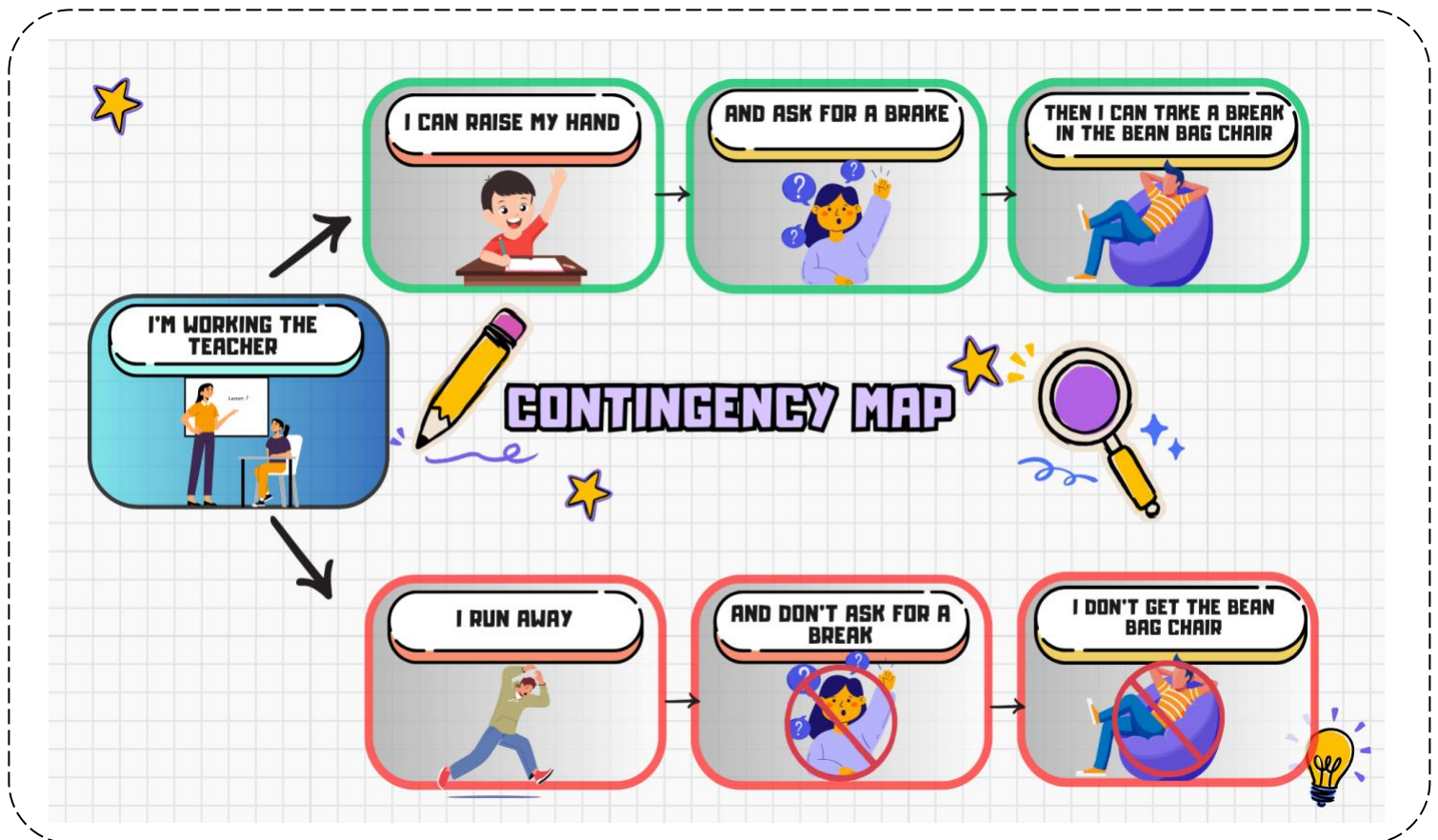
To listen

Activity: Using a Contingency Map to Solve Everyday Problems

Duration: 30 min.

This activity is important for youth workers and parents because it helps children and young people better understand the cause-and-effect relationship in their behaviour. The contingency map visually illustrates how certain actions can lead to different outcomes, which aids children in making responsible decisions. Adults can use this map as a tool to help children recognize the consequences of their behaviour and encourage them to choose positive actions that lead to desired outcomes.

What is a Contingency Map? A Contingency Map is a visual tool that illustrates various possible behaviour scenarios and their consequences. This map allows a child to see that they have a choice: to behave positively or negatively. The map shows that positive behaviour, such as asking for a break by raising a hand, leads to a desired outcome -having the opportunity to relax on a beanbag. On the other hand, negative behaviour, such as running away without asking for a break, leads to a negative outcome -losing the privilege of using the beanbag.



*A Contingency Map example ([download / translate](#))

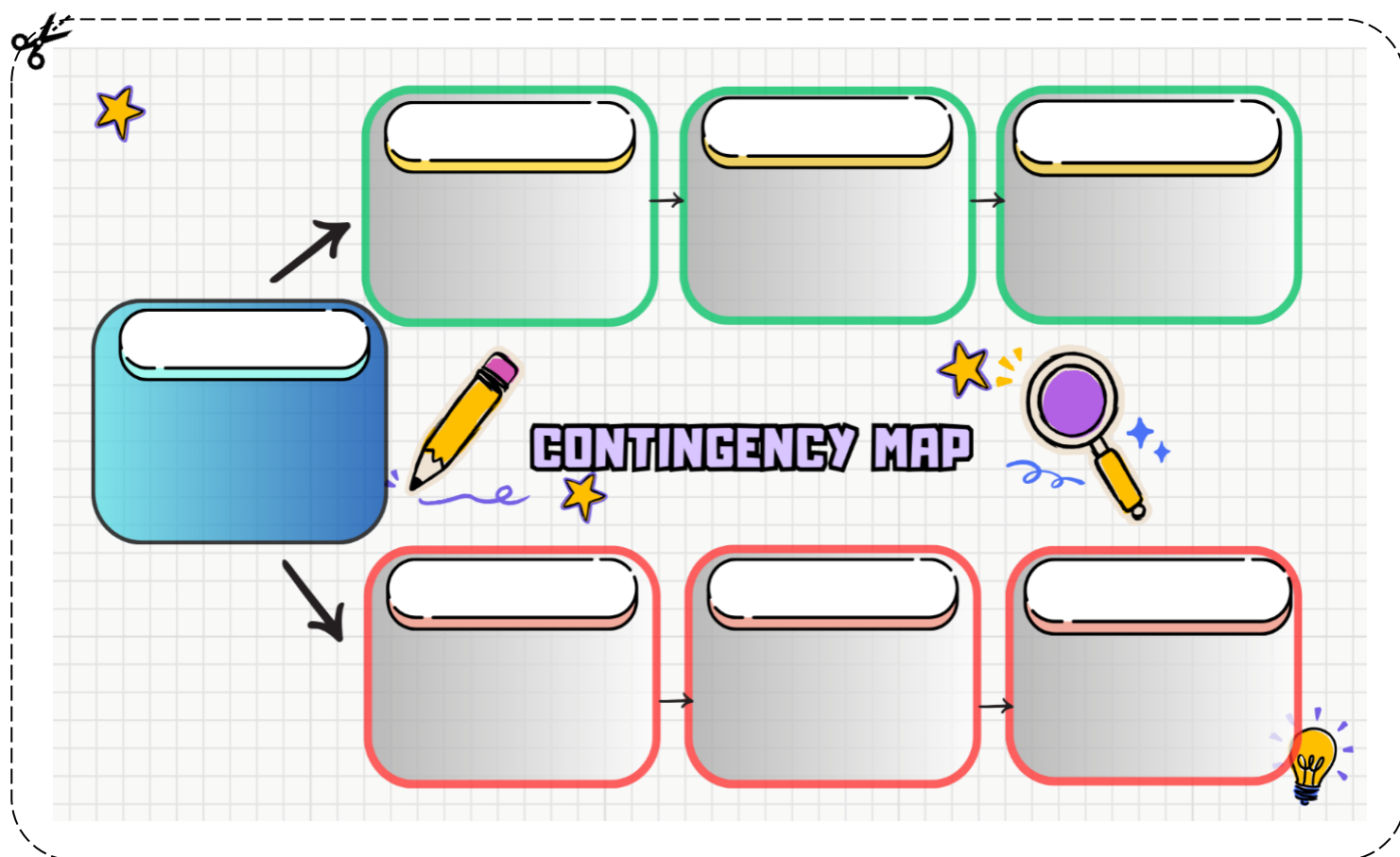
Activity Description:

1. **Introduction (5 minutes):** Begin the activity with a brief explanation of what a Contingency Map is and how it works. Show participants the map and discuss the different behavioural choices and their consequences.

2. **Discussion (10 minutes):** Invite participants to discuss how they might use such a map in their work with youth or with their own children at home. The discussion should emphasize the importance of helping children understand that they have the power to choose their behaviour and how these choices impact their environment.

3. **Practical Exercise (15 minutes):** Participants work in pairs or small groups to create their own Contingency Map based on a real-life situation they face in their work or family. They need to define the problem, propose positive and negative behavioural choices, and outline the consequences. Each group then presents their map and discusses how they plan to apply it in real-life scenarios.

4. **Summary (5 minutes):** The facilitator summarizes the outcomes of the activity, highlighting the benefits of the Contingency Map in helping children and youth better understand their behaviour and its consequences. Participants are encouraged to use this technique in daily situations to help children learn to make responsible decisions.



*a Contingency Map ([download](#))

Questions for debriefing (20 min.) Structure:

1. **Introduction:** The facilitator begins the discussion by thanking the participants for their participation and efforts in trying the activities themselves. They emphasize that this discussion is intended to share impressions and decide how these activities can be applied at home with their children or in school.

2. **Reflection Session:** The facilitator invites participants to share their experiences, how they felt performing the activities, and their thoughts on the possibility of using them at home or in the classroom.

Reflection questions that could be asked to seminar participants:

1. **How did you feel while doing these activities?**

This question helps youth workers and parents reflect on their emotional experience during the session.

2. **Do you think these techniques will be useful in your work or family life?**

This question encourages youth workers and parents to assess the relevance of the activities in their context.

3. **Did you notice any challenges that your children or youth might face when applying these techniques?**

This question helps youth workers and parents anticipate potential difficulties.

4. **How do you think these activities could improve your or others' emotional well-being?**

This question encourages youth workers and parents to think about the positive impact of these techniques.

5. **Do you plan to apply these activities at home or in your work? If so, how do you plan to do it?**

This question helps youth workers and parents envision the practical application of these activities in their daily lives.

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Session 15. Balance family life and professional life

Introduction, group rules, get to know each other, warm up (10 min.)

Welcome participants and make a short introduction about the objectives of this session.

The ideas and information about what to talk about during introduction. Sometimes you find yourself overly occupied with work or any other aspect of your life (such as caring for a child with special need), and this can lead to overwhelming [exhaustion](#). You might feel you're a poor or ineffective spouse, parent or worker. These feelings can take a severe toll on your mental health. This session is designed to help you consider each area of your life in turn and assess what's of balance. As such, it helps you to identify areas that need more attention.

Objectives of the session

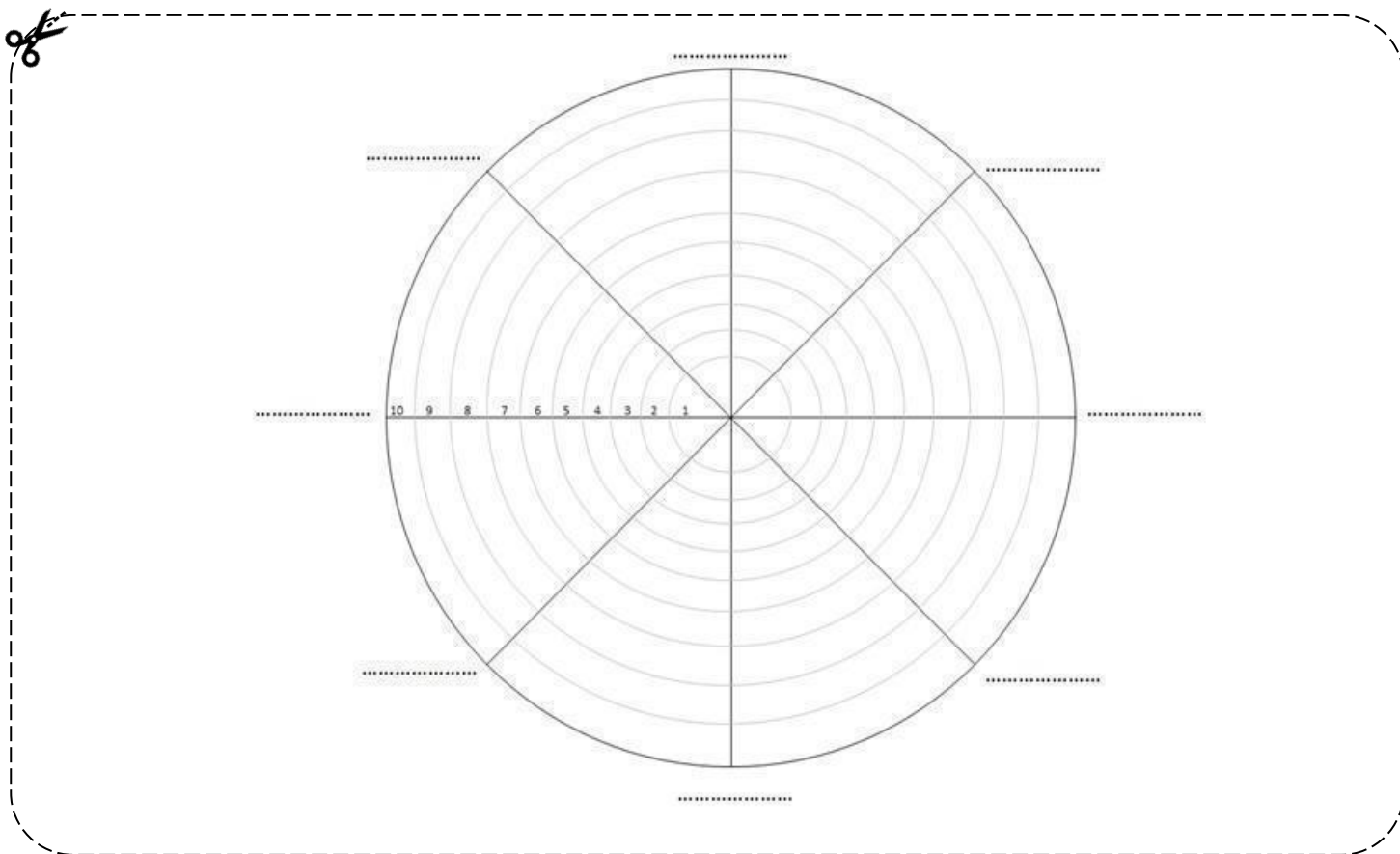
1. With visualising your current state, you will gain insight into whether your life is in balance.
2. By rating each area both on its current importance and future importance, you will see the gaps and identify areas that need support and improvement to reach individual and overall life goals.
3. The process of writing down, reviewing, and agreeing upon ratings will provide input to the goal-setting process and insights into areas of your life that are causing you difficulty.

Activity: Wheel of life

Duration: 35min.

Ask participants to sit down in groups of 4 people. Distribute among participants worksheet »Wheel of life« and give them 10 min. to complete the worksheet and follow the information below.

Wheel of life worksheet



Begin by thinking of six to eight "dimensions" of your life that are important to you. These might include your role as parent or manager, for example, and aspects such as education, friends, or health. Here are some suggestions:

Career/Work: How satisfied are you with your current job or career path? Are you fulfilling your professional aspirations?

Finances: How comfortable do you feel with your current financial situation? Are you effectively managing your finances and saving for the future?

Health/Wellness: How would you rate your physical and mental health? Are you taking proper care of your well-being through exercise, nutrition, and stress management?

Family & Relationships: How strong are your connections with family members and close friends? Are your relationships supportive and fulfilling?

Personal Development: Are you actively pursuing personal growth and learning opportunities? Are you working on improving yourself intellectually and emotionally?

Fun & Recreation: How much time do you allocate to hobbies, leisure activities, and things that bring you joy and relaxation?

Romance/Love Life: If applicable, how satisfied are you with your current romantic relationship or love life?

Physical Environment: How content are you with your living environment? Does it promote comfort and tranquillity?

Spirituality: How connected do you feel to your spiritual beliefs or practices? Are they providing you with a sense of purpose and peace?

Time Management: Do you feel in control of your time, or do you struggle with managing your schedule effectively?

Stress Management: How well do you handle stress and challenges?

Self-Care: Do you prioritise self-care and set aside time for relaxation and rejuvenation?

The next step is to assess how much time and attention you are giving to each dimension. Use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are ignoring it and 10 means it dominates your life. Mark your scores with a selected colour on the wheel, working out from 0 at the centre to 10 on the rim. Now draw a line from score to score, working round the wheel until all the points are joined together. What does it look like? Are any parts clearly out of balance?

The larger the gap, the more occupied you are with a certain dimension. The smaller the gap, the more balanced you feel. Neither of these polls are permanent positions. There is no such thing as “balance” because there is no such thing as a human being in a steady state. We are not who we were yesterday, and we will be different people tomorrow.

The goal is not to make a perfect circle but to think about how much attention you'd like to give to each part of your life. It's about recognizing the trade-offs you are making as you achieve your goals. It's about noticing whether a particular category needs attention and development because it disproportionately distracts or hinders your progress. Remember, different dimensions will need attention at different times in your life, so there's no one right answer. Sometimes it's even OK to neglect certain areas so you can go all in on others. There are many times in life where one category will take priority over the others, such as when you've just had a child, or if you are in graduate school, or if you are starting a business. So, now you can plot your ideal scores on the diagram, too, and visualise how things could be for you. Use a different colour so it will be clearer which category is overwhelming you at this moment and which is lacking your attention.

After they have finished filling out the worksheets, ask participants to share their **conclusion and insights with others in their group** (15min.). Here are some questions to consider:

- Are there any surprises for you?
- How do you feel about your life when you look at your wheel?
- How do you currently spend your time in these areas?
- How would you like to spend your time in these areas?
- Which of these areas would you like to see improved?
- How could we make room for these changes?
- Can you make the necessary changes yourself?

- What help and cooperation from others might you need?

At the end, challenge participants to share their findings/answers with the whole group (10 min.).

The next step is to assess how much time and attention you are giving to each dimension. Use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are ignoring it and 10 means it dominates your life. Mark your scores with a selected colour on the wheel, working out from 0 at the centre to 10 on the rim. Now draw a line from score to score, working round the wheel until all the points are joined together. What does it look like? Are any parts clearly out of balance?

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Activity: S.M.A.R.T. method

Duration: 15min.

Distributed among participants worksheet »S.M.A.R.T. method« and give them instructions on how to use the presented worksheet.

Instructions for participants:

Based on the results of your Wheel of Life Assessment, you can identify the areas of your life that require attention and improvement. It's important to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for each area. This will provide you with a clear direction and enable you to track your progress effectively.

Start by selecting one or two areas that you would like to focus on. For example, if your assessment reveals that your career satisfaction is low, you may set a goal to enhance your professional development or explore new career opportunities. If your relationships are lacking, you might prioritise setting a goal to improve your communication skills or spend more quality time with loved ones. Remember to

consider your own values and priorities when setting goals. What is most important to you? What changes do you want to see in these areas? By setting meaningful goals, you can align your actions with your values and move closer to a more balanced and fulfilling life.

Instructions on how to use the S.M.A.R.T. method are written on the other side of your »S.M.A.R.T. method« worksheet.

S	Specific	—————→	What do you want to accomplish? What specific outcome do you want to achieve?
M	Measurable	—————→	How will you measure your success? What type of data will you include? How will you evaluate it, and how frequently will you check?
A	Attainable	—————→	Do you have all the necessary skills and resources to achieve this goal? If not, can you obtain them?
R	Relevant	—————→	Is this goal aligned with your other goals, or the overarching goals of your team or organization?
T	Time-Bound	—————→	What is the timeframe for achieving this goal?

1. Make your goal SPECIFIC. The first step in creating a SMART goal is to make it specific. Consider your goal in quantifiable terms by asking yourself the following questions:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- Will achieving this goal have an important impact?
- What actions will I need to take?

Applying SMART "Specific" criteria: "I will spend more time talking with my husband."

2. Make your goal MEASURABLE

This step in the SMART process prompts you to apply methods of measuring your progress toward achieving your goal. Being measurable also considers any actions you would implement to help you further your progress toward your goal. For instance, this

may take the form of tracking the time it takes you to complete an action or meet a milestone.

Applying SMART “Measurable” criteria: “I will spend more time talking with my husband. We will take time during dinner (15–20 min.) and talk about our day.”

3. Make your goal ACHIEVABLE

This aspect of the SMART strategy relates to your goal being achievable. Do you have the resources and time needed to achieve the goal? This may include gathering necessary data, asking team members for help and learning new skills. You're more likely to be successful in your goal once it is specific, measurable and deemed achievable.

Applying SMART “Achievable” criteria: “I will spend more time talking with my husband. We will take time during dinner (15–20 min.) and talk about our day. For this time, we will put down our phones and other distractors.”

4. Make your goal RELEVANT

A relevant goal will directly contribute to successful results. Keep in mind that every action you take should move you closer to your goal. In our example, a relevant goal will directly reduce expenses.

Applying SMART “Relevant” criteria: “I will spend more time talking with my husband. We will take time during dinner (15–20 min.) and talk about our day. For this time, we will put down our phones and other distractors. This will help us reconnect and strengthen our relationship.”

5. Make your goal TIME-BASED

A time-based goal has a specific time deadline. You'll want to determine if your goal is a short-term or long-term goal (or a combination of both). From there, you can determine a timeline and set a schedule to meet deadlines and accomplish your objective. Your timeline should also be realistic and allow you plenty of opportunities to adjust your goal regarding its relevance, specificity and achievability. Consider the final step in the SMART process in the following example.

Applying SMART “Time-based” criteria: “I will spend more time talking with my husband. We will take time during dinner (15–20 min.) and talk about our day. For this time, we will put down our phones and other distractors. We will start implementing this activity from next Sunday.”

Questions for debriefing (5min.)

How was this exercise for you?

Did you find solutions or ideas to overcome your challenges?

Have we understood how precisely defining our goal helps us achieve it more easily?

Closing activity (3 min.)

We thank the participants for their cooperation and encourage them with the following wisdom: **Don't make yourself feel badly about where you are in life. We are most likely to shift when we get a dose of reality. Seeing where we are in life is helpful data. When coupled with the goals we have, this information can be a tremendous source of empowerment to help you figure out where you need to invest and develop.**

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Session 16. Encourage your child's / the child's you are caring independence and self-sufficiency

Introduction (15 minutes)

Welcome and reference to the activity as a topic. We ask participants to present themselves through the structure of their family group (members, ages, characteristics).

On a board, we have placed slips of paper with various activities of the day, and phrases that enhance autonomy and ask participants to take one, important for them, and of course to put another. (activity: take one, put one). We discuss their choices and try to delve deeper into the concepts.

What You'll Learn

- How can young children learn to do things on their own?
- How can you keep your child safe and let them learn at the same time?
- What can parents say to help kids build their self-confidence?
- Set predictable routines
- Let your child choose
- Let your child help
- Give your child chores
- Let your child solve problems
- Let your child use money (management)
- Encourage projects
- Nurture free play
- What to say while they work and play- What we call the “P-R-I-D-E” skills (Praise – Labeled – Unlabeled • Reflect • Imitate • Describe – Specific Behavior child- student is doing • Enjoy)
- Respect a child as a person
- Withhold The Answers
- Provide Students with Opportunities to Self-Monitor Their Progress
- Coach Students on How to Set Goals
- Reward Initiative

Activity description:

The aim of the activity is for caregivers to feel strong empathy and << wear the trainees' >> shoes. Through a narrative written activity, in place of the other, the aim is to become observers and understand shortcomings, mistakes, and omissions that we do not discern under the pressure of the daily schedule and through our own formed ideas.

Activity: Anonymous letter

Duration: 15 min. Activity – for parents–trainers to write an anonymous letter as if they are the person with a disability: what are their goals and dreams, what they would like to be able to do, what they cannot do, how they think or feel.

We place the anonymous letter in a mailbox and then someone from the group randomly distributes the letters to the participants. If someone has received their letter, they throw it back into the box and get another one.

Then in free discussion, we analyse the letters as a case study: what we do in this case, what the trainer could do, what the young person does, and what solutions I can find.

Questions for debriefing (10 minutes)

- What conclusions did we draw?
- What happens when a young person has a disadvantage?
- How can I make my child have important skills with simple techniques?
- Why can't I help my child move forward?
- What are the inhibitions I experience that become obstacles?
- How can I avoid negative thoughts, scruples, and all <<if >>

Deep focus on words, Mental Empowerment Exercises: 5 minutes

On a cardboard, parents–trainers write down what are the common activities they do with the child and which activities during the day they let the child do on his own and find solutions, face any difficulties

Questions for debriefing (2 minutes)

Teach your child– students to use “3-before-me” when they need help.

Important notice: The worksheet is from the <https://emmatheteachie.com/5-ways-to-turn-your-students-into-independent-learners/>

- Brain: students need to take some time to think about their question and see if they can solve it themselves. I often find that students can answer their own questions. They just haven't taken a moment to actually figure it out for themselves!

- Book (or binder or notebook or interactive notebook – whatever your students use in class to store their notes): students should check to see if they already have the answer within their notes.

- Buddy: if they are still stuck, students should politely ask a classmate if they can help them. I would set some parameters around who they can ask. You don't want them walking across the classroom to “ask” their bestie and spending the next 10 minutes chatting about their weekend.

Closing activity (3-5 minutes)

We turn inward for a moment and focus on our breathing. We take deep diaphragmatic breaths. We inhale, we exhale. We relax. We keep breathing for as long as we want. Now we turn outwards. We watch without judging or analysing our thoughts, feelings, moods, sensations as objects floating in a stream, which appear and disappear. We remove an object from the stream and focus on it by noting new thoughts or feelings that may arise from the observation. Whenever we are ready, we leave the object on a leaf and let it float.

Additional information

Raising a child with special needs can be a lot of work. You want to provide them with the best support and services to maximise their potential while protecting them from being hurt. Depending on the nature of your child's needs, you may become overprotective in an effort to help them be more successful. It is important to build your child's confidence and independence so they realise how much they can do on their own. Their special needs do not have to hold them back. Collaborate with therapists and teachers. Talk about ways that you can work together to create consistency in building skills and fostering independence. Open communication allows you to share strategies that are or aren't working well and come up with new approaches so you're all on the same page.

Another relative option is the self-fulfilling prophecy

The term self-fulfilling prophecy was first mentioned by Robert Merton in the book "Social Theory and Social Structure" (1949). Simply put, we could define self-fulfilling prophecy as the state in which beliefs, beliefs, statements, or predictions we make about ourselves or someone else, although they may be wrong, come true in the process. The well-known study of two Harvard professors, Rosenthal and Jacobson, on elementary school students, confirms the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy. The above teachers administered an intelligence test to elementary school students and then informed the students' teachers about the results. In fact, they misleadingly informed about the results, stating that one group of students had a high IQ, while another group had a low IQ, which did not correspond to reality. The result was that students with supposedly high IQs did better in classes, and the opposite happened with the other group of students. What had happened was the fact that teachers' expectations had influenced students by treating them as better or not, and the consequences were evident in their performance. Self-fulfilling prophecy has many applications in our daily lives and concerns the tendency of the individual to meet the expectations of others and adapt to what others expect of him. Especially when it concerns people very important in our lives such as parents for their children, teachers for their students, it is easier for the person to be influenced by their beliefs, statements or predictions even if they are wrong. A person can also be trapped in the trap of self-fulfilling prophecy when he thinks in a negative way about himself and his personality, but also when he has negative thoughts about what he would like to achieve, resulting in failure and frustration.

Have in mind:

- *Safety should always be a priority. Offer supervised opportunities for children to explore and learn, gradually allowing more independence as they demonstrate responsibility and awareness of their surroundings.*
- *Messes are a natural part of learning. Instead of scolding, teach your child how to clean up after themselves, emphasising the importance of responsibility and learning from mistakes.*
- *Encouraging independence in children is a gift that will serve them well throughout their lives. By providing opportunities for them to make choices, take on responsibilities, and learn from their experiences, we empower them to grow into self-reliant and confident individuals. As parents and caregivers, nurturing independence in children is a rewarding journey that paves the way for a bright and successful future.*

Session 17. Set healthy boundaries with your child

Introduction (10 minutes)

This session is designed to help youth workers and parents effectively set healthy boundaries with children using practical tools and strategies. Various methods will be applied during the session to help participants understand the importance of boundaries, communicate them effectively, and maintain them. The goal is to develop skills that will help both children and adults better understand and respect boundaries, manage everyday situations, and create a safe and supportive environment.

The session begins with an icebreaker game, "Two Truths and One Lie." Each participant shares two true statements and one false statement about themselves. The group then tries to guess which statement is the lie. This activity helps build connections among participants and creates a comfortable atmosphere for the session.

Objectives of the session

1. Understand the concept of healthy boundaries and their importance in child development.
2. Learn practical strategies for setting and maintaining boundaries with children.
3. Develop skills to communicate boundaries effectively and consistently.

Activity: Exploring the Importance of Boundaries

Duration: 30 min.

Objective: To help youth workers and parents understand the importance of setting boundaries for children.

Description:

1. **Group Work:** Participants are divided into small groups of 3-4 people. Each group is tasked with discussing and listing at least five reasons why it is important to set boundaries for children. Groups can draw on their personal experiences, theoretical knowledge, or practical examples.
2. **Presentation:** Each group presents their list of reasons. The facilitator writes down the key points on a board or large sheet of paper so that the entire group can see them.
3. **Discussion:** After the presentations, the facilitator encourages a discussion about the reasons listed, emphasizing how setting boundaries helps children develop responsibility, understand social norms, and foster a sense of security and self-confidence. The discussion also covers how boundaries help parents and youth workers maintain structure and order.
4. **Reflection:** Participants are invited to share their thoughts on how this information can be applied in their work or family life, and what challenges they might foresee in the boundary-setting process.

Outcome: Youth workers and parents will understand the key reasons why setting boundaries is essential in child development and will have the opportunity to discuss how to implement this practice in real-life situations.

Activity: Developing a Boundary Setting Plan

Duration: 30 min.

Objective: To help youth workers and parents learn practical strategies for setting and maintaining boundaries with children and to create a plan for effectively communicating and implementing these boundaries.

Description

1. **Introduction to the Worksheet:** The facilitator explains to the participants that they will be working on a boundary-setting plan, which will help them clearly define boundaries in specific situations. Each participant will receive a worksheet that contains several sections to fill out.

2. **Filling Out the Worksheet:**

- **Section 1: Defining the Problem** – Participants describe a specific situation in which they want to set boundaries (e.g., a child refuses to go to bed at the designated time, disregards boundaries while playing with others).

- **Section 2: Defining the Boundary** – Participants clearly define the boundary they want to set (e.g., bedtime is set at 8:00 PM, playtime ends after one hour).

- **Section 3: Choosing Strategies** – Participants choose the strategy(ies) they will use to maintain the boundary (e.g., positive reinforcement, natural consequences, clear communication of boundaries).

- **Section 4: Communication Plan** – Participants formulate how they will communicate this boundary to the child (e.g., "I understand you enjoy playing, but it's time to stop now. We can play again after school tomorrow").

- **Section 5: Reward** – Participants determine what reward the child will receive for positive behaviour and adhering to the boundaries (e.g., extra playtime on the weekend, a favourite activity, or a treat).

- **Section 6: Anticipating Challenges** – Participants reflect on potential challenges they might face when trying to set these boundaries and how they plan to overcome them.

3. **Discussing the Worksheets:** After all participants have completed their worksheets, they share their plans in small groups or pairs. Participants can discuss their strategies, anticipate challenges, and offer advice or ideas to one another.

4. **Group Discussion:** The facilitator leads a group discussion about the process of filling out the worksheets. Participants discuss what they found useful, the challenges they encountered while completing the worksheet, and how they plan to implement their plans in real life.

Outcome: Youth workers and parents will create specific boundary-setting plans that they can apply in their work with children or at home. They will have a clear plan for how to communicate and maintain boundaries, along with a list of potential challenges and strategies to overcome them.

Defining the Problem (e.g., a child refuses to go to bed at the designated time, disregards boundaries while playing with other children).	The child consistently refuses to do homework after school and instead plays video games.
Defining the Boundary (e.g., bedtime is set at 8:00 PM, playtime ends after one hour).	Homework must be completed immediately after returning from school, before any leisure activities begin.
Choosing Strategies (e.g., positive reinforcement, natural consequences, clear communication of boundaries).	Use positive reinforcement – if the homework is done on time, the child earns extra video game time on the weekend.
Communication Plan (e.g., „I understand that you enjoy playing, but it’s time to stop now. We can play again after school tomorrow.	“I understand that you enjoy playing, but we need to finish homework first. Once it’s done, you can play your games.”
Reward (e.g., extra playtime on the weekend, favourite activity, or a treat).	If all homework is completed on time throughout the week, the child gets an additional hour of playtime during the weekend.
Anticipating potential challenges (consider the possible difficulties that may arise when trying to set these boundaries and how to address them).	Possible challenge: The child may feel frustrated or resist the boundaries. Solution: Discuss with the child why homework is important and agree on a suitable playtime schedule together.

**Boundary setting plan. An example from a teacher's practical experience*

**Filling out a table like this is beneficial because it provides a clear, organised approach to addressing behavioural issues or challenges with children. By breaking down the problem into specific steps—defining the problem, setting boundaries, choosing strategies, and planning communication and rewards—parents or caregivers can more effectively manage and guide a child. behaviour. This method also helps anticipate potential challenges and allows for proactive problem- solving, ensuring that the approach is consistent and constructive. Additionally, having a structured plan fosters better communication between the parent and child, helping the child understand expectations and the reasons behind them, which can lead to more positive outcomes.*

Situation/Solution strategy	Problem/Action
Defining the Problem (e.g., a child refuses to go to bed at the designated time, disregards boundaries while playing with other children).	
Defining the Boundary (e.g., bedtime is set at 8:00 PM, playtime ends after one hour).	
Choosing Strategies (e.g., positive reinforcement, natural consequences, clear communication of boundaries).	
Communication Plan (e.g., "I understand that you enjoy playing, but it's time to stop now. We can play again after school tomorrow.").	
Reward (e.g., extra playtime on the weekend, favourite activity, or a treat).	
Anticipating potential challenges (consider the possible difficulties that may arise when trying to set these boundaries and how to address them).	

**Boundary setting plan.*

Questions for debriefing (20 minutes)

Structure. Introduction: The facilitator begins the discussion by thanking the participants for their participation and efforts in trying the activities themselves. They emphasize that this discussion is intended to share impressions and decide how these activities can be applied at home with their children or in school.

Reflection Session: The facilitator invites participants to share their experiences, how they felt performing the activities, and their thoughts on the possibility of using them at home or in the classroom.

Reflection questions that could be asked to seminar participants:

1. **How did you feel during the role-playing and discussing boundary setting?** This question helps participants reflect on their emotional experience while practising boundary setting, providing an opportunity to understand their emotional reactions and discuss their importance in learning new skills.

2. **What did you find most challenging in the boundary-setting scenarios?** This question encourages participants to think about which aspects of the boundary-setting processes were most difficult, helping them identify their weak points and potential challenges they will need to address in practice.

3. **Do you think the strategies discussed today could be applied in your work or with your children?** This question helps participants evaluate the applicability and relevance of the discussed strategies in their specific contexts.

4. **What insights have you gained about the importance of boundaries in fostering healthy relationships?** This question allows participants to reflect on what they have learned about the importance of boundaries and how it can help in building healthy relationships with children.

5. **How do you think mindfulness or relaxation techniques could assist you in setting and maintaining boundaries?** This question encourages participants to consider how mindfulness or relaxation techniques can support their ability to set and maintain boundaries.

6. **What are your key takeaways from this session, and how do you plan to apply them in practice?** This question helps participants summarise their learning experience and consider how they might apply the acquired knowledge and skills in their work or home life.

References:

Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2016). *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. Bantam Books. <http://livre2.com/LIVREE/E1/E001014.pdf>

Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (2012). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Scribner. https://www.tbcs.org/uploaded/Resources/Presentations/Tools_for_Success_16/How_to_Talk_So_Kids_Will_Listen.pdf

Miltenberger, R. G. (2016). *Behavior Modification: Principles and Procedures (6th ed.)*. Cengage Learning.

Session 18: Improve your child's / the child you are caring for social and emotional skills

Welcome and Housekeeping (10 minutes)

Welcome Script: “Welcome, everyone, to our workshop on improving social and emotional skills for your child or the child you are caring for. I’m [Your Name], and I’ll be facilitating today’s session. Thank you for taking the time to be here. Let’s start by setting a few ground rules to ensure a respectful and engaging environment.”

Workshop Rules:

- Respect confidentiality.
- Listen actively and without judgement.
- Respect the time limits when speaking.
- Turn off or silence mobile phones to minimise distractions.
- Everyone’s experience is valuable—share openly and support each other.

Introduction to Workshop Theme:

Introduction Script: “Today’s focus is on enhancing the social and emotional skills of children in our care. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is crucial for children's success both in school and in life. SEL involves the process through which children learn to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

Understanding Social and Emotional Skills (10 minutes)

Key Concepts:

- What Are Social and Emotional Skills?

Social and emotional skills are the abilities that allow children to manage their emotions, build healthy relationships, and navigate social situations effectively.

Importance of SEL:

- SEL promotes better academic performance, improved attitudes and behaviours, and reduces emotional distress.
- SEL supports a positive school climate and students’ personal well-being.

Emphasize:

- All children, regardless of their abilities, can learn and improve these skills.
- Recognizing and nurturing each child’s unique strengths and potential is essential.

Activity: Exploring Experiences

Duration: 15 min.

Discussion Prompts

- “Think about a time when your child showed great social or emotional skills. What happened, and how did you feel?”

- “Have you encountered challenges in developing these skills with your child? What were those challenges?”

- “What strategies have you found effective in teaching your child about emotions and social interactions?”

Facilitation Tips:

- Encourage participants to share experiences and strategies in pairs or small groups.

- Listen actively and validate the participants' feelings and experiences.

Group Sharing

- After the small group discussions, invite volunteers to share key insights or ideas with the larger group.

Strategies for Enhancing Social and Emotional Skills (20 minutes)

Present Key Strategies

1. Model Positive Behaviour: Children learn by observing adults. Model calmness, empathy, and respectful communication.

2. Label Emotions: Help children identify and label their emotions. Use phrases like, “It looks like you’re feeling sad. Can you tell me why?”

3. Use Storytelling: Use stories to discuss emotions and social situations. This can help children relate to and understand different perspectives.

4. Role-Playing: Practise social scenarios through role-play. This can help children learn how to navigate different situations effectively.

5. Encourage Empathy: Discuss how others might feel in different situations and explore how your child can respond with kindness and understanding.

6. Create a Safe Environment: Ensure that the child feels safe to express their feelings and thoughts. Acknowledge and validate their emotions, even when they seem irrational or exaggerated.

7. Teach Problem-Solving Skills: Encourage children to come up with solutions to conflicts or challenges. Ask guiding questions that help them think through their options and consequences.

8. Practice Mindfulness: Introduce simple mindfulness techniques to help children stay calm and focused. This can include deep breathing, counting to ten, or imagining a peaceful place.

9. Use Visual Supports: Incorporate visual aids like emotion charts or social stories to help children understand and manage their emotions.

10. Build Routines: Establish predictable routines to provide stability and security, which can help children manage their emotions better.

Discussion:

- “Which strategies have you used before, and how did they work?”
- “Which new strategies do you find interesting and would like to try?”

Activity: Creating a social story

Duration: 15 minutes

Objective: Participants will create a simple social story to help their child understand and navigate a challenging social situation.

Materials Needed:

- Blank paper or templates for social stories
- Markers, crayons, or pens
- Example social stories for reference

Instructions:

1. Choose a Scenario: Think of a social situation that is challenging for your child, such as sharing toys, joining a group activity, or expressing anger.
2. Create a Story. Write a short story that includes:
 - A beginning that describes the situation.
 - A middle that explores the feelings and reactions involved.
 - An end that presents a positive resolution or strategy for managing the situation.
3. Illustrate the Story: Add simple drawings or use pictures to illustrate each part of the story.
4. Share Your Story: Invite participants to share their stories in pairs or small groups.

Example

Title: Making New Friends

Beginning: “Emily is at the playground and wants to play with other kids.”

Middle: “She feels nervous and unsure about what to say. She remembers feeling shy before and knows it’s okay to feel this way.”

End: “Emily decides to smile and say, ‘Hi, can I play too?’ She feels proud when the other kids include her in their game.”

Conclusion and Debriefing (10 minutes). Debrief Questions:

- “How did it feel to create and share your social stories?”
- “What new insights did you gain about your child’s social and emotional skills?”
- “What strategies do you plan to implement following today’s session?”

Closing Remarks:

“Thank you all for your participation and openness today. Remember that every child has the potential to grow and thrive with the right support. By focusing on

developing social and emotional skills, we can help our children build confidence, resilience, and meaningful relationships."

Optional Stress-Relief Exercise: Deep Breathing (5 minutes)

Instructions:

- "Let's end our session with a simple deep-breathing exercise to help us relax and refocus. You can do this exercise anytime you feel stressed or overwhelmed."
- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose, counting to five.
- Hold your breath for a moment, then exhale slowly through your mouth, counting to five.
- Repeat this process for a few minutes, focusing on the rhythm of your breath.

Session 19: Courage, resilience and increase network support

Welcome and housekeeping.

Welcome script: “Welcome, everyone, to our workshop on courage, resilience and increasing network support for your child or the child you are caring for. I’m [Your Name], and (other names) will be facilitating today’s session. Thank you for taking the time to be here. Let’s start by setting a few ground rules to ensure a respectful and engaging environment.”

Workshop rules:

- Respect the confidentiality of others.
- Listen actively and without judgement.
- Respect the time limits when speaking.
- Please set your mobile devices to silent or vibrate mode. If you need to take a call, kindly step outside to avoid disruption.
- We encourage everyone to participate actively.
- All thoughts and ideas are valued.

Introduction to workshop theme. Introduction script:

“Today’s program is to strengthen the courage, resilience and social network support for our children in our care. Courage is essential in many areas of life, as it allows children to push beyond their comfort zones and act in the face of adversity. Resilience involves emotional strength, mental flexibility, and the ability to maintain a positive outlook, even when facing tough situations. A strong support network can be crucial in helping children overcome challenges, achieve their goals and maintain well-being.”

Understanding courage, resilience and social network support (5 minutes)

Key concepts:

- What is courage, resilience and social network support? Courage is the ability to confront fears and act despite uncertainty or potential risks, resilience is bouncing back from adversity, and social network support is the help provided by relationships and resources.
- Importance of courage, resilience and social network support. Courage empowers people to act on their convictions, driving progress and innovation. Resilience allows children to maintain their efforts over time, even when facing difficulties or repeated failures. A strong support network can bolster children’s resilience by offering encouragement, understanding, and a sense of belonging.
- Emphasize. Courage means facing fear, resilience is bouncing back from adversity, and social network support offers essential help through relationships.

Activity exploring experiences

Duration: 10 minutes

Discussion prompts

- “What role does self-esteem play in a child’s ability to demonstrate courage, and how can we help build it?”
- “How do different cultural backgrounds influence a child’s development of resilience, and what can we learn from a diverse perspective?”
- “How can parents, teachers, and communities work together to create a supportive network for children, and why is this important for their development?”

Facilitation tips:

- Pen and paper to prepare their answers.
- Encourage participants to share experiences and strategies in pairs or small groups.
- Listen actively and validate the participants feelings and experience.

Group sharing

After the small group discussions, invite volunteers to share key insights or ideas with the larger group.

Strategies for enhancing courage, resilience and social network support (15 minutes).

Present key strategies. Courage:

1. Encourage safe risk-taking: Provide opportunities for children to try new activities and face manageable challenges in a supportive environment.
2. Praise efforts, not just successes: Focus on the effort and perseverance they show rather than just the outcome to build confidence.
3. Teach problem-solving skills: Help them develop solutions for their problems and support them in trying out their ideas.
4. Model courageous behaviour: Demonstrate bravery in your own actions, as children often learn by observing adults.

Resilience:

1. Normalise mistakes and failure: Help children understand that making mistakes is a part of learning and growth.
2. Teach coping strategies: Introduce techniques like deep breathing, talking about feelings, or positive self-talk to manage stress.
3. Encourage a growth mindset: Reinforce the idea that abilities can improve with effort and persistence.
4. Celebrate small wins: Acknowledge and celebrate their progress and small victories to build a sense of achievement.

Social network support:

1. Foster positive relationships: Encourage participation in group activities like sports, clubs, or classes where they can build friendships.
2. Facilitate social skills development: Teach and model social skills such as empathy, communication and teamwork.
3. Create a supportive home environment: Maintain open lines of communication, listen to their concerns, and offer consistent emotional support.
4. Encourage peer support: Promote group projects or team-based activities where children can collaborate and support each other.

Discussion:

- “What is some age-appropriate challenges that children tackle to build their confidence?”
- “What strategies can we use to help children view mistakes and failures as learning opportunities?”
- “How can we help children communicate their needs and feelings to their social network effectively?”

Activity: Courage – “Challenge chart”

Duration: 10 minutes.

Materials needed:

- Chart paper or a whiteboard
- Markers
- Stickers or stars

Instructions:

- Create a chart with columns for different types of challenges.
- Help the child set small, manageable challenges for themselves in each category.
- For each challenge attempted, let them mark it with a sticker or star on the chart.
- Celebrate their efforts and progress, regardless of the outcome.

Activity: Resilience – “I Am Special” Collage

Objective: to help children recognize their unique qualities and strengths, promoting a positive self-concept and enhancing resilience.

Materials Needed:

- Coloured paper or construction paper
- Magazines or printed images
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Markers or crayons
- Stickers (optional)

Instructions

Introduction (2 minutes):

Begin by explaining to the children that everyone has special qualities and strengths that make them unique. Emphasize the importance of recognizing and appreciating these qualities to feel good about themselves and to build resilience.

Self-Reflection (3 minutes):

Ask the children to think about what makes them special. Prompt them with questions such as:

- What are some things you are good at?
- What do you like about yourself?
- What makes you happy?
- What do others say they like about you?

Encourage them to think about their personality traits, talents, interests, and things they have accomplished.

Collage Creation (8 minutes):

Distribute the materials (paper, magazines, scissors, glue, markers).

Instruct the children to create a collage on their paper that represents their special qualities and strengths. They can:

- Cut out pictures or words from magazines that relate to their qualities.
- Draw or write positive words and phrases about themselves.
- Use stickers to decorate their collage.

Encourage creativity and assure them that there is no right or wrong way to create their collage.

Sharing and Reflection (2 minutes):

- If time allows, invite a few children to share their collages with the group.
- Encourage them to talk about one or two things they included in their collage and why they chose them.
- Reinforce the idea that everyone has unique qualities that are valuable and worth celebrating.

Activity: Social network support – “Support circle”

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials needed:

- Paper
- Markers
- Stickers

Instructions

- Let the child draw a large circle on the paper and label it “support circle”.
- Inside the circle, ask them to draw or write the names of people who support them (family, friends, teachers, etc.).
- Discuss the ways these people provide support and how the child can also support others.

- Create a “support pledge” where the child commits to one way, they will offer support to someone in their circle.

Example

These activities are designed to be engaging and reflective, helping children build key skills related to courage, resilience, and social network support.

Discussion Points:

- “What emotions did you experience by doing these activities?”
- “Which new activity are you interested in trying now?”
- “How might you use what you learned from these activities in the future?”

Conclusion and debriefing. Debrief questions

- “What did you learn about yourself today? “Encourage self-reflection on personal insights gained during the activity.
- “How can you apply what you learned today in your everyday life?” Discuss practical ways to incorporate courage, resilience, and support into daily experiences.
- “Is there anything you would like to do differently in the future when facing challenges?”
- Encourage children to think about how they can apply new strategies to future situations.

Closing remarks

“Keep in mind the people around you who are there to support you—your family, friends, teachers, and others who care about you. They are your network of support, and you are also part of someone else’s support network. By helping each other, we all grow stronger together.”

Session 20. Make positive changes in your daily life

Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome Script: “Welcome, everyone, to our workshop on making positive changes in your daily life. I’m [Your Name], and I’ll be facilitating today’s session. Thank you for taking the time to be here. Let’s start by setting a few ground rules to ensure a respectful and engaging environment.”

Workshop Rules

- Respect confidentiality.
- Listen actively and without judgement.
- Respect the time limits when speaking.
- Turn off or silence mobile phones to minimise distractions.
- Everyone’s experience is valuable—share openly and support each other.

Introduction to Workshop Theme

• **Introduction Script:** “Today’s focus is on making positive changes in daily life. Making positive changes that help parents to recharge, and reset can prevent and manage parental exhaustion.”

Positive changes in your daily life. Individual Changes. Learning adaptive coping skills are important for parents who feel overwhelmed by daily responsibilities. This may include:

- **Self-care:** Regular exercise, adequate sleep, healthy eating, making time for hobbies, activities and outings with friends and family are crucial for maintaining physical and emotional well-being.
- **Compassion and Self-compassion:** Treating loved ones and us with warmth, care and kindness when there is pain. You can train to make room for painful experiences and try to let go of punishing and judgmental thoughts and instead be more understanding. Compassion for yourself is as important as compassion for others. The more self-compassion you can develop the more compassion you will feel towards others and the other way around. This means that as a parent you will not only be less hard on yourself but also on your children.
- **Mindfulness and relaxation techniques:** Exercises such as meditation, yoga or deep breathing exercises can reduce stress levels and improve overall mental health.
- **Time management:** Prioritising tasks and setting realistic goals can help reduce feelings of being overwhelmed.
- **Setting boundaries:** Learning to say no or delegate tasks can help parents avoid over-involvement and reduce stress.
- **Knowledge:** Knowledge about child development and parenting can provide parents with tools and understanding and provide an explanation about the meaning

of the child's behaviour. It is also important for parents to have knowledge about parenthood, to know that other parents also feel insecure, and that starting parenthood is often accompanied by a (temporary) increase in conflicts between partners. This knowledge means that expectations that parents have about themselves and their children are realistic.

Activity: Self-Compassion

Duration: 10 minutes

Discussion prompts

“Think about the struggles you have experienced with your child. It might be something that happened, some misfortune, some failure or difficulty, some inadequacy.”

“How do you feel about yourself? What do you say to yourself? What words do you use? What is your attitude?”

“Take a moment to write down your responses.”

Now, imagine that a friend, neighbour, family etc. is telling you the same situation about their own difficulties and she/he is giving themselves the same critics. What would you say to them?”

Facilitation Tips

- Encourage participants to share experiences in pairs or small groups.
- Listen actively and validate the participants' feelings and experiences.

Group sharing in a group. After the small group discussions, invite volunteers to share key insights or ideas with the larger group.

Changes at home. Spouse/partner: the support of a partner can be critical in managing parental responsibilities and preventing exhaustion. Keyways partners can help include:

- *Shared Parenting Responsibilities:* ensuring that both partners share parenting duties equally can significantly reduce the burden on one person.
- *Emotional support:* regular communication and understanding can help partners stay connected and aware of each other's stress levels and emotional well-being.
- *Time for individual activities:* supporting each other in having personal time for hobbies or relaxation can improve individual resilience and overall relationship satisfaction.

Bonding with your children: being more *mindful* about spending time with your children. For example, taking a walk to school together two days a week rather than driving your children to school every day. It can bring more joy into the relationship.

Exercise with a stick (10 minutes)

- Try to hold a stick with your hands up in the air. I want to ask you not to move your arms. How is your body feeling? Do you enjoy this feeling?

Facilitation Tips

Participants are divided into 3 different groups.

The first group: “Try to hold a stick with your hands up in the air for 3 minutes. I want to ask you not to move your arms.”

Second group: “Try to hold a stick with your hands up in the air for 3 minutes. I want to ask you not to move your arms. There will be a second person that stands behind person 1 and puts his/her hand on the back after 1 minute and 30 seconds.”

Third group: ““Try to hold a stick with your hands up in the air for 1 minutes and 30 seconds. I want to ask you not to move your arms. After, you will be asked to lower your stick and hold it like this for another minute and 30 seconds.”

- Encourage participants to share experience.
- Listen actively and validate the participants' feelings and experiences.

Group sharing: invite volunteers to share key insights or ideas with the larger group.

Discussion: what are your thoughts about this exercise? What does this exercise tell you?

Changes in support system. The researchers note that rich and individualistic Western countries are affected most severely by parental exhaustion. Culture plays a very important role. Parenting is a very lonely activity in the West. Western countries have an individual culture. People in the West strive for good performances, good results from making effort and being perfect as a parent. This is very different in African countries. In Africa there is an entire village involved in raising children. Children are seen as children of a community. That is a good protection against parental exhaustion. A good support system providing emotional and practical help can be crucial in preventing and managing parental exhaustion:

- **Family and friends:** Asking for help from family and friends with parenting. It can help parents to take a break, recharge, reset and reduce social isolation.
- **Parenting groups/community organisations:** Joining these groups can provide emotional support and advice to others in similar situations.
- **Online Resources:** Several websites and forums offer advice, tips and support for dealing with parenting issues and stress.

Asking for professional help

Although many parents cope with stress through personal or community support, professional help may be needed in some situations:

- **Parenting classes:** Classes about parenting children with special educational needs can provide strategies for more effective parenting, reducing feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

- **Counselling:** Therapists can help parents develop strategies to manage stress and address underlying issues that contribute to burnout.
- **Medical assistance:** If stress leads to physical complaints or mental health problems such as depression, consulting a healthcare provider is crucial.
- **Helplines and support networks:** Many organisations offer helplines and online chat services for parents in need, providing immediate support and guidance.

Conclusion and Debriefing (10 minutes)

Debrief Questions: "What new insights did you gain about the necessity of changing our behaviour in a positive way? What strategies do you plan to implement following today's session?"

Closing Remarks:

"Thank you all for your participation and openness today. Remember that taking care of yourself and each other and being able to ask help can make sure your mental health and your relationship with yourself and others will improve."

Session 21. Set a new life design

Introduction (10 minutes)

- We present for some symptoms that may be related to a problematic outlook of our life and are indicators for change:
 - Have you noticed in yourself any of the following signs?
 - Do you have insomnia?
 - Can't concentrate?
 - Do you spend a lot of time on social media?
 - Don't have an interest in further education or hobbies?
 - Do you have headaches or feel intense anxiety?
 - Do you eat too much, or have you lost your appetite?
 - Do you complain often?

We introduce the group and briefly describe the activity and the topics. We have written on the board in bold letters the following phrase and listening to soft music we ask the participants to introduce themselves and focus on the change they want to achieve.

*"Try to defeat yourself first of all, despite your fate. And change your desires, despite the world"~
René Descartes*

Objectives of the session:

- Review your actions and take stock of your life so far.
- Identify your goals based on this review.
- Write down your goals in a goal setting tool.
- Create a personal preparation plan to reach your goals.
- Take time for yourself and what pleases you

Activity description (duration – 30 minutes)

Interactive activity: 10 minutes

We sit in a circle and share papers and markers. We ask participants to follow the rules in-game: write down 3 things that you feel like you have no boundaries for and are under pressure.

Reposition. Write down 4 things you're unhappy about

Reposition. Write down 5 things you're grateful for.

Questions for debriefing 10 minutes

We talk to participants about the results, what they put on themselves and others, the space they give up and the personal needs they violate.

Interactive Activity (10 minutes)

Then we ask the participants to draw with graphs, shapes and anything else they wish for the map of their life's. Place goals, plans, persons, hobbies, thoughts and analyse them at dimensional level (100% possible).

Questions for debriefing (10 minutes)

- You have 5 minutes to review your personal map.
- What did you find?
- What changes did you make?
- What is difficult to redefine?
- Have you noticed your comfort zone?
- We discuss all the findings and changes.

Deep focus on words, Mental empowerment activity (5-8 minutes)

Visualisation techniques: listening to music in a calm space, where we have placed various plants:

- Visualise your ideal self, focusing on the qualities that define this version of yourself. Visualisation creates a mental plan that you can follow to achieve positive change.
 - Self-improvement is not about correcting what is broken, but about recognizing the beauty that lies within.
 - Get up at a leisurely pace and head to the plant area, choose what you want and sit relaxed. We discuss our choice: the plant is ourselves; we must take care of it and take care of it so that it does not wither!!

Additional information

Most people don't easily cope with every change they make. Even if it is positive. They resist what they are experiencing. There is no flexibility. And if it's hard to make the change, imagine how hard it is to maintain it.

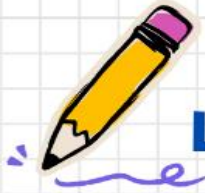
But it is an essential element in our lives. Even if things are already good, they can always be done better (optimization)

Remember, positive changes, when you make them, will fill you with joy, gratitude, satisfaction, motivation. Motivation to evolve, to grow, to touch self-realisation!

The realisation that something must change never happens from one moment to the next. Some event, good or bad, triggers this inner process, and our inner dialogue that pushes us to change things, situations, ourselves.

Activity: The cup of my life ([download](#))

Take a cup and write down (or use prepared worksheet) on papers with what you feel it in....

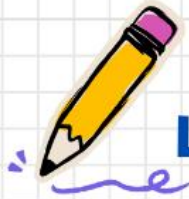


Let's share some positive tea





Example of activity: The cup of my life



Let's share some positive tea

you are enough

you can get through anything

everything will be a-okay

you are worthy & worth it

you are amazing

you are beautiful

you are strong & fearless

believe in yourself

tomorrow is a new day



Activity: IKIGAI



HOW TO FIND IKIGAI

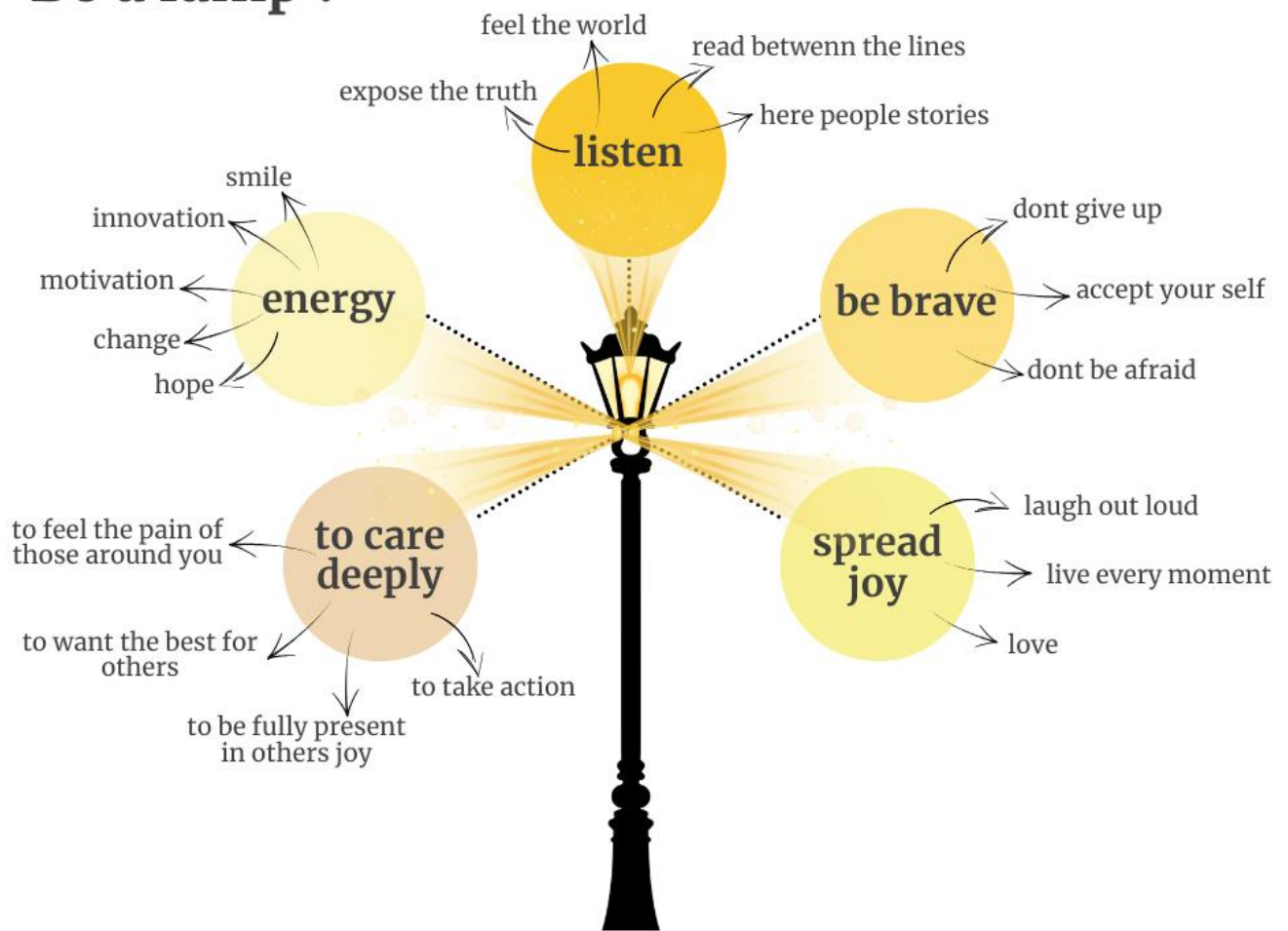




Activity: Be a lamp

EXAMPLE OF..... design a lamp as you wish and write down your ideas about being a lamp in someone's life or for yourself!

Be a lamp !



Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Support Groups Self-Assessment Form

This form is designed to give you the opportunity to reflect deeply on your personal growth and development throughout the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) support group sessions. The aim of this self-assessment is to provide you with insight into how these sessions have influenced and shaped your thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, particularly in the context of your role as a parent or caregiver of a child with special educational needs (SEN).

The ACT support group was designed to help you:

- **Enhance your psychological flexibility.** This refers to your ability to remain open to and accepting of your thoughts, emotions, and experiences, even in difficult or challenging situations. It also involves staying present in the moment and making decisions guided by your values.
- **Strengthen your emotional resilience.** Emotional resilience is your capacity to navigate and manage difficult emotions effectively, particularly in high-stress situations like parenting a child with SEN. Through the sessions, you have been introduced to mindfulness techniques and tools for emotional regulation.
- **Improve your caregiving and parenting skills.** The ACT support group has provided strategies to help you align your actions with your values as a parent, supporting both your child's needs and your well-being. This self-assessment will give you a chance to evaluate how you have implemented these strategies in your day-to-day life.

The form here now consists of several sections that cover key themes from the ACT support group, including:

Psychological Flexibility – your ability to accept your emotions, stay present, and take actions that align with your values.

Emotional Awareness and Regulation – your capacity to recognize, understand, and manage your emotions effectively.

Values and Goals – how well you have identified and acted upon your personal values and long-term goals in your parenting or caregiving role.

Impact of the Support Group – the overall impact of the group on your well-being and your relationship with your child.

Overall Evaluation – a summary of your satisfaction with the sessions and the skills you've gained.



Assessment form

Please take your time in answering each question thoughtfully and reflectively. There are no right or wrong answers—this is an opportunity for you to explore and recognize your own progress.

This self-assessment is an important step in your ongoing journey toward personal growth and well-being. By taking the time to reflect on your progress, you will:

- gain greater awareness of how much you have grown since the start of the sessions.
- identify areas where you have made significant improvements and areas that may still need attention.
- reflect on how the sessions have helped you in managing both emotional and practical challenges in your parenting or caregiving role.

Confidentiality. Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of evaluating your own progress and improving future sessions. If you feel comfortable, you may share any insights with the group, but this is entirely voluntary.

Thank you for participating in this assessment and for your ongoing commitment to your personal growth and the well-being of your child. We look forward to hearing about your progress and experiences.

Instruction: for questions that ask you to rate them from 1 to 10, please write your own rating, and for questions that ask you to give an open-ended answer, please write it in the boxes after the question.

EXPLANATION: In this form, please rate yourself according to your status, i.e. if you participated in the sessions as a parent(s) or caregiver(s), please rate yourself from the position of a parent or caregiver, if you participated in the sessions as a youth worker or a youth worker, please rate yourself from the position you hold. In questions or statements where you find the terms parents, guardians or caregivers, understand and appreciate that you are being asked about the situations, and that you are being asked to answer as a youth worker or youth worker.

A.1. Psychological Flexibility

This section assesses participants' ability to stay present, accept emotions, and take committed action, key components of ACT.

Questions about Mindfulness and Being Present

1. Presence in Challenging Situations: On a scale of 1-10, how able are you to stay focused on the present moment when faced with difficult situations with your child?

Scores

Can you recall a recent stressful situation? How did you apply any mindfulness techniques to stay present and avoid becoming overwhelmed?

.....
.....

2. Acceptance of Emotions: when difficult emotions arise (e.g., frustration, sadness, fear), how often do you acknowledge and accept them rather than pushing them away? (1-10 scale)

Scores

.....
.....



3. Noticing Your Thoughts: how often do you notice your thoughts in the moment, without immediately reacting to them? (1-10 scale)

Scores

When challenging thoughts arise (e.g., self-doubt, guilt), how do you respond? Have you found it easier to distance yourself from negative thoughts since starting the sessions?

.....
.....

4. Shifting Perspective: How often do you catch yourself getting "stuck" in unhelpful thoughts and manage to shift your focus back to the present? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe a specific technique you have used to "defuse" from negative or repetitive thoughts (e.g., observing thoughts as passing clouds, labelling thoughts without judgment).

.....
.....

Acceptance

5. Acceptance of the Situation: how well have you accepted the realities of your child's special needs without trying to control or change the situation? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Has your acceptance of your child's challenges influenced your ability to make more thoughtful decisions as a caregiver? If so, describe how.

.....
.....

6. Responding to Emotional Challenges: when your child's behaviour triggers an emotional response, how often do you accept your emotional reaction rather than suppress or deny it? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Share an example of a situation where you practiced acceptance during a difficult moment. How did this approach differ from how you may have reacted before attending the support group?

.....
.....

7. Self-compassion: how often do you show yourself compassion when facing parenting challenges? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe a time when you treated yourself with kindness after making a mistake or encountering a challenge in caregiving.

.....
.....

Committed Action

8. Values-driven Actions: how often do you make decisions based on your core values rather than on short-term emotional reactions? (1-10 scale)

Scores



Can you identify a time when you took action that was aligned with your values as a parent or caregiver, even when it was difficult or uncomfortable?

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.....

9. Following Through on Intentions: Since starting the sessions, how often do you follow through on commitments or goals you set for yourself, even in the face of obstacles? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Provide an example of a goal you set during the support group and the steps you have taken to achieve it.

10. Balancing Flexibility and Persistence: how flexible are you when circumstances change or when things don't go as planned? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe a situation where you had to balance sticking to your values and being flexible in your approach. How did you manage that balance?

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.....

Reflection Questions

11. Overall Reflection on Psychological Flexibility: reflecting on your progress in psychological flexibility, how would you describe the biggest change in how you handle emotional and mental challenges?

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.....

What strategies have you found most helpful in maintaining flexibility, and how do you plan to continue practicing them moving forward?

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.....

12. Learning and Growth:

How have the techniques learned in the ACT sessions changed your daily routines or interactions with your child? Please provide a specific example.

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.....

What areas of psychological flexibility would you still like to improve, and how can you work toward these goals?

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.....

A.2. Emotional Awareness and Regulation

Emotional Awareness

Scores

Recognizing Emotions: how often do you take the time to notice and identify your emotions when they arise? (1-10 scale)

Describe a moment where you recognized a strong emotion (e.g., anger, sadness) before reacting. How did this awareness influence your response?

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.....

Naming Emotions: how comfortable are you now with labelling your emotions (e.g., using tools like the "Wheel of Emotions") compared to before the sessions? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Can you recall a specific situation where naming your emotions helped you gain control of the situation?

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.....

Tracking Emotional Triggers: how often do you reflect on what triggers strong emotional responses in your interactions with your child? (1-10 scale)

Scores

What patterns have you noticed in your emotional responses to your child's behaviour, and how have you worked on identifying these triggers?

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Body Awareness: how aware are you of how emotions manifest physically (e.g., tension, shallow breathing) in your body? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Can you describe a time when you became aware of an emotional reaction in your body and used that awareness to calm down or re-centre?

.....
.....

Emotional Regulation

Scores

Regulating Difficult Emotions: when experiencing intense emotions (e.g., frustration, guilt, fear), how often do you use techniques learned in the sessions to regulate your emotional response? (1-10 scale)

Share an example of when you successfully managed a difficult emotion using one of the regulation strategies from the support group (e.g., mindfulness, breathing techniques, grounding exercises).

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Preventing Emotional Overwhelm: how often are you able to prevent emotional overwhelm by taking a moment to pause, reflect, and respond calmly to your child’s behaviour? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe a situation where you felt overwhelmed but managed to calm yourself down. What steps did you take?

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.....

Using the Feelings Thermometer: have you found the "Feelings Thermometer" exercise helpful in identifying and managing your emotional intensity in the moment?

Yes No

Can you provide an example of a time when you used the Feelings Thermometer to manage escalating emotions before they became overwhelming?

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.....

Functions of Emotions: how well do you now understand the purpose or function of your emotions (e.g., anger as a sign of unmet needs, sadness as a sign of loss)? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe a time when understanding the function of your emotion helped you navigate a difficult situation with your child.

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.....

Managing Stress and Burnout

Recognizing Burnout: how aware are you of signs of emotional burnout in yourself (e.g., irritability, fatigue, disengagement)? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Have you experienced signs of burnout since the sessions started? If yes, how did you address it?

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.....

Stress-Reduction Techniques: how often do you apply stress-reduction techniques (e.g., breathing exercises, body scan, relaxation techniques) to manage the daily stresses of caregiving? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Which stress-reduction technique has been most effective for you? Describe how it has helped you in specific situations.

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.....

Balancing Emotional Needs: how well do you balance your emotional needs with your responsibilities as a parent/caregiver? (1-10 scale)

Scores



Can you describe a time when you took steps to care for your emotional well-being? How did it impact your caregiving or parenting?

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.....

Emotional Expression and Communication

Expressing Emotions Healthily: how often do you express your emotions in a healthy, non-reactive way when interacting with your child? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe an example where you communicated your emotions effectively to your child or another family member. How did it affect the outcome of the situation?

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.....

Modelling Emotional Regulation for Your Child: how often do you try to model healthy emotional regulation for your child by showing them how to handle difficult emotions calmly? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Can you share a situation where you consciously modelled emotional regulation for your child? How did they respond?

.....
.....

Helping Your Child with Emotional Regulation: how often do you guide your child in recognizing and managing their emotions (e.g., helping them label emotions, teaching them calming techniques)? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe a situation where you successfully helped your child manage a strong emotion. What strategies did you use?

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.....

Reflection Questions

Overall Reflection on Emotional Awareness and Regulation: reflecting on your progress, how would you describe the biggest change in how you handle emotions compared to before the sessions?

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What strategies have been most helpful in managing your emotional responses, and how do you plan to continue practicing them?

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.....

Areas for Improvement: are there any areas of emotional awareness or regulation that you still find challenging? If so, what steps can you take to improve these areas moving forward?

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A.4. Impact of the Support Group

Effect on Well-being

Scores

Emotional Well-being: how much has the support group helped you manage your overall emotional well-being? (1-10 scale)

Can you share a specific example of how the sessions have supported you in handling stress, anxiety, or emotional overwhelm related to caregiving or parenting?

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Self-care and Balance: how often do you practice self-care techniques (e.g., mindfulness, relaxation exercises) that were introduced during the sessions? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe one self-care practice you've adopted from the sessions and how it has helped you balance your responsibilities as a parent/caregiver with your personal needs.

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Reduction of Burnout: have the sessions helped reduce feelings of burnout or exhaustion related to caregiving?

Yes No

Can you provide an example of how you managed a high-stress situation or period of burnout differently after attending the group?

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Empowerment and Confidence: how much more confident and empowered do you feel in your caregiving role since joining the support group? (1-10 scale)

Scores

What is one key area where you've gained confidence in managing challenges with your child or caregiving duties?

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Impact on Relationship with Your Child

Strengthening Connection: how much has your relationship with your child improved due to what you've learned in the support group? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Describe one way your connection with your child has grown stronger through applying the techniques or strategies from the sessions.

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.....



Handling Conflicts: how have the sessions influenced how you manage conflicts or challenging behaviours with your child? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Can you share an example of a difficult moment with your child where you applied the skills from the group to resolve or de-escalate the situation?

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.....

Positive Communication: how often do you use positive communication techniques learned in the group when interacting with your child? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Please describe a situation where using these techniques improved your understanding or communication with your child.

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Impact on Parenting Approach

Changes in Parenting Style: how much has the support group changed your overall approach to parenting or caregiving? (1-10 scale)

Scores

What specific changes have you made in your parenting style because of the group's teachings? Provide an example.

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.....

Handling Emotional Outbursts: have you become more skilled at managing your child's emotional outbursts or challenging behaviour due to the sessions?

Yes No

Please share an example where you successfully applied a strategy from the group to help your child through an emotional outburst.

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.....

Consistency in Applying Techniques: how consistent have you been in applying the skills and strategies from the sessions in your everyday parenting or caregiving? (1-10 scale)

Scores

What challenges have you faced in applying these techniques, and how have you overcome them?

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ACT Support Groups Feedback Form

Thank you for participating in the ACT Support Group. Your feedback is essential to help us understand the effectiveness of the sessions and to improve future offerings. Please take a few minutes to complete this form. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to enhance the quality of the program for future participants.

Session Content and Structure

Relevance of Topics: how relevant were the topics covered in the sessions to your needs as a parent or caregiver of a child with special educational needs (SEN)? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Which session topic(s) did you find most helpful? Please explain why.

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.....

Usefulness of Exercises: how useful did you find the activities and exercises provided during the sessions in your daily life? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Please provide an example of an activity or exercise that you've found particularly valuable in managing your caregiving responsibilities.

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.....

Session Structure: was the pacing and structure of the sessions appropriate for you?

Too fast Too slow Just right

If you think the pacing was not right, how would you suggest it could be improved?

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.....

Facilitation and Group Dynamics

Facilitator Support: how supported did you feel by the facilitator(s) during the sessions? (1-10 scale)

Scores

What did you appreciate most about the facilitator's approach, and what could they improve?

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.....

Group Interaction: how comfortable did you feel sharing your thoughts and experiences with the group? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Was there enough time for discussion and reflection during the sessions?

Yes No

Please describe any aspect of the group dynamic that contributed to or hindered your learning experience.

.....
.....



Impact on You

Scores

Personal Empowerment: how much did the sessions help you feel more empowered in your role as a parent or caregiver? (1-10 scale)

Please describe a specific situation where you felt more capable of handling challenges due to the skills learned in the sessions.

.....
.....

Stress and Emotional Management: how much have the sessions helped you manage stress and regulate your emotions when dealing with difficult situations? (1-10 scale)

Scores

Can you share an example of a time when you applied a technique from the sessions to manage stress or emotional challenges?

.....
.....

Parenting/Caregiving Skills: have the sessions helped improve your parenting or caregiving skills?

Yes No

Please describe one skill or strategy you've implemented in your daily life since the sessions began.

.....
.....

Peer Support and Group Benefits

Scores

Value of Peer Support: how beneficial was the peer support you received from other group members? (1-10 scale)

Was there a specific peer interaction or experience that made a significant impact on you? If so, please describe it.

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Sense of Community: did you feel a sense of connection and community with the other participants?

Yes No

How could we enhance the group's sense of community and peer support in future sessions?

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.....

Suggestions for Improvement

Improvements in Content: were there any topics that you feel should have been covered in more detail or additional topics that were missing?

Yes No



If yes, please specify the topics or areas you would like to see included or expanded.

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.....

Improvements in Structure: how satisfied were you with the overall structure and delivery of the sessions?

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Please provide any suggestions you have for improving the structure or delivery of future sessions.

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Overall Experience: What was the most valuable aspect of the support group for you?
If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be?

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.....

Recommendation

Would You Recommend?: How likely are you to recommend this support group to other parents or caregivers in similar situations? (1-10 scale)

Scores

If you would recommend the group, what would you highlight as its main benefit? If not, what would need to change for you to recommend it?

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.....

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