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GREEN SERENITY

Guide for Stress Resilience and Positive Mental Well-being

No. 2025-1-LT02-KA220-YOU-000349930



1'st INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT
2026



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Erasmus+ KA220-YOU- Cooperation partnerships in youth 2025

”Green Serenity: Promoting positive mental well-being for abused youth through outdoor nature therapy”

Project Nr: 2023-1-RO01- KA220-YOU-000151909



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Introduction

Young people who have experienced violence in the past, suffer the most stress. Disturbed physical and mental health, acquired complexes, lost self-esteem and trust in people - these are the consequences of violence experienced in childhood.

Rate of child abuse is very high in all countries. Almost three in ten 18-19 year olds youth have experienced intimate partner violence, according to a national study by the Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). Exposure to child physical abuse and parents' domestic violence can subject youth to pervasive traumatic stress and lead to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the future.

The consequences of childhood violence persist in a young person's later life and affect their relationships, self-esteem, etc.

The project consortium will work to help abused youth deal with stress and negative thoughts. The project aims to harness the healing power of nature to empower today's youth in overcoming stress and negative thoughts. "Green Serenity" is a structured program that integrates nature therapy practices, mindfulness techniques, and positive psychology principles to promote resilience and mental well-being among young individuals.

The guide is innovative as it combines several approaches that are usually used separately—trauma-informed care, nature-based learning, and participatory group methods.

Relevance for the youth workers

This program includes training materials and resources that will be used by youth workers to enhance their nature and outdoor therapy using skills and effectively increase young people stress resilience.

Youth workers will increase knowledge, skills, competences and intervention capacity in the field of nature and outdoor therapies for young people experienced stress and provide them an interactive training package consisting of a piloted curriculum, training materials and methodology, and an inspirational digital library for improving the stress resilience, wellbeing, self-esteem and self-healing capacity of young people.

The more training sessions you will conduct with your target group, the higher the results and the greater the impact will get. Supervision, intervision or a form of networking among peer teachers may be useful. The same long-term practice with the same group of young people can produce important and sustainable results. A one-time participation may not have an impact on emotion regulation.

Objectives

1. Increase knowledge, skills, competences and intervention capacity of youth workers, social workers, psychologists, counsellors, health professionals, instructors in the field of nature and outdoor therapies for young people experienced stress
2. Provide them an interactive training package consisting of a piloted curriculum, training materials and methodology for improving the young people stress resilience, wellbeing, self-esteem and self-healing capacity



Trainers

The Guide is created for youth workers, social workers, psychologists, counsellors, health professionals, instructors and other people working with youth.

Synergies between different fields of education, training, youth and sport

YOUTH

The Guide is highly recommended to be used also by all young people as a hobby or for therapeutic purposes, individually to improve resilience, mental health, stress resistance, relationships, etc., but also in the practices of psychologists, coaches, mentors, counselors. NGOs, youth education centers, non-formal education providers could offer face-to-face or online courses based on adapted training materials.

SCHOOL

The Guide can be easily adapted for school education for use with abused students and those experiencing stress. The "Green Serenity" Guide can be a solid basis for workshop guides, art classes, interdisciplinary lessons, as well as for extracurricular activities, with the aim of realizing the artistic potential in the evolution of the human being, increasing creativity, self-expression.

VET EDUCATION

The "Nature therapy" training package can be used with high impact VET and university education for stress experienced students, as well as for the continuing professional development of psychologists, educational counselors, teachers and others in special education or health.

ADULT

Nature and outdoor therapy workshops or sessions using the "Green Serenity" training materials can create synergies in the elderly care for preventing and treating different forms of dementia, Alzheimer, anxiety, depression etc that is why their use by health professionals and family carers is highly recommended. Thus it may be successfully used in anxiety, depression, substance addiction, stress and burnout, post traumatic stress disorders, attention deficit, hyperactivity, compassion fatigue, eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia), cognitive impairments, sleep disorders.

SPORT

The guide is highly recommended to be used in the field of Sport, where statistically there is still much violence and trauma among children, young people and adults.



Training outline

„Green Serenity“ Guide for Stress Resilience and Positive Mental Well-being Training Guide will include 6*5=30 workshops, designed for face to face learning.

It will include:

WORKSHOPS	Partner, responsible
1. Forest bathing exercises, puppy yoga	KAI, Lithuania
2. Outdoor Relaxation and meditation exercises	Well-being LAB, Sweden
3. Mindful Practices for Positive Mental Well-being, Aromatherapy for relaxing	Demetrius, Romania
4. Community Gardens and Green Spaces for stress coping	ENJOY, Italy
5. Land Art therapy	ARAXA, Turkey
6. Group outdoor activities for positive communication	Teatro Metaphora, Portugal



Topic 1: Forest bathing and puppy yoga	
General goal(s):	The goal of the forest bathing exercises is to help young people who have experienced trauma restore emotional balance, inner peace, and self-confidence through mindful presence in nature.
Description of workshops:	The topic includes five structured exercises designed to help young people rebuild a sense of safety, calmness, and connection through nature-based experiences. Each activity focuses on body awareness, emotional grounding, and restoring trust in oneself and the environment. 1. The Journey of Five Senses – Experience the Forest with Your Whole Self 2. Creating Safety – The Tree of Support 3. Calming the Mind – Nature Breathing 4. Observing Inner State – Forest Footprints 5. Creating Safe Connection – Circle of Silence
Objectives	● To develop mindfulness and sensory awareness ● To foster emotional regulation and self-reflection ● To rebuild a sense of safety, belonging, and trust ● To promote connection with nature as a tool for healing
Methods	Nature-based therapy techniques Grounded in ecopsychology and the biophilia hypothesis, which emphasize the innate human connection to nature. Exposure to natural environments is associated with stress reduction, emotional regulation, and restoration of cognitive functioning. Mindfulness practices Based on the principles of mindfulness, defined as a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Research indicates positive effects on emotional regulation, attentional control, and psychological resilience. Sensory exploration Informed by sensory integration and experiential learning principles. Direct sensory engagement (e.g., visual, auditory,



	tactile) enhances mind–body awareness, supports grounding, and deepens experiential processing. Creative expression Linked to art therapy and expressive practices. Creative processes facilitate indirect emotional expression, foster self-reflection, and promote psychological flexibility. Reflective silence Based on principles of introspection and self-observation, which are considered essential mechanisms of self-awareness in psychology. Silence provides space for integrating experience and deepening internal insight. Group sharing Grounded in group psychotherapy principles such as interpersonal reflection, normalization, and social support. Sharing experiences enhances a sense of connection and emotional safety.
Resources needed	Natural environment (forest, park, or garden), comfortable clothing, mats or blankets, natural materials (leaves, stones, branches), notebook or paper for reflection.
References	• Li, Q. (2020). Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness. • Kotera, Y., Richardson, M., & Sheffield, D. (2020). <i>Effects of Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing) and Nature Therapy on Mental Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis</i>. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11469-020-00363-4



Exercise 1: The Journey of Five Senses “Experience the Forest with Your Whole Self”.

Duration: ~20 – 40 min.



Goal	To restore the connection between the body and the environment through all five senses; to cultivate mindfulness and a sense of safety.
Relation to the target group	Young people who have experienced trauma often lose connection with their body and surroundings. This exercise helps them to safely “feel the world” again through sensory experience, return to the present moment, and rebuild trust in themselves and the environment.
Objectives	• Activate all five senses; • Strengthen awareness of the present moment; • Develop a sense of bodily safety
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction & safety framing The trainer briefly explains that the exercise invites participants to notice the forest through the five senses. Participation is voluntary; eyes may remain open; participants may stop or step aside at any time. Sight – noticing the environment Participants slowly observe colors, shapes, light, and movement in the forest, focusing on gentle, non-analytical seeing. Hearing – listening to the surroundings Attention is brought to sounds near and far, such as birds, wind, or rustling leaves, without identifying or judging them. Smell – sensing the air Participants notice natural scents in the environment while allowing breathing to remain natural and unforced. Touch – physical sensations Participants notice bodily sensations such as air temperature or breeze. If comfortable, they may gently touch natural elements (tree bark, leaves, stones).



	Taste – awareness of taste Participants notice any taste present in the mouth. If water is available, they may take a small sip and observe the taste and temperature. Integration – experiencing all senses together Participants are invited to notice all senses at once—what they see, hear, smell, feel, and taste—allowing the environment to be experienced as a whole, without effort or analysis.
Tips for trainers/Ensuring Safety	Choice and control: Allow participants to keep their eyes open, change posture, or move if needed. Avoid instructions that involve closing eyes or physical contact. Predictability: Clearly explain the structure and duration of the exercise before starting, so participants know what to expect. Nature as the main guide: In this exercise, nature itself is the primary guide. The facilitator’s role is to create supportive conditions and gently redirect only when necessary. Neutral language: Use non-directive, invitational language (e.g., “you may notice,” “if you wish”) rather than commands. Monitoring emotional responses: Observe participants for signs of discomfort or dissociation (withdrawal, agitation, freezing). Be prepared to gently ground them by inviting attention back to the present environment. Environmental safety: Choose a calm, non-threatening location with minimal sudden noises or interruptions. Ensure physical safety of the surroundings. Debriefing: Allow time after the exercise for reflection or sharing, making verbal participation optional. Normalization: Remind participants that different reactions (calm, restlessness, numbness) are normal and acceptable.
Impact Evaluation	The impact of the exercise will be evaluated using: ● Short reflection questions, such as: ○ Which senses did you notice most strongly during the exercise? ○ What did you see, hear, smell, or feel that helped you stay present? ○ Which sensory experience felt calming or neutral for you? ○ How did your body feel during or after the exercise? ● A self-assessment questionnaire ● Facilitator observation



Exercise 2: Creating Safety “The Tree of Support”

Duration: ~20 – 40 min.



Goal	To develop a sense of trust, stability, and support through connection with nature.
Relation to the target group	Young people affected by trauma often lack inner and physical stability. This exercise helps them to feel grounded, supported, and connected to nature as a source of safety and trust.
Objectives	• Encourage body awareness and grounding • Experience a sense of safety and stability • Strengthen self-trust and trust in nature
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction The trainer briefly introduces the essence of the exercise – to experience a sense of stability and support through connection with nature. Participation is voluntary, and each participant may choose how and how much to engage. Choosing a tree Participants are invited to calmly look around and choose a tree near which they feel neutral or safe. The tree does not need to be “liked” – the most important aspect is that it does not evoke discomfort. The choice can be changed at any time, or participants may stay nearby without direct contact. Contact and grounding Participants take a comfortable position near the chosen tree – they may stand, sit on the ground or a stump, or lean against the tree trunk. If comfortable, they may gently touch the tree with a hand, back, or shoulder. Attention is directed to bodily sensations: feet on the ground, body weight, and the sense of support. Recommended facilitator text (spoken during this stage): <i>“When you are with your tree, choose a position that feels most comfortable for you right now – you may stand, sit, or lean against it. Your eyes can remain open, or, if you wish, you may gently close them. Choose what feels safest for you. Bring your attention to your</i>



	<i>body – how it is supported by the ground, where you feel stability. If you like, you may gently touch the tree and notice the sensation in your hand, back, or shoulder. Bring your attention to what is happening right now: your body weight, a sense of quiet presence, your breath as it naturally comes and goes. There is nothing you need to change or control. If thoughts arise, you do not need to stop them – simply and gently return your attention to bodily sensations or to the presence of the tree nearby. Stay with this experience for as long as feels comfortable, allowing yourself simply to be.”</i> Experiencing stability Participants are invited to notice the tree’s solidity and calmness, and how their body responds to being nearby. Breathing remains natural, without conscious regulation. All experiences are considered acceptable. Closing Participants are gently invited to step away from the tree and return their attention to their body and surroundings.
Tips for trainers/ Ensuring Safety	Nature as the main guide: In this exercise, nature itself is the primary guide. The tree and the environment naturally lead the experience; the facilitator’s role is to create supportive conditions and gently redirect when needed. Less talking – more space: Avoid excessive verbal guidance. Allow silence and nature to “do the work.” Invitation rather than instruction: Use invitational, non-directive language (“you may,” “if you wish”). Participants choose how deeply they engage. Respect individual pace: Each participant experiences the practice differently; avoid comparison, evaluation, or pressure to “feel more.” Being over guiding: The facilitator’s calm presence, steady voice, and grounded posture often have a stronger impact than words alone. Attention to safety: Observe participants for signs of discomfort or dissociation. If needed, gently invite attention back to bodily sensations or the surrounding environment.



	Normalization: Remind participants that all experiences – calm, neutrality, or discomfort – are normal and acceptable.
Impact Evaluation	The impact of the exercise will be evaluated using: ● Short reflection questions, such as: ○ <i>What did you notice in your body while being with the tree?</i> ○ <i>What felt pleasant or neutral during this experience?</i> ○ <i>What emotions did you notice?</i> ○ <i>What would you like to take with you from this experience?</i> ● A self-assessment questionnaire ● Facilitator observation

Exercise 3: Calming the Mind “I Am Here, with Nature”

Duration: ~20-40 min.



Goal	To create an opportunity to experience being “here and now,” strengthening a sense of safety and stability through quiet presence with nature.
Relation to the target group	Young people affected by trauma often experience heightened inner tension or disconnect. This exercise helps them safely return to present-moment awareness, using nature as a neutral, non-demanding source of support.
Objectives	● Encourage present-moment awareness ● Increase awareness of the body and the surrounding environment ● Strengthen a sense of safety through connection with nature ● Reduce inner tension and pressure to “do” or “achieve”
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction The facilitator briefly explains that this is a practice of being, not of changing, understanding, or achieving anything. The presence of nature itself is enough. Choosing a place



	Participants are invited to choose a place or a natural element (a tree, a stone, grass, shade, a spot where the wind is felt) where they feel comfortable staying for a while. The most important criterion is that the place does not evoke tension or discomfort. Being with nature Participants are invited to notice how nature is present around them: sounds, movement, stillness, or change. There is no need to interpret, name, or analyze what is noticed. Noticing body and environment The facilitator gently invites participants to notice one bodily sensation and one element of nature nearby. There is no need to connect or explain them—simply noticing that both are present is enough. Closing Participants are gradually invited to bring their attention back to their body and surroundings, preparing to move on to the next activity.
Tips for trainers/ Ensuring Safety	• Nature as the guide: Nature serves as the main guide in this exercise; the facilitator's role is to create supportive conditions and avoid interfering with the experience. • Less talking – more being: Avoid excessive guidance; allow silence and presence to unfold naturally. • Freedom of choice: Participants may change their place, posture, or level of engagement at any time. • Normalization: All experiences (calm, discomfort, emptiness, restlessness) are considered normal and acceptable. • Attention to safety: If needed, gently invite participants to reconnect with bodily sensations or the immediate environment.
Impact Evaluation	The impact of the exercise will be evaluated using: • short reflection questions, such as: ○ <i>Did you notice any changes in your attention during the practice?</i> ○ <i>Was there something in nature that helped you feel calmer or safer?</i> ○ <i>Was this experience different from how you usually spend time in nature?</i> • a self-assessment questionnaire; • facilitator observation.



Exercise 4: Creating Safe Connection “Letting Go Practice in Nature”

Duration: ~40 min.



Goal	To provide a safe opportunity to release heavy memories, emotions, or experiences through symbolic action supported by movement in nature.
Relation to the target group	Young people affected by trauma often carry emotional burdens that are difficult to release verbally. This exercise enables letting go through action rather than analysis, using nature as a regulating and supportive element
Objectives	• Support safe emotional release • Reduce inner tension and emotional load • Strengthen a sense of choice and control in the letting-go process • Build trust in nature as a supportive environment
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction. The facilitator clearly explains the purpose of the exercise. It is emphasized that this is not a practice of analyzing memories or revisiting traumatic experiences, but a symbolic act of letting go of something that currently feels heavy. Participation is voluntary, and each participant may choose how deeply to engage. Walking along the environment. Participants are invited to walk slowly along the river, stream, or through the surrounding landscape if no water is present. They are encouraged to move at their own pace and remain mostly in silence, allowing thoughts to come and go naturally. Choosing what to let go of. While walking or standing, participants are invited to gently choose one thing they would like to let go of at this moment. This may be a difficult memory, emotion, thought, person, relationship, or situation. It is emphasized that there is no need to define, explain, or verbalize this choice. Choosing a release object. Participants find a small natural object already present in the environment, such as a stone, twig, cone, or leaf. They are invited to mentally associate this object with what they wish to release, without needing to add meaning or interpretation.



	Letting go through movement. If there is flowing water (a river or stream), participants approach the water safely and place the object into it, observing how it is carried away by the current. If there is no water, a hill or natural slope is used, and participants release the object, watching it roll downhill. In both cases, attention is directed toward the movement, distance, and gradual disappearance of the object. Being after release. After releasing the object, participants remain in the environment for a few moments. They may observe the water, the landscape, or bodily sensations such as breathing or the feeling of their feet on the ground. No further action is required; the focus is on allowing the experience to settle.
Tips for trainers/ Ensuring Safety	Clear boundaries: Emphasize that this is a symbolic letting-go practice, not an analysis of traumatic memories. Freedom of choice: Participants decide what to release and how deeply to engage; choosing a neutral theme is acceptable. No pressure to verbalize: Avoid inviting participants to explain or share what they released. Monitoring and response: Observe for signs of emotional overwhelm or dissociation; if needed, gently guide attention back to bodily sensations or the immediate environment. Grounding alternatives: If the experience becomes too intense, suggest simply observing the water or landscape without performing release action. Physical safety: Always ensure safe distance from water or slopes and stable footing. Normalization: Remind participants that all reactions (relief, neutrality, emptiness) are normal and acceptable.
Impact Evaluation	The impact of the exercise will be evaluated using: ● short reflection questions, such as: ○ <i>How did you feel during the letting-go process?</i> ○ <i>Did you notice any changes in your body or attention after releasing the object?</i> ○ <i>What was it like to observe movement (flowing water or rolling downhill)?</i> ○ <i>Was this experience different from how you usually spend time in nature?</i> ● a self-assessment questionnaire; ● facilitator observation.



Exercise 5: Puppy Yoga “Play with me “

Duration ~20- 40 min.



Goal	Combine active movement with elements of animal therapy, calm the mind, relax the body.
Relation to the target group	For young people who have experienced trauma, yoga exercises and interaction with puppies help reduce anxiety, calm the mind, and relax the body. This exercise supports emotional security and peace through nonverbal communication with cute puppies.
Objectives	• To develop the ability to control breathing and relax • To integrate the emotional experience of the session • To help you become happier and take a break from everyday problems • To promote communication and making new friends
(Step-by-step description)	Preparation of space Participants gather in a comfortable, calm environment designed to ensure the safety and well-being of both participants and puppies. Soft yoga mats and blankets are provided, allowing space for movement as well as resting areas for the puppies. Introduction The instructor briefly explains the structure of the session and emphasizes that participation is voluntary. Movements can be adapted or paused at any time, and interaction with the puppies is optional. Light physical movement The facilitator guides simple, easy physical movements that do not require physical fitness, correct postures, or breathing techniques. Although the session is called “Puppy Yoga,” this is not yoga as a formal practice. Movements are performed freely and at each



	participant's own pace. The main focus is on sensing the body in movement and experiencing the presence of animals nearby. Participants are encouraged to pause or rest whenever needed. Puppy interaction Puppies are free to move around the space, approach participants, rest nearby, or engage in light play. Participants are encouraged to allow puppies to approach on their own terms, without forcing interaction. Relaxation phase The session concludes with relaxation postures, where participants may lie down or sit comfortably. Puppies may rest nearby or next to participants, supporting a sense of calm, warmth, and emotional ease.
Tips for trainers/ Ensuring Safety	• Choice and control: Participants may modify movements, rest, or observe at any time. Interaction with puppies is always optional. • Respect for animals: Puppies must be allowed to approach voluntarily; handling should be gentle and respectful. • Physical safety: Ensure movements are appropriate for beginners and avoid positions that may cause strain. • Allergies and sensitivities: Check for animal allergies or fears in advance and provide alternatives if needed. • Hygiene: Encourage hand washing after the session and maintain a clean environment for both participants and animals
Impact Evaluation	The impact of the exercise will be evaluated using: • short reflection questions; • self-assessment questionnaires; • facilitator observation of emotional engagement, relaxation, and group atmosphere



Topic 2: Outdoor Relaxation and meditation exercises	
General goal(s):	To support young people in reducing stress, calming the nervous system, restoring inner balance and strengthening present-moment awareness through outdoor relaxation and meditation practices.
Description of workshops:	The topic includes a series of structured outdoor relaxation and meditation exercises designed to help young people slow down, release tension, and calm their nervous system through connection with nature, breath, movement, and mindful presence. Each activity focuses on relaxation, emotional regulation, grounding, and restoring inner balance in a gentle and trauma-sensitive way. 1. Relaxing body & mind “Guided body scan meditation” 2. Connecting with the body “Dancing meditation” 3. Connecting to nature “Nature and Me” 4. Grounding in nature “Nature Pause” 5. Feeling anchored in the here & now “Soft landing”
Objectives	• Reduce stress and emotional tension through relaxation and mindfulness practices • Calm nervous system and experience greater inner stability • Improve emotional regulation and the ability to self-soothe • Experience nature as a supportive and grounding environment • Strengthen a sense of safety, calmness, and inner balance
Methods	Nature-based mindfulness Integrates principles of ecopsychology and mindfulness, emphasizing present-moment awareness within natural environments. This approach supports stress reduction, attentional restoration, and emotional regulation. Guided meditation Based on structured meditation practices that use verbal guidance to support attention focus and relaxation. It facilitates cognitive quieting, emotional processing, and increased self-awareness. Breathwork Informed by psychophysiological regulation principles and the role of breathing in activating the parasympathetic nervous system.



	Conscious breathing techniques help reduce physiological arousal, enhance emotional regulation, and promote a sense of safety. Gentle movement Draws on body-based approaches such as somatic practices, emphasizing slow, mindful movement. This supports body awareness, tension release, and integration of physical and emotional experiences. Sensory awareness Grounded in sensory integration and mindfulness-based attention to sensory input. It enhances present-moment awareness, grounding, and embodied experience. Reflection Based on introspective processes studied in psychology, enabling individuals to process experiences, derive meaning, and deepen self-understanding. Group sharing Informed by group psychotherapy principles such as mutual support, normalization, and interpersonal learning. It fosters connection, empathy, and emotional safety within the group.
Resources needed	Access to a safe natural outdoor space (e.g. forest, park, garden, beach, meadow) Comfortable clothing suitable for outdoor conditions Yoga mats, blankets or sitting pads (optional, for comfort) Portable speaker (for dancing meditation) Prepared music playlist (for dancing meditation) Drinking water for participants Facilitator guidance and prepared scripts Optional: eye masks or scarves (for participants who prefer not to close their eyes but want visual support for dancing meditation)
References	B. Plotkin, "Soulcraft" (2003) B. Plotkin, "Nature and the Human Soul" (2007)



Exercise 1: Relaxing body & mind “Guided body scan meditation”

Duration: ~50 min



Goal	Calm down the nervous system, the mind and the body, and bring participants attention and awareness to the present moment.
Relation to the target group	Meditation practices are proven to calm down the nervous system, relax the body and bring people’s attention to the present moment. It can be especially powerful for young people who have experienced trauma in the past, because it helps to bring their minds and bodily sensations into the present moment where they are safe and forget all the hardships for at least a moment.
Objectives	• Increase awareness of the body, breath, and present moment • Practice a simple, accessible tool for self-regulation and emotional grounding • Strengthen participants ability to notice and gently release stress stored in the body • Learn a technique they can use independently in daily life when feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or disconnected
(Step-by-step description)	Settling In Invite participants to choose a place in the space that feels most comfortable and safe for them. Let them know they can sit down or lie down – whatever feels best for their body today. Encourage them to adjust their position, use cushions (if the meditation is done indoors) or jackets for support (if the meditation is guided outdoors), and make themselves comfortable. Give them a moment to settle. Introduction: What is Meditation & How It Helps You can use the following script or creating your own introduction: <i>“Before we start, I would like to share a few words about what we are going to do.</i>



Meditation is not about emptying the mind or doing something perfectly. It is simply a practice of gently bringing our attention to the present moment – to our body, our breath, and how we feel right now.

Our nervous system is constantly scanning for safety or danger. When we have experienced stress, pressure, or difficult experiences in life, our body can stay in ‘alert mode’ even when we are actually safe. This can show up as tension in the body, restlessness, tiredness, or a busy mind.

Through slow breathing and gentle awareness of the body, we send a signal to the nervous system that it is safe to relax. This allows the body to soften, the breath to slow down, and the mind to become quieter.

Today’s practice is a body scan meditation. We will slowly move our attention through different parts of the body and invite them to relax. There is no right or wrong way to feel. You don’t need to force anything. Just notice, allow, and be kind to yourself.

If at any moment you feel uncomfortable, you are always free to open your eyes, change your position, or simply listen without following the instructions. You are in control of your experience.”

Note: allow space for questions from participants if there might be some.

Guided meditation

We are going to gently and softly close our eyes. We can take a couple of deep breaths in and out to start coming into this present moment, calming our minds and relaxing our body. We can take a couple of deeper breaths in and out. And we start breathing naturally in our own rhythm.

We are going to start gently and softly relaxing our head and our forehead. And we start relaxing our eyes and our eyeballs, feeling how the eyes after a whole working day start slowly being relaxed. While you are relaxing in different parts of the body, try to bring your attention to that part of the body and feel how it is getting relaxed. When the body truly relaxes, it starts getting warmer - warming us from the inside and spreading the warmth to all our body parts, our cells and inner organs.



We are going to relax our nose, our cheeks and our lips. While we are relaxing our lips, we can give a little smile to ourselves to prepare in a positive way for the meditation. And all

Our bodies are slowly relaxed from the top of the head until the toes. Feel how relaxation covers your whole body.

We are going to relax our neck and our shoulders. And once we relax our shoulders, we can feel how they gently fall, while we are releasing the tension from our shoulders. We continue to relax our upper back and our lower back, remembering to breathe gently and slowly. If you have any thoughts coming in, imagine that your thoughts are like leaves on the tree and like the leaves are slowly falling down from the tree onto the ground, we are letting our thoughts fall down and go without focusing on them. We can come back to our thoughts later.

We continue to relax our arms, hands and fingers feeling the warmth in our hands and fingers. And just feel how this warmth is spreading throughout our whole body and warming us from the inside.

We continue to relax our chest and heart area, releasing all the feelings and emotions which we might be holding inside our chest and heart area, freeing ourselves from those emotions and feelings, and feeling how all our body is slowly getting relaxed.

We continue to gently relax our belly. While we are relaxing our belly, we can feel how the belly is lifting with every breath we breathe in and out. And all our bodies are slowly relaxed, from the top of the head until the toes.

We gently relax our hips, knees and our legs and we can feel more and more relaxed. We relax our feet and toes and all our body is now relaxed. For a moment, we will continue breathing and bringing our attention to our breath in silence.

Note: stop talking for 3-5 min, so that participants can stay in silence and focus on their breath. After 3-5 min. are over, continue the guidance.

We will now start slowly coming back from meditation by gently wiggling our fingers, feet and toes, and moving our body softly and gently. Perhaps you want to stretch a little with your closed eyes. And whenever you feel ready, you can slowly gently and in your own time, open your eyes’.

Reflection

After the meditation, invite participants to share their experiences.

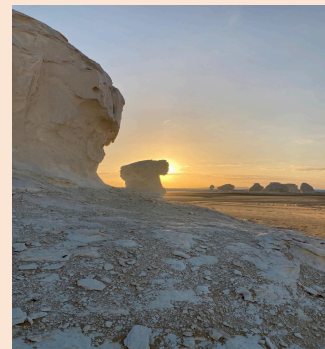


	Note: Remind participants, especially those new to meditation, that it's normal if they didn't fully relax. With practice, it becomes easier to be present and achieve deeper relaxation.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● Normalize all experiences. Remind participants, especially those new to meditation, that it is completely normal if they do not fully relax, if their mind is busy, or if they feel restless. Meditation is a practice, not a performance. With time and repetition, it becomes easier to be present and experience deeper relaxation. ● Offer choice around eye contact. Some participants may not feel comfortable closing their eyes. Always offer the option to keep the eyes open. They can simply lower their gaze and gently focus on one neutral object on the ground or in the room. This helps maintain a sense of safety and orientation. ● Emphasise autonomy and control. Gently remind participants that they are always in control of their experience. They can change their position, open their eyes, or stop following the guidance at any time. This is especially important for participants with trauma histories. ● Avoid pressure and expectations. Do not encourage participants to "try harder" to relax. Instead, invite them to notice whatever is present with kindness and curiosity. Even noticing tension is part of the practice. ● Use soft, inclusive language. Avoid commands such as "you must" or "you should." Use invitations like "you may," "you can," or "if it feels okay for you." This supports psychological safety. ● Model calm presence. Your tone of voice, pace, and body language set the emotional climate. Speak slowly, leave pauses, and embody the calm you are guiding others into.
Impact Evaluation	● Reflection at the end of the exercises. You can ask the following questions: ○ "How did it feel?" ○ "Did the meditation feel long or short?" ○ "Do you feel more relaxed now?" ○ "How do you feel intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?" ○ "Is there anything in your body that feels different now compared to before meditation?" ○ "Was anything surprising for you in this experience?"



Exercise 2: Connecting with the body “Dancing Meditation”

Duration: ~50 min



Goal	To connect with the body, slow down, relax the mind, and support emotional expression through intuitive movement.
Relation to the target group	Dancing meditation helps young people release stress, express emotions, and reconnect with their bodies and inner resources. In a safe, non-judgmental environment, intuitive movement supports nervous system regulation, reduces tension, and encourages self-expression, building resilience, self-trust, and emotional well-being.
Objectives	• Strengthen participants’ connection to their body and physical sensations • Release accumulated tension, stress, and emotional blocks through movement • Experience greater freedom of self-expression without judgment • Improve body awareness and present-moment focus • Explore movement as a tool for emotional regulation and self-connection
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction & Creating Safety Start by introducing the purpose of the session: “In this session, we will use music and intuitive movement to connect with our bodies, release tension, and express ourselves freely. There is no choreography, no right or wrong way to move. This is about listening to your body and allowing it to move in the way it wants.” Before you start, ask the group to collectively agree to keep their eyes closed, - explain to the group that by keeping our eyes closed, we are creating a safe space for everyone to move freely. Dancing in public can be scary for many people as people might fear to be judged by others, thoughts like “what if people think that I am stupid” or “what if people will think that I move or dance weirdly”, etc. can often come to the people and prevent their free expression while dancing, so by closing our eyes, we



reduce the possibility of such thoughts coming in and feel safer. An important thing to note, - make sure that no one is recording the session and even tell the whole group and the team. This again enables the creation of a safe environment.

Important: give an alternative to closing the eyes, - participants who may not feel comfortable closing their eyes, can simply find a space where they turn around away from the group and be in their own little bubble.

Settling In

Before starting the music, say:

“The only thing you need to do is find your space in the environment, close your eyes, and listen to the music and my guidance. You can stand, sit, or move in any way that feels right for you.”

Wait until everyone has found their space and closed their eyes.

Start the music.

Guided dancing meditation

Arriving in the Body (First 2 Songs | approx. 3–8 min)

Start by inviting participants to take a couple of deep breaths in and out, so that they would come to this present moment, start feeling and connecting with their bodies. Invite participants to take 3-4 deep breaths and afterwards start breathing naturally in their own rhythm.

Invite participants to start gently moving their arms and hands and step by step go through all the body parts until the whole body starts moving by the sound of the music.

Expressive / Tribal Energy (3rd Song)

The 3rd song of the playlist starts being more active, so you can invite participants to start connecting with their wild tribal nature while listening to the song. That part of them that is connecting to the group, to the circle, the part of them that carries their authenticity, creativity, inner power and inner strength. Invite participants to express through dance their wildness, their authenticity, their inner power.

Heart Connection & Softening (4th Song)

The 4th song is more gentle and calm, so for this song, invite participants to connect with their heart and feel what the heart wants to tell them, what messages it carries and what does their heart need at the present moment. Perhaps the heart wants to dance slowly or perhaps it wants to just sit or lie down still on the ground. Invite participants to tune in to the feelings of the



	heart and body, and choose individually what feels right for them at the present moment. Closing & Grounding (Last Song) For the last song, invite participants to start slowly coming back into the room, into the space, slowing down the movements, taking 3-4 deep breaths in and out. And whenever they feel ready, they can gently in their own time open their eyes. “We will now start slowly coming back from the meditation by gently wiggling our fingers, feet and toes, and moving our body softly and gently. Perhaps you want to stretch a little with your closed eyes. And whenever you feel ready, you can slowly gently and in your own time, open your eyes”. Reflection After the dance, you can invite the group for a short reflection.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● Make sure that you have a speaker connected and have a playlist ready. One playlist you could use for 21 min is below, but you can choose your own. https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6nGiGjVpakuYQeeAWpK7Pb?si=a709a1a1bdd54e98 ● Avoid pushing people to be expressive. Some will move a lot, others very little – both are valid. ● Hold the space with confidence and neutrality. Your presence is what makes this safe. ● Never allow filming or photos. This is non-negotiable for trust.
Impact Evaluation	Reflection at the end of the exercises by asking them some guiding questions: ● <i>How did this practice feel to you?</i> ● <i>Was it easy or challenging to connect with your body and dance by the music?</i> ● <i>How did it feel for you to have your eyes closed during the practice?</i> ● <i>Did you feel safe and free in your expressions?</i>



Exercise 3: Connecting to Nature “Nature and Me”

Duration: ~ 65 min



Goal	To support deep relaxation, reduce stress, and calm the nervous system through mindful presence and gentle connection with nature.
Relation to the target group	Gentle connection with nature offers a powerful way to slow down, ground, and experience safety in the present moment. This practice allows participants to relax without pressure to speak, perform, or analyse, making it especially suitable for young people who feel overwhelmed, emotionally guarded, or disconnected from their bodies. Through sensory awareness and quiet presence in nature, participants can experience deep calming, inner stability, and emotional relief.
Objectives	● Experience a sense of calm, grounding, and inner stillness. ● Reduce mental tension and emotional overload ● Regulate nervous system through sensory connection with nature. ● Strengthen present-moment awareness and inner safety. ● Experience nature as a supportive and calming environment. ● Learn a simple tool for self-soothing and stress reduction
(Step-by-step description)	Setting Natural environment (forest, park, beach, meadow, garden). Choose a space that is safe, quiet, and not overly crowded. Crossing the Threshold Invite participants to cross a simple physical threshold (e.g. stepping over a stick, passing between two trees, crossing a small path). You can say: “As you cross this threshold, you are leaving behind the rush of the day and entering a space for slowing down, breathing, and resting.” Explain gently: ● phones on silent



- no eating during the practice
- silence as much as possible

Frame this as support for relaxation, not as rules.

Wandering (Soft Attention)

Invite participants to walk slowly and without a goal.

“Allow yourself to wander without direction. Let your body slow down. Notice what draws your attention naturally – something that feels calm, pleasant, or simply interesting.”

This could be:

- a tree
- a stone
- a plant
- water
- sunlight
- a patch of moss

Encourage them not to choose with logic, but with feeling.

Settling with the Chosen Element

Once they have found something, invite them to sit or stand comfortably with it.

“Make yourself comfortable. You can sit, lean, or stand. Let your body rest.”

Invite them to:

- soften their shoulders.
- relax their jaw.
- slow their breath.

Sensory Relaxation

Guide them into sensory awareness:

“Gently bring your attention to what you see. Notice colours, shapes, light. Now notice what you hear – near and far. Now notice what you feel – the ground, the air, the temperature. You don’t need to analyse. Just receive.”

Encourage:

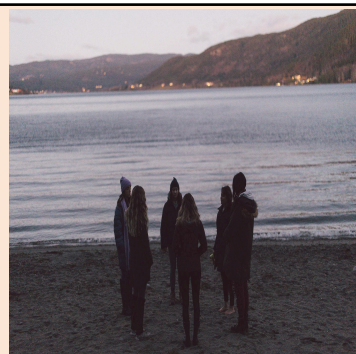
- slow breathing
- minimal movement



	• comfort Gentle Inner Dialogue Invite, softly: “If it feels natural, you can quietly say hello to this place or this element. You don’t need to say anything special. Just acknowledge its presence.” No pressure to speak. Resting & Listening Invite them into stillness: “Now allow yourself to simply be here. You don’t need to do anything. You don’t need to think about anything. Let nature hold you for a moment.” This is the core relaxation phase. Allow silence. Gratitude & Closing Invite them to gently close the experience: “You may offer a quiet thank you – to the place, to nature, or to yourself for taking this time.” Then invite them to slowly stand up and return. Returning to the Group Guide participants back to the meeting point. Invite them to cross back over the threshold. “As you return, notice how your body feels. Notice your breath. Notice your pace.” Reflection Keep it light and non-intrusive. Possible questions: • How does your body feel now compared to before? • Did you notice any change in your breathing or tension? • What helped you relax the most? • Did you feel a connection to the nature around you?
Tips for trainers/ Keeping	• Participants may stay close to the group if they don’t feel safe going alone. • No one is required to speak, share, or go deep. • Participants can stop at any time.



learners safe	• Avoid intense emotional processing. This practice is about rest • Clearly mark boundaries of the area. • Be available and visible as a facilitator. • Check in gently with anyone who seems overwhelmed. • Do not rush transitions. • Avoid analysing participants' experiences. • Hold silence comfortably – it deepens relaxation. • Emphasise that doing nothing is allowed. • Model calm presence in your own body.
Impact Evaluation	• Reflection at the end of the exercises

Exercise 4: Grounding in nature “Nature Pause” Duration: ~50 min 	
Goal	To help participants cultivate relaxation, grounding, and reflective self-care skills through guided nature-based experiences.
Relation to the target group	This exercise is suitable for young people with traumatic experiences because it is trauma-informed, choice-based, and focused on safety and regulation rather than trauma processing.
Objectives	• Experience deep relaxation and grounding through gentle, nature-based practices (slow nervous system, release physical tension, and feel more present and supported using simple, accessible mindfulness exercises in nature). • Develop a personal sense of connection and emotional support from the natural environment (explore nature as a non-judgmental companion, helping to access feelings of calm, steadiness, and inner resources such as patience, strength, or rest).



	Strengthen self-awareness and self-care skills they can carry into daily life (reflect on what rest, “enough,” and slowing down mean for them personally, gain practical insights and grounding tools participants can reuse outside the workshop).
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction Participants stand or sit in a circle. Trainer explains that everyone is welcome to participate in whatever way feels supportive for them today. Now invite participants to simply let nature exist alongside them “You don’t need to notice or analyze anything. Just allow the trees, sky, or ground to be here with you — like quiet company.” Ask participants to give a number on how relaxed they feel on the scale 1-10. How relaxed is their chest? 1-10 Their jaw? 1-10 Invite participants to think of one word that they want nature to gift them in the coming time you will be there. “Listening to the Trees” Guided Exercise Participants can stand, sit, or lean against a tree — whatever feels safe and comfortable. Facilitator Script: <i>“Take a moment to settle where you are. Feel the support of the ground beneath you. Notice your body as it rests — no need to change anything. If it feels okay, gently bring your attention to the tree near you. Notice its shape, its trunk, its branches, without needing to touch it or move closer. Now, imagine the tree could share something with you — not with words, but in its own way. Maybe it’s calm, steady, patient, or strong. You don’t need to interpret it perfectly — just allow yourself to be open to whatever comes to mind. Spend a few moments in silence, simply noticing the tree. If an image, feeling, or idea comes, let it come and go naturally. There’s no right or wrong — the tree is here simply as a companion in this moment. You may also notice your own breath moving in time with the quiet stillness around the tree. If you feel comfortable, you may share one word or image that comes to mind. Or, you can simply keep it to yourself listening is enough”.</i> Find your perfect stone activity Invite participants to go and walk around and choose a stone that feels grounding, steady, or supportive.



	As they come back, they place it in the circle simply as a marker of presence or support for themselves. They can say aloud or in their minds a positive intention that gives them presence. After they returned and placed the stones: Start by inviting everyone to rest how they want (lying down, sitting, leaning on a tree... Guide them through: <i>Take a comfortable position — sitting or lying down wherever you feel safe. You can rest your hands wherever it feels easiest. There's no need to do anything except be here. Let your body notice the support beneath you (pause) the ground, the earth, or the surface you are resting on. Feel how it holds you effortlessly. You do not need to move unless you want to. Now, allow your breathing to slow naturally. Inhale gently... and exhale a little longer. No need to force your breath — just let it move at its own pace. If it feels comfortable, let your awareness widen to the space around you. You might notice trees, the sky, or open space. Or simply notice that you are here, in this safe place. Nothing to do, nothing to change. Bring your attention to your whole body. Imagine your muscles softening, letting go, one part at a time — your shoulders (pause) your arms (pause) your legs (pause) your back. Any tension can simply rest now. If thoughts come, that's okay — notice them lightly, then let them drift away like clouds. There's nothing you need to hold onto. Take one final slow breath in (pause) and a long, gentle breath out. When you're ready, you can slowly open your eyes, stretch, or move, carrying a sense of calm and grounding with you.</i> If time allows you can do also: ● Journaling ● Drawing a symbol of what grounded the participants ● Choosing a small natural object to keep
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation Tips ● Offer choices. Trauma-informed practice prioritizes autonomy ● Avoid “close your eyes” commands. Instead say: “If it feels comfortable, you may soften your gaze or look down.” ● Keep invitations gentle. Use language like “You’re welcome to...” rather than “Now we will...” ● Keep sessions brief. Small does prevent overwhelm.



	● Normalize stepping away. Let participants know they can pause, walk, or sit out anytime.
Impact Evaluation	Reflection at the end of the exercise, - Invite participants to assess how they feel compared to the beginning before the exercise. Short reflection questions, such as ● <i>What does rest mean to you today?"</i> ● <i>"What helps you slowdown in daily life?"</i> ● <i>"What does 'enough' look like for you right now?"</i> ● <i>Ask participants to give a number on how relaxed they feel on the scale 1-10 at the moment.</i>

Exercise 5: Feeling anchored in the here & now “Soft landing” Duration: ~60 Minutes 	
Goal	To experience a deep sense of relaxation outdoors by inviting participants to use outdoor spaces.
Relation to the target group	This exercise is suitable for young people with traumatic experiences because it is trauma-informed, choice-based, and focused on safety and regulation rather than trauma processing.
Objectives	● Help participants experience calm and stabilization through breath regulation, grounding practices, rhythmic movement, sound, and rest. ● Guide participants to connect with bodily sensations, the natural environment and help to feel anchored in the here and now.
(Step-by-step description)	Opening and creating safe space ● Invite participants to choose a place in the area that feels most comfortable. ● Let them settle, sit, or stand there. ● Encourage them to notice why this spot feels safe or calming. Now invite participants to take a few slow breaths:



- inhale for 2 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds or
- inhale for 4 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds

Most important that exhale is longer than inhale, to activate parasympathetic nervous system for calming

Guide the group through a short meditation

Short practices are more tolerable for trauma-affected young adults than longer meditation and that's why it is best to do micro length meditation. Recommended facilitator text:

“Take a moment to get where you are. You can be sitting or standing — whatever feels most comfortable for your body right now. There’s nothing you need to change or fix. If it feels okay, begin by noticing your feet. Feel your feet pressing into the earth beneath you. Notice the support coming up from the ground: the steadiness (pause) the firmness (pause) or the softness.

You might gently shift your weight a little, just to feel that connection more clearly. For the next few moments, let your attention stay with your feet — being held by the earth (pause) supported (pause) here.

(pause 30 seconds)

Now, if it feels comfortable, allow your gaze to lift toward the sky. You might notice the clouds — or simply the open space above you. Begin to breathe slowly. Inhaling gently (pause) and exhaling a little longer. There is no need to breathe perfectly. Just letting the breath move at an easy pace. As you breathe, notice the clouds moving — or imagine them drifting slowly across the sky. Nothing to follow. Nothing to hold onto. Just breathing... and watching.

(pause about 1 minute)

Now, gently bring your attention to the air around you. Notice the wind or the breeze on your skin — perhaps on your face (pause) your hands (pause) your arms. If there is no wind, simply notice the temperature of the air. Let the sensation come and go on its own. You do not need to name it or analyze it. Just noticing and allowing.

(pause about 1 minute)

As we begin to close, bring your awareness back to your whole body — feet on the ground (pause) breathing gently (pause) air around you. Take one more slow breath in... and a longer breath out. And when you’re ready, you can softly return your attention to the space around you — carrying this sense of grounding with you.”



Journaling or Quiet Reflection

Now instructor hands out some pens and paper and invites the participants to journal reflecting on questions like:

- “What around me feels supportive right now?”
- “What colors or textures stand out to me?”
- “What sensations tell me I am grounded?”

Group Rhythms

Instructor invites you to:

Alternative 1: Gentle group walking synchronized to slow steps. Instructor invites on a slow pace synchronized walk, everyone encouraged to attune to the pace and steps of the person that is leading. Walking side by side is encouraged to feel the sense of group. The instructor might also introduce a gentle chant to accompany the walk, like **“Here... now...Soft steps...I’m here...We walk...Safe... enough...”** saying one word per step or one per exhale.

Alternative 2: Light drumming on thighs or soft clapping patterns as everyone sits in the circle

Alternative 3: Quiet humming together (if comfortable). Regulating by using sounds like “Mmm” or Breath-Led Humming (hum only on the exhale and pause between breaths)

Finishing with Shavasana, (5 mins) a guided resting posture where the body lies still, allowing the nervous system to relax and integrate the effects of the practice.

Instructions for Shavasana (everyone lies down on a yoga mat). Begin the guided meditation using a soothing, slow voice, you can use the following script:

“Begin by lying down in a comfortable position. Let your feet fall open. Rest your arms where they feel at ease. If it feels okay, allow your eyes to close — or soften your gaze.”

Notice the places where your body meets the ground. Let the ground support you. There’s nothing you need to do. Nothing to fix. Let your breath move naturally. No need to change it. If thoughts arise, let them pass — like clouds moving across the sky. Rest here. You are safe enough in this moment.

(pause 1–3 minutes in silence)



	<i>Notice the room around you again. The sounds. The air on your skin.” “When you are ready, gently deepen your breath. Slowly bring movement back to your fingers and toes. Take your time rolling to one side or coming up in a way that feels right for you”.</i> Step 5: Reflection circle (10 mins) The instructor invites participants to form a circle or semi circle and tells the group that sharing is always optional—you can pass or just listen as others share. Remind participants that it is not about fixing or advice, silence to be respected. So much can come from the silence moment.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation Tips ● Offer choices. Trauma-informed practice prioritizes autonomy ● Avoid “close your eyes” commands. Instead say: “If it feels comfortable, you may soften your gaze or look down.” ● Keep invitations gentle. Use language like “You’re welcome to...” rather than “Now we will...” ● Keep sessions brief. Small does prevent overwhelm. ● Normalize stepping away. Let participants know they can pause, walk, or sit out anytime.
Impact Evaluation	Short reflection questions, such as: ● <i>What part of today helped you feel even a little more settled or calm?</i> ● <i>Did you notice any moment when your body felt supported or at ease?</i> ● <i>What did you become more aware of — in yourself or in nature — during this time?</i> ● <i>Is there one practice from today you might carry with you outside this space?</i> ● <i>How does your body feel now compared to when you first arrived?</i>



Topic 3: Mindful Practices for Positive Mental Well-being Aromatherapy for relaxing	
General goal(s):	To promote positive mental well-being among youth affected by trauma and post-traumatic stress by developing self-regulation, grounding, and emotional resilience skills through mindful practices supported by aromatherapy. The workshops aim to empower participants with practical, sensory-based tools that enhance relaxation, body awareness, emotional safety, and coping capacities in everyday life.
Description of workshops:	This workshop series integrates mindfulness, creative expression, movement, guided imagery, and aromatherapy into a trauma-informed learning experience. Participants engage in structured yet flexible activities that use scent, touch, movement, visualization, and creativity to calm the nervous system and restore a sense of safety and control. The workshops are experiential and participatory, emphasizing choice, autonomy, and non-judgment, which are essential when working with youth who have experienced trauma. Aromatherapy is used as a supportive element to deepen relaxation, enhance sensory awareness, and serve as an anchor for grounding and emotional regulation. The activities include: 1. Creating personal grounding tools (anchor stones, thought jars). 2. Developing calming bedtime rituals (scented dream catchers). 3. Reconnecting with the body through mindful movement and dance. 4. Building an internal “safe space” using guided imagery and scent. 5. Learning to observe thoughts and emotions without judgment. Each activity is designed to be adaptable, culturally sensitive, and safe, with clear attention to emotional boundaries and individual comfort levels.
Objectives	Increase awareness of their body, breath, emotions, and sensory experiences. Learn practical grounding and self-soothing techniques to manage stress, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms. Develop personal coping tools that can be used independently in daily life. Experience aromatherapy as a supportive method for relaxation and emotional regulation. Strengthen emotional resilience, self-awareness, and a sense of inner safety.



	Improve their ability to remain present and regulate overwhelming thoughts or emotions.
Methods	The workshops use a trauma-informed, experiential learning approach, combining: ● Mindfulness practices (grounding, breath awareness, sensory focus). ● Aromatherapy (use of gentle essential oils as calming and anchoring stimuli). ● Creative and expressive methods (crafting, drawing, symbolic objects). ● Guided imagery and visualization. ● Mindful movement and intuitive dance. ● Reflection and optional group sharing. Observation-based evaluation and verbal feedback.
Resources needed	Materials: ● Smooth stones, jars with lids, glitter, glycerin or glue ● Hoops, yarn, beads, feathers, natural elements (leaves, acorns, stones) ● Paper, colored pencils, crayons, markers ● Small containers, cotton balls, felt pieces Aromatherapy resources: ● Essential oils (e.g., lavender, chamomile, cedarwood, sandalwood, frankincense, citrus) ● Diffuser (optional) ● Cotton pads or scent strips ● Labels and small resealable bags or jars Other resources: ● Calm instrumental music or nature sounds ● Chairs, mats, or open space for movement ● Well-ventilated room Quiet corner with grounding alternatives (coloring, puzzles)
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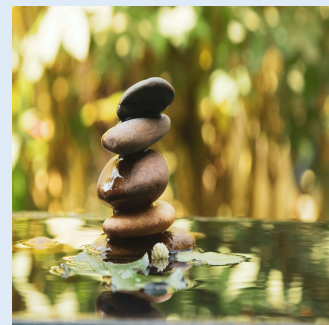
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Exercise 1: Sensory Stones “Anchor”

Duration: ~ 45 minutes



Goal	To create a tangible, portable grounding tool that uses touch and scent to anchor a person in the present moment during times of distress.
Relation to the target group	Trauma can cause dissociation or feeling disconnected from reality. A physical anchor provides a discreet, immediate way to reconnect with the present moment and self-regulate when triggers arise, empowering the individual.
Objectives	• Participants will learn a simple grounding technique using their senses. • They will create a personalized “anchor stone” infused with a calming essential oil. • They will practice using the stone to manage a moment of simulated, gentle stress (e.g., focusing on a slightly uncomfortable thought).
(Step-by-step description)	Step 1 Introduction (10 minutes): Explain the concept of grounding. You can describe it as a way to connect with the “here and now, especially when our minds feel overwhelmed or floaty. Use simple metaphors as: • When thoughts feel like a stormy sea, grounding is like dropping an anchor. It doesn't stop the storm, but it keeps you steady and prevents you from being swept away by waves of worry or difficult memories. • A “pause button” for intense feelings helps pull your attention away from upsetting thoughts about the past or anxieties about the future, bringing you back to the safety of the present moment. • Grounding works by waking up your five senses. By focusing intensely on what you can actually touch, see, and smell right now, you give your brain a different job to do, making it harder for it to get stuck on distressing thoughts. Stone Selection: Participants choose a smooth, polished river stone from a varied collection. Encourage them to pick one that feels good in their hand—considering its weight, texture, and shape. Scent Infusion: Provide calming essential oils (like lavender, chamomile, or sandalwood) and cotton pads. Let the participants smell the oils and chose



their favorite. Participants add a few drops of their chosen oil to a cotton ball and rub it onto the surface of their stone, letting it absorb.

Guided Practice: Lead the group in a practice exercise.

Ask them to hold their stone and close their eyes if they feel comfortable. Instruct them to bring a mildly stressful thought to mind (e.g., an upcoming test, a minor disagreement).

Guide them to shift their full attention to the stone: notice its temperature, the smooth texture under their thumb, its weight in their palm, and the calming scent. Have them take three slow, deep breaths while focusing only on the stone.

You can use the following script:

Find a comfortable way to sit in your chair, with your back supported and your feet resting gently on the floor.

(Pause)

Take your anchor stone and hold it in whichever hand feels most natural to you. Let it rest in your palm for a moment. There's no right or wrong way to do this.

(Pause)

In a moment, I will invite you to close your eyes, but only if that feels comfortable and safe for you. If you'd prefer, you can simply lower your gaze and focus on a point on the floor in front of you. You are in control. Choose what feels best for you right now.

(Pause for about 10 seconds)

Now, I want you to gently bring to mind something that is causing a small amount of stress or worry. It's very important that this is a mild stressor—a '1' or '2' on a scale of 1 to 10. Perhaps it's a thought about an upcoming appointment, a minor disagreement, or a task you need to do later. Choose something that feels like a small cloud, not a big storm. Just let that thought rest lightly in your mind."

(Pause for about 20 seconds)

Acknowledge that thought and the feeling that comes with it. And now, we are going to gently shift our focus. Bring all of your attention to the stone in your hand.

First, just notice its weight. Feel the gentle pressure of it resting in your palm. Is it heavy or light? Solid and present.



(Pause)

Now, begin to move your thumb across the surface of the stone. Feel its texture. Notice if it's perfectly smooth, or if it has tiny pits or lines. Explore the unique landscape of your stone with your thumb. Let that sensation fill your awareness.

(Pause)

Next, bring your attention to its temperature. Does it feel cool against your skin, or has it warmed up from your touch? There's no need to analyze it, just notice the sensation of temperature.

(Pause)

Now, gently bring the stone a little closer to you and notice the scent. Breathe in that calming aroma you chose earlier. Let the scent travel with your breath, a quiet reminder to be calm and present.

(Pause)

Your mind might wander back to that stressful thought, and that's completely okay. If it does, gently and without judgment, guide your attention back to the stone. Back to the feeling of its weight, its texture, its temperature, or its scent. The stone is your anchor in this present moment.

(Pause)

Let's now tie this all together with our breath. We will take three slow, deep breaths together. As you breathe in, focus on the calming scent of the oil. As you breathe out, focus on the solid, smooth feeling of the stone under your thumb.

Ready? Let's take a slow breath in, filling your belly with air... And a long, slow breath out...

(Pause)

Again, a deep breath in, noticing the scent...

And a slow breath out, feeling the texture of the stone...

(Pause)

One last time. Deepest breath of all, in through your nose...

And slowly let it all go, out through your mouth...

(Longer pause, about 15 seconds)

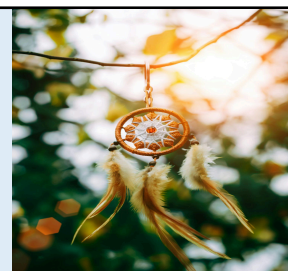


	<i>Now, let the thought you were holding go. Just let it drift away. Keep your focus on the stone for a moment longer.</i> <i>When you feel ready, you can slowly begin to bring your awareness back to the room. Maybe wiggle your fingers and toes. Gently shift in your seat. And when you're ready, you can slowly open your eyes or lift your gaze.</i> <i>Take a moment to notice how you feel. Is there any difference, however small? Remember that this anchor stone is now your tool. You can use this exact practice anytime, anywhere, to bring yourself back to the present moment.</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Emphasize that participation is voluntary. They can choose their stone, their scent, or choose not to use a scent at all. Some scents can be triggers. Use, gentle oils (dilute them if necessary) and ensure the room is well-ventilated. Never force a participant to smell something. Reassure them there is no right or wrong way to feel about a scent or the exercise. All experiences are valid.
Impact Evaluation	1. Observation. Notice changes in posture, breathing, and general calmness in the room. 2. Group Share. Ask if anyone would like to share one word about how they feel after the exercise.



Exercise 2: Creative exercise “Scented Dream Catchers”

Duration ~70 minutes



Goal	To create a beautiful, personalized object that serves as a symbolic guardian of sleep and a tool for establishing a calming pre-sleep ritual.
Relation to the target group	Sleep disturbance, including nightmares and hypervigilance at night, is a very common and distressing symptom of trauma. The bedroom, which should be a sanctuary, can feel like an unsafe place. This exercise empowers youth to reclaim their sleep environment by actively creating an object of protection and peace. The creative process is a mindful activity in itself, and the final product, infused with a calming scent, becomes a powerful sensory cue that signals safety and helps quiet the nervous system before sleep.
Objectives	• Participants will discuss the importance of rituals and creating a safe space for sleep. • They will learn the basic technique of weaving a dream catcher as a form of mindful, repetitive motion. • They will design and create a personalized dream catcher that reflects their own sense of peace and beauty. • They will learn to use aromatherapy as part of a calming bedtime routine.
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction Begin a gentle conversation about sleep. Ask open-ended questions like: What does a restful night feel like? or What helps our bodies know it's time to wind down? Introduce the idea of a “bedtime ritual” as a series of small, comforting actions that signal to our minds and bodies that the day is over and it's safe to rest. Briefly and respectfully share the traditional story of the Ojibwe dream catcher: how the web is believed to catch bad dreams, letting only the good dreams filter down through the feathers to the sleeper. Emphasize that today, they can give their dream catcher any meaning that feels right for them—it can be a symbol of peace, strength, or happy thoughts.



Materials and Scent Exploration

Lay out all the creative materials on a central table. Encourage participants to see and touch the different textures and colors of yarn, beads, and feathers.

Introduce 2-3 calming essential oils (e.g., Lavender for relaxation, Cedarwood for grounding, or Chamomile for peace). Place a drop of each on separate cotton pads.

Invite participants to gently smell each one and choose the scent that makes them feel the most calm and safe. This choice is a key part of personalizing their creation.

The Weaving Process - A Mindful Practice

Guide the group through the creation process step-by-step, reassuring them that there is no “perfect” way to do it. The beauty is in its uniqueness.

Materials Needed:

- Metal or wooden hoops (4-6 inches in diameter)
- Various colors and textures of yarn or suede cord
- Assortment of beads (wooden, glass, colorful)
- Feathers, leaves, (various colors and sizes), acorns, stones
- Scissors

Wrap the Hoop

Show them how to tie the end of their yarn to the hoop and wrap it tightly all the way around, creating a soft, colorful frame.

Weave the Web

Demonstrate the simple looping technique to create the web inside. Frame this as a calming, repetitive motion. Instruct them to focus on the rhythm of the yarn—over, under, though, and let their mind quiet down as your hands do the work.

Personalize

Once the web is woven, encourage them to add beads to the web or attach feathers, leaves, acorns and ribbons to the bottom. This is where their individual creativity shines.

For more instructions on how to create a dream catcher, you can see this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vmtkc7FOWLw>

Infusing with Scent and Intention



	Once the dream catchers are complete, show participants how to add their chosen scent. They can add a few drops of their essential oil to a small piece of felt, a wooden bead, or directly onto the yarn of the hoop. As they do this, guide them with a final instruction: “As you add this calming scent, think of one positive word you want to invite into your rest tonight. It could be 'peace,' 'calm,' 'safety,' or 'joy.' Let this scent be a reminder of that intention.” Closing and Integration Create an opportunity for voluntary sharing. Invite participants, if they wish, to share one thing they like about their creation. Discuss how they can use this at home. Suggest hanging it near their bed where they can see it. “Tonight, before you sleep, take a moment to look at what you made. Touch the soft yarn, look at the colors you chose, and take a deep breath of that calming scent. Let it be the last thing you connect with before you drift off to sleep.”
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Focus on the creative process rather than the final product. Avoid any direct discussion of specific nightmares unless a participant initiates it in a one-on-one setting. Ensure the crafting process is frustration-free by providing clear instructions and assistance.
Impact Evaluation	Observe the level of engagement: Are they absorbed in the task? Or are they distracted and disengaged? Do they show curiosity in choosing their materials (colors, charms, scents)? Ask questions as: • <i>What was that experience like for you?</i> • <i>What was your favorite part of making this?</i> • <i>What was the most challenging part?</i> • <i>How did it feel to work with the materials and the scent?</i>



Exercise 3: Movement & Dance with Aromatherapy “The Moving Aroma”

Duration ~ 50 minutes



Goal	To cultivate body awareness, emotional expression, and a sense of grounded presence through gentle, intuitive movement, dance, and the soothing support of aromatherapy.
Relation to the target group	Trauma can create a disconnect between mind and body, leading to feelings of disembodiment, tension, and difficulty regulating emotions. This exercise invites participants to reconnect with their bodies in a safe, non-judgmental way, allowing them to explore and release held emotions through movement and scent. The absence of structured choreography encourages a focus on internal sensations and self-expression, and aromatherapy enhances relaxation and emotional processing.
Objectives	● Increase body awareness and mindful presence. ● Provide a safe outlet for emotional expression through movement. ● Reduce physical tension and promote relaxation. ● Foster a sense of self-awareness and emotional resilience. ● Enhance relaxation and emotional processing through aromatherapy.
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction and Grounding Briefly introduce the exercise, emphasizing that there are no right or wrong ways to move. Explain the benefits of mindful movement and dance, and how aromatherapy can enhance the experience. Invite participants to stand or sit comfortably, close their eyes, and bring their attention to their breath. Guide a short grounding exercise: ● Notice the sensations of their feet on the floor. ● Feel the support of the chair or the earth beneath them. ● Take a few deep, calming breaths. Introduce the aromatherapy by diffusing a calming essential oil (lavender, chamomile, frankincense) into the room (or offering a diluted topical application).



Gentle Warm-Up

Lead participants through a series of gentle stretches and movements to warm up the body. Encourage them to move at their own pace and listen to their bodies. Focus on releasing tension in common areas like the neck, shoulders, and back.

Examples:

- Head rolls
- Shoulder shrugs and circles
- Arm swings
- Torso twists
- Gentle hip circles
- Ankle rotations

Mindful Movement and Dance Exploration

With instrumental music playing, invite participants to explore movement and dance in a way that feels authentic and comfortable to them.

Suggest starting with simple movements like swaying, rocking, or walking in a circle.

Encourage them to pay attention to the sensations in their bodies as they move. Invite them to notice any emotions that arise and allow themselves to express them through movement.

Remind them that there is no need to judge or analyze their movements. Offer prompts to guide their exploration:

- *How does your body want to move today?*
- *What emotions are present in your body?*
- *Can you allow your body to tell a story through movement?*

Emphasize the use of breath to support and deepen the movement experience. Continue to diffuse the calming essential oil to enhance relaxation and emotional processing.

Cool-Down and Integration

Gradually bring the movement to a close. Guide participants through a series of gentle stretches to cool down the body.

Invite them to lie down or sit comfortably and close their eyes.



	Guide a short visualization or body scan, inviting them to notice any sensations in their body and any emotions that are present. Encourage them to carry this sense of body awareness and presence with them throughout the day.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Be mindful of creating a safe and supportive environment. Encourage participants to move at their own pace and listen to their bodies. Remind them that there is no need to judge or analyze their movements. Adapt the exercise to meet the needs of the participants. Be aware of any potential triggers and provide support as needed. If using essential oils, be aware of allergies and sensitivities.
Impact Evaluation	Debriefing Questions: • <i>How did it feel to move your body in this way?</i> • <i>What emotions did you notice during the exercise?</i> • <i>What did you learn about your body and your emotions?</i> • <i>How did the aromatherapy enhance the experience?</i>

Exercise 4: Creating Inner Safety “The Scented Sanctuary” Duration ~ 65 minutes		
Goal	To use aromatherapy and guided imagery to create a personal mental safe space that can be accessed during stressful times, promoting a sense of control and providing a powerful coping mechanism.	
Relation to the target group	Youth who have experienced trauma often lack a sense of safety and struggle with anxiety and hyperarousal. This activity helps them build an internal sanctuary that is theirs alone. It provides a sense of control, offering a powerful coping mechanism for managing stress and triggering memories.	
Objectives	• Participants will explore and identify scents that evoke feelings of peace, safety, or happiness. • They will practice extended guided visualization to build a detailed and multi-sensory mental safe space.	



	• They will learn to use a specific scent as a cue to access and strengthen this mental space. • Participants can share their experience if they would like.
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction and Grounding Welcome participants and briefly explain the exercise. Emphasize the importance of self-compassion and creating a non-judgmental space for exploration. Lead a short grounding exercise: <i>Let's take a moment to settle into our bodies. Feel your feet on the ground, your seat in the chair... Take a few deep breaths, noticing the rise and fall of your abdomen.</i> Scent Exploration Present a wider variety of evocative scents on cotton balls or scent strips (e.g., cedarwood, pine, sandalwood for nature; vanilla, cinnamon, baking spice for home; citrus, peppermint for energy; lavender, chamomile, rose for relaxation; ocean air/aquatic scents for the sea). Instruct participants to gently inhale each scent, one at a time, without judgment. Encourage them to notice what feelings, memories, images, or colors arise with each scent. Provide paper and pencils for jotting down notes or associations for each scent. This can help them remember their impressions. Choosing an Anchor Scent Ask participants to reflect on the scents they experienced. Guide them to choose the scent that evoked the strongest feelings of peace, safety, or happiness. Explain that this will be their “anchor scent” to access their mental safe space. Provide small, labeled containers (e.g., small jars, resealable bags) for participants to keep a cotton ball or scent strip with their chosen aroma Guided Journey Dim the lights (if possible) and play gentle, calming music or nature sounds. Instruct participants to close their eyes gently or lower their gaze. Begin the guided meditation using a soothing, slow voice, you can use the following script:



	<i>Take a deep breath in, filling your lungs completely... As you exhale, release any tension you may be holding in your body... Let your shoulders relax, your jaw soften...</i> <i>Now, bring your chosen scent to your nose... Breathe it in deeply, letting the aroma be your guide... Allow yourself to be transported to a place where you feel completely safe, at peace, and at ease... This place can be real or imaginary – it is entirely up to you.</i> <i>Begin to explore this place with your senses... What do you see around you? Notice the colors, the light... Are there trees, water, mountains, buildings?... Take in the details...</i> <i>What sounds do you hear in this place?... Is there birdsong, the gentle lapping of waves, the rustling of leaves, or the soft hum of activity?... Listen closely...</i> <i>What do you feel on your skin?... Is there a gentle breeze, the warmth of the sun, the coolness of shade?... Notice the sensations...</i> <i>Are there any tastes or smells in your space besides your anchor scent?... Perhaps there is the scent of flowers, the taste of fresh fruit, or the aroma of rain on the earth...</i> <i>Notice how your body feels in this place... Do you feel relaxed, energized, secure, free?... Allow yourself to fully experience these sensations...</i> <i>You are in complete control here. This is your space. You can change anything you don't like, add anything that brings you joy or comfort... Know that you can return to this place anytime, simply by remembering your anchor scent.</i> <i>(Pause for several minutes, allowing participants time to explore their safe space)</i> <i>Now, imagine that you are building a strong, protective barrier around this space... This barrier is made of light, love, and strength... It will keep out anything that could harm you or disturb your peace... You are safe and protected here...</i> <i>Take another deep breath of your chosen scent, strengthening the connection between this feeling of peace and this aroma... Know that you can return to this place anytime, simply by remembering this scent and taking a deep breath.</i> <i>Now, gently begin to bring your awareness back to the present moment... Wiggle your fingers and toes... Gently stretch your body... Take a few deep breaths...</i> <i>When you are ready, slowly open your eyes, carrying the peace and serenity of your safe space with you.</i>
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	Creative Expression Offer paper, colored pencils, crayons, or other art supplies. Invite participants to draw, paint, or write about their "ScentScape" if they wish. Emphasize that this is a non-verbal way to process and integrate the experience and that sharing is optional. Feedback Circle If time allows and the group is comfortable, facilitate a brief sharing circle. Ask open-ended questions such as: • <i>What was it like to create your own space?</i> • <i>What did you notice about the different scents?</i> • <i>What did you learn about yourself during this exercise?</i> • <i>How might you use your 'ScentScape' in your daily life?</i> Focus on the process and individual experiences, not on evaluating the success of the outcome.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Always give participants the option to keep their eyes open and simply lower their gaze. Repeatedly state that they are in control of their imaginary space and can change anything they don't like. Let them know they can stop the exercise at any time if they feel uncomfortable. Have a designated quiet corner or a calming activity (e.g., coloring books, puzzles) in the room they can go to. Use gentle, invitational language. Avoid directive or demanding statements. Watch for signs of disassociation (e.g., staring blankly, becoming unresponsive). If this occurs, gently guide the person back to the present moment by asking them to focus on their breath or the sensation of their feet on the floor.
Impact Evaluation	Observe participants' body language and facial expressions throughout the exercise. Listen attentively to their feedback during the sharing circle (if offered).



Exercise 5: Calming the Mind “The Thought Jar”

Duration ~ 55 minutes



Goal	To create a visual and sensory tool that helps participants understand and manage their racing or overwhelming thoughts, integrating aromatherapy and relaxation techniques to deepen the calming effect.
Relation to the target group	Youth who have experienced trauma often struggle with racing thoughts, intrusive memories, and difficulty focusing. The Thought Jar provides a concrete, visual representation of these thoughts, allowing them to observe and understand the temporary nature of these mental patterns. Combining it with aromatherapy and relaxation helps soothe the nervous system and promote mental clarity.
Objectives	• Participants will create their own Thought Jar as a tool for managing racing thoughts. • They will learn to identify and label overwhelming or intrusive thoughts. • They will practice mindful observation of their thoughts without judgment. • They will explore the use of aromatherapy and relaxation techniques to calm their minds.
(Step-by-step description)	Step 1 Introduction (10 minutes) Briefly introduce the concept of racing thoughts and how they can impact well-being, especially for youth who have experienced trauma. Explain how the Thought Jar can serve as a visual metaphor for observing and managing these thoughts. Introduce the concept of aromatherapy and how certain scents can influence mood and mental state. Step 2 Scent Introduction (10 minutes) Introduce the selected essential oils. Explain their properties (e.g., lavender for calming, chamomile for relaxation). Offer a diffuser with a calming blend or allow participants to choose an oil to apply to a tissue for personal inhalation.



	Creating the Thought Jar & Mindful Observation Instruct participants to fill their jars about $\frac{3}{4}$ full with water. Add a generous amount of glitter to the jar. Explain that the glitter represents their thoughts – some big, some small, some sparkly, some dull. Add a small amount of clear glue or glycerin to help the glitter swirl more slowly. Seal the jar tightly and shake it. Encourage them to observe the swirling glitter. Ask participants to shake their jars again and observe the glitter settling. Guide them to notice how the glitter (thoughts) initially swirls rapidly and chaotically, then gradually settles down. Encourage them to identify and label the types of thoughts they experience (e.g., "worries about the future," "memories from the past," "tasks I need to do"). Explain that just like the glitter, thoughts are temporary and will eventually settle. Emphasize that they don't need to "fix" or "get rid of" their thoughts, but simply observe them without judgment. Relaxation & Mindfulness Practice Guide participants through a short relaxation exercise (e.g., deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation) while they focus on their chosen scent and the swirling glitter in the jar. Encourage them to observe their thoughts as they arise and pass, without judgment, just like the glitter settling in the jar. Discussion & Sharing Invite participants to share their experiences if they feel comfortable (optional). Discuss how they can use the Thought Jar and aromatherapy techniques in their daily lives when they feel overwhelmed by thoughts. Encourage them to practice mindful observation of their thoughts regularly.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Be mindful of potential triggers. Offer modifications and alternatives for participants who may feel uncomfortable with certain aspects of the activity.



	Create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences without judgment. Be aware of potential allergies to essential oils. Offer unscented options or alternatives. Closely supervise the use of essential oils and glitter to prevent accidental ingestion or skin irritation. Emphasize the importance of confidentiality and respect for each other's experiences. Have additional grounding techniques available for participants who may become overwhelmed.
Impact Evaluation	Observe participants' engagement and participation throughout the activity. Note any changes in their mood or behavior.



Topic 4: Community Gardens and Green Spaces for stress coping	
General goal(s):	Make youth workers aware of the importance of caring for green spaces to support stress management among young people and adolescents. Encourage the co-creation of community gardens and green spaces where young people can find themselves by carrying out individual or collective green care activities. Promote participatory approaches to local community life through green care. The focus is on how community gardens and green spaces can be used as safe, engaging and stimulating environments for stress management, emotional regulation and social inclusion of young participants.
Description of workshops:	• The workshops take place outdoors: in a public or private space. Participants will identify and co-design the shared green space where they will carry out gardening activities. They will prepare the soil and collect leaves, stones, branches, flowers or sand and use them to create temporary works of art. • The sessions guide participants to connect with nature and the soil and learn how to care for plants (herbs, flowers, aromatic herbs), expressing their emotional responses in a relaxed and cooperative learning environment where everyone has a role and contributes to the result. • Activities include short exercises in preparing the planting soil and caring for the plants (clearing weeds and watering). A sensory garden will also be created using aromatic herbs. • The workshops are suitable for: ○ Pre-teens and teenagers aged 14 to 17 young people who have experienced violence and show signs of traumatic stress ○ Professionals such as youth workers, psychologists, social workers and educators who need stress management tools due to their daily work
Objectives	• Use green spaces as spaces for care • Increase physical and mental wellbeing through gardening activities • Increase self-esteem of participants • Reconnect with nature • To promote connection with nature as a tool for healing



	● Develop a sense of community and shared responsibility through the practical experience of caring for a shared space ● Support professionals who work with the target group in using community gardening as a therapeutic tool
Methods	● Use of manual skills Grounded in experiential and embodied learning approaches, emphasizing the role of hands-on activity in cognitive and motor development. Manual engagement supports fine motor skills, concentration, and the integration of sensory and cognitive processes. ● Learning by doing Based on experiential learning principles, which highlight active participation as central to knowledge acquisition. Direct engagement in tasks enhances understanding, retention, and practical skill development. ● Creation of a community garden through cooperative learning Informed by cooperative learning, emphasizing shared goals, collaboration, and social interaction. The collective creation process fosters responsibility, social skills, and a sense of community belonging. ● Observation-based learning with respect for individual developmental rhythms Rooted in learner-centered educational approaches and developmental psychology. Emphasize observing individual needs and pacing, supporting autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and self-directed learning. ● Use of natural and sustainable materials Aligned with principles of sustainability education and environmental awareness. The use of natural materials promotes ecological responsibility, sensory engagement, and connection to the natural environment.
Resources needed	● Safe outdoor location (garden, park, school playground, edge of the woods) ● Natural materials found in the environment (soil, stones, flowers) ● Paintings of aromatic herbs, seeds ● Gardening tools and protective gloves ● Water, tissues and bags for collecting rubbish ● Tools for measuring the soil
References	● Therapeutic Gardening: Mental Health Benefits of Nature, (2026) https://www.avidcounseling.org/therapeutic-gardening-mental-health-benefits-of-nature/ ● Therapeutic Community Gardening as a Green Social Prescription for Mental Ill-Health: Impact, Barriers, and Facilitators from the Perspective of Multiple Stakeholders ● Righetto, C. (2015). Giardini per rivivere: orticoltura e giardinaggio a fini terapeutici in contesti sanitari [Tesi di dottorato, Alma Mater



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Exercise 1: Defining and preparing a shared green space “Our Garden Our Garden “ Duration: ~ 45 minutes		
Goal	To foster self-regulation, functional cooperation and mutual recognition, particularly within vulnerable groups. This a exercise: - promotes active participation by creating a sense of belonging and empowerment through the co-creation of a community garden; - reduces conflict without direct confrontation, encouraging each participant to contribute in a constructive way; - strengthens self-confidence through hands-on gardening activities; - transforms a simple task (taking care of a green space) into an experience of active citizenship; - allows educators and youth workers to observe real group dynamics, supporting the improvement of future educational interventions.	
Relation to the target group	Young people who have experienced violence often face traumatic stress, concentration problems, trembling, and stomach aches. They may struggle to talk about emotions. Land art gives a safe, non-verbal way to release feelings through movement and creation.	
Objectives	1. Emotional down-regulation Structured contact with the natural environment, supported by the constant presence of an adult, helps reduce emotional hyperactivation often linked to traumatic experiences. The predictability of actions (planting, watering, waiting for growth) supports the restoration of a sense of control and safety. 2. Emotional regulation through the body The activity mainly operates on a bodily and sensory level, avoiding invasive verbal or narrative requests. For young people who find it difficult to talk about emotions, working with	



	soil and plants enables indirect emotional regulation, fostering calmness, grounding and a reduction of impulsive reactions. 3. Experience of continuity and trust Caring for the garden over time provides a concrete experience of continuity, counteracting the fragmentation often associated with trauma. Seeing what has been planted reinforces the idea that present actions lead to future outcomes, rebuilding trust in educational and relational processes.
(Step-by-step description)	Structured entry and containment The educator gathers the group in the selected space (garden, courtyard or common area) using a calm, firm and clear tone. Key messages: • the activity has a defined duration; • the space is real and concrete; • the outcome must be visible. No negotiation or open discussion is introduced at this stage. This step provides containment and reduces initial uncertainty, which is often a trigger for oppositional behaviour. Role assignment as functional tasks Roles are presented as technical responsibilities, not as rewards or punishments. Examples of roles: • Order keepers: collect and organise materials or waste found on the ground; • Transformation team: make the space more organised and welcoming (e.g. defining borders with stones); • Materials managers: distribute and monitor tools and materials (soil, plants, seeds) and time; • Practical observers: ensure everyone is involved and identify or solve operational issues. Each role has: • a clear task; • defined boundaries; • a limited duration. <i>This structure reduces power struggles and perceptions of unfairness.</i> Collaborative work through concrete micro-goals The activity is divided into progressive micro-goals: • first 7 minutes: basic cleaning and organisation; • second 7 minutes: intentional arrangement of the space; • last 6 minutes: preparation of the symbolic element. During this phase, the educator:



	• moves through the space, observing and reinforcing functional behaviours; • avoids prolonged verbal confrontations; • intervenes immediately in case of disrespect, using short and clear reminders. <i>The focus remains on action, not on behaviour itself.</i> Creation of a visible and symbolic sign The group creates a sign that remains visible after the activity. The sign should: • be chosen or approved by the group; • represent the idea of a “shared space”; • be simple, concrete and non-aestheticised. Examples: • a sign with a sentence chosen by majority; • a symbol made with natural elements; • a spatial arrangement clearly showing a “before and after”. <i>This step consolidates the experience and makes it memorable.</i> Guided and protected debrief The final moment is short and structured to avoid forced exposure. The educator proposes sentence starters such as: • “One useful thing I did today...” • “One thing that worked well in the group...” • “One thing that surprised me...” Participants who do not wish to speak can point to the created sign or use a gesture. <i>The aim is not emotional analysis, but recognition of the shared experience.</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• Accept that participants may engage in different ways. • Value functionality over enthusiasm. • Use the language of “works / does not work” instead of “right / wrong”. • Remember that, for many young people, doing together comes before feeling like a group. Safety and relational climate • Simple and alternating physical activities. • Safe tools, always supervised. • Clear key rule: <i>“You may stay silent, but you may not be disrespectful</i>



Impact Evaluation	• Short guided reflection at the end of the activity • Observation of group dynamics and participation levels • Qualitative assessment of cooperation and sense of belonging
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Exercise 2: Creating a Community Garden “Green Explorers” Duration: ~30–45 minutes 	
Goal	To develop participants’ ability to observe, listen to and perceive the natural environment as a tool for self-regulation, responsibility and cooperation. The activity aims to: • strengthen attention to detail and presence in the <i>here and now</i>. • support the connection between physical sensations and emotional experiences. • enhance emotional self-regulation and impulse control. • promote calmness, patience and tolerance of frustration. • provide practical tools to manage anxiety, anger and emotional over-arousal. • encourage respect for shared timing and collective agreements; • foster personal and collective responsibility through environmental care.
Relation to the target group	Relation to the Target Group The activity addresses the needs of adolescents who: • struggle with sustained attention and abstract rules; • display oppositional or impulsive behaviours; • learn more effectively through bodily, concrete and non-verbal experiences.



	<i>The natural setting and experiential approach reduce performance pressure and allow emotional and social competences to be developed through learning by doing</i>
Objectives	• Develop sensory awareness and attention to detail • Strengthen teamwork and functional cooperation • Promote responsibility and care for the environment • Improve emotional regulation and impulse management • Connect sensory experience to a concrete and lasting project • Reinforce a sense of belonging and group identity
(Step-by-step description)	Preparation and activation The facilitator introduces the activity with a clear and motivating message: <i>"Today you will become Green Explorers and caretakers of our garden."</i> Simple and functional roles are assigned: • planting; • watering; • organising spaces and materials. <i>Roles are temporary and interchangeable to ensure inclusion and fairness.</i> Guided sensory exploration Before planting, participants explore the area using all their senses: • Sight: colours, shapes, light and shadows • Touch: soil texture, leaves, bark • Smell: flowers, aromatic herbs, wet soil • Hearing: wind, birds, footsteps, garden sounds Each participant records or represents: • a word, • a colour, • or a sensation that reflects their sensory experience. <i>This phase supports presence, slowing down and the connection between body and emotions.</i> Garden creation The group collaboratively creates the garden by: • planting seeds or plants following practical instructions; • arranging plants based on sensory observations (light, smells, spatial preferences);



	labelling each plant with a name chosen by the participants, linked to an emotion, a keyword or a sensory perception. This phase strengthens responsibility, cooperation and a sense of achievement. Shared reflection and closure The group gathers in a circle. Each participant is invited to share one word or one emotion related to the experience (verbal sharing is optional). The facilitator closes the activity by highlighting: <i>"We observed, created and took care of this space together. This garden will grow with us."</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	Educational approach - Adopt a firm, consistent and non-punitive style. - Use descriptive and concrete language ("I see you stopped"), avoiding judgement. - Maintain a calm and predictable presence: adult self-regulation comes before group regulation. Managing oppositional behaviors - Anticipate instructions in a simple and visual way. - Break tasks into clear micro-actions. - Offer limited choices to increase a sense of control while maintaining structure. Using the garden as an educational tool - Treat the green space as neutral, not as a reward or punishment. - Link garden processes to emotional processes metaphorically, without forcing verbalization. - Emphasise continuity: returning to the same space strengthens responsibility and belonging. Safety Measures - Mandatory use of gardening gloves - Closed, non-slip footwear - In case of strong sun exposure: hats, access to drinking water and shaded breaks
Impact Evaluation	Impact Evaluation - Short guided reflection at the end of the activity - Qualitative observation of participation, cooperation and emotional regulation - Assessment of sense of belonging and responsibility towards the shared space



Exercise 3: Nature “Hands in the Soil”

Duration: ~ 45–50 minutes



Goal	To use gardening as a sensory and bodily experience to support emotional self-regulation and the reduction of psycho-physical tension. Direct contact with soil becomes a concrete tool to slow down, focus on the present moment and rebuild a deep connection between body, environment and emotions, in line with Erasmus+ non-formal education principles.
Relation to the target group	Relation to the Target Group The activity is particularly effective with young people who: ● struggle to express emotional distress verbally; ● show communicative withdrawal or resistance to direct confrontation; ● benefit from practical, repetitive and non-judgmental experiences. The non-verbal language of doing, touching and caring helps overcome communication barriers, enabling implicit, natural and safe emotional expression, while strengthening a sense of competence and presence.
Objectives	● Foster bodily grounding through sensory engagement and contact with natural elements ● Strengthen self-efficacy and perceived competence by completing a concrete and visible task ● Promote calmness, focus and sustained attention through repetitive and intentional gestures ● Provide a protected context for emotional self-regulation, accessible even without verbalisation
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction to the meaning of care The activity begins with a short welcoming moment. The facilitator introduces the concept of care as a simple but powerful action: taking care of a plant means giving time, attention and respect to something that grows slowly.



A symbolic and non-invasive parallel is suggested between caring for the plant and caring for oneself.

No personal reflection is required: the message works at a metaphorical level, leaving space for individual interpretation.

Guided practical demonstration

The facilitator slowly demonstrates the basic actions step by step:

- filling a pot with soil;
- handling the soil with hands;
- placing the seed or plant;
- gently covering it;
- watering.

Movements are **slow, intentional and repetitive**, almost ritual-like, to transmit calmness and support imitation.

Attention is drawn to physical sensations: weight, texture, smell and temperature of the soil.

The focus is on sensory experience, not on performance.

Guided autonomous activity

Each participant works independently on their own pot or planting space. The facilitator remains present but non-intrusive, offering support only if requested.

This phase represents the **core of the activity**:

- productive silence;
- direct contact with soil;
- repetition of gestures

The plant becomes a small personal project, fostering responsibility and ownership.

Awareness pause

After planting, a short observation pause is proposed:

- hands still;
- slow breathing;
- gaze directed at the completed work.

Participants are invited to notice how their body feels (hands, shoulders, breathing) and to recognise any changes compared to the beginning of the activity.

*No verbal sharing is required: **simply being present is considered active participation.***



	Final reflection The closing space is dedicated to a free, voluntary and non-judgmental reflection. Those who wish may share: • what they felt; • what they found pleasant; • what surprised them. The facilitator may support a symbolic link between: • the time needed for a plant to grow; • the time needed to develop skills, emotions and personal well-being. <i>The aim is not emotional analysis, but recognition of the lived experience.</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• Adopt a calm, predictable and non-directive approach • Value the process over the final result • Accept silence as a legitimate form of participation • Avoid pressure to verbalise emotions Safety measures • Mandatory use of gardening gloves • Closed, non-slip footwear • In case of strong sun exposure: ○ hats ○ access to drinking water ○ shaded breaks
Impact Evaluation	• Short guided reflection at the end of the activity • Qualitative observation of calmness, focus and engagement • Assessment of individual sense of competence and responsibility



Exercise 4: Sensory Awareness and Emotional Grounding through Aromatic Plants “The Garden of Scents”

Duration: ~ 50–55 minutes



Goal	To support emotional regulation, sensory awareness and a first positive contact with the inner world through the experience of an aromatic garden. The garden becomes a symbolic space of care, growth and choice, where participants can experience calmness, presence and a sense of control, in line with Erasmus+ priorities on well-being, inclusion and non-formal learning.
Relation to the target group	Relevance for the Target Group The activity is specifically designed for adolescents who may present: • hyperarousal or dissociation; • difficulties in emotional verbalisation; • a strong need for safety, predictability and autonomy. The use of aromatic plants allows: • non-verbal access to the experience; • gentle and self-regulated sensory stimulation; • absence of judgement or performance expectations. Participation is always voluntary: each participant can choose to touch, smell, observe or simply remain present without actively engaging.
Objectives	• experience grounding through the senses, particularly smell and touch; • strengthen their perception of safety in the here and now; • support self-efficacy through simple and concrete choices; • explore a symbolic self-narrative without pressure to verbalise; • develop an initial sense of care and responsibility.



(Step-by-step description)	Welcome and creation of a safe setting The facilitator introduces the activity using simple and reassuring language: • clarifying that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to participate; • emphasising that participants can stop or step back at any time. Setting • circle or shared table; • aromatic plants (e.g. basil, rosemary, mint, lavender); • pots, soil, optional gardening gloves. Guided sensory exploration Participants are invited to: • observe the plants; • smell them; • touch them if they wish. The facilitator may offer non-intrusive prompts, such as: • “Which scent feels softer or more pleasant to you?” • “Is there one that makes you feel a bit calmer?” No verbal response is required. Silence is fully accepted. Personal choice and symbolic planting Each participant chooses one plant to place in their own pot. The choice is presented as personal and non-interpreted by the group or facilitator. During planting: • actions are slow and intentional; • attention is gently brought to the contact with soil and breathing. Optional verbal cue from the facilitator: “While placing the plant in the soil, you can think of how, just like this plant, growth needs space, time and care.” Optional reflection and sharing In a circle, participants who wish may share: • why they chose that plant; • how they felt during the activity. It is clearly stated that: • silence is a valid form of participation; • participants may talk only about the plant, not about themselves.
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	Closing and grounding exercise A short grounding practice is proposed: • observing the plant; • taking three slow breaths; • noticing one detail (colour, scent or shape). • <i>Participants may take their plant with them as a transitional object, supporting continuity of the experience beyond the exercise.</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• Use neutral and non-clinical language • Avoid psychological interpretations or links to trauma • Always provide an option of non-participation • Monitor signs of sensory or emotional overload • Maintain clear timing and predictable structure Safety Measures • Avoid plants with very intense scents or potential triggers • Optional use of gloves • Ensure access to water and breaks if needed • Maintain a calm and controlled environment
Impact Evaluation	Qualitative and non-performance-based evaluation through: • observation of participation (active or observational); • signs of regulation (slower breathing, relaxed posture); • spontaneous verbal or non-verbal feedback; • willingness to take the plant and care for it.



Exercise 5: Emotional regulation and psychological wellbeing through the chromatic experience of nature “The Garden of Colors”

Duration: ~ 50 minutes



Goal	To promote psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation through conscious exposure to the colours of nature, with particular focus on green as a colour associated with calmness, balance and mental restoration. The garden is proposed as a visual and symbolic space where participants can experience stress reduction, emotional stabilisation and a sense of safety, in line with Erasmus+ principles of non-formal education, prevention of distress and wellbeing promotion.
Relation to the target group	Adolescents with traumatic experiences often show: ● difficulties in concentration and sustained attention; ● emotional hyperactivation; ● mental fatigue and cognitive overload. Natural colours, and green in particular, are scientifically associated with: ● reduced stress levels; ● improved attention; ● a sense of cognitive restoration. <i>Working with colours allows an indirect, non-verbal and non-invasive access to emotional experience, avoiding potentially reactivating narrative requests and respecting individual pace and boundaries.</i>
Objectives	By the end of the exercise, participants will be able to: ● experience a reduction in visual and emotional stress; ● develop colour and sensory awareness; ● strengthen self-regulation skills through observation; ● associate the colour green with feelings of calmness, stability and continuity; ● acquire simple wellbeing tools that can be replicated in everyday life.



(Step-by-step description)	Welcome and introduction to the theme The facilitator introduces the workshop by explaining that: ● colours influence our mental and emotional state; ● nature uses green as a dominant colour to promote balance and rest. Setting: ● natural images (leaves, grass, trees, water); ● creative materials (paper, pencils, crayons, pastels, paints); ● real plants or natural elements, if available. Language is simple, reassuring and non-interpretative. Guided observation of natural colours Participants observe images or real natural elements. The facilitator guides attention through open, non-invasive questions, such as: ● “Which colours do you notice first?” ● “Which ones feel more restful for your eyes?” Special attention is given to green, without any obligation to speak. Silence and passive observation are considered valid forms of participation. Creative activity: creating a personal “garden of colours” Each participant creates their own <i>garden of colours</i> on paper, using the colours they perceive as most beneficial. Guidelines: ● complete freedom in colour choice; ● no aesthetic or realistic criteria; ● possibility to use only green or combine it with other natural colours. Optional verbal prompt: “Let the colours you choose represent what your mind needs today.” Optional sharing In a circle, participants who wish to do so may share: ● which colour they used the most; ● how they felt during the activity. It is clearly stated that: ● participants may talk only about the colour, not about personal experiences;
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	● silence is a legitimate form of participation. Closing and integration A short guided visualisation: ● imagining being in a green natural environment; ● mentally observing shapes and shades; ● breathing slowly for a few cycles. The facilitator concludes by reminding participants that: <i>“Even a few minutes a day of looking at green spaces can help the mind rest.”</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● Avoid psychological interpretations of colour choices ● Do not rigidly associate colours with emotional states ● Always allow passive observation as a valid option ● Monitor signs of sensory overload ● Maintain a slow, clear and predictable rhythm
Impact Evaluation	Qualitative, non-performance-based evaluation focused on: ● level of concentration during the activity; ● signs of visual and bodily relaxation; ● spontaneous feedback related to calmness or pleasant sensations; ● interest in repeating the experience or observing nature more consciously.

Exercise 6: Co-creating safe and restorative outdoor spaces for wellbeing and inclusion “Designing Wellbeing Spaces in the Garden.”

Duration:~ 60 minutes



Goal	To support participants in co-creating simple wellbeing spaces within a garden, designed to promote calmness, safety, rest and emotional regulation. The workshop transforms the garden into a shared, intentional environment where young people actively shape spaces that respond to
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	their need for balance, pause and restoration, strengthening ownership, agency and inclusion.
Relation to the target group	Young people with emotional or traumatic experiences often: ● struggle to recognise and communicate their need for rest or safety; ● benefit from concrete, spatial and visual forms of expression; ● feel more empowered when they can actively modify their environment. Designing wellbeing spaces: ● provides a non-verbal and practical way to express needs; ● reinforces a sense of control and predictability; ● supports emotional regulation through environmental cues rather than rules.
Objectives	By the end of the exercise , participants will be able to: ● recognise environmental elements that support calmness and wellbeing; ● collaborate in the creation of shared, safe spaces; ● strengthen self-efficacy through visible and lasting contributions; ● experience responsibility and care for a common space; ● develop awareness of how environments influence emotional states.
(Step-by-step description)	Introduction: what is a wellbeing space? The facilitator introduces the concept of wellbeing spaces, explaining that: ● some places help us feel calmer, safer or more focused; ● small environmental changes can strongly influence how we feel. Participants are invited to think (without sharing yet) about: ● places where they feel calm or comfortable; ● elements that help them relax (shade, silence, softness, colours, distance). No personal disclosure is required. Observation and mapping of the garden In small groups or as a whole group, participants explore the garden and observe: ● sunny and shaded areas; ● quiet and more active zones; ● natural elements (plants, trees, ground, smells, colours).



	The facilitator encourages noticing, not judging. Participants may mark or remember areas that feel suitable for rest, pause or grounding. Co-design of wellbeing spaces Participants collaboratively design one or more wellbeing areas, such as: • a quiet corner for sitting or breathing; • a shaded rest area; • a sensory zone with plants, stones or natural textures. Possible actions: • arranging natural materials (stones, wood, leaves); • positioning benches, cushions or logs; • defining space boundaries using plants or symbolic markers. Roles are flexible and functional. Participation can be active or observational. Naming and symbolic meaning Each wellbeing space is given a name or short description, chosen collectively (e.g. The Calm Corner, The Green Pause). The facilitator may ask optional, non-invasive questions: • “What is this space good for?” • “How should people behave here to keep it safe?” The focus remains on the space, not on personal stories. Closing and grounding reflection Participants gather in one of the newly created wellbeing spaces. A short grounding moment is guided: • noticing posture and breathing; • observing one natural detail nearby; • recognising the collective work done. The facilitator highlights that: <i>“You have created spaces that can continue to support wellbeing over time.”</i>
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Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• Keep instructions clear, concrete and predictable • Avoid emotional pressure or forced reflection • Respect different participation levels • Monitor group dynamics and sensory overload • Emphasise cooperation rather than aesthetic results
Impact Evaluation	Qualitative, non-performance-based evaluation focused on: • level of engagement and cooperation; • sense of ownership and responsibility for the space; • observable signs of calmness and regulation;



Topic 5: Land Art therapy	
General goal(s):	To reduce stress, support emotional healing, and help young people reconnect with nature through creative activities using natural materials. Land Art therapy aims to calm the mind, reduce anxiety symptoms, and strengthen emotional resilience in a safe outdoor environment.
Description of workshops:	Workshops take place outdoors. Participants collect natural materials such as leaves, stones, branches, flowers, or sand and use them to create temporary artworks. The sessions guide participants to observe nature, express emotions safely, and build meaning through shapes, patterns, textures, and symbols. Activities include short grounding exercises, individual and group creations, and gentle reflection. Workshops are adapted for: • young people aged 18–30 who have experienced violence and show signs of traumatic stress • professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, social workers, health professionals, and teachers who need stress-management tools for their work
Objectives	• reduce stress and support emotional stability • offer safe, non-verbal tools for expressing difficult emotions • help participants reconnect with the body through grounding activities • increase self-esteem through successful creative experiences • encourage mindful awareness and relaxation in nature • develop a sense of safety and trust through calm, structured activities • strengthen resilience and positive coping strategies • help professionals learn new nature-based methods they can use with their clients
Methods	Nature-based experiential learning Grounded in experiential learning and ecopsychology, emphasizing direct engagement with natural environments as a pathway to learning. This approach supports holistic development, sensory integration, and emotional well-being. Guided grounding and breathing exercises Based on mindfulness and psychophysiological regulation principles, including activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. These practices help reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and increase present-moment awareness.



	Visual exploration and observation Informed by attention training and observational learning theories. Focused visual engagement enhances awareness, concentration, and the ability to notice environmental details, supporting cognitive and perceptual development. Creation of individual and group land art pieces Linked to art therapy and collaborative creative practices. Working with natural materials encourages self-expression, creativity, and social connection through shared artistic processes. Emotional reflection through storytelling or symbolic meaning Grounded in narrative approaches within psychology. The use of storytelling and symbolism supports meaning-making, emotional processing, and integration of personal experiences. Trauma-sensitive facilitation (slow pace, predictable structure, no pressure) Informed by trauma-informed care principles, emphasizing safety, choice, and empowerment. A structured and non-demanding environment helps reduce overwhelm and supports emotional regulation. Use of natural materials only (no artificial materials) Aligned with sustainability education and nature-based approaches. Using only materials found on site strengthens ecological awareness, creativity, and connection to the environment.
Resources needed	• safe outdoor location (garden, park, school yard, forest edge) • natural materials found in the environment (stones, leaves, sticks, moss, flowers, seeds) • optional: blankets or sitting mats • paper and pencils for simple planning • phone or camera for documenting artworks • water, tissues, and a quiet space for emotional regulation if needed • trash bags to leave the place clean
References	• Exploring nature-based art therapy: a scoping review https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1522629/full • The nature of art therapy: uniting human and planetary health (2025).



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Exercise 1: Expressing Emotions “Nature Symbols” Duration: 60 minutes		
Goal	To help participants express emotions safely using natural materials and experience the calming effects of nature-based creative work.	
Relation to the target group	Young people who have experienced violence often face traumatic stress, concentration problems, trembling, and stomach aches. They may struggle to talk about emotions. Land art gives a safe, non-verbal way to release feelings through movement and creation.	
Objectives	- reduce physical and emotional tension - encourage safe expression of feelings through symbols and shapes - improve focus and concentration - build inner calm and grounding - support self-esteem through the completed artwork - help professionals learn a trauma-sensitive outdoor method	
(Step-by-step description)	Arrival and grounding Participants stand or sit in a circle. Trainer guides a simple grounding exercise: – notice feet touching the ground – take slow breaths – look around and name three things they see in nature	



Nature walk and material collection

Participants walk slowly in the area and collect natural materials that attract their attention.

Trainer reminds them: select only what is safe and already on the ground.

Creation of the artwork

Participants create a small land art piece.

They are encouraged to:

- place materials in patterns (circles, spirals, lines)
- build a symbol that represents their current emotion (fear, hope, sadness, calmness)
- work slowly and mindfully

Trainer stays supportive and avoids asking intrusive questions.

[SAMPLE LAND ART THERAPY WORKS](#)

Reflection

Participants stand near their artwork and share only if they want.

Possible guiding questions:

- What did this process make you feel?
- Which material drew your attention most?
- What does the shape mean for you today?

For youth with trauma, the trainer keeps reflections optional.

Closing

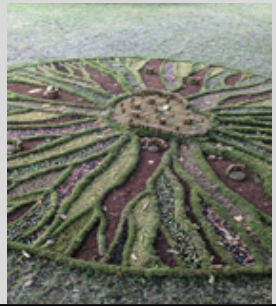
Group takes photos.

Trainer leads a short closing sentence, such as:

"Thank you for creating safely today."



Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• always ask for consent before touching or approaching participants • offer choice: participants may work alone or in pairs • avoid forcing verbal sharing; trauma survivors may prefer silence • provide a calm tone, slow pace, and predictable structure • ensure the environment is safe, without triggers like noises or crowded spaces • have water and a quiet regulation area nearby • allow participants to step aside if overwhelmed • remind them that their artwork does not have to be beautiful or perfect • end the session with grounding to avoid emotional activation
Impact Evaluation	• short stress self-report: How stressed do you feel now compared to the beginning? • trainer observes changes in body language (breathing, relaxation, posture) • participants describe one emotion they released or one positive feeling they gained • professionals evaluate how useful this method feels for their work • optional: photo documentation of artworks as evidence of engagement

Exercise 2: Creating Inner Balance “The Nature Mandala” Duration: 60 Minutes		
Goal	To help participants calm their mind, organise their thoughts, and experience emotional balance by creating a nature mandala.	
Relation to the target group	Young people who experienced violence often feel internal chaos, anxiety, loss of control, or emotional confusion. Creating a circular, repetitive pattern helps restore a sense of order, safety, and self-regulation.	
Objectives	• support emotional regulation through structured visual patterns	



	● improve concentration and reduce anxiety ● give participants a calm, repetitive activity that encourages mindfulness ● strengthen feelings of control and stability ● create a safe atmosphere where emotions can settle gently ● help professionals learn a grounding nature-therapy tool
(Step-by-step description)	Opening grounding Participants sit or stand in silence. Trainer guides slow breathing: ● inhale for 4 seconds ● exhale for 6 seconds Participants are asked to notice sounds and colours around them. Choosing a centre point Participants select a stone, pinecone, or leaf to place at the center of their mandala. Trainer explains: this center represents stability, inner strength, or safety. Collecting natural materials Participants collect leaves, stones, sticks, petals, seeds, or any natural items found on the ground. Trainer reminds them to move slowly, stay mindful, and observe textures and colours. Building the mandala Participants place materials in circular layers around the center point. Trainer encourages: ● repeat shapes or colours ● build rings that feel balanced ● follow their inner rhythm No pressure for perfection. Quiet reflection Participants spend a moment looking at their mandala. Trainer gently asks optional questions: ● Which part of your mandala feels most calming?



	• What does this circle represent for you today? • If your mind had a place of balance, what would it look like? SAMPLE MANDALA WORKS Closing ritual Participants take a photo if they want. Then they return materials to nature, thanking the space for its support. This ending helps with closure and emotional grounding.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• avoid forcing symmetry; some participants may create freely • keep tone calm and slow • explain that emotional reactions are normal and participants can pause anytime • keep group size small for trauma-affected youth • ensure the environment feels safe and not crowded • some youth may be triggered by silence; allow background nature sounds • always keep choice: share or not share, sit or stand, be close to others or stay alone • avoid interpretation of artwork; let participants explain their meaning • be ready to provide short grounding support if someone feels overwhelmed
Impact Evaluation	• ask participants: “Do you feel more balanced after the activity?” (short verbal check) • observe breathing, posture, and relaxation during and after the activity • participants share one calming element they used (colour, texture, shape) • professionals reflect on how useful this activity would be in their work



Exercise 3: Discovering Inner Strength “The Nature Path”

Duration: 45 Minutes



Goal	To help participants identify personal strengths, build confidence, and improve emotional stability by creating a symbolic “path” using natural materials.
Relation to the target group	Young people who experienced violence often struggle with low self-esteem, self-doubt, and fear. Creating a physical path using natural objects helps them visualize progress, hope, and personal growth.
Objectives	• increase awareness of personal strengths • reduce stress through slow mindful movement • support trauma survivors in rebuilding self-confidence • promote grounding and emotional regulation • give professionals a technique they can later use with clients • encourage positive thinking and safe symbolic expression
(Step-by-step description)	Grounding introduction Participants take three slow breaths and place a hand on their chest or stomach. Trainer asks them to think of one strength or positive quality they have (courage, patience, creativity, kindness, survival, intelligence, the ability to keep going). Collecting materials Participants walk quietly and collect items that symbolise strength for them: stones for stability, sticks for direction, leaves for growth, flowers for hope, etc. Creating the path Participants use the materials to create a small “path” on the ground, about one or two meters long. The path can be straight, curved, or spiral. Guidelines: • The beginning represents the past



	• The middle represents the present • The end represents the future They place materials in an order that feels meaningful: stones at the start to represent challenges, flowers at the end to represent hope, etc. Walking the path Participants walk slowly along their created path. Trainer guides gently: “Notice how it feels to walk through your own strength.” “Look at what carried you from past to present.” “See where you want to go.” Optional reflection Participants may share one thought: • something they learned about themselves • something that gave them strength • something they want to leave behind Sharing is always optional for trauma-affected youth. SAMPLE WALKING PATHS
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• avoid discussion about past trauma; focus on strengths only • participants may cry; this is normal—stay calm and supportive • allow participants to work separately if they need space • avoid interpreting symbols; let meaning come from participants • some youth may feel uncomfortable with “future talk”—offer neutral language like “next steps.” • ensure the environment is safe and without triggering noise • watch body language for signs of overwhelm (shallow breathing, freezing, shaking)
Impact Evaluation	• ask participants quietly: “Do you feel stronger after the activity?” • observe signs of relaxation, deeper breathing, slower walking • participants identify at least one personal strength • professionals reflect on how they could use this method with their clients



Exercise 4: Nature “Emotion Mapping”

Duration: 60 Minutes



Goal	To help participants recognize, name, and externalize their emotions by creating a “map” on the ground using natural materials. This supports emotional clarity, grounding, and stress reduction.
Relation to the target group	Young people affected by violence often cannot easily identify or talk about emotions because of trauma symptoms like numbness, confusion, or fear of expression. Creating an emotion map allows them to express feelings safely through colours, textures, and symbols instead of words.
Objectives	● increase awareness of emotions ● support non-verbal emotional expression ● create a safe distance between the person and the emotion ● help regulate overwhelm through slow, focused activity ● teach professionals a practical nature-based emotional tool ● strengthen the feeling of control over inner experiences ● reduce confusion and inner tension
(Step-by-step description)	Emotional check-in The trainer invites participants to silently identify three emotions they feel today. They can choose simple words like: calm, tired, scared, hopeful, angry, lost, and strong. Collecting nature materials Participants walk around and gather items that represent their chosen emotions. Examples: ● dry leaves for sadness ● sharp stones for anger ● soft moss for calm ● flowers for hope ● twisted sticks for confusion



	There is no right or wrong; meaning is personal. Creating the emotion map Participants create a small “map” on the ground, divided into three sections: ● left section: emotion 1 ● middle section: emotion 2 ● right section: emotion 3 Each section is made with specific natural items that match how the emotion feels inside. Trainer guidance: ● allow emotions to be small or large ● the map shows how feelings exist together ● participants do not need to explain anything unless they wish Viewing from a distance Participants take three steps back and look at their map from afar. The trainer invites them to notice: ● Which emotion takes more space? ● Which emotion feels easier to look at? ● Which one feels harder? This is done silently to support internal reflection. Optional sharing Participants may share one sentence: ● “This emotion surprised me.” ● “This part feels heavy.” ● “This colour helped me.” No pressure to talk about trauma or the past. Closing Participants gently return the materials to nature. The trainer leads slow breathing to close the activity safely.
Tips for trainers/	● avoid pushing participants to name or explain difficult emotions ● if sadness or anger becomes overwhelming, guide slow breathing ● allow participants to sit aside or observe instead of creating



Keeping learners safe	• maintain a calm, steady voice and slow pacing • avoid interpreting the map; meaning must come from participants • ensure enough personal space between participants • provide a quiet regulation area if feelings intensify • do not connect emotions to past traumatic events
Impact Evaluation	• participants report whether the activity helped them understand their emotions better • trainers observe relaxation signals (slower breathing, calmer posture) • participants identify one emotion that became clearer through the activity • professionals' comment on the usability of the method in their work • photos of emotion maps may be collected (only with consent) as evidence of engagement

Exercise 5: The Safe Space “Circle” Duration: 40 Minutes 	
Goal	To help young people create a symbolic “safe space” using natural materials, supporting emotional security, grounding, and the rebuilding of internal safety after trauma or high stress.
Relation to the target group	Young people who experienced violence often struggle with feeling unsafe in their bodies, in relationships, or in their environment. This exercise allows them to externalise safety by building it in nature first, where it feels less threatening.
Objectives	• help participants rediscover what safety feels like • create a physical symbol of protection and comfort • reduce anxiety through slow, mindful construction • encourage grounding through contact with natural materials • support resilience and emotional self-awareness • provide professionals with a technique to use with clients



(Step-by-step description)	Quiet arrival Participants find a comfortable place to stand or sit. Trainer invites them to close their eyes for 10 seconds and imagine what “feeling safe” means for them. Choosing natural materials Participants walk around freely and select natural items that make them feel protected or calm, such as: ● stones for strength ● leaves for softness ● branches for boundaries ● pinecones for alertness ● flowers for comfort Trainers remind them: choose only items found on the ground. Building the safe space circle Participants create a small circle (personal safe space) on the ground using their collected materials. The size is up to them: big enough for their hands, or large enough for them to stand in. Inside the circle, they may place one object representing hope or support. Trainer guidance: ● there is no correct shape ● circles can be open or closed ● participants may work quietly and slowly ● if someone does not want a circle, they may build a symbol instead Participants step inside the circle only if they feel comfortable. Experiencing the circle Participants stand or sit near their circle and observe how it feels. Silent reflection prompts: ● Does this feel like protection? ● Which material brings comfort? ● What do I need more of? (space, colour, softness, strength) Optional sharing Participants may share one sentence: ● “This circle makes me feel...” ● “I realised I need...” ● “This material represents safety for me.” Sharing is fully optional.
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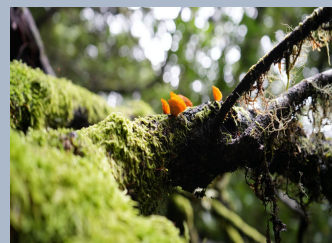
	Closing Participants take one slow breath while looking at the circle. Then they return materials to nature.
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• avoid talking about the past or trauma; focus on safety only • ensure enough space between participants • some may not want to step into the circle; that is normal • avoid interpreting symbols; let meaning come from participants • remain calm, gentle, and predictable in your guidance • offer a quiet space nearby if someone feels overwhelmed • keep the pace slow and avoid loud voices or sudden tasks
Impact Evaluation	• participants report whether they felt calmer or more stable after creating the circle • observe relaxation signs such as slower breathing, deeper focus • participants identify one element that made them feel safe • professionals evaluate how useful this technique is for their work • optional photos can document the final product



Topic 6: Group outdoor activities for positive communication	
General goal(s):	To provide trauma-informed outdoor experiences that build emotional resilience and social reconnection. By using nature as a bridge, to help abused youth develop trust, healthy communication, and a sense of belonging.
Description of workshops:	The workshops are delivered through five structured, trauma-informed outdoor activities: <i>Inner world, reflected in nature</i> “ <i>The Nature Mirror</i> ”, <i>Walking in nature</i> “ <i>Side-by-Side: The Walk and Talk</i> ”, Using a symbolic web “ <i>The Forest Web</i> ”, A sense of shared purpose “ <i>The Shared Regeneration Trail</i> ”, and Circle of Understanding “ <i>The Empathy Circle</i> ”. Each activity uses nature-based and non-formal education methods to promote positive communication, trust-building, empathy, and cooperation among young people.
Objectives	● Improve positive communication and listening skills; ● Build trust, empathy, and cooperation in group settings; ● Increase emotional awareness and coregulation; ● Strengthen peer relationships and social inclusion; ● Support self-confidence through supportive group interaction.
Methods	Nature-based therapy techniques Grounded in ecopsychology and the biophilia hypothesis, which emphasize the innate human connection to nature. Exposure to natural environments is associated with stress reduction, emotional regulation, and restoration of cognitive functioning. Mindfulness practices Based on the principles of mindfulness, defined as a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Research indicates positive effects on emotional regulation, attentional control, and psychological resilience. Sensory exploration Informed by sensory integration and experiential learning principles. Direct sensory engagement (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile) enhances mind–body awareness, supports grounding, and deepens experiential processing.



	Creative expression Linked to art therapy and expressive practices. Creative processes facilitate indirect emotional expression, foster self-reflection, and promote psychological flexibility.
Resources needed	• Outdoor space: access to a safe natural environment such as a forest, park, garden, or nature trail suitable for group activities and walking; • Rope and yarn, paper, flipchart sheets or posters and markers; • Leaves, stones, sticks, moss, or other found objects from the environment; • Lightweight sticks/poles; • Question cards for <i>Side-by-Side: The Walk and Talk</i> activity; • Printed activity instructions, timers or a watch, and evaluation sheets or short reflection questionnaires.
References	1. van der Kolk, B. (2014). <i>The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma</i>. Viking. 2. Selver, C., & Brooks, C. V. W. (2007). <i>Reclaiming vitality and presence: Sensory awareness as a practice for life</i>. North Atlantic Books 3. Lowen, A. (2003). <i>The way to vibrant health: A manual of bioenergetic exercises</i>. Bioenergetics Press.

Exercise 1: Inner world, reflected in nature “The nature mirror - from self to group” Duration: ~ 45 minutes 	
Goal	To move from internal sensory awareness to a safe, non-verbal, and verbal connection with others.
Relation to the target group	For youth who have experienced abuse, these nature-based activities replace hyper-vigilance with "soft fascination", allowing their nervous systems to move from survival to safety. By grounding in sensory experiences and using nature as a metaphor for their inner state,



	participants can process complex emotions and rebuild social trust without the pressure of direct verbal disclosure.
Objectives	● To use tactile interaction with nature to pull the participant out of a "dissociative" state and back into the physical present; ● Re-establish social contact, allowing participants to acknowledge others without the pressure of finding the right words; ● Use natural objects as "mirrors" to externalize inner feelings, making it easier to share personal states through metaphor; ● Build a supportive group environment where every participant feels heard and valued within their small sharing circle; ● Empower participants to choose their own objects and determine how much of their story they wish to reveal.
(Step-by-step description)	The sensory walk The trainer leads the group into the forest, garden, or park. ● Instruct participants to walk in silence. Encourage them to lead with their hands, touching different textures like rough bark, cool stones, soft moss, grass, etc. The soft greet ● Ask participants while walking to greet each other using only their eyes, a nod, or a small smile, but not to talk. The symbolic search ● Invite participants to spread out slightly, staying within sight; ● Ask them to take a walk and find a "natural mirror"- an object like a fallen leaf, a twig, or a stone that represents them or how they feel. Formation of small groups ● Divide the participants into three groups of five people; ● Have each group find a comfortable spot to sit together. The sharing circle ● Each participant takes a turn showing their object and explaining its meaning; ● Use the "right to pass" rule (it's okay to just show the object without speaking). While one person shares, the others listen quietly with full attention. Trainer's "closing" prompt:



	To end the session, the trainer might say: <i>"As we leave this circle, notice that even though we all found different objects, we are all part of the same forest (garden, park) today. Thank you for sharing your space and your story."</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● Shift from command to invitation. Instead of saying <i>"now, touch the tree,"</i> use phrases like: <i>"I invite you to explore..."</i> <i>"If it feels comfortable, try to..."</i> <i>"Notice what happens if you..."</i> ● Be alert for signs of hyper-arousal (agitation, rapid breathing, looking around wildly) or hypo-arousal (shutting down or appearing numb); ● Clearly explain the activity before you start. Knowing what is coming next reduces anxiety for those who are hyper-vigilant; ● Use gentle transitions. Say, <i>"In two minutes, we will gather in our circle."</i>; ● Allow plenty of personal space. Abused youth are often highly sensitive to people standing too close. The forest is large, so it lets everyone breathe; ● Calm is contagious: your nervous system is a tool. If you are calm, grounded, and breathing deeply, the participants' nervous systems will mirror yours. Keep your voice low and your movements steady.
Impact Evaluation	For the impact evaluation, the trainer can use the quick check-out or a simple survey to capture the internal impact: ● "On a scale of 1-5, how 'at home' did you feel in the forest (garden, park) today?" ● "Did finding a 'natural mirror' make it easier to express how you were feeling?" ● "Did you feel you had the choice to share only what you wanted to?"



Exercise 2: Walking in nature “Side-by-Side - the walk and talk”

Duration: 40 minutes



Goal	To foster natural, low-pressure conversation and peer support by using movement to ease the flow of communication.
Relation to the target group	For youth who have experienced abuse, this activity is a powerful tool for rebuilding social confidence because it eliminates the intensity of traditional communication. In trauma-informed care, sitting face-to-face can often trigger a "threat response," as direct and prolonged eye contact can feel confrontational or invasive. By walking side-by-side, the focus shifts to a shared forward direction, which provides parallel communication. This physical alignment reduces anxiety and allows the young person to control the pace of the conversation.
Objectives	• To eliminate the pressure of direct eye contact, making it easier for youth to share thoughts without feeling threatened; • Encourage participants to match their walking pace with a partner, fostering a subconscious sense of "being in sync" and mutual support; • Provide a structured space where participants can choose how much to reveal about their inner state, using the natural environment as a conversational buffer.
(Step-by-step description)	Pairing up • Invite participants to find a "walking partner." If the group is still hesitant, the trainer can assign pairs. The "walking path" • designate a clear, easy-to-follow trail. (To walk a maximum of 30 minutes)



The path should be wide enough for two people to walk comfortably side-by-side. Avoid narrow paths where one person has to walk behind the other.

Give the pairs 10 "open-ended" questions to discuss.

Questions to make the cards:

1. What was your favorite age growing up?
2. What is the best joke you have ever heard?
3. What would be the first thing you'd do if you won the lottery?
4. If you could change your relationship with a family member, would you? If so, with who?
5. What was your favorite game when you were a child?
6. A genie gives you three wishes, what do you wish?
7. What is the funniest/craziest thing you've ever done?
8. What are you the most proud of?
9. If you could relive one moment in your life, which would it be?
10. Why do pajamas have pockets?
11. Ideally, how would you spend your birthday?
12. What's your favorite family moment?
13. If you could invite three people to dinner, living or dead, who would you invite?
14. What's your favorite story about yourself?
15. How do you motivate yourself?
16. What the best thing you've learned in your life?
17. What was the most embarrassing moment of your life?
18. What's your favorite family tradition?
19. Random fact about you.
20. What is your definition of success?
21. If you could do anything besides what you do now, what would you do?
22. If you were a fictional character, who would you be?
23. What is the best advice you've ever received?
24. Do you have any friends you would consider family?
25. What goes up and down but can not move?
26. Have you ever lost a friend? Why?
27. How old were you when you had your first celebrity crush? Who?
28. What kind of superpower do you want to have?
29. Do you believe in astrology? Why?



30. If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
31. In which situations do you laugh and cry at the same time?
32. What are your “long-term” goals?
33. What are your “short-term” goals?
34. What’s the best decision you’ve ever made?
35. Would you rather go through life unable to forget anything ever or unable to remember anything?
36. What is the most unusual place you have fallen asleep?
37. If you had only one sense, which would you want? (sight, smell, hearing, touch, or taste)
38. When was the last time you cried, and why?
39. If you could change anything about yourself, would you? If so, what and why?
40. Who do you admire most in the world?
41. What annoys you the most?
42. If you could go back in time, where would you go?
43. Do you have a work best friend?
44. How do you define beauty?
45. How do you feel right now?
46. What is your favorite sleeping position?
47. What was the best vacation you ever took and why?
48. What was the most interesting place you have ever been to?
49. If you could be an animal, what would you be?
50. If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
51. What song instantly puts you in a better mood?
52. What food do you associate with comfort?
53. If today had a title, what would it be?
54. What’s a small thing that makes your day better?
55. What fictional world would you like to visit for a week?
56. What’s your go-to way to relax?
57. If you had a personal theme song, what would it be?
58. What smell brings back a memory for you?
59. What’s something you enjoy doing alone?
60. What’s a habit you secretly enjoy?
61. What do people often misunderstand about you?
62. What’s something you’ve changed your mind about over time?
63. What makes you feel most like yourself?
64. When do you feel most confident?



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| | <p>65. What helps you feel grounded when things are stressful?</p> <p>66. What kind of support means the most to you?</p> <p>67. What's something you're learning right now (about life or yourself)?</p> <p>68. Who has influenced you more than they realize?</p> <p>69. What do you value most in friendships?</p> <p>70. What makes you feel appreciated?</p> <p>71. How do you usually show care for others?</p> <p>72. What makes communication difficult for you sometimes?</p> <p>73. How do you know when someone is really listening to you?</p> <p>74. What helps you open up to others?</p> <p>75. What kind of feedback is easiest for you to receive?</p> <p>76. How do you react when there's conflict?</p> <p>77. What makes you feel safe in a group?</p> <p>78. What's something you wish people asked you more often?</p> <p>79. How do you prefer to be supported when you're struggling?</p> <p>80. What does trust mean to you?</p> <p>81. What's a challenge that helped you grow?</p> <p>82. What are you more patient about now than you used to be?</p> <p>83. What's something you're proud of but don't talk about often?</p> <p>84. What helps you keep going when things feel hard?</p> <p>85. What does "success" look like for you right now?</p> <p>86. What lesson took you a long time to learn?</p> <p>87. What motivates you when you feel stuck?</p> <p>88. What would you tell your younger self?</p> <p>89. What do you want more of in your life?</p> <p>90. What do you want less of?</p> <p>91. If your life had a motto, what would it be?</p> <p>92. What would your ideal day look like?</p> <p>93. If you could instantly master one skill, what would it be?</p> <p>94. What kind of world do you want to help create?</p> <p>95. What does freedom mean to you?</p> <p>96. What makes life feel meaningful to you?</p> <p>97. If you could give one gift to everyone in this group, what would it be?</p> <p>98. What do you hope people remember about you?</p> <p>99. What helps you feel hopeful?</p> <p>100. What's one thing you're grateful for today?</p> |
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	Instruction "Now, for the last 30 minutes, you will walk together and the same time talk and answer the cards I gave you." The "closing step" ritual (5 minutes) To provide a concrete sense of closure, you can lead the group in this short exercise: <i>"Before we leave the trail, look back at the path we just walked. Acknowledge the distance you traveled - both with your feet and with your thoughts. Now, take one intentional step forward toward our final circle, carrying only the calm you found with you."</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	• When facilitating this activity, the trainer's primary goal is to ensure the movement remains therapeutic and doesn't become a source of stress; tell participants that they can share whatever it feels comfortable for them. • Allow participants to choose their partners if they feel comfortable. However, be ready to step in if someone is left out. A trainer can also pair up with a participant who seems particularly anxious or isolated.
Impact Evaluation	Individual Reflection: • "Did you notice your pace change when you were talking versus when you were silent? Which felt more comfortable?" • "Imagine you left one heavy thought or worry on the trail behind you. What does it feel like to walk forward without it?" • "What was it like to have someone walk beside you without needing to look at you directly? Did that change how much you felt you could say?"



Exercise 3: Using a symbolic web “The forest web – threads of Connection”

Duration: ~ 45 minutes



Goal	To demonstrate how every person’s voice and position affects the whole group, while practicing clear, supportive verbal and non-verbal communication.
Relation to the target group	For youth who have experienced abuse, communication has often been a source of fear, manipulation, or "trapping." This activity reclaims positive communication by making the abstract concept of social connection visible, tangible, and controllable.
Objectives	• To practice cooperative communication: learning how to give and receive instructions in a team; • To build "group attunement": developing a shared rhythm where no one is left behind; • To visualize the "social web": understanding that we are all connected and our actions impact others.
(Step-by-step description)	Setting the container • form a wide circle in a quiet forest clearing. The trainer holds a ball of yarn; • Explain the goal: to build a visible web of support; • Establish the "Ready?" rule: "before you pass the string, you must make eye contact and ask if they are ready." The gift of the word • The trainer holds the end of the string and shares one positive thing; • give participants three options for what to say before tossing the ball: ○ About themselves: "One thing I am proud of today is..." ○ About a peer: "One thing I appreciate about [Name] is..."



	○ About the world: "One beautiful thing I see right now is..." ● The movement: after speaking, the participant holds their part of the string firmly and tosses the ball to someone across the circle. Creating the tension ● Once everyone is linked, the group is holding a complex star-shaped web. ● Trainer: <i>"Notice how every positive word we spoke is now a physical line connecting us."</i> ● Ask the group to lean back slightly together to feel the strength of the web, then lean in to see it soften. (This teaches how group "energy" feels.) Deconstructing the web To end, the ball of yarn is passed back in the exact reverse order. ● As each person receives the ball back, the person who sent it says <i>"Thank you for sharing your strength/word."</i> This ensures a structured, safe "ending" to the connection, preventing the feeling of being suddenly "dropped."
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● You are the regulator of the group's "nervous system." ● If the web becomes too tight and people start to panic or pull away, speak in a low, slow voice. Remind them: <i>"We have the power to loosen the string. Everyone, take one step toward the center. Feel the tension drop."</i> This teaches them that they have the power to de-escalate stress.
Impact Evaluation	After the web is deconstructed, use "Scale of 1–5" or "One-Word" check-outs: ● "On a scale of 1–5, how safe did it feel to be 'connected' to the whole group today?" ● "How did it feel to hear your own voice say something positive out loud?" ● "When you looked at the web we built, did you feel like you were an important part of it?"



Exercise 4: A sense of shared purpose “The shared regeneration trail”

Duration: 60 minutes



Goal	To strengthen a sense of safety, cooperation and positive communication within a group of young people with experiences of violence.
Relation to the target group	This exercise is designed for young people who have experienced violence, exclusion or prolonged stress. It avoids direct disclosure of traumatic experiences and instead focuses on action-based, group-centered activities that allow participants to rebuild trust, experience cooperation and develop supportive group dynamics in a safe and non-invasive way.
Objectives	● strengthen group cohesion and mutual trust, promote positive, non-violent communication; ● enhance participants' sense of agency and participation; ● support emotional regulation through movement and nature; ● provide corrective relational experiences without retraumatization.
(Step-by-step description)	General setup ● The exercise consists of 4 stations, each located in the outdoor environment; ● Set up stations in the way to ensure they are at least 5-6 meters apart, so groups don't distract one another. ● Each station, has papers, pencils and the poster, with short instructions and guiding questions; ● Participants work in small groups (4 groups of 3-5 people);



- Transitions between stations: the group will rotate and every 10 minutes they move to the next station and take their paper with them.

Group A: Starts at Station 1>2>3>4

Group B: Starts at Station 2>3>4>1

Group C: Starts at Station 3>4>1>2

Group D: Starts at Station 4>1>2>3

The trainer opens the activity:

"You have 10 minutes at each station. Each station has a unique poster. First, read the 'Task', then use the 'Guiding Questions' to guide your discussion, and finally summarize your discussion on your paper. After my signal, move clockwise to the next station, taking your paper with you."

STATION 1: Shared safe place

Poster text: *"Safety begins with shared understanding."*

Task: The group discusses what a shared safe place would need to include for *everyone* to feel safe. They can: agree verbally or write/draw key elements on paper (words, sentences, symbols, simple sketch). This is a conceptual safe place, not a physical one.

Guiding questions:

- What needs to be present so everyone can feel safe?
- What should *not* be part of this place?
- Is this place calm, open, protected?
- How do people behave in this place?

Outcome: a shared agreement or written/drawn representation of safety.

STATION 2: Rules that protect us

Poster text: *"Rules help groups take care of each other."*



Task: the group creates 4-6 shared rules that help them feel safe and respected as a group. Rules should be phrased in a positive way (what we do, not what we forbid).

Guiding questions:

- What helps us feel respected in a group?
- What makes cooperation easier for us?
- Can everyone agree to these rules?
- How do we want to treat each other when something is difficult?

Outcome: a visible set of group rules that applies to the whole activity.

STATION 3: Acting together

Poster text: *"Some things only work when we act together."*

Task: the group completes a cooperative task that requires collaboration (e.g. building a structure, transporting an object, solving a practical challenge using available materials). The task should be adapted to the local environment and physical abilities of the group. There is no assigned leader; decisions are made together.

Examples of task:

1. The group stands in a tight circle. Everyone reaches in and grabs the hands of two different people (not the person directly next to them). Without letting go, the group must untangle themselves into a perfect circle.
2. The Floating Stick

Materials: A long, thin, lightweight rod (a bamboo cane, a tent pole). It must be light.

The task:

1. Ask the group to form two lines facing each other.
2. Everyone holds out their two index fingers at waist level.



3. Lay the stick across their fingers. Every person's fingers must be in contact with the stick at all times.

The goal: Lower the stick all the way to the ground.

The stick has a tendency to float upward rather than go down.

The rules

1. Fingers must stay flat (palms down or fingers extended straight). No "hooking" the stick or grabbing it.
2. If anyone's finger loses contact with the stick, the task restarts from waist height.

The trainer: *"the goal of the task is not the final result, but the process"* (to prevent participants from frustration if something goes wrong or they have difficulties to finish the task.)

Guiding questions:

- How did we communicate during the task?
- What helped us cooperate?
- How did we include everyone?

Outcome: A shared experience of cooperation and mutual reliance.

STATION 4: group symbol

Poster text: *"What we build together stays with us."*

Task: the group creates a symbol of their group, choosing one option: draw it on paper or create it from natural objects.

Participants choose the form that feels most comfortable for the group.

Guiding questions:

- What does this symbol say about us as a group?
- What helps us stay connected?



	Once all groups have visited all four stations, bring everyone back to a central circle. Each group present what they created and discuss in the circle; Trainer summarises the activity: <i>"You have defined safety, set rules, worked together, and created a symbol. Look around-which of these four stations felt the most important for your group today?"</i>
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● Focus on group processes, not individual stories. ● Observe energy levels and offer breaks when needed. ● Use simple language and clear instructions.
Impact Evaluation	Group self-rating at the beginning and end: <i>"How connected do we feel as a group?" (scale 0–10)</i> Short closing reflection: one word or sentence about what participants take with them.

Exercise 5: Circle of Understanding “The Empathy Circle”

Duration: 20 minutes



Goal	The primary goal is to show participants that their private struggles, fears, or stresses are often shared by others. When someone steps into the circle and sees five other people already there, the psychological "weight" of that struggle decreases. It replaces "I am alone" with "we are together."
Relation to the target group	This activity is specifically designed to respond to the emotional, social, and communicative needs of the target group. Many participants, especially young people and individuals working or learning in group environments, experience difficulties in expressing feelings, asking for support, or feeling



	genuinely heard within a group. These challenges often remain unspoken and can negatively affect group cohesion, trust, and well-being. This activity offers a safe, inclusive, and non-verbal framework that allows participants to recognize shared experiences without the pressure of verbal self-disclosure. By using movement instead of speech, the activity reduces anxiety, power imbalances, and language barriers, making it accessible to participants with different communication styles, confidence levels, or cultural backgrounds.
Objectives	● Promote positive and respectful communication ● Strengthen empathy and mutual understanding ● Build trust and group cohesion ● Increase self-awareness ● Create a safe space for emotional expression ● Encourage a culture of support and solidarity
(Step-by-step description)	Preparation Use a long rope to create a large circle (large enough to fit the whole group). Everyone starts by standing outside the circle, facing inward, forming a larger ring around the rope. As the trainer, lower your voice. Explain that this is a silent activity. There is no talking, laughing, or commenting - only moving. The small "icebreaker" rounds Start with light, low-risk statements to get people comfortable with the physical movement. The trainer says: <i>"Step into the circle if you are a coffee lover."</i> (People move in, look at each other, and then step back out). The trainer says: <i>"Step into the circle if you have ever traveled outside the country."</i> Moving into "shared reality" Now, shift to statements that reflect work or group dynamics without being too heavy yet. Trainer: <i>"Step into the circle if you sometimes feel there aren't enough hours in the day."</i>



"Step into the circle if you find it hard to ask for help when you're stuck."

When people are inside the circle, tell them: *"Look around. Notice that you are not alone in this feeling."*

The deep empathy rounds

These statements target the "hidden" emotions. This is where the "understanding" part happens.

"Step into the circle if you have ever felt misunderstood by someone."

"Step into the circle if you have ever felt like you had to hide your true self to fit in."

"Step into the circle if you are currently carrying a stress that no one here knows about."

Let them stand in the circle for 5–10 seconds. The silence is where the empathy happens.

The strength & support rounds

Always end on a high note to "stitch" the team back together.

"Step into the circle if you are proud of how hard you've worked this year."

"Step into the circle if you are willing to support someone else in this ring, even if you don't know them well."

Final Move

The trainer: *"Now, everyone step into the circle together."* (This symbolizes unity).

The Statements:

1. "Step into the circle if you find peace being outdoors in nature."
2. "Step into the circle if you have a favorite song that always makes you feel better."
3. "Step into the circle if you sometimes prefer to be alone with your thoughts."
4. "Step into the circle if you've ever felt like you had to be 'brave' even when you were scared."
5. "Step into the circle if you sometimes feel like adults don't quite understand what's in your heart."
6. "Step into the circle if you have ever felt like you didn't have a voice, or weren't allowed to say 'no'."



	7. "Step into the circle if you've ever felt like you were the only one going through something hard." (<i>Pause here so they can see they are not alone</i>). 8. "Step into the circle if you are learning how to trust yourself again." 9. "Step into the circle if you have found a way to be kind to others, even when things were unkind to you." 10. "Step into the circle if you have a dream for the future that you are protecting." 11. "Step into the circle if you are proud of how far you have come, even on the days it felt impossible." 12. "Step into the circle if you want this group to be a place where everyone feels safe." 13. "Step into the circle if you believe you deserve to have peace and joy in your life." 14. Final invitation: "Everyone, let's all step into the circle together to show that we are a community that supports one another."
Tips for trainers/ Keeping learners safe	● If you feel comfortable, step into the circle yourself for the harder questions. It shows the group that it is safe to be vulnerable. ● No pressure: remind them at the start: "<i>You only step in if you feel comfortable..</i>" ● If it's a sunny day, try to find a spot under a large tree. The "enclosed" feeling of branches overhead creates a natural sense of privacy and safety.
Impact Evaluation	After everyone steps back out, sit on the grass in a circle and ask these three questions: ● "<i>How did it feel to step into the circle and see others already standing there?</i>" ● "<i>What did you notice about the group that you didn't know before?</i>" ● "<i>Knowing now that many of us carry the same hidden stresses, how can we communicate more gently with each other tomorrow?</i>"



More about project:

Green Serenity

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