



ARTS TOOLKIT



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the ARTS Toolkit for Youth Work

This toolkit supports youth workers in using art as a practical tool for self-expression, emotional well-being, and personal development. It brings together methods from visual arts, drama, movement, and collaborative creation, offering activities that are easy to use and adapt in different youth work settings.

Art helps young people express emotions, explore identity, and connect with others in ways that go beyond words. Through creative activities, youth workers can create safe spaces where young people feel confident to share, reflect, and grow.

The toolkit is organised into five modules, each focusing on a different artistic approach:

- **Module 1 – Visual Arts for Self-Discovery:** drawing and simple visual activities that support reflection, emotional awareness, and identity exploration.
- **Module 2 – Drama and Performance for Self-Awareness:** role-play, storytelling, and performance-based exercises to explore feelings, relationships, and inner experiences.
- **Module 3 – Music and Sound for Emotional Expression:** sound-based activities that help young people recognise, express, and reflect on emotions through rhythm, music, and listening.
- **Module 4 – Dance and Movement for Resilience:** movement-focused practices that build resilience, emotional regulation, and mind-body awareness.
- **Module 5 – Trauma-Informed ART Practices:** trauma-sensitive creative approaches that prioritise safety, grounding, and supportive expression respectfully.

How to Use This Toolkit

You don't need special artistic skills to use this toolkit. Activities focus on process, not perfection, and can be used as a full programme or as standalone sessions. Choose what fits your group, adapt as needed, and combine methods freely.

Art supports young people to express themselves, manage emotions, and build confidence and connection. For youth workers, it offers a flexible and engaging way to support learning, dialogue, and well-being.

Trust your presence more than the method - your openness, care, and curiosity matter just as much as the activities themselves.

INTRODUCTION

If you're beginning to explore facilitation and training skills and are looking for practical tools to support your learning, we invite you to review the implementation training set developed specifically for this project:



MODULE 1

Visual Arts for Self-Discovery



MODULE OVERVIEW

Module Content

This module introduces youth workers to the use of visual arts - drawing, painting, and collage - as tools for self-expression and self-discovery. Participants will explore how these activities can help adolescents reflect on their identity, emotions, and personal stories in a safe and supportive environment.

Why It Matters

Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation and emotional development. Visual arts provide a non-verbal, creative outlet for young people to process feelings, explore personal experiences, and communicate internal states that may be difficult to express through words alone. Integrating art into youth work supports emotional literacy, resilience, and well-being.

What You'll Gain

Completing this module, youth workers will:

- Understand the therapeutic potential of visual arts in youth development
- Recognize how drawing, painting, and collage can help adolescents explore their emotions, identities, and personal experiences.
- Learn why creative expression is an effective tool for building emotional literacy, resilience, and self-awareness.
- Appreciate the role of visual arts within the broader context of art therapy and youth work, linking creativity with psychological and social development.

Youth workers will gain practical strategies for facilitating creative sessions with young people. This includes access to step-by-step activity plans that can be used immediately in youth programs. They will know how to design sessions that engage participants, support different skill levels, and respect diverse backgrounds.

They will also develop techniques for encouraging reflection, discussion, and storytelling through art, helping to ensure that activities are both enjoyable and meaningful. Most importantly, they will learn to observe and support emotional expression through visual mediums, including how to notice non-verbal cues, emotional signals, and themes that appear in young people's artwork.

CORE CONCEPTS

Essential theory:

Visual arts allow young people to externalize internal experiences, facilitating self-awareness and emotional regulation. Artistic creation can act as a mirror for identity exploration, helping adolescents articulate thoughts and emotions they may not fully understand or can't verbalize.

Engaging in visual arts enhances cognitive and emotional integration, young people learn to recognize patterns in their feelings, link experiences to emotions, and communicate these insights to others. Art also serves as a non-judgmental space for processing difficult experiences, reducing stress and supporting mental health.

Why it matters for youth emotional development:

- Encourages reflection on self-identity and personal narratives
- Enhances emotional literacy by naming and visualizing feelings
- Promotes self-confidence and autonomy through creative decision-making
- Provides a safe space to explore challenging emotions and experiences

Connection to art therapy:

- Visual arts are one of the four core directions of art therapy in youth work alongside music, drama, and dance/movement.
- Activities are designed to be therapeutic, reflective, and expressive, not just artistic
- Supports holistic development: emotional, cognitive, and social skills

Case story / short real-life example:

During a visual arts session at a youth center, a 16-year-old created a self-portrait using collage techniques. The layered imagery of family, school, and personal hobbies sparked a discussion about their identity, stressors, and aspirations. Through the artwork, the facilitator observed underlying anxieties and guided the adolescent to reflect on coping strategies.

ACTIVITY 1

Name & Duration

Emotion Mandala - 45 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Emotional awareness and regulation

Learning Goals

1. Participants will be able to identify and label their current emotions through visual representation
2. Participants will practice mindfulness and emotional regulation by engaging in focused, creative activity

Materials

- Paper, markers, colored pencils
- Optional collage materials or printed Mandalas if necessary

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome participants and explain the purpose of the activity: to explore and express emotions visually.
- Introduce the concept of a mandala: a circular, balanced design often used for reflection and mindfulness.
- Remind the group that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to create a mandala - it is more about personal expression.

2. Reflection and Emotional Awareness (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to take a moment to reflect on how they are feeling right now. You can use prompts such as:
“What emotions are strongest for you today?”
“Are there feelings you have been holding inside?”
- Encourage participants to quietly identify 3–5 key emotions they want to express.

3. **Creating the Mandala** (25 minutes)

- Provide each participant with a template or a blank sheet of paper to create their own mandala.
- Instruct them to assign a color, shape, or symbol to each emotion they identified.
- Circulate gently, observing without interrupting, and offer guidance if someone is unsure how to start.

4. **Sharing and Reflection** (5–10 minutes)

- Invite participants to share their mandalas with the group, if they feel comfortable.
- Facilitate a brief discussion:
 - “Which emotions were easiest to represent?”
 - “Did anything surprise you while creating your mandala?”
- Highlight that sharing is optional and respecting privacy is important.

5. **Closure** (2–5 minutes)

- Conclude by summarizing the purpose: self-awareness, mindfulness, and emotional regulation through creative expression.
- Encourage participants to take their mandalas home or keep them as a reference for reflecting on future emotions.

Variations

Low-Resource / Time-Limited Version (25–30 minutes):

- Use a blank sheet of paper or notebook instead of a circular template.
- Ask participants to draw a simple circle or freeform shapes to represent emotions.
- Use whatever materials are available - pens, pencils, or even digital drawing apps.
- Skip the optional sharing circle; participants can reflect individually in writing or by journaling next to their drawing.

Reflection Prompts

How did creating the mandala feel? Which emotions were easiest or hardest to express?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Encourage individual pacing; allow each participant to work slowly or quickly based on their comfort level.
- Observe non-verbal cues of emotional difficulty, such as withdrawing, sudden silence, restlessness, or frustration.
- Offer gentle guidance without interpreting the artwork for the participant.
- Use open, non-leading questions like “How was this process for you?” or “Is there anything you’d like to share about your colors or shapes?”
- Create a calm atmosphere with minimal pressure -remind participants that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to create a mandala.
- Make sharing optional to respect privacy and emotional boundaries.

Tips for Facilitators

Allow participants to skip sections if uncomfortable; ensure a supportive discussion environment.

ACTIVITY 2

Name & Duration

My Shield - 40 to 60 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Self-esteem, resilience, identity awareness

Learning Goals

1. Identify personal strengths and positive traits
2. Boost confidence and self-acceptance
3. Use symbolic design to express one's inner resources

Materials

- Shield template (or blank A4 paper)
- Markers, colored pencils
- Optional: stickers, markers or pens

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Introduction** (5 minutes)

- Begin by explaining the concept of a “strengths shield,” drawing inspiration from traditional family crests, medieval shields, or modern superhero emblems.
- Highlight that shields often represent identity, protection, power, and personal qualities.
- Tell participants that today they will create their own symbolic shield to reflect the strengths and positive traits that help them navigate life.

2. Dividing the shield into 4 parts (10 minutes)

- Provide a blank shield outline (or have them draw one).
- Ask participants to divide their shield into four equal sections, each representing an important part of themselves.
- Walk through the suggested themes, giving simple examples:

1. **A strength I'm proud of**

- Example: a sun for positivity, a mountain for perseverance.

2. **A challenge I've overcome**

- Example: a bridge for transition, a broken chain for freedom, waves for difficult emotions.

3. **A value I care about**

- Example: a heart for kindness, scales for fairness, a tree for growth.

4. **A dream for my future**

- Example: stars for goals, a road for future paths, wings for ambition.

3. Drawing & decoration (20–25 min)

- Invite participants to begin working on their shields.
- Encourage them to take their time and choose materials that help them express themselves authentically - bold colors for strong emotions, soft colors for calmness, abstract shapes for complex feelings.
- Facilitators may circulate to offer support, ask gentle questions (“What does this symbol mean for you?”), or help participants who feel stuck by offering simple prompts or examples.
- Participants may add:
 1. Colors
 2. Symbols
 3. Simple drawings
 4. Short words or phrases
 5. Patterns or borders

4. Sharing round (10 min)

- Invite participants to present one section of their shield they feel comfortable discussing—this keeps the activity safe and pressure-free.
- Encourage respectful listening
- Thank everyone for sharing, whether they shared verbally or simply participated through their artwork.

Variations

Low-Resource / Time-Limited Version (25–30 minutes):

- If printed shield templates or art materials are not available, participants can simply draw a circle, square, or any shape to divide into four sections.
- The focus remains on the symbolism rather than the shape itself.
- Encourage them to use pencil or a single pen if colored materials are limited.
- This version is ideal for outdoor settings, last-minute sessions, or groups with limited supplies.
- For groups comfortable with technology, participants can create their shield digitally using tools such as Canva, Google Drawings, or a simple drawing app on a tablet or phone.

Reflection Prompts

- Which strength was hardest to identify?
- What did you discover about yourself?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Participants should never be required to explain personal symbols, challenges, or emotions.
- Ensure that “sharing time” is voluntary and framed as an invitation, not an expectation.

Tips for Facilitators

- Set up a calm, welcoming space with clear instructions and a supportive tone.
- Encourage participants to work at their own pace—no rushing or comparing artworks.
- Use open-ended questions
- Instead of interpreting the artwork, ask questions like:
 - “What does this symbol mean for you?”
 - “What part of this drawing feels most important?”
- This keeps the focus on the young person’s meaning, not the facilitator’s assumptions

MODULE SUMMARY

Key takeaways:

Visual arts offer young people a meaningful way to express themselves, explore their identity, and understand their emotions. Facilitators should focus on creating a safe, inclusive environment and encourage reflection throughout the session. Even very simple art activities can provide deep insight into an adolescent's thoughts and feelings.

Suggested debrief activity:

After the session, facilitators should take a moment to reflect on what participants expressed and how the activity influenced the group atmosphere. This reflection can help identify new ways to include visual arts more regularly in youth programs.

Guiding questions for future use:

- How can visual art activities support young people in expressing feelings that are hard to put into words?
- Which activities work best with different group sizes and levels of available materials?
- How can facilitators better notice and respond to emotional signals that appear during creative work?

RESOURCES

- Expressive Arts Toolkit Manual – University of Memphis

A collection of expressive-arts interventions for educators / youth workers (includes art, collage, identity work, feelings exercises)

[University of Memphis+1](#)

[Download the PDF](#)

- Art Therapy for Adolescents – ArtTherapyResources.com.au

Free downloadable art therapy exercises specifically designed for adolescents, with explanation of techniques. [Art Therapy Resources](#)

[Download the Guide](#)

- Arts Therapies with Children and Adolescents — Edited by Dafna Regev.

This is a scholarly collection covering visual art therapy, music, drama, dance, and more, specifically in child & adolescent contexts.

[Download the PDF](#)

MODULE 2

Drama and Performance for Self-Awareness



MODULE OVERVIEW

Module Content

This module explores how drama, role-play, and performance can help young people understand themselves, express emotions safely, and build confidence in who they are.

Core elements include:

- Role-play and identity exploration – experimenting with characters to reflect on personal experiences and internal dynamics.
- Improvisation for emotional release – using spontaneous action and dialogue to express feelings safely and creatively.
- Embodied storytelling – turning personal or imagined stories into short scenes to explore meaning, choices, and consequences.
- Presence and confidence-building – developing voice, posture, and overcoming shyness through simple performance practices.

Grounded in principles from drama therapy, applied theatre, and experiential learning, this module offers practical tools that support emotional understanding, social connection, and psychological resilience.

Why It Matters

Young people often carry emotions they can't easily name or talk about. Drama provides a playful, low-risk space where they can experiment with new ways of expressing themselves and explore situations that mirror their real-life challenges.

Using performance-based methods helps young people:

- Externalize feelings without feeling exposed.
- Build empathy by embodying different perspectives.
- Reduce social anxiety by practicing presence and communication in a supportive group.
- Strengthen identity through creativity, spontaneity, and self-discovery.

What You'll Gain

- Facilitate safe, inclusive drama and improvisation activities that help young people express emotions and build self-awareness.
- Use simple role-plays to explore real-life situations in a supportive way.
- Recognize emotional cues in young people's stories, gestures, and performances - and adapt your facilitation accordingly.
- Combine drama with other creative methods (movement, art, music) to deepen reflection, trust, and group cohesion.

CORE CONCEPTS

Performance as Emotional Regulation

Role-play and improvisation give young people a safe way to express emotional intensity without being overwhelmed. Research in drama therapy (Jones, 2007; Emunah, 2015) shows that shifting between expressive action and reflective pauses helps regulate the nervous system, similar to the titration/pendulation described in Somatic Experiencing (Levine, 2010). Acting out feelings safely teaches youth to recognize rising tension and return to calm.

Embodied Self-Awareness and Perspective-Taking

Drama turns inner states into visible gestures, tone, and story. Studies in applied theatre (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Bannerman, 2012) highlight how stepping into a character builds embodied self-awareness—youth notice what confidence, fear, or sadness “feel like” in the body. Storytelling also supports empathy: adopting different roles helps adolescents understand perspectives outside their own, improving social insight and communication.

Confidence, Presence, and Identity Exploration

Performance strengthens confidence by engaging proprioception—awareness of one’s body in space. Research on embodiment (Porges, 2011; Koch et al., 2014) shows that grounded posture, movement, and voice projection reduce anxiety and support a sense of agency. Drama becomes a playground for identity exploration, letting young people try out roles and behaviours without real-life consequences, which supports healthy self-development.

Drama-based methods also provide a structured yet playful way for young people to process real-life challenges. Research in youth theatre and applied drama (Neelands, 2009; Nicholson, 2014) shows that fictional scenarios create enough emotional distance for adolescents to explore sensitive topics—peer conflict, identity struggles, stress at home—without feeling exposed. This protective “as if” frame allows difficult emotions to emerge gradually and safely, supporting resilience, problem-solving, and healthier relational patterns.

Trauma-Sensitive Facilitation Considerations

Because drama activities often involve emotional expression, facilitators should adopt a trauma-sensitive approach. Participation should always be invitational rather than mandatory, allowing young people to choose their level of engagement. Clear boundaries, predictable structures, and opportunities to opt out of activities help create psychological safety. Facilitators should avoid pressuring participants to disclose personal experiences and instead encourage exploration through fictional characters, scenarios, or symbolic storytelling.

When emotionally charged themes emerge, facilitators can support regulation by balancing activation with grounding activities. Brief check-ins, movement breaks, breathing exercises, or reflective journaling can help participants reconnect with the present moment. Maintaining a focus on choice, safety, and respect ensures that dramatic exploration remains empowering rather than overwhelming.

Facilitation Guidance for Sensitive Social Topics

Drama is often used to explore themes such as identity, discrimination, belonging, conflict, mental health, and social justice. Before engaging with sensitive topics, facilitators should establish group agreements around respect, confidentiality, active listening, and non-judgment. Participants benefit from knowing that disagreement is acceptable, but personal attacks or harmful language are not.

When discussing challenging issues, facilitators can use fictionalized scenarios or character-based role-play to create emotional distance while still allowing meaningful exploration. It is helpful to regularly pause activities for reflection, inviting participants to consider what they observed, how different characters may have felt, and what alternative responses were possible. This approach encourages critical thinking while reducing the risk of participants feeling personally exposed.

BEFORE STARTING

One common thing in drama facilitation is that many young people feel nervous about performing. For that reason, it is important to build confidence gradually through low-risk activities. Let's name a few:

Warm-Up Activities

- **Name & Gesture:** Participants say their name with a simple movement; the group repeats it.
- **Mirror Exercise:** In pairs, one person leads slow movements while the other copies.
- **Pass the Expression:** Participants pass a facial expression or emotion around the circle.
- **Tableaux (Frozen Pictures):** Small groups create still images to represent a theme or situation.
- **One-Word Story:** The group builds a story one word at a time to encourage collaboration.

Inclusive Group Work

Use a mix of pairs, small groups, and whole-group activities. Rotate groups regularly and provide different ways for participants to contribute to ensure everyone feels included. Iternative roles such as narrator, director, scriptwriter, observer, designer, or discussion leader allow meaningful participation while respecting personal boundaries. These options support inclusion, particularly for participants experiencing anxiety or sensory sensitivities.

Reflection & Debrief

After emotionally intense activities, use a simple reflection framework:

1. **What happened?** – Describe events objectively.
2. **How did it feel?** – Reflect on emotions, reactions, and observations.
3. **What did we learn?** – Identify learning, insights, or future applications.

End with a grounding activity such as stretching, breathing, or a closing circle to help participants transition out of role and return to a calm state.

ACTIVITY 1

Name & Duration

Mirror to the Inside - 25 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Self-awareness, emotional expression, empathy.

Learning Goals

Recognize and express emotions through simple dramatic gestures.

- Increase awareness of how feelings show up in posture, movement, and facial expression.
- Practice empathy by observing another person's emotional "mirror."

Materials

Quiet room with open space

- Optional: soft background music, printed emotion cards (happy, tense, confused, hopeful, frustrated, calm)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Warm-up (3 min):

- Invite participants to walk slowly around the room, noticing posture, breath, and energy.

Choose an Emotion (2 min):

- Distribute emotion cards or ask participants to think of a mild emotion they often feel.

Shape it in the Body (5 min):

- Ask each participant to express that emotion just through body posture, no words. Encourage subtlety rather than exaggeration.
- Let them freeze in their "emotional shape."

Mirror Exchange (10 min):

- Pair participants.
- Partner A holds their pose; Partner B imitates it as accurately as possible.
- Partner B then describes what the pose feels like: heavy/light, closed/open, tense/relaxed.
- Switch roles.

Reflection (5 min):

- Bring the group together and invite short reflections:
- What did you notice about your own body?
- What did you learn by mirroring someone else?

Variations

- Low-resource: Remove cards; ask participants to choose an emotion from their day.
- More active: Instead of freezing, let pairs improvise a short silent scene based on the emotional posture.
- Shorter version: Do a single group freeze where all participants mirror one volunteer's pose.

Reflection Prompts

- What did you notice happening in your body when you expressed your chosen emotion?
- How did it feel to mirror another person's posture or energy?
- Did the mirrored pose reveal something new about yourself or the other person?
- Which emotions felt easier or harder to express physically, and why?
- How did your body feel after the exercise—more open, tense, calm, or energized?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

Encourage participants to choose mild or moderate emotions and avoid anything overwhelming or trauma-related. Remind them they can pause, soften, or shift to a neutral pose at any moment; having choice is essential. Maintain clear physical boundaries and avoid touch unless explicitly agreed. If someone becomes emotionally activated, guide them toward grounding through breath, reconnecting with their feet on the floor, or noticing the room around them. Normalize all reactions and keep the space well-lit and comfortable to reduce feelings of exposure. Emphasize that sharing is completely voluntary and participants may skip, modify, or stop an activity at any time.

Tips for Facilitators

- Large groups can work in trios or as a full circle; shy groups may prefer subtle movements or quieter mirroring; high-energy groups often engage better with more dynamic transitions.
- Encourage culturally authentic expression rather than assuming how emotions “should” look, and provide seated or simplified options for those with limited mobility.
- Pay attention to emotional red flags such as freezing or sudden withdrawal and offer the option to step aside or observe.
- Close the session with a creative check-out such as asking each participant to share a gesture that represents how they feel now, a single descriptive word, or a slow, grounding breath together.



ACTIVITY 2

Name & Duration

Story in Three Images - 45-60 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Emotional insight, creativity, perspective-taking.

Learning Goals

- Help participants externalize an inner feeling through symbolic images.
- Support emotional regulation by moving between action and reflection.
- Strengthen empathy through observing and interpreting others' "image stories."

Materials

- Open space
- Optional soft music, printed prompt cards (e.g., challenge, support, hope, confusion, change)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Arrival and framing (3-5 min):

- Explain that participants will create a short "story" from their week using three frozen images with their bodies (no acting, no talking at first).
- Emphasize choice and safety: they should only choose a situation that feels manageable, not something traumatic or overwhelming.
- Clarify that the focus is on body expression and observation, not on perfect performance.

Individual Creation of Three Images (10-15 min):

- Ask them to create three body images: the beginning of the situation, the moment of strongest emotion, and the resolution or desired resolution.
- Let them rehearse the sequence slowly, noticing how their body shifts from one image to another.

Sharing in Small Groups (15–25 min):

- Form groups of three (or pairs if the group is small).
 - Person A shows their three images in silence: they move from Image 1 to Image 2 to Image 3 and then return to a neutral standing or seated position.
 - The others simply watch without speaking or reacting.
-

- After A's sequence, the observers first describe only what they saw: shapes, tension, direction, posture, distance, or closeness.
- Then they may carefully offer gentle guesses about possible feelings or themes, using language like: "It looked to me like..." or "I imagined that..."
- Person A can share whether any of these guesses felt close to their experience or not, and add as much or as little verbal explanation as they want.
- Rotate so each person has a turn as the storyteller.

Reflection (20 min):

Invite a few short shares about what they discovered by turning a situation into images, or what surprised them while watching others.

Variations

- Short version: do only two images (emotion beginning → emotion now).
- Low-energy version: participants can create their images seated or using only hands.
- Creative version: allow participants to add one line of dialogue after showing the final image.
- Trauma-sensitive/shyness version: let the participants describe the images verbally without demonstrating them.

Reflection Prompts

- What did you discover about your situation by turning it into images instead of words?
- How did your body change as you moved from the first image to the last?
- What was it like to be observed without speaking?
- Which image felt easiest or hardest to embody, and why?
- How did watching others' stories affect your understanding of their emotions?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

Encourage participants to choose mild or everyday situations rather than deeply painful or traumatic ones.

Remind them they may alter or skip any image that feels too exposed.

Provide grounding options like feeling their feet on the floor or taking a slow breath if emotions rise.

Avoid interpreting someone's images as a diagnosis or assumption; keep feedback descriptive and gentle.

Allow anyone to participate as an observer only if they don't want to create images.

Tips for Facilitators

- Adapt group size by forming circles or multiple small groups to keep all participants engaged.
- Use inclusive language by acknowledging that images and emotions may look different across cultures and personalities.
- Watch for participants who freeze, avoid eye contact suddenly, or appear overwhelmed—offer a pause or a switch to observation.
- Close the session creatively by inviting participants to share a gesture that represents what they're taking away, a word summarizing their experience, or a slow shared breath to reset the space.



ACTIVITY 3

Name & Duration

Walk the Emotion Line - 40-45 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Emotional awareness, regulation, confidence in expression.

Learning Goals

- Help participants tune into how emotions shift and feel in the body.
- Increase confidence in expressing emotions safely through movement.
- Develop empathy through observing emotional expression in others.

Materials

- Open room with enough space for participants to walk comfortably
- Optional: soft music, printed prompt cards (calm, curious, irritated, hopeful, shy, proud)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Arrival and framing (3-5 min):

- Explain that movement often reveals emotional states more honestly than words.
- Introduce the idea that participants will explore different emotions by walking across the room, shifting their posture, pace, and energy in subtle ways.
- Emphasize emotional safety: participants should choose only manageable emotions and may switch to neutral walking at any point.

Exploring Neutral Movement (5 min):

- Ask participants to walk normally around the room, noticing tempo, breath, and where their attention naturally goes.
- Guide them to sense the weight of their feet, the swing of their arms, and the general quality of their movement without changing anything.

Walking Emotions (10 min):

- Invite participants to choose a mild emotion and let it subtly influence their pace, posture, and direction; as if the emotion were a gentle wind guiding them.
- Ask them to switch to a second emotion, then a third, keeping the changes subtle, not theatrical.
- After each emotional walk, ask them to pause in neutral and check how their body feels.

Silent Observation in Pairs (10-15 min):

- Form pairs.
- Person A chooses one mild emotion and walks for a short moment while Person B observes.
- Person B then describes what they saw (without interpreting motives) focusing on movement qualities like speed, heaviness, or openness.
- Switch roles so both participants walk and observe.

Group Reflection & Grounding (10 min):

- Invite participants to share something they discovered about how emotions express themselves through movement.
- End with a grounding breath and a stretch, inviting everyone to return to neutral presence.

Variations

- Add a short freeze moment where participants hold their emotional pose.
- Explore emotions through seated gestures or hand movements.

Reflection Prompts

- What changed in your body when you walked with each emotion?
- Which emotion felt most natural to express, and which felt more difficult?
- How did it feel to be observed while moving through an emotion?
- What did you learn about someone else's emotional expression by watching them?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Encourage participants to stick to mild emotions and avoid exploring anything that feels overwhelming.
- Allow anyone to pause, return to neutral walking, or observe instead of participating.
- If someone becomes tense or dysregulated, guide them to focus on their feet, slow their breathing, or orient visually to the room.
- Avoid making assumptions about what someone “must” be feeling; keep observations descriptive and respectful.

Tips for Facilitators

- For large groups, create two or three walking zones to avoid crowding.
- Acknowledge that emotional expression through movement varies widely across cultures and personalities.
- Watch for emotional red flags such as freezing, collapsing posture, or sudden withdrawal; offer a gentle check-in.
- Close with a simple gesture check-out, asking participants to choose one movement or posture that represents how they feel now.



MODULE SUMMARY

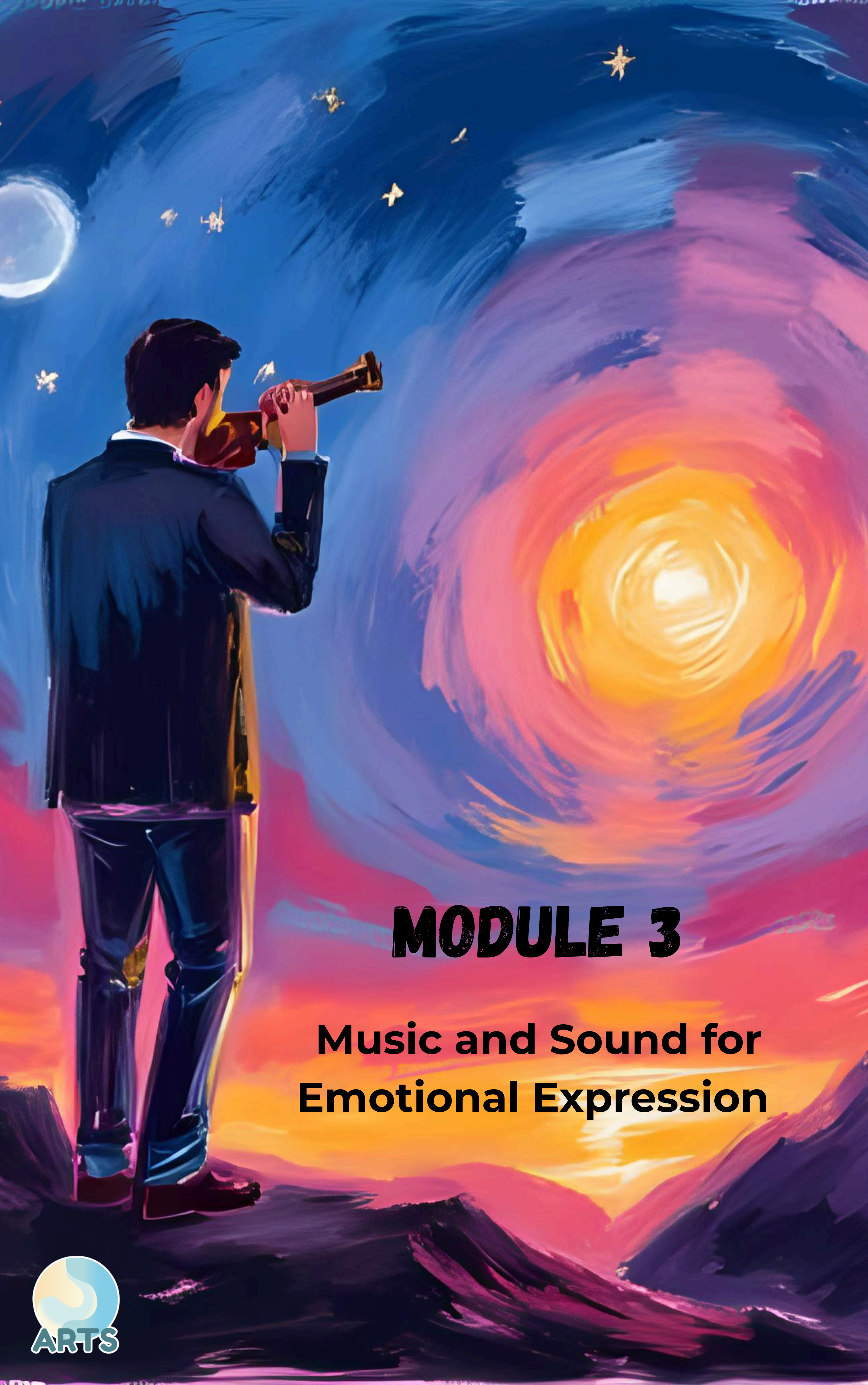
This module introduces performance-based methods (role-play, improvisation, embodied storytelling) as tools for supporting self-awareness, emotional expression, and interpersonal understanding in young people. Through active, low-risk dramatic exploration, participants learn to recognize how emotions are experienced in the body, experiment with new behaviours, and observe themselves with greater clarity. Performance practices help regulate the nervous system by shifting naturally between activation and calm, while also fostering empathy by inviting young people to step into different perspectives. By engaging imagination, movement, and sensory awareness together, the module creates an accessible framework for youth workers to promote confidence, communication, and emotional resilience in non-formal settings.

RESOURCES

- Bannerman, C. (2012). Applied theatre and youth: Young people's experiences. Methuen Drama.
- Emunah, R. (2015). Acting for real: Drama therapy process, technique, and performance (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Jones, P. (2007). Drama as therapy: Theory, practice and research (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Neelands, J. (2009). Structuring drama work: A handbook of available forms in theatre and drama. Cambridge University Press.

Tips for practical resources:

- Resource Document for European Youth in Action Training Courses – a dense toolbox of ready-to-run exercises; includes “tell a well known story in three images” plus facilitation notes you can directly adapt into a module. (SALTO-YOUTH)
- FORUM THEATRE (Guide, EN) – concise facilitator guide with practical pointers on creating scenes, the Joker role, and debrief/closure. (ANPCDEFP)
- Interactive Youth Theater (IYT): Strengthening Peace and Tolerance in Kyrgyzstan – Forum Theater Manual – facilitator-focused manual covering Image Theater and Forum Theater with concrete steps, games, and debrief guidance. (UNICEF)



MODULE 3

**Music and Sound for
Emotional Expression**

MODULE OVERVIEW

What this module covers

This module explores how music and sound can be used as tools for emotional expression, emotional regulation, and connection in youth work. It introduces accessible ways to incorporate musical activities—including rhythm exercises, soundscapes, vocal work, and listening sessions—into non-formal settings, regardless of participants' musical background or ability. The module also integrates principles from music therapy and participatory arts, emphasizing the value of sound as a non-verbal, inclusive medium for self-expression.

Why this topic matters in youth work

Adolescents often struggle to express emotions verbally or directly. Music offers a universal, culturally resonant language through which young people can externalize and explore complex feelings. In non-formal education, using music and sound-based activities can create emotionally safe spaces, promote peer empathy, and foster a sense of belonging—especially for those who find it difficult to engage through traditional verbal or written methods. This approach also supports emotional literacy, stress reduction, and confidence-building in diverse youth populations.

What outcomes youth workers can expect

By the end of this module, youth workers will:

- Understand the emotional potential of music and sound in youth development
- Be able to facilitate simple music-based activities that promote self-expression and emotional awareness
- Learn how to adapt sound-based methods for different emotional states, group dynamics, and individual needs
- Gain tools to use rhythm, voice, and soundscapes for building trust, reflection, and group cohesion
- Feel more confident using music as a low-barrier, creative method even without formal musical training

CORE CONCEPTS

The Power of Music in Youth Work

Music is one of the most universal and emotionally resonant forms of human expression. Unlike language or visual imagery, it bypasses the need for interpretation and speaks directly to the body and emotions. From lullabies to protest songs, music helps us express, regulate, and connect—across cultures, generations, and personal experiences.

In adolescence, when young people often face heightened emotional experiences and identity struggles, music becomes a core part of how they make sense of themselves and the world around them. Whether through personal playlists, shared musical interests, or casual humming and drumming, young people are already using music as a way of expressing what they may not yet be able to say.

Why Music Matters for Emotional Development

In non-formal education and youth work, emotional development includes:

- Recognising and naming emotions
- Learning how to regulate emotions in healthy ways
- Building emotional vocabulary and self-awareness
- Developing empathy and understanding others' feelings

Music supports all these areas in ways that are low-barrier, creative, and often non-verbal. For youth who find it difficult to talk about how they feel—due to emotional overwhelm, trauma, neurodiversity, or cultural norms—music offers a route into emotional exploration without direct confrontation.

Through musical activities, youth can:

- Externalize internal emotions (e.g., using sound to represent sadness or joy)
- Observe how different sounds affect their mood or energy
- Recognize emotional resonance in others' musical choices
- Build confidence in sharing their feelings in symbolic, non-direct ways

Research in music therapy has shown that rhythm and melody can help regulate stress responses, improve mood, and promote social bonding. Music activates the brain's limbic system (emotion), motor cortex (movement), and prefrontal cortex (reflection), offering a full-bodied emotional learning experience.

CORE CONCEPTS

How It Connects to Art Therapy and Creative Youth Work

This module is grounded in principles from participatory music therapy, art therapy, and experiential learning. In contrast to performance-based music education, this approach focuses on:

- Process over product – the goal is not to create a polished song, but to explore emotions
- Participation over perfection – youth do not need to be “musical” to benefit
- Expression over explanation – feelings are expressed through sound, not analysis

In art therapy, music and sound are recognised as vital components of expressive arts approaches. They help access unconscious material, build sensory awareness, and create emotional safety in group settings.

Sound-based methods are especially useful for:

- Working with youth who experience language barriers or communication difficulties
- Creating inclusive activities for neurodiverse participants
- Offering trauma-sensitive ways to explore difficult emotions without verbal reactivation

As a youth worker, you are not expected to be a musician or therapist. Your role is to facilitate space for creative exploration, listen with openness, and guide group processes with sensitivity and reflection.

CORE CONCEPTS

Case Story: “The Mood Soundtrack” – Connecting Through Music

At a local youth centre, a youth worker invited a group of 10 adolescents (ages 14–17) to participate in a “Mood Soundtrack” activity. Each participant chose a song that matched their current emotional state and assigned it a colour or symbol. The songs were added to a shared playlist, which was then played in the background while the group reflected together.

The youth worker encouraged voluntary sharing of why they chose their song. One 16-year-old said: “This song is how I feel when I have to act like everything’s okay, but inside I’m stressed out.”

Another participant linked a high-energy song to the “mask” they wear at school to seem confident. These symbolic conversations, triggered by music, led to moments of empathy, peer support, and authentic self-expression—without requiring direct emotional confrontation.

The activity was accessible to all participants regardless of musical skill. The youth worker noted that some typically quiet participants engaged more than usual, as the focus was on emotion through music, not verbal explanation or artistic performance.



ACTIVITY 1

Name & Duration

Mood Soundtrack - 45–60 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Emotional awareness, empathy, self-expression

Learning Goals

- Enable participants to connect with and express their emotions through music.
- Promote emotional literacy by naming and identifying moods.
- Foster group cohesion and understanding through shared listening.

Materials

- Smartphones or computers with internet access
- Access to YouTube/Spotify or similar platform
- Speakers or one device with enough volume
- Sticky notes or A6 coloured paper
- Pens or markers
- Flipchart or large surface (wall, board)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Welcome & Introduction (5 min)

- Gather participants and explain that music can be a powerful way to express how we feel.
- Tell them: “Today we’ll explore our feelings using songs we already know and love.”

2. Individual Reflection (10 min)

- Ask: “If your current emotional state were a song, what would it be?”
- Participants think silently, then use their phones to search for a song that reflects their current mood.
- Tip: For those who can’t think of a song, offer genres/emotions as guidance (e.g., chill, angry, hopeful).

3. Writing It Down (5 min)

1. On a sticky note or coloured paper, each person writes:
 1. Song title & artist
 2. One emotion word OR one colour that fits their mood

4. Sharing and Listening (20–25 min)

1. In a circle, each participant:
 1. Shows their note
 2. Plays a 30–45 second clip from their song (ideally via speaker)
 3. Briefly shares why they picked it (optional – no pressure)
2. After each song, the group is asked:
 1. “How did this song make you feel?”
 2. “Does it remind you of something?”

5. Mood Wall (5 min)

1. Collect all sticky notes and post them together on a flipchart or wall to create a group “Mood Soundtrack.”
2. Optionally draw lines connecting similar emotions or colours.

6. Group Reflection (10 min)

1. “Did hearing each other’s songs help you feel more connected?”
2. “Was it easier to show your emotion with music than words?”
3. “How might music help when you're having a hard day?”

Variations

- **Plan B (No internet):** Ask participants to describe or hum their song, or explain its mood/genre.
- **Plan C (Time-limited):** Play 2–3 pre-selected songs representing different moods and have the group choose which best matches them today.

Reflection Prompts

Personal Reflection

- What did your song say that you couldn’t put into words?
- How did it feel to hear your mood out loud?

Empathy & Group Connection

- Did someone’s song make you feel something unexpected?
- Do you feel more connected to others after this?

Self-Awareness

- Did this help you notice your emotions more clearly?
- Has your mood changed since the activity?

Looking Ahead

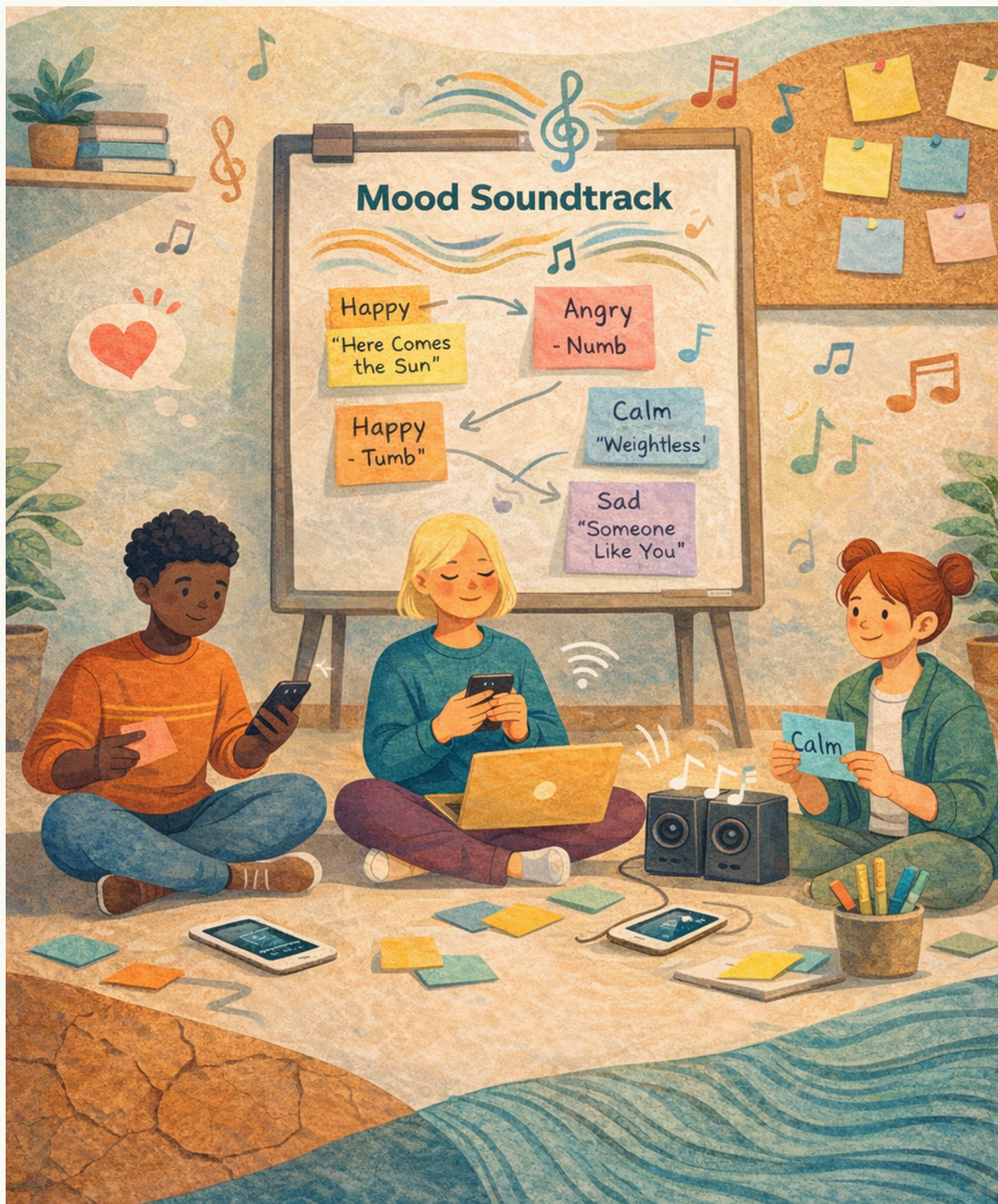
- How can you use music to deal with tough emotions?
- What song always helps you feel better?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Make sharing optional. Never ask “why” if someone doesn’t want to explain.
- Be mindful of emotional lyrics; preview songs if possible.
- If any song brings visible distress, quietly offer support or break.

Tips for Facilitators

- Start with your own example to model vulnerability and fun.
- Be aware of peer pressure—keep the atmosphere light but respectful.
- Use neutral follow-up: “Thanks for sharing that,” not “That’s sad.”
- In larger groups, split into pairs or small circles for sharing.



ACTIVITY 2

Name & Duration

Sound of Emotions - 40 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Emotional regulation, creativity, non-verbal expression

Learning Goals

- Support participants in expressing complex feelings through non-verbal means.
- Build sensory awareness and emotional vocabulary.
- Encourage connection through collective rhythm-making.

Materials

- Any objects that can make sound:
 - Plastic cups, spoons, keys, stones, bottles with rice, etc.
- Optional: hand percussion (shakers, drums, sticks)
- Floor space for a seated or standing circle

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Introduction (5 min)

- Gather participants and explain: “Today we will explore emotions—not with words, but through sound.”
- Clarify: “There is no right or wrong sound—just your honest expression.”

2. Warm-Up (5 min)

- Stand in a circle and clap together in a simple rhythm.
- Try changing the rhythm: fast, slow, soft, loud.
- Encourage experimentation with sounds using only body percussion.

3. Choose an Emotion (5 min)

- Read aloud a list: joy, sadness, anger, calm, nervousness, excitement.
- Ask each participant to silently choose one that matches their current or recent feeling.
- They then pick an object and test sounds that express this emotion.

4. Solo Sound Sharing (15 min)

- Each participant, one by one, plays their “emotion sound” to the group.
- After each, ask the group:
 - “What emotion do you think this sound shows?”
 - “How did it make you feel to hear it?”
- Emphasize non-judgment and active listening.

5. Group Sound Composition (5 min)

- Divide into small groups. Each creates a 30-second soundscape combining individual emotion sounds.
- Perform to each other.

6. Reflection (5 min)

- “Was it easier or harder to express emotions through sound?”
- “Did you understand others’ emotions better through sound?”

Variations

- **Plan B (No objects):** Use only voice, breath, or body percussion.
- **Plan C (Time limit):** Skip group composition and end with solo sound round.

Reflection Prompts

- How did it feel to express yourself without using words?
- Was it easier or harder than talking about emotions?
- Did you connect with someone else’s sound? Why?
- What surprised you during the activity?
- How could you use sound to calm down or lift your mood in daily life?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Use a soft signal (e.g., bell or hand wave) to return group to silence.
- Give quiet options to sensory-sensitive participants.
- Don’t label sounds as “good” or “bad”—just different.

Tips for Facilitators

- Encourage risk-taking and playfulness.
- Avoid guessing the emotion too directly to prevent embarrassment.
- For neurodiverse groups, offer visual emotion cards to support choice.

ACTIVITY 3

Name & Duration

Musical Timeline of Me - 60–75 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Self-awareness, reflection, storytelling, resilience

Learning Goals

- Support youth in reflecting on key emotional moments in their life.
- Encourage symbolic thinking and identity expression through music.
- Promote peer empathy and resilience-building through shared stories.

Materials

- Blank paper (A4 or larger)
- Pens, pencils, or coloured markers
- Access to devices with music (optional)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Framing the Activity (5 min)

- Introduce the activity as a way to reflect on life's ups and downs using music.
- Say: "Music can help us tell our story, especially when words feel too big or too small."

2. Draw a Timeline (5 min)

- Each participant draws a horizontal line on paper.
- On the left: early childhood; on the right: present day.
- Mark 4–5 key personal life moments (can be joyful, challenging, or proud moments).

3. Assign Music to Moments (15–20 min)

- For each moment, they choose a song or describe the kind of sound that fits:
 - "Loud drums – anger"
 - "Calm guitar – friendship"
 - "Sad piano – moving house"
- If they can't name a song, they write a sound, genre, or mood.

4. Optional: Listening Corner (10 min)

- In pairs or alone, participants listen to 1–2 of their chosen songs (using headphones).
- Encourage silent reflection during this time.

5. Sharing (10–15 min)

- Invite volunteers to share one moment from their timeline and the sound/song they chose.
- Allow time for the group to respond with appreciation or related feelings.

6. Closing Reflection (10 min)

- “Which moment changed when you thought of it through music?”
- “What strength or emotion did your soundtrack reveal?”

Variations

- **Plan B (No tech):** Use drawing only—draw symbols, colours, or lines to show emotions instead of music.
- **Plan C (Digital):** Have youth build a Spotify or YouTube playlist that matches their timeline.

Reflection Prompts

- What moment felt strongest when linked to music?
- Did the music help you see your past differently?
- What did your timeline reveal about your strengths?
- Was there a song or sound that surprised you?
- How can music support you through future challenges?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Make sharing optional.
- Check in with anyone showing strong emotional responses.
- Offer a quiet corner for those who need space.

Tips for Facilitators

- Use examples from your own life to reduce pressure.
- Validate each story with simple feedback (“Thank you for sharing.”)
- Emphasize resilience and growth, not perfection or trauma.

MODULE SUMMARY

This module explored the power of music and sound as tools for emotional expression, reflection, and connection in youth work. By tapping into young people's natural engagement with music, youth workers can facilitate activities that allow emotions to surface safely, identities to be explored creatively, and stories to be shared in ways that feel accessible and meaningful.

Through theory, case examples, and hands-on exercises, youth workers gained insight into:

- How sound and rhythm can be used to process and regulate emotions, especially when words are hard to find.
- The psychological basis of musical expression as part of self-awareness and resilience-building.
- Practical, ready-to-use methods for integrating music-based activities in diverse group settings, regardless of resources.

Music is not only a form of entertainment but a language of emotional truth — especially for adolescents navigating identity, social stress, or mental health challenges.

RESOURCES

- “Music Therapy and Other Music-Based Interventions in Pediatric Health Care” – overview of evidence in children/adolescents. (PMC) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6473587/>
- “A Systematic Review of Music-Based Interventions to Improve Engagement in Treatment and/or Mental Health Outcomes among Adolescents and Young Adults” – research on music-based interventions. (PMC) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9666939/>
- “Music therapy for adolescents with psychiatric disorders: An overview” – insights into self-esteem, social engagement, isolation. (PubMed) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35196161/>
- “Art therapy – a unique resource for personal development (Exchange of Good Practices)” – article on art therapy for youth with disabilities and non-formal settings. (teatrometaphora.org) <https://teatrometaphora.org/art-therapy-a-unique-resource-for-personal-development-exchange-of-good-practices/>

MODULE 4

Dance and Movement for Resilience



MODULE OVERVIEW

Module Content

This module explores how dance, movement, and body awareness can help young people feel calm, confident, and connected.

- Grounding and focus – helping young people feel safe and centered in their bodies.
- Body awareness – noticing posture, tension, breath, and energy levels.
- Emotional expression – using movement and rhythm to release or communicate feelings.
- Connection – strengthening trust and empathy through shared, non-verbal experiences.

The module blends ideas from dance/movement therapy, somatic practices, and expressive arts to support well-being and resilience.

Why It Matters

Many young people spend a lot of time in their heads; online, worrying, or feeling pressure to “keep it together.” Movement brings them back into their bodies, where they can notice what’s happening inside and use that awareness to calm or energize themselves.

Body-based practices help young people to:

- Recognize stress signs early (tight shoulders, fast heartbeat).
- Release emotions in healthy ways instead of acting out or shutting down.
- Feel ownership of their body and confidence in how they move and express themselves.
- Build community through shared rhythm, laughter, and creative expression.

What You’ll Gain

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

1. Facilitate safe, inclusive movement and body awareness activities that help young people regulate and express themselves.
2. Use grounding and proprioceptive techniques to bring focus and calm to your group.
3. Notice body cues of stress, energy, or disengagement — and respond with the right activity.
4. Combine movement with other arts-based methods (music, drawing, drama) to promote resilience and well-being.



CORE CONCEPTS

The Body as a Pathway to Regulation

When young people experience stress, anxiety, or trauma, their bodies can become stuck in states of over-arousal (feeling jumpy, angry, or restless) or under-arousal (feeling numb, tired, or disconnected).

According to Somatic Experiencing (Patrick, 2021), movement and awareness of bodily sensations help bring the nervous system back into balance, what's called the window of tolerance.

Gentle, body-based activities like stretching, rhythmic movement, or grounding through the feet allow the body to release tension gradually (a process called titration) and move safely between activation and calm (pendulation).

This balance builds emotional regulation and resilience.

Movement and Embodied Self-Awareness

Dance and movement increase embodied self-awareness, the ability to sense and understand one's own body, emotions, and energy.

Braun and Kotera (2021) found that people who dance regularly feel greater emotional freedom, confidence, and well-being. Movement creates a bridge between inner feelings and outer expression.

Through rhythm, repetition, and flow, the body becomes a source of joy, creativity, and healing, rather than just a vessel of stress or self-consciousness.

This awareness helps young people recognize how emotions feel physically, for example, how anxiety tightens the chest or how relaxation feels like openness and warmth.

Proprioception and Body Awareness

Proprioception, the sense of where the body is in space, develops through movement, resistance, balance, and sensory feedback.

Research (NHS Borders, 2023) shows that engaging muscles and joints through weighted or stretching activities can calm the nervous system, improve focus, and organize sensory processing.

For adolescents, activities that strengthen proprioception (such as mindful walking, slow stretching, or "mapping" their body in space) build a sense of safety and stability within the body.

CORE CONCEPTS

Dance and Movement as Tools for Resilience

Harbison (2020) highlights that dance and movement are natural tools for self-expression, inclusion, and resilience.

Movement allows young people to express feelings without words and to connect with others in ways that feel playful and creative.

When youth are invited to move freely without judgment or competition, they build body confidence, trust, and belonging.

These experiences are protective against isolation and low self-esteem, both of which are common challenges in adolescence.

A real life example

In Braun and Kotera's study (2021) on dance and well-being, one participant described how dancing helped her reconnect with her body after years of feeling "cut off" and anxious.

Through weekly movement sessions, she began to feel a sense of freedom and flow; moments where thoughts quieted and her body felt alive.

She said,

"When I dance, I stop thinking so much. I just feel myself; strong, real, and enough."

This simple but powerful statement reflects what many young people need: a space to move, feel, and exist without judgment.

In youth work, this same approach, using movement to reconnect body and mind, helps adolescents find calm, confidence, and belonging.

By noticing what's happening inside, tension, calm, or energy, they learn to self-regulate and express feelings safely through the body.

ACTIVITY 1

Name & Duration

Mapping your Inner Weather - 45 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Body awareness, self-regulation, emotional expression, and group connection.

Learning Goals

- Recognize and describe how emotions feel in the body (tension, energy, calm).
- Use movement and rhythm to shift between stress and relaxation states.
- Express emotions safely through non-verbal, creative movement.
- Strengthen connection and empathy by sharing movement in a group space.

Materials

- Music player with 2–3 tracks (one calm, one rhythmic, one uplifting)
- Open space for movement
- Masking tape or chalk (to mark “personal spaces” or zones)
- Paper and colored pencils or markers for reflection

Step-by-Step Instructions

Welcome & Grounding (5 min)

Participants are invited to participate at their own pace. Observing, using minimal movement, or engaging through drawing are equally valid ways to take part.

Invite participants to stand in a circle, feet grounded.

Guide slow breathing: inhale 4 counts, exhale 6 counts.

Ask: “If your body had a weather report right now, what would it be; sunny, stormy, foggy?” Encourage them to hold that image quietly.

Body Mapping Warm-Up (10 min)

- Invite slow, mindful movement through each body part; feet, legs, torso, shoulders, arms, head.
- Participants may complete the body scan using seated movements such as wiggling toes, rolling shoulders, stretching fingers, or changing posture.
- Use cues: “Notice where it feels heavy, light, tight, or free.”
- Encourage movements that match the “inner weather” they imagined (e.g., swirling for wind, still for fog).
- No right or wrong way to move; focus on noticing sensations.
- Here you can find a suggestion for a script, please adapt as needed.

Movement Journey: From Storm to Calm (15 min)

- Play rhythmic music. Ask participants to move as if they are expressing a storm; big, expressive, maybe chaotic gestures.
- After 2–3 minutes, fade into a slower, softer track.
- Invite them to slowly bring movements down: smaller, slower, closer to their center.
- End in stillness, hand on heart or belly.
- Ask softly: “Where in your body do you feel calm now?”

Reflection through Art (10 min)

- Provide paper and colors.
- Prompt: “Draw your body as a weather map; where did you feel stormy, calm, or clear?”
- Optional: write a few words describing what helped your body shift.

Sharing & Closing (10 min)

- Invite participants to share a word, gesture, or color from their drawing.
- End with one collective grounding breath and a group gesture — e.g., arms wide open, then down to heart.

Variations

Outdoor: Use natural elements (wind, grass, sunlight) as sensory cues for the “weather” theme.

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Remind participants: “You choose how much to move; small gestures are enough.”
- Avoid forcing emotional expression; focus on comfort and curiosity.
- If someone appears overwhelmed, invite grounding (pressing feet into floor, slow breath, open eyes).
- No physical contact unless explicitly agreed.

Tips for Facilitators

- Model calm, expressive movements yourself to reduce self-consciousness.
- Use inclusive language: “Move in your way.”
- Link back to everyday life: “When you notice your ‘storm’ starting, what movement might help you find calm again?”
- Celebrate creativity; there’s no “right” weather pattern.
- Participants who prefer not to move may imagine the weather shifting internally, use hand gestures only, or express the transition through drawing.
- Participants may choose to share a word, gesture, colour, or simply place their drawing in a shared "weather gallery" without explanation.
- Repeating this activity over multiple sessions can help participants become more aware of bodily sensations and increasingly comfortable expressing emotions through movement.
- As participants become more familiar with the activity, invite them to explore more complex emotional "weather patterns," develop personalized movement sequences for self-regulation, and reflect on changes in body awareness over time. Repetition can deepen emotional literacy, confidence, and participants' ability to identify supportive strategies for themselves.

ACTIVITY 2

Name & Duration

Echo & Flow - 45 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Connection, empathy, trust, and non-verbal communication.

Learning Goals

- Strengthen group connection through shared, responsive movement.
- Explore non-verbal ways of expressing and mirroring emotions.
- Increase body awareness by observing and responding to others' movements.

Materials

- Music player and soft background music.
- Open space where participants can move freely.

Step-by-Step Instructions

Warm-Up: Body Listening (10 min)

Invite everyone to spread out in the room.

Guide a short warm-up: gentle stretches, slow circles of shoulders, wrists, hips.

Ask participants to notice one part of their body that feels most awake and move from that part for a few minutes.

Echo Pairs (10 min)

Begin with mirroring the facilitator as a whole group before moving into pairs.

Form pairs by inviting participants to look each other in the eyes.

- Partner A starts moving slowly in any way (small gestures are fine).
- Partner B mirrors their movement - not perfectly, just following the energy and rhythm.
- After 1-2 minutes, switch roles.
- Encourage soft focus and curiosity: "Notice what it feels like to be seen and to follow."

Group Flow (15 min)

Bring everyone into a circle.

Explain: “We’ll create a shared wave of movement — like one flowing body.”

One person begins a simple movement (raising an arm, swaying, bending).

The movement travels around the circle, each person echoing it.

After a few rounds, invite others to introduce new gestures — one at a time — so the flow evolves.

Variations

- Low-energy group: keep movements seated or subtle (hands, upper body).
- Outdoor version: use wind, sounds, or trees as natural movement inspiration.
- Small groups: try “trios” instead of pairs.

Reflection Prompts

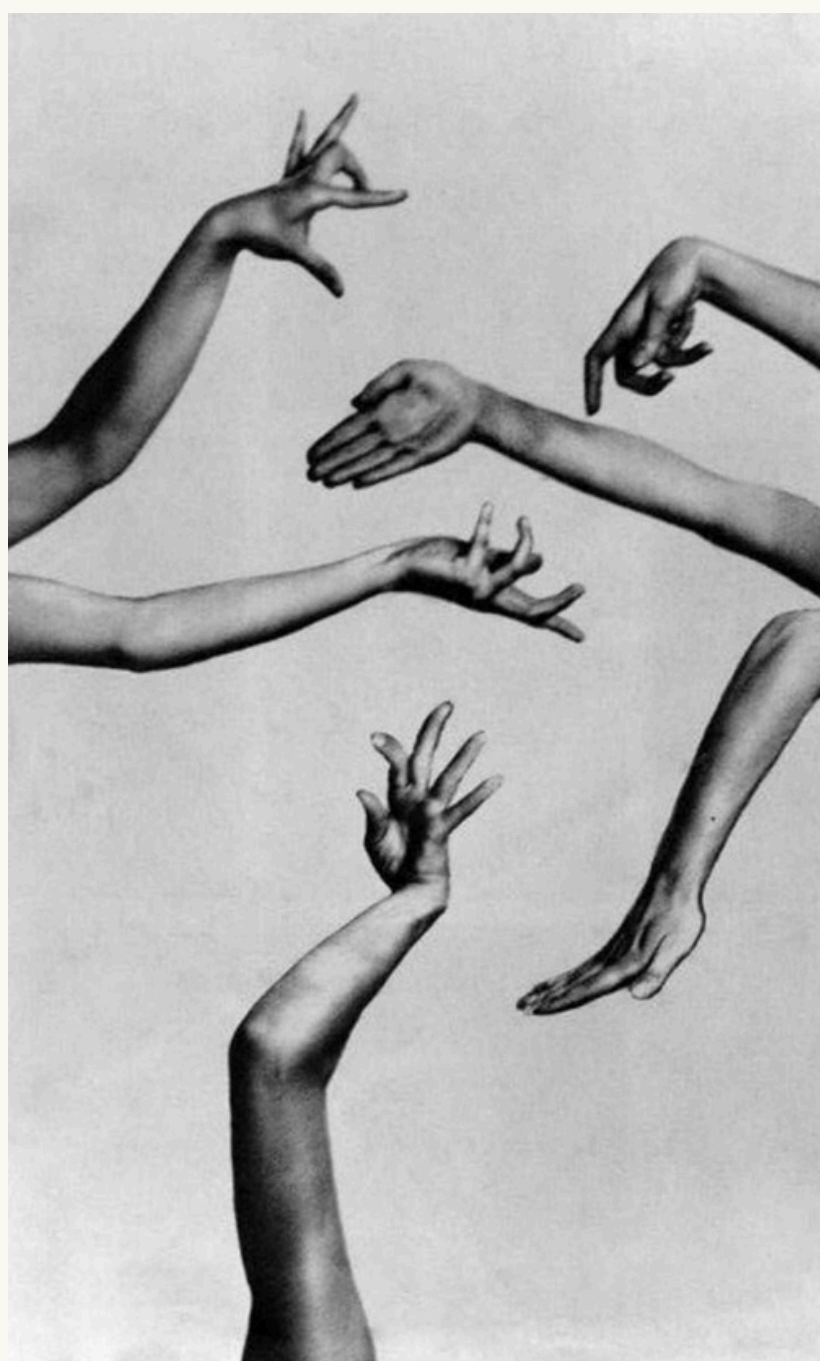
- “What did you notice when leading vs following?”
- “How did your body feel when we moved together?”
- “How does this kind of connection feel different from talking?”
- Invite participants to show how they felt using a gesture, posture, or by selecting an image card instead of speaking.

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Emphasize there’s no right or wrong way to move.
- Allow personal space; no physical contact unless invited.
- If a participant feels shy, they can join by observing first.
- Hesitation, laughter, or reluctance may reflect nervousness rather than disengagement. Normalize these reactions and invite participants to participate in ways that feel manageable.

Tips for Facilitators

- Use reassuring language: “Move in your way,” “Small movements are just as valid.”
- Model vulnerability by offering your own slow, imperfect movement.
- Keep the pace slow at first — adolescents often get silly when nervous; slowness helps them regulate.
- Validate differences: “Everyone mirrors differently — that’s good.”
- If someone feels self-conscious, let them be the observer first.
- Watch for dynamics: ensure the same people aren’t always leading; invite quieter youth to lead gently.
- Keep music low or optional — too much stimulation reduces body awareness.
- Consider revisiting this activity with the same group over time. Familiarity often increases trust and willingness to engage in paired movement experiences.



Source: Pinterest

ACTIVITY 3

Name & Duration

Body Compass - 45 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Grounding, confidence, focus, self-awareness, emotional navigation.

Learning Goals

- Understand how posture and direction influence emotional states.
- Explore movement as a tool for self-regulation.
- Strengthen proprioception and balance through directional motion.
- Create personal meaning through metaphor (North = strength, etc.).

Materials

- Masking tape or chalk to mark N / S / E / W
- Music with a gentle rhythm (drums or ambient beats)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Setting the Compass (5 min)

Invite participants to notice where their feet connect with the floor and take three slow breaths before beginning directional exploration.

- Mark the four directions on the floor.
- Explain the metaphor:
 - North = strength
 - South = grounded
 - East = curiosity
 - West = calm

Exploring Directions (10 min)

Call out directions and movements:

- North – Strength: Stand tall, open chest.
- South – Grounded: Bend knees, feet heavy.
- East – Curiosity: Side twist or reaching.
- West – Calm: Open arms, slow breath.

Encourage noticing emotional differences:

“What changes when you turn to a new direction?”

Creating Personal Maps (15 min)

- Ask participants to explore which direction feels “most like them” today.
- Participants may choose to omit directions or movements that do not feel supportive today.
- Invite them to create a short sequence visiting all four points.
- Encourage personalization: big or small, fast or slow.

4. Group Sharing (10 min)

- Volunteers show their sequence.
- Group reflects with a word or gesture (“strong,” “soft,” “active”).
- Invite participants to stand (or sit) facing the direction they would like to carry with them into the rest of their day.

Variations

- Small room: Use hand gestures only for each direction.
- Advanced: Associate music with each direction.
- Large groups: Rotate small groups between compass stations.

Reflection Prompts

- “Which direction felt most like ‘you’ today, and why?”
- “Did one direction help you feel calmer or more confident?”
- “Which movement or direction would you use again when you feel stressed?”
- “What did you learn about your body or emotions from moving through the compass?”

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- No competition (not “who is the strongest North”).
- Allow participants to skip movements that feel uncomfortable.
- Avoid sudden directional jumps if someone seems dizzy or anxious.
- Avoid interpreting participants' movement choices or emotional responses. Invite curiosity rather than analysis.

Tips for Facilitators

- Keep metaphors simple — teens relate better to meaning when explanations are brief.
- Use direction intentionally: if group energy is high, spend more time in West (Calm).
- Praise creativity over coordination: “Your version matters most.”
- Let youth design alternative meanings (e.g., North = future, South = home).
- Look for emotional cues: slumped posture when facing North could signal low confidence — adjust pace gently.
- Shift tempo based on group readiness; don’t rush transitions between directions.
- Encourage participants to notice whether their preferred directions change across sessions, reinforcing self-awareness and emotional flexibility over time.
- Use humor — directional metaphors become engaging when playful.



source: www.wellbeing4sustainability.eu

MODULE SUMMARY

Many young people today spend much of their time in their heads, thinking, worrying, or scrolling, and can lose touch with how their bodies feel. This module invites them to reconnect through dance, movement, and mindful body awareness, creating space to feel grounded, expressive, and present. Each activity guides participants to notice where emotions live in the body and how movement can shift tension into calm or energy into focus. Youth workers learn how to hold these experiences safely, using rhythm, creativity, and non-verbal expression to support resilience and emotional well-being. In the end, movement becomes more than activity; it becomes a shared language of connection, confidence, and belonging.

RESOURCES

Case story or short real-life example from the references we got before Braun, N., & Kotera, Y. (2021). Influence of dance on embodied self-awareness and well-being: An interpretative phenomenological exploration [Preprint]. University of Derby.

Harbison, E. (2020). Fostering resilience: Connecting children with dance and movement [Undergraduate honors thesis, Western Washington University]. Western C.A.R.E. Digital Commons.

Somatic experiencing and expressive arts therapy to support autonomic regulation in trauma treatment with adults: A literature review [Master's thesis, Lesley University]. DigitalCommons @ Lesley.

Further Readings:

Books: The Art and Science of Dance/Movement Therapy by Sharon Chaiklin

The Body Keeps The Score by Bessel van der Kolk

Other toolkits:

Supporting Resilience: Equipping Youth Workers to Address Trauma from Salto

Cultivating Resilience in At-Risk Youth through Art and Mindfulness from Salto

Websites:

<https://traumahealing.org/>

<https://eadmt.com/sources>

MODULE 5

Trauma informed ART practices



MODULE OVERVIEW

This module explores how trauma-informed art practices can support emotional safety, regulation, and resilience in young people. It introduces accessible, low-intensity creative activities (drawing, color exploration, collage, symbolic imagery, and simple tactile materials) that help youth externalize feelings without reactivating overwhelming memories. The focus is on using art as a grounding, stabilizing, and meaning-making tool rather than a deep therapeutic process. The module outlines core trauma-sensitive principles such as choice, pacing, containment, and non-interpretation, and shows how to integrate them into non-formal educational settings. Youth workers learn what they can facilitate safely and where the boundary lies between supportive creative practice and clinical therapy.

Why It Matters

Many young people carry stress, emotional overload, or traumatic experiences that affect focus, behaviour, and relationships. Art provides a gentle, non-verbal way to regulate the nervous system, helping youth express themselves symbolically without needing to describe painful events directly. Trauma-informed creative methods reduce overwhelm, support emotional stability, and strengthen agency by prioritizing control, choice, and self-paced exploration. In youth work, these approaches help build trust, resilience, and social connection while avoiding practices that could unintentionally trigger re-experiencing or emotional collapse.

What You'll Gain

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

- Facilitate safe, trauma-sensitive art activities that support grounding and emotional regulation.
- Apply key principles such as choice, containment, non-interpretation, and supportive observation.
 - Recognize clear boundaries between non-therapeutic creative support and processes that require a trained trauma therapist.
 - Adapt art-based methods for different emotional states, sensory needs, and levels of readiness.
- Create environments where young people feel safe, respected, and empowered during creative exploration.

CORE CONCEPTS

Art as a Pathway to Regulation

Trauma impacts the nervous system, often creating cycles of hyperarousal (anxiety, agitation) or hypoarousal (numbing, shutdown). Low-intensity art techniques (repetitive strokes, simple patterns, colouring, or tactile materials) activates sensory pathways that support grounding and emotional regulation. Research in trauma-informed expressive arts (Malchiodi, 2020) shows that structured, predictable creative tasks help stabilize attention and soothe the nervous system without requiring verbal disclosure. Neuroscience findings (van der Kolk, 2014) indicate that non-verbal, sensory-based activities can reconnect fragmented emotional states and strengthen the brain's capacity to self-regulate.

Choice, Control, and Emotional Safety

Trauma often involves a loss of control. Trauma-sensitive art practices restore agency by offering continuous choice: choice of materials, colours, pace, and whether to share or not. Studies in trauma-informed care (SAMHSA, 2014; Bath, 2015) emphasize that safety and empowerment are the foundation of healing; not emotional catharsis. In non-formal settings, this means youth workers avoid interpretative questions, avoid pushing for emotional depth, and prioritise predictable, choice-based activities that support stability rather than emotional release.

Symbolic Expression Without Retelling the Trauma

Art allows young people to express internal states symbolically rather than narratively. This symbolic distance protects them from re-experiencing while still enabling emotional processing. Research in art therapy for trauma (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009) demonstrates that metaphor and imagery can externalize feelings safely without forcing memory retrieval. Youth workers can facilitate symbolic expression, like shapes, colours, textures, while steering away from graphic reenactments or probing for meaning, which belong to clinical therapy.

Embodied Creativity and Sensory Integration

Trauma affects body awareness and sensory regulation. Gentle, hands-on creative activities support sensory integration and grounding. Studies in somatosensory art practices (Lobban, 2018; Kaiser & Deaver, 2019) show that tactile engagement helps reorganize dysregulated sensory patterns and creates a felt sense of safety. This embodied approach helps youth settle, focus, and reconnect with present-moment awareness.

CORE CONCEPTS

Boundaries Between Youth Work and Therapy

A key trauma-informed concept is knowing what not to do. Youth workers can provide stabilizing, choice-based, sensory-safe activities but must avoid trauma-processing methods. Research on scope of practice in trauma care (Cook et al., 2017) stresses that untrained adults guiding emotional "deep dives" can unintentionally trigger dissociation or overwhelm. Youth workers can support grounding, emotional literacy, and regulation, while therapists handle narrative trauma work, memory processing, and emotionally intense expression.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Think of the window of tolerance as a river and you're floating down it.
When the river narrows, it's fast and unsafe.
When it widens, it slows down and you:

- Are at a balanced and calm state of mind
- Feel relaxed and in control
- Are able to function most effectively
- Are able to take on any challenge life throws at you

- **Shrink your window of tolerance:**

Stress and trauma can cause your window of tolerance to shrink.

- **Expand your window of tolerance:**

Meditation, listening to music, or engaging in hobbies can expand your window of tolerance.

DYSREGULATION

- You start to feel overwhelmed, your body might start shutting down and you could lose track of time
- You don't feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet

HYPOAROUSAL

- An abnormal state of decreased responsiveness
- Feeling emotional numbness, exhaustion, and depression
- You may experience your body shutting down or freezing

ACTIVITY 1

Name & Duration

Safe Lines, Safe Space - 20 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Grounding, emotional regulation, gentle self-expression.

Learning Goals

- Help participants experience how simple, repetitive artmaking can calm the nervous system.
- Support symbolic, non-verbal expression without touching trauma content.
- Strengthen a sense of safety and control through choice-based creative activity.

Materials

- Plain paper (A4 or larger)
- Coloured pencils, markers, or crayons
- Optional: soothing music, masking tape to secure paper

Step-by-Step Instructions

Arrival & Framing (3 min)

- Explain that participants will explore simple repetitive lines and shapes as a grounding method, not as a way to express deep emotions or memories.
- Emphasize that they can choose colours, pressure, speed, and can stop at any time.

Creating Safe Lines (7 min)

- Invite participants to begin drawing simple repetitive lines, curves, spirals, waves, or shapes that feel comfortable and easy to repeat.
- Encourage them to focus on the physical sensation of the movement rather than on creating a picture or artwork.
- Suggest noticing the rhythm of the hand, the pressure on the paper, and the visual pattern that emerges.
- Allow quiet concentration, offering occasional prompts such as: *"Notice how your body feels as you repeat the movement."*

Expanding or Changing the Pattern (5 min)

- Allow participants to add colours or vary movement.
- Guide them to observe how each change affects their sense of calm or focus.

Closing & Gentle Sharing (5 min)

- Invite one short sentence about the experience (optional).
- End with a grounding moment: feet on the floor, one slow breath, and looking around the room.

Variations

- Short version: draw with only one colour
- Low-stimulation version: draw with minimal visual input
- Sensory version: use soft pastels or charcoal for tactile grounding

Reflection Prompts

- What did you notice in your body while drawing repetitive lines?
- Did any colour or movement feel especially soothing or energizing?
- How did your emotional state shift during the drawing process?
- What was it like to focus purely on the process?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Encourage participants to stay with neutral, non-triggering imagery.
- Remind them they can pause or switch to simple marks anytime.
- If someone becomes activated, guide grounding through breath and body awareness.
- Do not interpret drawings or assign meaning.ell-being and trauma-informed facilitation.

Tips for Facilitators

For very large groups, divide participants into smaller circles or spread them across the room to reduce noise and visual overstimulation.

Working with different moods or energy levels

- If the group is anxious or restless, start with slower, heavier movements such as drawing wider, slower lines to support settling.
- If the group is tired or numb, introduce more tactile materials (soft pastels, textured paper) to increase sensory engagement without intensity.
- If the group feels shy or self-conscious, allow drawing with the paper rotated at an angle so others cannot see it easily.

Use inclusive language acknowledging diverse cultural associations with colour or shape.

Watch for signs of overwhelm and offer breaks as needed.

Close with a simple check-out such as naming a colour that matches their current feeling.



ACTIVITY 2

Name & Duration

Texture Trails - 20-25 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Sensory grounding, present-moment focus, gentle exploration

Learning Goals

- Help participants regulate through tactile engagement and slow, intentional movement
- Support non-verbal self-expression without emotional content
- Increase sensory awareness and grounding through texture and repetition

Materials

- Plain paper (A4 or larger)
- A variety of safe textures: thick paper, smooth paper, soft pastels, crayons, charcoal, cotton pads, fabric scraps
- Optional: soothing music, wet wipes for hands

Step-by-Step Instructions

Arrival & Framing (3 min)

- Explain that participants will explore different textures and how they feel to hold, drag, or press on paper.
- Clarify that this is sensory exploration, not emotional expression, and they can stop or switch materials anytime.

Exploring Textures (7 min)

- Invite participants to choose one texture-based material and make slow marks on the page.
- Encourage noticing pressure, sound, friction, and the feel of the material in their fingers.
- Remind them there is no right or wrong way to move.

Changing the Material (7 min)

- Participants choose a second texture and continue making slow, repetitive marks or trails.
- Guide them to observe how the sensation changes with each material and how their body responds.

Closing & Gentle Sharing (5 min)

- Invite participants to look at the marks without interpreting them and notice their breath or body state.
- End with a grounding moment: hands pressed gently on the table, one slow deep breath, or smoothing the surface of the paper.

Variations

- Short version: use only one textured material
- High-sensitivity version: allow participants to touch textures without marking the paper

Reflection Prompts

- What textures felt most grounding or calming to you?
- How did your hand movement change with different materials?
- What shifts did you notice in your body throughout the activity?
- Did any texture surprise you in how it made you feel?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Avoid intense sensory materials for participants who may be easily overwhelmed.
- Remind participants they have full control to switch, pause, or observe.
- If someone shows signs of distress, guide them to slow their movements and place both feet firmly on the ground.
- Do not comment on patterns or shapes they created.

Tips for Facilitators

Trauma-sensitive arts work is not about being impressive or innovative; it is about feeling safe. Repeat instructions. Keep the structure simple. Give clear beginnings and endings. The nervous system relaxes when it can anticipate what comes next.

A participant may choose red because they like it, not because they are angry. Never assume meaning. The artwork is expression, but sharing is exposure. Youth can express privately without needing to reveal anything.



ACTIVITY 3

Name & Duration

Shared Shapes Dialogue - 20 minutes

Target Emotion / Skill

Connection, co-regulation, gentle communication, non-verbal collaboration

Learning Goals

- Support young people in building trust through simple, low-pressure shared drawing
- Encourage co-regulation by matching pace, rhythm, and gestures with a partner
- Offer a safe alternative to verbal sharing for youth who find communication difficult

Materials

- Plain paper (A4 or larger)
- Coloured pencils, markers, or crayons
- Optional: soothing music, a flat surface or clipboard for each paper

Step-by-Step Instructions

Arrival & Framing (3 min)

- Explain that participants will draw together in pairs using simple shapes and movements, without needing to talk or explain anything.
- Emphasize that the focus is on following and responding gently—not interpreting or guessing meanings.

Partner Warm-Up (3 min)

- Invite pairs to sit side by side or across from each other.
- Ask them to place a pencil on the paper and make a few slow, simple lines just to feel the movement.

Shared Shapes (7 min)

- One partner begins by drawing a small, simple shape (circle, line, wave, spiral) anywhere on the paper.
- The other partner responds with a shape of their own, placed near, touching, or echoing the first.
- Partners continue taking turns, letting the drawing grow slowly like a visual conversation.
- Encourage very slow pacing to support co-regulation.

Switching Roles (5 min)

- Invite partners to switch who initiates for the next round, beginning again with a new shape.
- Allow them to explore mirroring each other's movement quality—faster or slower, heavier or lighter, depending on what feels calming.

Closing & Grounding (4–5 min)

- Partners look at the finished drawing without discussing meaning.
- Ask them to notice: the rhythm of the collaboration, how the pace felt, and if anything shifted in their bodies.
- End with a grounding breath or gentle stretch.

Variations

- Silent version: partners do not speak at all
- Conversational version: partners may softly name shapes or colours without emotional content
- Low-energy version: draw only with fingers in sand or on textured paper

Reflection Prompts

- What did you notice in your body while drawing with your partner?
- How did it feel to respond to someone else's shapes?
- Did your pace or rhythm change during the activity?
- What was it like to create something together without talking?

Safety Notes / Trauma Sensitivity Tips

- Ensure participants choose a partner they feel safe with; offer private drawing if pairing feels stressful.
- Remind pairs that they never need to explain or justify their choices.
- If tension arises (fast movements, pressure, freeze), suggest slowing down or switching materials.
- Avoid interpreting the shared artwork or focusing on its appearance.

Tips for Facilitators

Introduce gentle pairings; avoid putting highly dysregulated youth together.

Walk calmly through the space, offering presence without evaluating. Encourage slow tempo and clear breathing to support co-regulation. End the session with a grounding ritual to close the shared energy.



MODULE SUMMARY

This module introduces trauma-informed arts practices as a gentle way to support emotional safety, grounding, and resilience in young people. Through simple creative activities such as mark making, colour exploration, collage, and symbolic drawing, youth workers learn to help participants regulate emotions without triggering overwhelm.

Key principles include predictable structure, continuous choice, non-interpretation of artwork, and clear boundaries. The module also clarifies what youth workers can safely do in non-formal settings and what must be left to trained therapists. This gives facilitators practical, low-risk tools for creating calm, supportive, and empowering creative spaces.

RESOURCES

- Bath, H. (2015). The three pillars of trauma-informed care. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 23(4), 5–11.
- Gantt, L., & Tinnin, L. W. (2009). Support for a neurobiological view of trauma with implications for art therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 36(3), 148–153.
- Lobban, J. (2018). The role of tactile arts activities in trauma recovery. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 9(2), 203–220.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2020). *Trauma and expressive arts therapy: Brain, body, and imagination in the healing process*. Guilford Press.
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
- SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach – core trauma-informed principles (safety, choice, collaboration, empowerment), the “4 Rs,” and a clear boundary between trauma-informed support and trauma-specific clinical treatment (useful for your scope/limits section). (SAMHSA via NY State Dept. of Health)
- Games & Activities Manual on Trauma-Informed Youth Work (Facing Trauma toolkit) – practical, low-intensity activities for youth professionals aimed at safety, regulation, empowerment and group containment; easy to translate into creative/expressive exercises in non-formal settings. (SolidarityNow)

PEER FACILITATOR TRAINING MANUAL



SUPPORTING PEER MENTORSHIP IN ART-BASED YOUTH WORK

Peer learning works especially well in creative activities because:

- young people feel more relaxed and less judged with peers
- sharing experiences through art feels safer than speaking directly
- creativity grows when ideas and perspectives are exchanged
- peers often motivate each other more than adults do
- collaborative art-making builds trust and belonging

Art-based peer learning encourages participants to experiment, take creative risks, laugh, reflect, and support one another — all of which strengthen emotional resilience and confidence.

Key ways to build peer mentorship in your group:

- Buddy pairs: match participants who support each other throughout activities.
- Rotating roles: let peers take turns guiding warm-ups, choosing music, or proposing creative prompts.
- Shared reflection: peers ask each other simple questions like “What did you notice?” or “What did you enjoy?”
- Collaborative art tasks: pairs or groups create something together rather than alone (drawing, soundscape, movement sequence, short scene).

These structures help young people feel ownership of the learning process.

Effective Communication Skills for Peer Facilitators

Good facilitation starts with communication that is clear, kind, and inclusive.

Use open, welcoming language

Instead of telling peers what to do, invite them:

- “You are welcome to try...”
- “Let’s explore this together...”
- “You can join in any way that feels right for you.”

Ask open questions

These help peers reflect:

- “How did this movement/drawing/sound make you feel?”
- “What stood out to you?”
- “What surprised you?”

Active listening

Show you are present by:

- nodding
- paraphrasing (“So you felt calmer when the music slowed down?”)
- giving space for silence

Respecting boundaries

Not every participant wants to share verbally. Communicate that all forms of participation are valid — drawing, moving, using gestures, or simply observing.

SUPPORTING PEER MENTORSHIP IN ART-BASED YOUTH WORK

Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback

Feedback in art-based youth work is not about judging skill.

It is about supporting self-expression and emotional exploration.

Helpful feedback focuses on:

- effort (“You really explored the movement fully”)
- expression (“Your drawing shows a strong feeling of calm”)
- process (“I noticed how you layered sounds and took your time”)
- curiosity (“What made you choose that color/movement/shape?”)

Avoid:

- criticism of talent
- comparison with others
- correcting someone’s expression

Use this simple feedback model:

1. Notice – describe what you genuinely observed
2. Appreciate – highlight something meaningful
3. Invite – gently ask if they want to share more

Example:

“I noticed how focused you were while drawing. I appreciated the way you used that shade of blue. Would you like to tell us what inspired it?”

This builds trust and encourages growth.

Creating a Supportive Peer Community

A strong peer community helps youth feel safe to explore identity, express emotion, and take creative risks.

To foster this, peer facilitators can:

Set shared group agreements:

- kindness and respect
- no judgement
- confidentiality
- permission to pass
- everyone’s voice matters

Model vulnerability:

Share your own artistic attempts, even if imperfect. Young people follow your lead.

Encourage multiple forms of expression:

Some may prefer drawing quietly, others acting, others moving or creating sound.

Allow diverse ways of participating.

SUPPORTING PEER MENTORSHIP IN ART-BASED YOUTH WORK

Celebrate small moments:

A meaningful gesture, a brave choice, a quiet reflection — acknowledge these. They build confidence.

Practice co-creation:

Shared drawings, group rhythms, collective movement pieces, or collaborative stories enhance connection.

6. Helping Peers Reflect on Their Creative Experience

Reflection is how young people learn from art.

Peer facilitators help the group pause, notice, and integrate.

Simple reflection tools (for any module):

- One word, one gesture to express how they feel after an activity
- Color check-in (“Choose a color that matches your mood now”)
- Body awareness prompt (“Where do you feel the activity in your body?”)
- Pair-share reflection (“Tell your partner one thing you discovered today”)

Reflection does not need to be long — just intentional and safe.

7. Knowing Your Boundaries

Peer facilitators are not therapists.

Your role is to guide creativity, not address trauma directly.

Seek support from a youth worker/adult when:

- someone becomes distressed
- trauma memories or triggers appear
- safety is at risk
- a participant discloses something serious

Asking for help shows maturity and care for the group.

Short Training Exercises for Peer Facilitators

These are quick (10–20 min), experiential, and perfect for a training workshop before peer leaders begin facilitating.

Training Exercise 1: “Reflection Roulette”

Goal: Help peer facilitators practice leading short reflections.

Duration: 10 minutes

How it works:

Prepare slips with quick reflection prompts:

- “One thing my body felt today...”
- “A color for my emotion...”
- “Something that surprised me...”
- “One sound/movement/drawing that spoke to me...”

Each participant draws a slip and leads the group through that reflection prompt.

Builds confidence and presence.

Training Exercise 2: “The 3 Feedback Stones”

Goal: Teach constructive, supportive feedback.

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: three stones or cards per pair

- Stone 1: “I noticed...”
- Stone 2: “I appreciated...”
- Stone 3: “I’m curious about...”

How it works:

- In pairs, each person performs a tiny creative action (draw a quick line, make a sound, do a movement).
- Their partner gives feedback using the three stones:
 - “I noticed...”
 - “I appreciated...”
 - “I’m curious about...”
- Switch roles.
- Debrief: “How did this kind of feedback feel compared to typical critique?”

Training Exercise 3: “Reading the Room”

Goal: Build awareness of group energy and emotional states.

Duration: 12–15 minutes

How it works:

- Facilitator names emotional/energy states (high energy, low energy, tense, distracted, open).
- Participants move around the room showing the state through simple posture or gesture.
- Pause and discuss what cues they noticed (posture, voice, silence, fidgeting).
- Ask: “As peer facilitators, what would you do when you notice these signs?”

This helps them adjust sessions in real time.

Training Exercise 4: “Boundaries in Motion”

Goal: Train peer leaders to respect physical and emotional boundaries.

Duration: 10–12 minutes

How it works:

- Participants walk freely in the space.
- Facilitator calls out prompts:
 - “Find a comfortable distance.”
 - “Show a movement that signals ‘yes’.”
 - “Show a movement that signals ‘no’.”
 - “Respect your partner’s boundary signal.”
- Discuss:
 - How did you know when someone was uncomfortable?
 - How can we support safe participation in art/movement sessions?

Perfect for Modules 2, 4, and 5.

Peer Facilitator Checklist

For use before, during, and after a session

Before the Session

✓ Preparation

- I reviewed the activity and understand its purpose.
- I know what materials are needed (art, music, movement space, etc.).
- I checked the space for comfort, accessibility, and emotional safety.
- I'm clear about my role (guide, not teacher or therapist).
- I prepared a simple check-in and reflection method.

✓ Group Safety

- We have shared group agreements (respect, non-judgment, confidentiality, permission to pass).
- I feel ready to hold space for different emotions and expressions.
- I know the boundaries: what I can handle and when to ask a youth worker for support.

During the Session

✓ Communication

- I use open, inclusive language ("You are welcome to try...", "Let's explore...").
- I ask open questions instead of giving answers.
- I listen actively and allow silence when needed.

✓ Group Dynamics

- I ensure everyone has a chance to participate in their own way.
- I keep an eye on the energy in the room and adjust if needed (breaks, movement, grounding).
- I encourage curiosity rather than perfection.
- I avoid judgement, comparison, or correcting someone's art or expression.

✓ Safety & Boundaries

- I respect personal space, especially during movement activities.
- I notice signs of overwhelm or disengagement and gently offer grounding/rest.
- I never pressure someone to share personal stories.

After the Session

✓ Reflection

- I facilitated a short closing reflection (word, gesture, color, or pair share).
- I considered what worked well and what could be improved.
- I checked in with anyone who looked upset or withdrawn.
- I asked myself: "Do I need support or guidance from a youth worker after today?"
- I celebrated small successes and positive group moments.

CONCLUSION

Art has the power to meet young people where they are, emotionally, socially, and creatively. Throughout this toolkit, you have explored how visual arts, drama, digital tools, movement, and collaborative creation can support self-expression, emotional regulation, and connection. These approaches remind us that learning and growth do not always come from discussion alone, but often from doing, feeling, and creating together.

As a youth worker, your role is central in shaping these experiences. By offering creative spaces that are safe, inclusive, and flexible, you allow young people to explore identity, emotions, and relationships in ways that feel natural and meaningful to them. The activities in this toolkit are not about artistic skill or perfect outcomes, but about process, curiosity, experimentation, and reflection.

This toolkit is designed to support you in adapting art-based methods to your own context. You can use the modules as a structured programme, select individual activities, or combine ideas across sections. Trust your instincts, observe your group, and adjust the pace and approach as needed. Even simple creative moments can open powerful conversations and strengthen resilience.

Most importantly, remember that your presence, openness, and willingness to learn alongside young people matter just as much as the tools you use. By choosing creativity as a pathway, you help young people feel seen, heard, and supported, and that is where meaningful change begins.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We hope this toolkit has inspired you with practical, creative, and meaningful ways to support young people's self-expression, resilience, and personal growth through art. The activities and approaches shared here are designed to be flexible, accessible, and grounded in real youth work practice, supporting self-awareness, emotional expression, and connection through creative processes.

This toolkit was developed through a collaborative and co-creative process, shaped by the shared experiences, knowledge, and commitment of all partner organisations involved. The consortium brought together youth work, education, coaching, and creative expertise from different European countries, ensuring that the content reflects diverse contexts and real needs across communities.

The project was implemented by a consortium of organisations from Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria, working closely together to exchange good practices and co-design this resource. Each partner contributed their unique perspective, strengthening the toolkit through collaboration and mutual learning.

The project was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme (KA2 – Strategic Partnerships), supporting cooperation, innovation, and the development of quality resources in youth work across Europe. This European framework made it possible to create a shared space for learning, creativity, and youth empowerment.

This toolkit is not only a resource, but a companion in your work with young people. Thank you for your dedication, care, and creativity, and for choosing art as a pathway to connection, resilience, and positive change.



PARTNERS



YOMN - Youth Matters Now

 www.youthmattersnow.org

IG: @youthmattersnow



YYSK - Youthfully Yours Slovakia

 www.youthfullyyours.sk

IG: @youthfullyyourssk



CBA - Coaching Bulgaria Association

 www.coachingbulgaria.com

IG: @coachingbulgariaassociation



COMP - CompEDX

IG: @compedx



SMART - Smart Institute

IG: @smart_idea_slovenia

