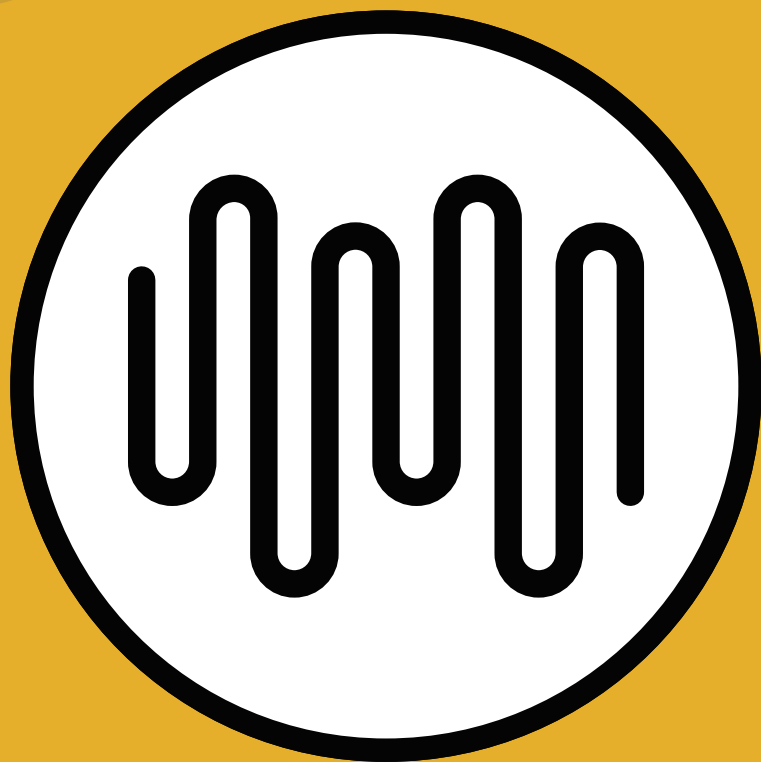


# Manual

for youth workers on  
**mental health topics**





# **Manual**

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mental health topics**

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This publication was prepared with the support of the European Union (EU). Its content is the sole responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the EU. The manual was created within the framework of the project “MindSpace: Mental Health in Youth Work” coordinated by the civic association Inprocess (Serbia), with the support of project partners: Ekvalis (North Macedonia), Roter Baum (Germany), Center Zvezda (Serbia) and Moj Krug (Serbia).

For the sake of clarity and easier reading, the authors of this manual use the general masculine, which is common in the Serbian language. We state that we explicitly address all gender identities, without any discrimination.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the creation of this manual, especially the young people and youth workers, leaders and peer mentors who participated in focus groups and shared their opinions and experiences with us on ways to work with at-risk youth. We owe special thanks to the members of the Project Team and the participants of the training organized within the framework of the project implementation. Their contribution was of great importance for the development of the manual.

Project Team: Ana Milak, Maja Josić, Tihomir Velikinac, Angel Dimitrievski, Tatjana Dražilović, Denis Čulahović, Elena Chiko

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# Reviews

## **dr. Tijana Mirović, psychologist and psychotherapist**

Based on the premise that understanding one's own and others' emotions is a crucial aspect of good emotional functioning, the Manual for Youth Workers on the Topic of Mental Health of Young People offers a theoretical framework and exceptionally well-designed workshops that provide precise guidelines for working on developing emotional intelligence, self-awareness and literacy, as well as empathy and the skills to accept one's own and others' thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and reality itself. The goal of this program is to train young people, primarily young people at risk, to manage their emotions more effectively, expand their repertoire of communication skills, and acquire new knowledge and skills for developing healthy relationships with themselves and others.

By developing these skills, young people at risk can gain significant resources and counterbalance the stressful and traumatic experiences they have gone through. The development of such resources would also be an important preventive and protective factor for mental health in young people who are not at risk. Accordingly, I believe that the skills that the Handbook develops are essential and exceptionally well-chosen. The selection of topics, the theoretical framework, and the way they are addressed through workshops make a remarkable impression. The topics are well-covered, and the activities are skillfully designed, diverse, and carefully (even empirically) adapted to both young people at risk as future beneficiaries and youth workers as future facilitators.

We know how many young people are at risk, and how few programs are designed specifically for them. We also know how few psychologists and psychotherapists there are, especially those trained to work with young people. Therefore, a program designed specifically for young people, even those at risk, and which can be implemented by youth workers who are not professionals in the field of mental health, is truly valuable.

In conclusion, the Handbook for Youth Workers on the Topic of Mental Health of Young People is an exceptionally important, well-designed, and skillfully crafted resource; a resource for young people, for youth workers, and for all of us. I hope that this handbook and workshops will reach a large number of people and that many young people at risk will have the opportunity to go through it, learn, and grow.

## **Vanja Rakić, Youth Worker and Trainer**

As a youth worker dedicated to improving the well-being of young people, I've had the pleasure of using the handbook "MindSPACE: Mental Health of Young People in Youth Work" in my practice. This invaluable resource goes beyond providing a deep understanding of young people's mental health and the boundaries of youth worker interven-



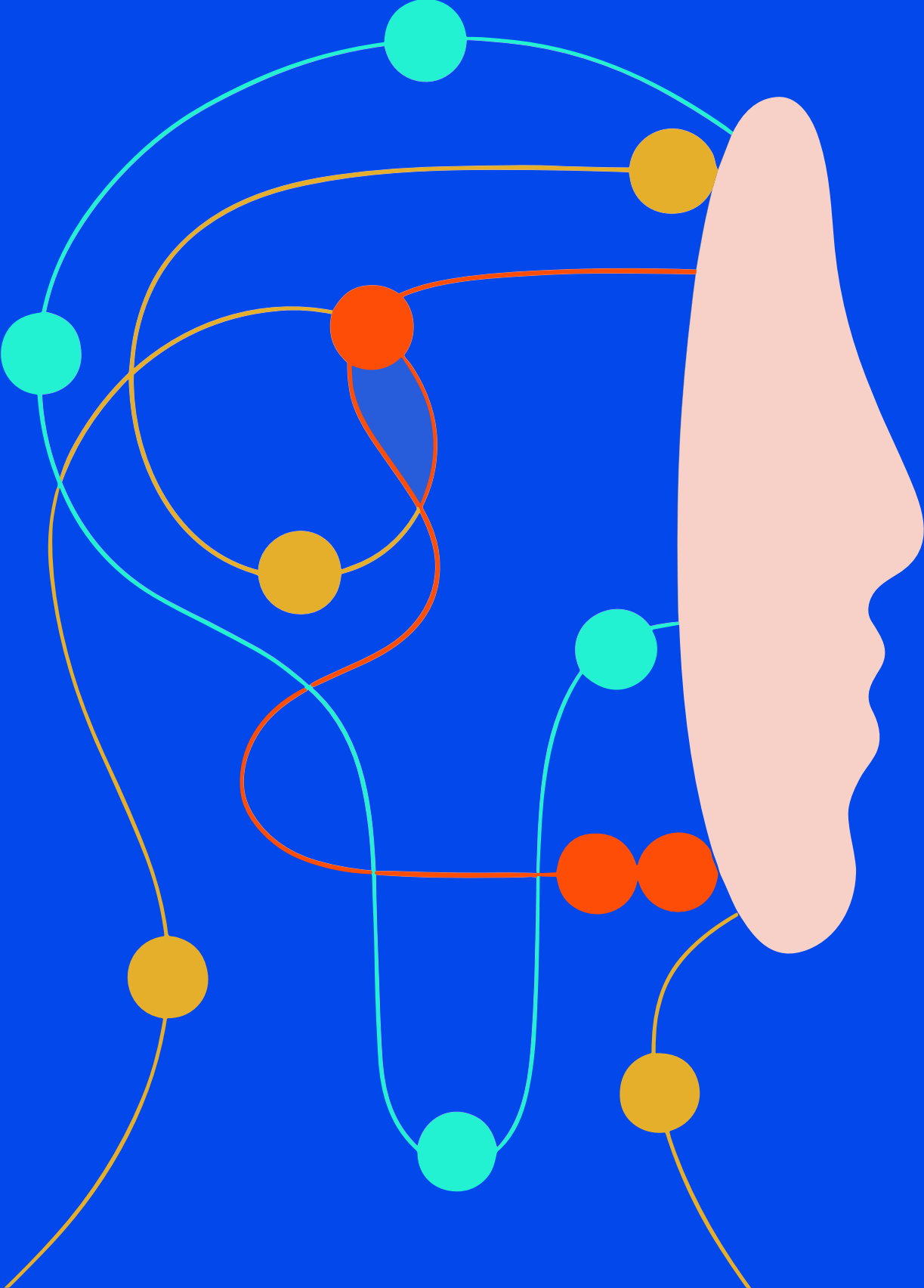
tion. It also offers concrete guidelines and tools for effective work in this crucial area, where access to resources is often limited.

The handbook's structure allows for easy adaptation to diverse groups of young people and their needs. Starting with foundational information about mental health, the author provides clear and accessible information on various risks and prevention strategies. This comprehensiveness makes the handbook a valuable tool for youth workers of various experience levels, and not just youth workers, but also youth leaders, peer educators, and others with experience working with young people.

One of the handbook's most significant strengths is its emphasis on empathy and building connections with young people while respecting the youth worker-young person boundaries. The author recognizes youth workers as key bridges between young people and mental health resources. I particularly appreciate the handbook's approach to destigmatizing mental health topics among young people. Within each theme and workshop, it emphasizes open dialogue about mental health as part of overall well-being, not something to be stigmatized or ignored. This approach is crucial in youth work, where community support and understanding are paramount.

The handbook also offers insights into five thematic areas through ten workshops, each containing detailed descriptions of activities and methods that youth workers can implement in their work. Each workshop requires participation from all present, making them fully interactive and encouraging young people to actively participate in self-help and mutual support processes.

As a youth worker, this handbook has become a key resource in my daily work. Its practicality, diversity, and emphasis on appropriate approaches based on ethical youth work principles make it an essential tool for all of us working to improve young people's mental health. I wholeheartedly recommend this handbook to all youth workers as an inspiring guide to better supporting and understanding young people in the area of mental health.





# Information & Context



# Introduction

**The mental health of young people is a necessary aspect to consider in youth work.** Primarily, this is due to the almost universal characteristics of the period of transition into adulthood, with all its developmental tasks and challenges, social pressures, and academic and career demands. Second, the high prevalence of mental health problems experienced by young people, as well as their hesitation to seek professional help, is recognized (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021).

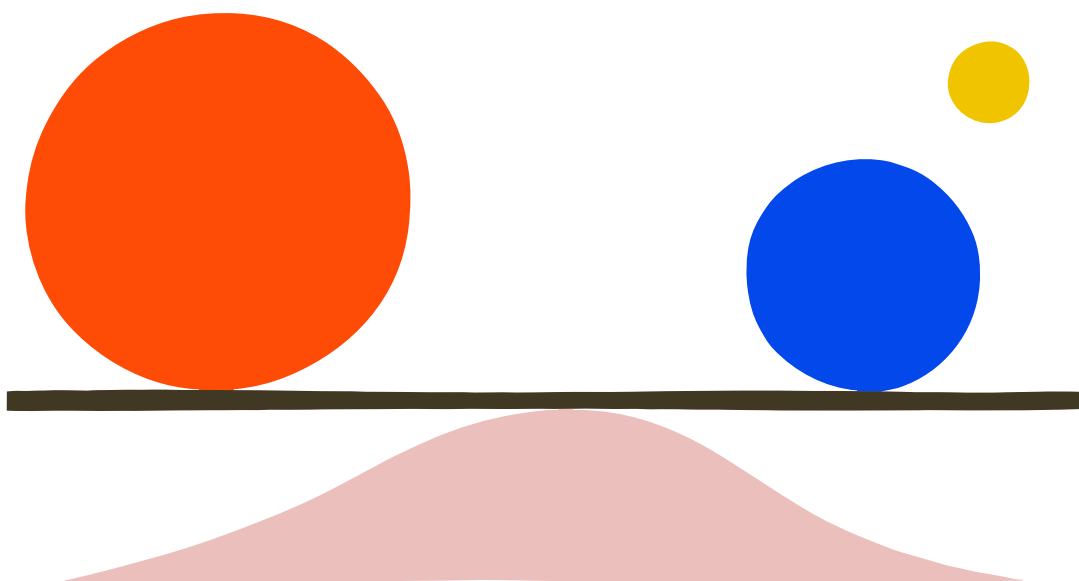
Every young person needs to possess a certain set of skills to overcome the challenges of transition. For those with fewer opportunities, such as youth at risk, the psychological and social challenges are greater and more complex. Their early learning processes has often been hindered by adverse events while growing up, and these important skills have not developed sufficiently. The experience of working with young people in different types of youth programs shows how the lack of these skills among young people, as well as the failure to recognize their importance in youth work, makes it difficult or even completely prevents the achievement of the goals of these programs...

Young people, especially those at risk, face many barriers to accessing professional services. It has been shown that young people are more likely to turn to reliable informal support networks and that young people across all countries value the support of their family, peers and community more. At the same time, most institutions and organizations that work with young people do not have enough resources and conditions to provide continuous psychological support to young people who are at risk. This is precisely why it is important to design a sustainable and easy-to-apply program that can be implemented by non-professionals, peer educators or employees of those institutions and organizations, which will enable continuous work with this group of young people.

**Youth workers**, who work directly with young people and are often in contact with those who are most at risk, could be particularly effective providers of mental health support for young people. If they were provided with adequate knowledge, methodology, and a set of skills, they could successfully respond to the needs of young people. This would facilitate the creation of a supportive environment for quality work with young people, ensuring that any program goal becomes more achievable.

The results of a **survey** which was conducted as part of the project “MindSPACE: Mental Health in Youth Work”, provided guidelines for the creation of this manual. The construction of the questionnaire was based on the results of the qualitative research that preceded it. Specifically, six focus groups (three with young people, three with youth workers/leaders/mentors) were conducted in Germany, North Macedonia, and Serbia. By analyzing the data obtained from a larger number of respondents, it was possible to gain a better understanding of the needs, attitudes, and capacities of young people and those who work with them, as well as common trends and deviations in all three environments from which the respondents come. The survey involved young people from three countries of different ages, socio-economic status, and educational background, some of whom can be characterized as young people at risk. On the other hand, most of the participants in the survey were youth workers, peer mentors and social workers, of different ages and experience, of whom the majority work with young people in civil society organizations, the social protection system, and the education system. This research made it possible to compare data obtained from young people on the one hand, and those who work with them on the other hand, taking into account

the different environments from which they all come. The results of the analysis of this data enabled adaptation of the program to the current needs and capacities of all stakeholders. Seventeen people who work with young people from three countries were then trained on the pilot version of the program, and the methodology was then applied in their parent organizations. The feedback received after this test phase of the program development was used for fine-tuning the methodology and finalizing this manual.



# Context for the manual development: terms, definitions, and approaches

## Youth at risk

**Young people at risk** can be defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 30 who are faced with environmental, social, and family conditions that hinder their personal development and successful integration into society as productive citizens. This term most often refers to young people who are victims of physical or sexual violence, who have dropped out of school, committed violent or delinquent acts, attempted suicide, as well as young members of national minorities, young people with disabilities, and young people from social welfare centers or without parental care. These vulnerable groups of young people are at increased risk of poverty, various forms of risky and delinquent behavior, substance abuse and addiction, and mental illness (Resnick, & Burt, 1996).

It is quite reasonable to assume that the majority of young people at risk have experienced not only one, but several unfavorable experiences such as abuse, loss of caregiver, or neglect during their development. Due to their intensity and frequency, these experiences can be justifiably qualified as **traumatic experiences**. As such, they have significant consequences for the lives of these young people and their later functioning in adulthood. Traumatic experiences of this kind **deeply alter the ability to function adequately emotionally, and therefore affect the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions**.

Adequate emotional functioning is essential for adapting to life in the community and the demands of the society in which we live. Emotions, as an important driver of our reactions and actions and an essential agent of social relations, are a key factor in our healthy and adaptive functioning. The different **aspects of emotional functioning** are unified under the concept of emotional intelligence (as Goleman defines it (Goleman, 1990)<sup>1</sup> with all its components)<sup>2</sup>. Emotional intelligence is an important skill for all people, but especially for young

<sup>1</sup> Although Daniel Goleman (Goleman, 2007) popularized the term emotional intelligence, it first appeared in 1976 in the work of Beldoch and Davitz (Beldoch & Davitz, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Goleman defines emotional intelligence as the capacity for recognizing one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, for motivating oneself, and for managing one's own emotions and relationships.

According to Goleman, emotional intelligence has five components:

1. Self-awareness (The ability to recognize one's own moods and feelings)
2. Self-regulation (The ability to control one's own impulses and moods and think before acting)
3. Intrinsic motivation (The existence of motivation that comes from within the person, not from external circumstances)
4. Empathy (The ability to put oneself in the shoes of another person, to recognize and understand the emotions and behaviors of another person)
5. Social skills (The ability to connect with people, manage relationships, and build social networks)

people at risk. Therefore, skills that contribute to better emotional functioning should be the core part of all programs working with people who have experienced early traumatic experiences.

**The ability to manage emotions** is based on awareness and recognition of one's own emotions and internal processes. Awareness of feelings and sensations within us enables us to understand and control them in an adaptive way. It is for this reason that the entire program for the development of emotional intelligence is at its core designed around mindfulness skills. Through learning and practicing these skills, young people learn about their emotions, how they arise and what their function is, then, how to recognize the triggers for these emotions within themselves or the external environment (such as thoughts and events), how to recognize dysfunctional and unadaptive relationships towards themselves and others as well as more functional and adaptive alternatives. In short, they learn to get to know and cope with events within themselves and have meaningful control over their emotions and social relationships. Therefore, learning mindfulness skills gives young people the tools to become aware of their own emotions and thoughts, to better understand themselves, and to regulate their internal processes more effectively and adaptively, and thus to develop their own emotional intelligence.

## How early experiences shape our emotional world?

“What cannot be communicated to another cannot be communicated to oneself” (Unknown author)

As deeply social beings, we learn to take care of ourselves, both physically and emotionally, through good and healthy relationships with our caregivers. Physical care means that we learn to maintain hygiene, be fed, clothed, and have the practical skills necessary to function in the world around us. **Emotional self-care** involves recognizing our own and others' emotions and emotional reactions, and the ability to manage our emotions. We learn to understand the reality that surrounds us, what is dangerous, what is safe, who is trustworthy and who is a threat, and how to meet our emotional needs. This way, in early childhood, we create our internal experience of the world, which remains very stable throughout later life.

If we feel safe and loved while growing up, we build adaptive relationships with the people in the world around us. We recognize our own and others' emotions, we can communicate them to ourselves and others, and we can react harmoniously. We are also able to protect ourselves and assess who we can rely on, to see ourselves as worthy of care, and to function in accordance with our needs. On the other hand, children who do not feel safe in the first years of life grow up into people who have the experience of living in a world full of danger. Such a world is full of triggers that can trigger their various defense reactions, which can sometimes seem incomprehensible to themselves and to the people around them. Their emotions are strong, unpredictable, seemingly inexplicable, and change quickly. They do not know how to influence their own emotions, and they also show higher levels of physiological stress (increased secretion of stress hormones, reduced immunological factors). As a result of their reaction to various triggers and their inability to manage their own emotions, these children show various types of socially unacceptable behavior from the earliest age, such as impulsiveness, aggressiveness, absence, or even behavior that may seem bizarre. According to some

studies, it is estimated that as many as 82% of traumatized children exhibit this type of behavior (Carlson, 1998).

Just as others do not recognize the real reasons for these reactions, they themselves often do not know what and why they feel and react that way. They grow up not knowing what these emotions are related to, but they still express them, which can be recognized as their anger, rage, insolence, submissiveness, and fear. They mostly try to distance themselves from these incomprehensible emotions, so they resort to various maladaptive strategies such as emotional numbing, alcohol and drugs, risky behavior, avoiding active engagement in their lives and taking care of their needs, their own well-being, and future. The inability to cope with these sudden and strong emotions further worsens the already negative self-image, which again leads to the increase in maladaptive strategies for dealing with these unpredictable and unpleasant emotions.

It is not uncommon for young people to be given various psychiatric diagnoses of attention deficit and behavioral disorders because of these impulsive, self-destructive, and dramatic emotional reactions, and they are sometimes even hospitalized. These diagnoses do not represent a true description of the problems they are facing; rather, the root of these problems is inadequate coping mechanisms for the consequences of extremely stressful and traumatic experiences.

As young people grow and mature, we cannot expect these problems to be spontaneously overcome. The consequences of adverse and traumatic experiences will not disappear. Although the consequences of these experiences are often hidden from consciousness, they have a significant impact on the lives of these young people. For example, overwhelming fear can prevent them from taking sometimes difficult steps into the unknown that will lead to a more meaningful and adequate life. Incomprehensible waves of uncontrolled anger can irrevocably destroy their relationships and, despite their need to connect with someone in a meaningful way, leave them feeling lonely and abandoned. That is why it is important to teach them how to befriend their inner world and live with it instead of avoiding it.

The first and most important step in working with this group of problems is to **teach young people at risk the skills necessary to recognize, understand, and manage their own emotions and emotional reactions**. We can achieve this by teaching them to be aware of, observe, and stay with their bodily sensations and feelings; to feel their own experiences from which they have been running away until now, and to get to know them.

The second important step is to teach them what to do with their own (but also others') emotions that they have learned to recognize. We can achieve this through the skills of acceptance and compassion, which teach us how to deal more healthily with our own and others' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, as well as the circumstances that surround us.



# Knowledge and skills that young people learn within the curriculum

## Emotional intelligence

“Anyone can be angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way—that is not easy.” (Aristotle)

Evolutionary psychology views the emotions of modern humans as the result of natural selection, which has distinguished us from our ancestors, the lower primates. Precisely because the emotions we possess today arose a long time ago (about 300,000 years ago) in the process of natural selection, we can expect that they will sometimes conflict with modern culture and technology (Schultz & Robarts, 2005).

In the distant past, when our ancestors were surrounded by various dangerous animals and insects, such as poisonous spiders, a panic fear of spiders was entirely justified and even adaptive. However, in today’s world, this panic fear (which still persists as an evolutionary legacy in environments where poisonous spiders do not exist) can disrupt the quality of our daily lives to a lesser or greater extent. On the other hand, the emotion of anger, which does not differ much from the reactions of our distant ancestors and which motivates us to protect ourselves when we feel threatened, can be adaptive in certain situations (if it is appropriate to the situation). The quality of our daily functioning and our relationships with others depends to a large extent on our ability to recognize, in both ourselves and others, which emotions are appropriate to the situation (i.e., adaptive for us) and which are not. We also need the skill to deal with emotions (both adaptive and maladaptive) in an appropriate way. The set of abilities that can help us with this is called emotional intelligence by some experts.

Emotional intelligence is defined as **the ability to perceive, integrate, understand, and regulate emotions for the purpose of personal growth** (Salovey and Mayer, 1997). It is also defined as the **capacity to recognize one’s own feelings and the feelings of others, to motivate oneself, and to manage both one’s own emotions and one’s relationships** (Goleman, 2007). Yet another important definition posits that emotional intelligence is “a set of non-cognitive abilities, competencies, and skills that influence a person’s **ability to cope effectively with the challenges and pressures that come from the environment**” (Bar-On, 1997). In explaining their definitions, these authors cite a number of aspects that emotional intelligence encompasses (Bar-On, 1997; Salovey and Mayer, 1997; Goleman, 2007). A few aspects stand out as common, namely:

- **Self-awareness** (the ability to recognize and understand one’s own moods and feelings)
- **Self-regulation** (the ability to control one’s impulses and moods and think before acting)
- **Emotional literacy** (the ability to recognize emotions in oneself and others)
- **Empathy** (the ability to put oneself in another person’s shoes, to recognize and understand the other person’s emotions and behaviors)

- **Social skills** (the ability to connect with people, manage relationships, and build social networks)

Emotional intelligence is not an innate ability (although there are some predispositions for high emotional intelligence that are innate), but rather a skill that is acquired and practiced. That is precisely why this curriculum is designed to develop the aforementioned aspects.

Through 5 thematic units, young people will practice mindfulness skills, learn about how emotions work, and how to make healthier decisions. The **curriculum** for working with young people is designed to develop the skills of recognizing and adaptively managing emotions by addressing all of the aforementioned aspects of emotional intelligence. Starting with the first thematic unit, which is narrowly focused on awareness of one's own and others' emotions (**self-awareness**), moving on to understanding how emotions work (**emotional literacy**), participants learn to manage emotions (**self-regulation**), accept their own and others' emotions and the circumstances in which they find themselves (**acceptance**), and relate to themselves and others with more compassion (**empathy and social skills**). The following part of this manual will provide a more detailed explanation of the aforementioned thematic units.

## Mindfulness skills

■ *"The core of recovery is self-awareness" (Bessel van der Kolk)*

The term "mindfulness" refers to the **awareness and recognition of our internal processes**, that is, the events that take place in our mind and body, as well as the events that take place outside of us, in the external environment. It involves intentionally bringing attention and focus to the "here and now" with a willingness to observe what is happening within us and in the external world in a non-judgmental, accepting, curious, and flexible way. Mindfulness is based on the following principles:

- **Contact with the present moment** – full awareness of what is happening in this moment;
- **Acceptance** of unpleasant emotions, bodily sensations, and thoughts without resistance and avoidance;
- **Learning diffusion**, that is, distancing oneself from and not attaching to unwanted thoughts, beliefs, and memories, which further gives the opportunity to overcome unpleasant thoughts and emotions.

Emotions are primarily a set of bodily processes that we give certain names and meanings to. Anxiety, for example, represents the activation of internal hormonal and neurotransmitter processes that aim to keep us away from some perceived danger. The same is true for anger, which aims to counter threats, or for sadness, which allows us to process losses. Therefore, as such, emotions are felt by the whole body and serve as signals for some kind of action. As mentioned before, traumatized people often do not understand these emotional and bodily processes. They live with bodily sensations that seem unfamiliar and difficult to bear, and in the absence of adequate solutions, they try to hide and escape from them.

The basic way of working with these feelings and internal sensations is to learn to breathe calmly and remain in a state of relative relaxation when approaching these disturbing emotions (Van der Kolk, 2021). Awareness of emotions and the accompanying bodily sensations,

without trying to escape from them, provides the opportunity to change one's relationship with these internal processes. Getting to know one's own internal processes gives a sense of mastery over oneself.

## Biological and social foundations of emotions

■ *"Respect your emotions" (Marsha Linehan)*

Young people often do not understand their own emotions (or the emotions of others), so some emotional reactions can be confusing and/or experienced as inadequate, inappropriate, and bad for them because of their intensity, ease of occurrence, and long duration. Thus, young people may see themselves and others as disturbed, inadequate, or wrong.

The bio-social theory of emotions explains the emergence, expression, and experience of emotions by combining biological and social factors. This theory is based on the assumption that emotions are complex phenomena that arise as a result of the interaction between biological processes and the social environment (Linehan, 1993, 2014).

The **biological aspects** of this theory refer to basic biological factors, such as genetics, the nervous and hormonal systems, which are responsible for the creation of basic feelings and reactions. According to this approach, emotions are evolutionarily developed mechanisms that have played an important role in the survival and adaptation of organisms to our environment.

Biological aspects include:

- **The limbic system:** This part of the brain, including the amygdala and hypothalamus, plays a key role in processing emotions and eliciting physiological responses.
- **Neurotransmitters and hormones:** Neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine and hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol have an impact on the regulation of emotions, stress, and arousal of the organism (also in cases of fatigue and hunger), as well as sex hormones as a result of hormonal cycles.
- **Genetics:** Some genetic factors may predispose people to certain emotional reactions and temperament.

**Social factors** include socialization, social norms, and culture. Social factors play a key role in shaping how we express, interpret, and manage emotions. Through socialization, people learn how to express and control emotions in different situations, depending on social norms and expectations.

Social factors are:

- **Culture:** Different cultures have different patterns of emotional expression and consider certain emotions to be acceptable or unacceptable.
- **Learning and socialization:** Through family, school, and other social interactions, people learn how to cope with emotions, how to control them, and how to recognize emotions in others.

- **Social norms:** The expectations of society and the group play a role in determining which emotions we consider appropriate in certain situations. For example, wearing "cheerful" colors to a funeral is considered inappropriate, while the same clothes at a happy event may be desirable.

By introducing young people to this concept of emotions, young people learn to recognize that the biological foundations are universal, but the expression and interpretation of emotions vary depending on the context and social conditions. This theory contributes to a deeper understanding of how individuals experience and react to emotions and how society shapes that process.

## Bio-social theory as we teach it to young people

The concept of bio-social theory that we use in the curriculum is simplified and adapted from Marsha Linehan's Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), specifically for work with adolescents and young people (Rathus & Miller, 2014). It provides an explanation of how and why some people have problems with emotional regulation and behavioral control. This model of bio-social theory, as it is used in this curriculum, assumes three biological aspects of emotional functioning and three types of social environments that influence emotions.

**Biological factors** include:

1. **Biological sensitivity**, which refers to the sensitivity to stimuli that elicit emotional reactions, and which can come from the person themselves or from the environment. It is reflected in the speed of response and the number of emotions to individual stimuli.
2. **Emotional reactivity**, which refers to the intensity of the experience and expression of emotions.
3. **Return to baseline**, which refers to the duration of the experience and expression of emotion over a period of time. It is reflected in the amount of time it takes to calm down after an emotional reaction.

People who are biologically emotionally vulnerable are more sensitive to stimuli (react faster), more reactive (react more intensely), and take longer to calm down.

**Social factors** refer to the influence of the social environment on the individual, i.e., how the people in the environment relate to the individual. The environment can be accepting and respectful (validating), or it can be rejecting and dismissive, which affects the experience and expression of emotions. The characteristics of an invalidating environment are:

1. **Rejection of someone's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors:** This type of social environment consists of messages that one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are not appropriate, normal, acceptable, etc. It is reflected in statements such as "It's your own fault, you didn't try hard enough" or "Stop crying", "You're just being dramatic", "What's wrong with you?"... Such experiences lead to self-doubt and questioning the normality of one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.

- 2. Ignoring or punishing mild emotions, but giving them more attention when they escalate:** This form of invalidation represents disrespect and non-acceptance of emotions of normal intensity, and respect for emotions of high intensity. It manifests itself, on the one hand, through ignoring and sending messages such as "You're exaggerating, it's not that bad", "What's wrong with you?", and on the other hand, through exclusive respect for emotions after a stormy emotional reaction. The message that the person receives is that only strong emotions can be respected and accepted, which further leads to increasingly frequent escalation of emotions in order to obtain validation. However, the perception of such behavior by others is often not favorable, and the person may often feel rejected, ashamed, and guilty.
- 3. Simplifying and minimizing problems:** Simplifying problems represents invalidation of another person's view of a situation and the emotions that arise from that view. It conveys the message that the solution is simple, that the coping mechanisms are inadequate, that the emotional reaction is excessive, and that the view of the situation is inaccurate. It is reflected in messages such as "It's easy", "It's not that big of a problem", "I would never do that", "You're getting upset over that?!", "Calm down, what's wrong with you?". All of this leads to the experience of one's own way of reasoning and coping with problems as inadequate, without a clear reason why this is the case. As a result, it leads to self-recrimination, self-criticism, self-deprecation, lack of self-confidence, and feelings of shame and depression.

## Managing emotions (self-regulation)

*"The degree of one's emotions varies inversely with the knowledge of facts." (Bertrand Russell)*

The ability to manage one's own emotions is an important prerequisite for good psychological and social functioning. For the purpose of learning self-regulation skills within the curriculum, the metaphor of the three states of mind from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) was used (Linehan, 1993, 2014; Rathus & Miller, 2014). The three states of mind represent three different aspects of our functioning.

The first state of mind is called the **emotional mind**. The emotional mind refers to reactions and decisions driven exclusively by emotions, without the influence of rational and reasonable thinking. Reactions that come from the emotional mind are fast, hasty, impulsive, sudden, and unconstructive, such as fleeing situations that cause anxiety, attacking or breaking something in anger, declaring eternal love when in love, and so on. What they have in common is that they are hasty, impulsive, and thoughtless. Such reactions do not take into account the consequences and aim for immediate gratification of impulses while ignoring long-term consequences.

The second state of mind is called the **rational mind**. The rational mind refers to cold, thoughtful decisions and reactions that do not consider the emotional aspect of functioning. Actions that come from this part of the mind are often useful when doing mechanical, repetitive, and not so meaningful and inspiring tasks that are performed without emotional engagement. For example, looking up a building number on a street, checking the mailbox, watering the plants of neighbors who are traveling, doing copy/paste in Word, or charging the

phone battery. Such actions are aimed at completing routine tasks and activities and do not have emotional weight.

The third state of mind is the intersection of the previous two and is called the **wise mind**. The wise mind equally respects emotions and rational thinking. Reactions that come from the wise mind are slower than emotional ones. They are thoughtful, constructive, and meaningful. The wise mind is often slower because it requires considering both the emotional and rational sides, as well as balancing them. Examples of reactions that come from the wise mind are buying a quality car that we also like; choosing a career that is fulfilling enough and provides enough earning opportunities; choosing a partner who is attractive enough and good for us, etc.

These three states of mind are most often represented by a Venn diagram that shows how reason and emotion together give the most desirable form of mental functioning - the wise mind. Learning this metaphor through experiential exercises actually represents learning strategies for stopping hasty emotional reactions and thinking before acting, i.e., strategies for self-regulation. Participants learn to stop and focus their attention by simultaneously recognizing their own thoughts and emotions when making decisions and choosing behaviors. For this reason, learning the metaphor of the three states of mind is also a form of mindfulness skill.

**Awareness of the different aspects of our mind gives us the opportunity to better recognize our own emotions, thoughts, and urges to act, increases self-awareness, and helps with making adaptive choices instead of impulsive reactions.** Also, awareness of the aforementioned aspects reduces emotional suffering and increases the feeling of satisfaction, helps with making important decisions, enables greater control over thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, provides a sense of balance, and is the foundation for increased acceptance of one's own emotions, self-compassion and compassion for others, and less emotional suffering.

## Acceptance

“Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any unfortunate circumstance.” William James (1896)

Acceptance is defined as the **ability to experience one's own thoughts, bodily sensations, or feelings without the need to engage in attempts to control or avoid them** (Hayes et al., 2013). In addition, it is defined as the ability to accept reality as it is, to accept current life circumstances that are unfavorable and currently unchangeable (Linehan, 2014).

In situations where one's own internal processes or circumstances are unfavorable and difficult to change, attempts at fighting and avoidance require large amounts of energy and time, and rarely lead to the desired results. The experience of self-efficacy and confidence in one's own capacities decreases, and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness increase. The person becomes preoccupied with the problem, trapped in unsuccessful attempts to cope, and develops a negative self-image. A secondary emotional problem also emerges, which represents emotional distress due to the existence of the primary condition (depression or self-punishment due to depression, anxiety or self-punishment due to anxiety, panic disorder, agoraphobia, etc.). All of this further leads to a significant impoverishment of the quality of life. There is a risk that the negative affect will turn into a chronic and long-term problem.

When attempts to control or avoid one's own thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, or circumstances are unsuccessful, acceptance represents one of the healthy alternatives (emphasis on the words "one of" since it is often not the only alternative, but it is often the most effective) (Westrup & Wright, 2017).

Acceptance as a skill is an active choice, a stance that the person is willing to take. And as such, the ability to accept needs to be developed and practiced. It is important to emphasize that acceptance does not mean approval, suffering, or resigned acceptance. On the contrary, these are completely separate viewpoints and can coexist independently of each other. Namely, a person can accept a circumstance but also disapprove of it (acceptance of circumstances that a person approves of is rarely a problem). For example, we can accept that we have problems with frequent heightened anxiety and accept this as a part of ourselves, thereby breaking our avoidance and controlling behaviors. Or we can accept that we have an incurable disease, and instead of avoiding dealing with it, we decide to accept our own limitations and unfavorable conditions as well as the resulting emotions and live in accordance with our values by building a life worth living. We can also accept a circumstance but not want to tolerate it, such as the poverty in which we live, and therefore learn the skills necessary to get a well-paying job. Or depression, which may be a reality at the moment, but since we don't want to tolerate it, we visit a professional who we believe can be helpful.

It is important to motivate young people to consider acceptance as an alternative, but not to insist on it. Acceptance is rarely adopted through didactic learning, but much more effectively through experiential learning. Demonstrating the usefulness of acceptance can have a powerful effect on young people, but it should not be expected, or desired, to completely eliminate previous control and avoidance strategies from their behavioral repertoire. Acceptance should be offered as an alternative that they can consider, and it is up to them whether and how they will use it.

## (Self) Compassion

▮ *"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." (Plato)*

**Empathy** is the ability to put oneself in the position of another, to understand the feelings and behaviors of another person, and to understand why that person feels and behaves that way. As mentioned previously, empathy is one of the important aspects of emotional intelligence. However, our experience in working with at-risk youth has shown that they do not lack empathy, but rather self-compassion and the existence of a rigid and demanding (albeit well-intentioned) attitude towards others. The messages that young people send to themselves, and others are messages that deny and invalidate vulnerability and unpleasant feelings, and call for distancing oneself from such emotions. Unfortunately, although they are often well-intentioned, these messages are generally disrespectful and, as such, have consequences for the psychological well-being of young people and their social relationships.

This attitude towards oneself and others is often encountered in work with people with a history of stressful experiences during childhood. As a result of the internalization of negative experiences with others, there is a high level of self-criticism and a harsh, rejecting, and unaccepting attitude towards oneself (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2006). This negative attitude towards oneself can be extremely punishing and can therefore have far-reaching consequences for both the emotional state of the person and the overall quality of life. Constant

self-criticism is discouraging and sabotages the achievement of life goals, making it impossible to live in accordance with one's own values.

Developing self-compassion is an adaptive alternative to the deadly critical and demanding attitude towards oneself and others. For the purposes of this curriculum, we define **compassion** as the **ability to empathize with others, but also to recognize pain and suffering in others, to have the strength to stay with that suffering, and to be motivated to help the person who is suffering.** In other words, sensitivity to suffering and the accompanying motivation to alleviate or prevent suffering (Gilbert, 2010).

The ability to compassion is an important component of a healthier relationship with oneself, but also of healthier and more meaningful relationships with others. In addition, this ability indirectly represents an emotion management skill, given that self-compassionate communication (with oneself and others) communicates care, affection, and understanding, in contrast to disrespectful communication.

By building their self-compassionate side, young people gain an alternative to the rejecting, punishing, and demanding attitude towards their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, as well as the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of others.

## **Why are these skills important for young at-risk youth?**

In the world of at-risk youth, which is full of various triggers, it is important to teach them to differentiate between real dangers and post-traumatic reactions. Awareness of emotional and accompanying bodily processes makes it possible to stay with a large part of one's own bodily discomfort, as well as to recognize one's own thoughts that occur together with this discomfort, and the need to react to them. These skills allow one to recognize the connection between different thoughts and accompanying emotions and bodily sensations. Recognizing the connection between self-defeating thoughts, accompanying emotions, and the need to react also contributes to mastering one's own internal processes. Mindfulness skills provide space for slowing down and reflection, thus enabling more meaningful and less impulsive, angry, avoidant, or otherwise maladaptive reactions.

## **Theoretical foundations on which the workshops cycle is based**

The workshop cycle for working with at-risk youth is designed so that, through as many experiential techniques and self-discovery as possible, young people learn how to be present in the here and now, how to accept their own emotions, and how to observe their own thoughts. The workshops are designed based on the theory and practice of **Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Schema Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy.** These approaches, which provide a wide range of techniques for learning mindfulness skills, awareness and understanding of one's own emotions, bodily processes, thoughts, and their interconnectedness, have been shaped into the methodology of this manual in accordance with the principles of youth work.



# Curriculum road map

## What, how and why do we teach participants?

As mentioned earlier in the text, the main identified problems of at-risk youth in terms of psychological functioning are non-recognition of their own emotions, lack of skills for managing them, a negative attitude towards themselves, and problems in social relationships. The curriculum is designed to address these identified problems through 5 thematic modules.

Each of the **5 thematic modules** is divided into two workshops with a recommended duration of 90 minutes. Each thematic module can be implemented independently, with two workshops in a row, or two workshops separated in time, depending on the assessment of the facilitator and time constraints. In addition, workshops can also be conducted separately, in accordance with assessments of the needs of young people. However, it is important to note that conducting only one workshop belonging to a particular thematic module, although it may have effects, does not address all of the set goals that the thematic module is intended to address. The highest effects and the best results can be expected if all workshops from the curriculum are implemented in the prescribed order. In that case, we can expect the workshops to produce the following results:

- Young people better understand how emotions work.
- Young people recognize the ways in which different emotional reactions occur.
- Young people better recognize their own and others' emotions.
- Young people accept their own and others' emotions to a greater extent.
- Young people manage their emotions more effectively.
- Young people accept their own thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and circumstances in which they find themselves to a greater extent.
- Young people possess new knowledge and skills for developing a healthy relationship with themselves and others.
- Young people have an expanded repertoire of communication skills.

**The first thematic module** addresses **the topic of emotional self-awareness and literacy**. Participants learn to recognize emotions, their manifestations, and the behaviors that emotions trigger. They learn to consciously observe the way in which emotions are experienced in the body and gain insight into how others experience emotions. In addition, young people learn to recognize nonverbal expressions of emotions and to communicate emotions non-verbally. These insights contribute to a better understanding of oneself and others, and to the acceptance and normalization of emotional reactions. They also have the opportunity, through group work, to see that they share certain emotional reactions with the other participants, as well as the ways in which emotions are experienced on a bodily level. Understanding one's own and others' emotions is an important aspect of good emotional functioning.

**The second thematic module** deals with the **biological and social foundations of emotions**. To better understand our own emotions, it is important to understand their nature. Understanding the biological foundations gives participants the opportunity to understand, normalize, respect, and accept different ways of expressing emotions, such as sensitivity to cer-

tain stimuli, the intensity of individual reactions, and the long duration of emotions. It is expected that a better understanding of the biological foundations of emotions can mitigate negative attitudes towards different emotional reactions. Understanding the social foundations of emotions allows participants to become aware of the influence of the environment on the manifestation and experience of emotions. In addition, it gives participants the opportunity to gain insight into the importance of appropriate, respectful, and accepting communication for the experience and expression of emotions in both oneself and others. This can further accelerate the development of their communication skills.

**The third thematic module**, through the metaphor of the **three minds**, gives participants the opportunity to learn to distinguish between impulsive, hasty emotional reactions and their alternative, thoughtful reactions. In fact, through this metaphor, participants learn to better regulate their own emotions. The metaphor of the three minds also implicitly teaches participants to use mindfulness skills to recognize the different factors in themselves and their environment that influence our behavior and decision-making. Young people learn to slow down their reactions, pay attention to objective circumstances, think, and act in accordance with their long-term goals instead of impulsively, hastily, and rashly.

**The fourth thematic module** deals with **acceptance skills**. Throughout our lives, we have been taught to cope with unfavorable situations by trying to control the conditions so that they do not happen or by avoiding the circumstances in which they may occur. We try to suppress, avoid, or control our unwanted emotions and thoughts. We put a lot of effort into controlling or avoiding, and often these efforts do not result in a favorable outcome. Such ineffective strategies lead to feelings of helplessness, low self-confidence, feelings of hopelessness, and dissatisfaction with oneself. The fourth thematic module aims to provide young people with alternative strategies for coping with such situations. Participants learn to accept their own and others' unwanted emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, as well as the unfavorable circumstances that surround them. This skill is an important prerequisite for developing a healthy relationship with oneself and the world around us.

**The fifth thematic module** aims to develop the **capacity for compassion**. Empathy is one of the five aspects of emotional intelligence. Compassion, as we define it in the context of this curriculum, is a step further than empathy. Participants learn not only to put themselves in the shoes of another person, but also to feel stable, strong, and motivated to help the person they empathize with. They learn to develop a compassionate relationship with themselves and others and to observe their own and others' emotions and behaviors in this way. This skill includes elements of everything learned previously - understanding emotions, their functioning and manifestation, the impact of one's own and others' words and behaviors on emotions, and the importance of accepting emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and circumstances (instead of controlling, judging, and avoiding).

The road map for implementing the curriculum is designed so that as the curriculum progresses, participants learn increasingly complex skills that build on what they have previously learned. It is precisely for this reason that it is assumed that the best results can be achieved by implementing the entire curriculum in the prescribed order. This does not mean, of course, that the curriculum will not have an effect if the workshops are conducted in a different order than planned, or if only individual workshops are conducted. However, the effect will be less than expected. We believe that any workshop conducted separately, independently of the entire curriculum, can be beneficial to participants.

# Tips and recommendations

**Safety of participants:** During the workshops, it is important to take into account the participants' sense of safety at all times. Therefore, it would be recommended to take some time at the beginning to define common working rules and boundaries that apply to everyone and that are important to respect throughout the workshop cycle. By defining rules and boundaries, a safe space is created, which is a prerequisite for working on topics related to the mental health of young people. Special attention should be paid to building a relationship of trust between all workshop participants. In this regard, it is important for the participants to get to know and connect with each other better before starting the workshops.

**Introductory activities:** Introductory activities such as warm-ups and icebreakers should be aligned with the theme of the workshop.

**Group homogeneity:** It is natural that there are differences in the various capacities of the participants in a group. In the case of large differences, the workshops can be very challenging for some participants, or on the other hand, not challenging enough and uninteresting for those with greater capacities. Also, uniformity can have a positive effect on group cohesion. Although it is desirable for groups to be approximately homogeneous according to various criteria such as age, educational level, cognitive capacity, and level of emotional functioning, it is possible to work effectively with less homogeneous groups as well.

**Interventions:** Given that young people are a very heterogeneous group in terms of psychological and emotional functioning, we cannot always predict and prevent strong reactions in participants. Such reactions can be unpleasant, but they are an integral part of learning and growth. Some of these reactions may require intervention from the facilitator. Depending on the type and intensity of the reaction, the facilitator can respond in different ways. Given the content of the program, sometimes it is enough for the trainer to call on lessons from previously implemented workshops, using the learned to analyze and resolve the crisis situation. It is also useful to remind the group of the agreed-upon working rules and boundaries. It is recommended that each workshop be led by a pair of trainers, which gives the possibility of intervention without disrupting the flow of the workshop. If the trainers notice that a participant is very upset and has difficulty calming down, they should refer them to a professional.

**Theoretical part of the manual:** The theoretical part of the manual is written to be easily understood by a reader who does not have professional knowledge. However, a significant number of concepts in the workshops are new to the facilitators themselves, not just the participants. For this reason, it is very important that the facilitators thoroughly study the theoretical part of the manual in order to become well acquainted with the concepts that they are trying to convey to the participants.

**Personal experience:** Due to the specific content of the program, it is recommended that the facilitator also go through the workshops. Personal experience in the activities that they conduct with participants can help the facilitator to gain a deeper understanding of the material and to become more familiar with their own strengths and limitations in relation to the topics and activities intended for participants.

**Working language:** The common definition and understanding of group-level concepts used during the workshops is an important prerequisite for achieving the program's goals. If a concept is not clear enough to the young people, it is necessary to set aside time from the workshop for discussion so that the young people can understand it. When working with young

people, flexibility in terms of the language used is desirable. If the facilitator's experience shows that young people use different words for certain concepts than those used in the manual, it is recommended to use their vocabulary.

**Regarding concepts, it is also recommended to avoid using the term mental health.** One reason is that this term too narrowly defines the goals of the curriculum, although it is only part of the goals. The other is that this term often carries an implicit negative connotation, which can deter some participants from participating in the workshops. Instead of the term mental health, terms can be used that are specifically related to the workshops, such as "emotion recognition", "decision-making", "controlling strong emotions and reactions", "acceptance", and "compassion". It is important to emphasize that this does not mean that the skills that young people learn should not be linked to mental health. It is important to show (or discuss with them) how what they have learned can positively affect their mental health at the end of the workshop.

**Flexibility in implementing workshops:** The workshops are designed to be applied in a flexible way, meaning that the facilitator does not have to strictly adhere to the workshop implementation plan within a thematic module, but can change it as they see fit. Once the facilitator is familiar with the workshops and has a deeper understanding of the content that they are transmitting to the participants, it is recommended that they apply activities from one thematic module at their own discretion and in accordance with their own experience, instead of rigidly adhering to the recommended content.

**Focus on the process, not just the goal!**







# Workshops



# Workshops

## Introductory exercise – short mindfulness exercise

It is recommended to start each workshop from the manual with a short mindfulness exercise, which will help participants to focus their attention and become more aware of their present experience.

The trainer/facilitator instructs the participants that at the beginning of the workshop they will do an exercise together that can help them to calm down and focus. The trainer explains to the participants that it is a "mindfulness" exercise that allows us to be aware of what is really happening in our environment or within us (This means that being aware of what is happening in different parts of our mind in the moment it is happening means living with open eyes, being aware of the experiences that are being experienced (with all 5 senses), instead of being pulled away by the past or the future. It also means having more control over our own minds instead of our minds having more control over us. Much of our anxiety stems from our thoughts about things that have been or things that have yet to happen. While it is important to sometimes think about what has happened or what lies ahead, it can often lead to upsetting emotions such as fear, depression, and the like. The trainer can give participants the example that if they were to think about the exam that is waiting for them at this moment, they would probably be anxious about it, even though they can't do anything about it at this point. The trainer emphasizes the benefit of mindfulness practice in such situations, noting that we can choose to focus on something unpleasant that has not yet happened and that we are just waiting for, and then be anxious, or we can focus our attention on what is actually happening in the present moment and try to be aware of it, which does not threaten us in any way.

The exercise should last only 30 seconds to one minute, but is not limited to that time. It is perfectly fine for the exercise to last several minutes if the trainer feels that the participants can devote more time to it.

The trainer gives the following instructions to the participants:

*I would like you to get comfortable in your chairs during the exercise, but with your back straight against the backrest. Both feet should be on the floor and you can keep your hands on your knees. If you can, close your eyes, but if you feel uncomfortable closing your eyes, you can focus on one point and keep your gaze on it for the duration of the exercise. Try to sit quietly and not say anything during the exercise, and I will give you instructions.*

*Let's begin. Pay attention to the sounds that are present. Don't try to hear more, just notice the different sounds (you can name what you hear, such as "air conditioning, traffic, someone walking in the hallway..."). Give participants 5 to 15 seconds to notice the sounds. Then pay attention to the smells in the room. Give them 5 to 15 seconds to notice that. Then notice the temperature in the room and the air that is still/moving, how it passes over your skin, hair. Give them 5 to 15 seconds to notice. Feel what your fingers on your hands are touching and the texture of what you are touching. Lightly rub your fingers over what you are touching. If it is fabric, feel the texture and what kind of fabric it is. Give them 5 to 15 seconds to feel. Feel your feet resting on the floor, the points of contact between your feet and the floor, and how they firmly adhere to the floor with all of their*



*weight. Give them 5 to 15 seconds. Then open your eyes and look around, be aware of what you see in the room you are in here and now. Give them another 5 to 15 seconds. And now we can slowly finish the exercise and continue our workshop.*

After the end, briefly discuss the exercise with the participants and start the workshop.

**Note:** The "Mindfulness" exercise can also be implemented separately, regardless of the type of activity that is being carried out. When the exercise is done with a group for the first time, the participants are given complete instructions. Otherwise, the exercise starts immediately. If the workshop program is implemented in its entirety, it is recommended that a different version of the "Mindfulness" exercise be carried out before each workshop. Examples of exercises are available in Appendix 1.

# What is the Purpose of Emotions and How do we Experience them?

## Workshop 1: Understanding Emotions

**Topic Description:** This workshop addresses the topic of emotional self-awareness and literacy. Participants learn to recognize emotions, their manifestation, and the behaviors that emotions trigger. They learn to consciously notice the way emotions are experienced in the body and gain insight into how others experience emotions.

**Workshop Objectives:** Learning about the different functions of emotions. Recognizing emotions in oneself and others. Awareness of different emotions, ways of expressing emotions, and reactions that arise from emotions.

### Workshop Content:

- Theoretical introduction
- Activity "Vote with your hands and feet"
- Deepening the discussion on the role of emotions
- Conclusion

**Materials:** A3 color pictures of different weather conditions (sunny weather, rainy and gloomy weather, stormy weather and fog) or emotions (sadness, happiness, fear, anger, shame, and confusion) depending on the version of the exercise used, scotch tape

**Recommended time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise before the start of the workshop

## Theoretical Introduction

The trainer begins the workshop by explaining what emotions are and their role:

*Emotions are signals from the body that tell us that something is happening. When something happens that we consider to be good, we feel good. When something happens that we see as disturbing, we feel bad. They are a quick signal about what we are doing and what our experiences are. The role of emotions is threefold:*

- *To motivate us to action*
- *To communicate with ourselves, to inform us*
- *To communicate with others*

The trainer emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence:

*The ability to recognize and understand emotions is called emotional intelligence. Many experts, and individual studies, indicate that emotional intelligence is just as important as conventional intelligence. There are studies that show that emotionally intelligent people are more successful in their careers and in their romantic and social relationships. This leads to better mental health for these people. That is why it is important to learn to understand and recognize our own and others' emotions.*

“Vote with your hands and feet”:

This activity raises awareness of one's own emotions in response to certain situations and shows how young people may react differently to the same things and how some events can trigger multiple emotions, some of which are clearer and some less clear.

**The activity can be done in two versions with minor changes.** If the trainer assesses that the participants do not recognize their own emotions well enough, they can use the first version of the activity. If the trainer believes that they have a sufficiently good awareness of emotions and can differentiate between a wider range of emotions, they can use the second version of the exercise.

In the first version of the exercise, pictures of different weather conditions are used in 4 corners of the room: sunny day, gloomy day, storm, and fog.

In the second version of the exercise, smiley faces with different emotions are used: sadness, happiness, fear, anger, shame, and confusion.

1. Pictures representing emotions are placed at a height of about 1 meter to 1.5 meters.

2. The exercise is done in a circle in the middle of the room. After the participants have gathered in a circle, the trainer gives them instructions that after they read out a fictional situation to them, they should go to the picture that best represents how they would feel in the given situation and use all parts of their body to point to that picture. Participants should also non-verbally express the intensity of the emotion they are feeling. For example, if they are very happy, they can raise their hand high and wave. If they are feeling the emotion at a low intensity, they can point with their hand or foot without much energy. It is up to them to be creative.
3. The trainer should emphasize that we often feel mixed emotions in response to certain situations. If, in some situations, the participants feel that they are feeling more than one emotion, they should take a place in the room where they can use their hands, feet, or body to show all the pictures that represent the emotions they would feel in response to the event that was read. They should not rush to show their emotions, but rather try to give themselves time to understand what they are feeling.

#### **Situations that are read to the participants:**

- *You are at a party at your best friend's house and having a good time.*
- *You failed an exam that was very important to you.*
- *Someone accused you of being responsible for the failure of a project you worked on, and you are not sure if it is true.*
- *Your pet died of old age.*
- *A close and very dear friend is moving to another country where you know they will have a better life.*
- *You are at a party at your best friend's house and having a good time, but you know that your ex-partner, whom you are not on good terms with, is there.*
- *You rarely see your best friend, with whom you love to spend time, because she spends a lot of time in a happy relationship with her partner.*
- *You rarely see your best friend, with whom you love to spend time, because you spend a lot of time in a happy relationship with your partner.*
- *Someone accidentally bumped into you with their shoulder in a nightclub. You look and see that it is a dear friend you haven't seen in a long time.*
- *You are at a concert with your dear friends for a band you don't really like.*
- *Someone hit your car in traffic with their car, through no fault of your own, and caused a lot of damage. A scared woman with a small child gets out of the car that hit you and apologizes for her carelessness and accepts the blame.*
- *Someone intentionally bumped into you very hard with their shoulder in a nightclub. You look and see that it is a person who is much stronger than you.*
- *You found abandoned kittens on the street. You know they won't survive long there, but you can't take them home because you have a dog at home who doesn't like cats.*

**Note:** The situations are graded according to the clarity of the emotions they evoke. The trainer chooses whether to use all of the situations, or some of them, depending on the group and the time they have available.

#### 4. Debriefing:

- *How did you find this activity?*
- *When was it the hardest for you to decide which picture to point to? Why?*
- *Did you know that you could feel more than one emotion in response to some events?*
- *How did you feel when you saw that some participants were pointing to different pictures than you?*
- *How do you explain that some participants reacted to the same situation with the same emotions but of different intensities?*
- *How do you explain that participants reacted differently to the same situations?*
- *Did something leave a special impression on you? What? Why?*

#### **Deepening the discussion about the role of emotions**

The trainer reminds the participants of what was said at the beginning about emotions and their role. The trainer then asks the participants questions and gives them enough time to discuss:

- *How do you think emotions motivate us to take action?*
- *How do you think emotions help us communicate with ourselves? How do we recognize what they want to tell us?*
- *How do emotions help us communicate with others? Can someone show how we communicate with emotions?*

## **Theory to support the discussion**

The following are examples of answers that can be used to facilitate the discussion:

### **How do emotions motivate us to take action?**

Emotions can make us take action against our will. For example, if we suddenly hear the roar of a wild animal, most of us will jump out of our chairs and be a little scared. If we are walking in the forest with a friend and we hear the sound of an animal behind us, we will certainly not stop to ask our friend “What do you think, should we hurry up a bit?” But what will we do? We will probably run away. Will we carefully consider the situation to see if we should run and how fast? Probably not.

Our brains are wired in such a way that when strong emotions are present, we tend to act quickly. This is very useful in some cases, such as the example in the forest or when we hear a siren blaring while crossing the street. Emotions save us a lot of time in these cases and we react quickly.

### **How do emotions help us communicate with ourselves? How do we recognize what they want to tell us?**

Emotions inform us. They tell us that something is happening. For example, “I don’t feel comfortable walking down this dark street alone” or “I’m angry that he’s avoiding me.” This can be important information, but it’s not enough. After all, emotions are not facts, and the problem is when we treat them as facts. For example, “I love her, so that must mean she’s good for me” or “Just because I’m afraid, there must be real danger.” My fear is not a guarantee that danger exists. It is just information coming from within me that a threat may or may not exist. Therefore, it is necessary to respect both emotions and facts and to assess whether the emotion is giving accurate or inaccurate information. In other words, the information that comes from emotions should not be ignored, but it should also not be taken as fact.

### **How do emotions help us communicate with others? Can someone show us how to communicate with emotions?**

Facial expressions and body posture tell us a lot about how we are feeling. Here are some examples:

- The trainer can use facial expressions and body posture to act like they are angry. They can frown, grit their teeth, glare at the group, cross their arms over their chest, clench their fists, and slightly hunch over. Once they do this, the trainer can ask the participants how they think they are feeling. Most participants will likely recognize that the trainer is angry.
- The trainer can relax their face, imagine that they are crying, and make a crying facial expression. They can look down at the ground, turn their mouth down, relax their spine, and lean forward, with their hands in their pockets. Then they can ask the participants to guess how they are feeling. Most participants will likely recognize that the trainer is sad.

## Workshop conclusion

The workshop can be concluded by asking the participants what was most significant to them in the workshop and why. Afterwards, the trainer can summarize everything that was learned from the previous activities and end the workshop.

**Important lessons:** Emotions have different functions. Therefore, it is important to learn to recognize them in ourselves and others. Learning to recognize and understand emotions is a skill that can significantly facilitate our daily functioning. This skill is called emotional intelligence. Scientists say that people who possess this ability actually do better in life because they better understand themselves and others around them. This allows them to react appropriately in different situations and thus create better outcomes for themselves.

# What are emotions for and how do we experience them?

## Workshop 2: Kaleidoscope of emotions – how we experience emotions

**Topic description:** The workshop addresses the topic of emotional self-awareness and literacy. Participants learn to recognize emotions, their manifestation, and the behaviors that emotions trigger. They learn to consciously notice the way emotions are experienced in the body and gain insight into how others experience emotions.

**Workshop objective:** Deeper understanding of how our own and others' emotions work. Gaining insight that we all share a similar way of experiencing emotions.

### Workshop content:

- Introduction
- Exercise 1: "Drawing a table"
- Exercise 2: "Emotion Map"
- Conclusion

**Materials:** A4 papers, pencils, markers of different colors (5 markers of different colors for each participant)

**Recommended time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Note:** It is recommended to conduct this workshop with participants after conducting the first workshop on this topic.

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise before the start of the workshop



## Introduction

The trainer asks the participants rhetorical questions:

- *Have you noticed that emotions, besides feeling them, involve our thoughts, bodily sensations, and actions?*
- *When we say I'm scared, what does that actually mean? What thoughts go through our heads? What bodily sensations? What actions do we take (or want to take) when we are scared?*

### Exercise 1: "Drawing a table"

Exercise for raising awareness of thoughts, behaviors, and bodily sensations through discussion, as well as for normalizing different ways of experiencing emotions.

1. The trainer draws a table on the flip chart by dividing the flipchart into 4 wide columns and the columns into 4 wide rows. The first column is labeled "Emotion", the second "Thoughts", the third "Behavior", and the fourth "Bodily Sensations". In this part of the workshop, the "Bodily Sensations" column is not filled in. The rows in the "Emotion" column are filled in with 4 emotions: fear, joy/happiness, sadness, and anger. Optionally, participants are asked to give their own examples of emotions.
2. The trainer asks the participants to think about what thoughts come to mind when each of the written emotions is present. The trainer summarizes the participants' answers and writes them down in the appropriate column.
3. The trainer asks the participants to think about what behaviors the emotion of fear motivates us to take. The trainer summarizes the participants' answers and writes them down in the appropriate column. The procedure is repeated for each emotion listed.

**Note:** A table of possible answers is presented below. If the participants themselves do not generate answers like the ones suggested, the trainer can fill in the columns according to the examples in the table, and then discuss with the participants whether what is stated matches their experiences. The last column (bodily sensations) is filled in after the exercise *Emotion Map*.

| Emotion              | Thoughts  | Behavior  | Bodily Sensations   |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Fear</b>          | <p>Something bad might happen.</p> <p>I am going to get hurt.</p> <p>I am going to fail.</p>                              | <p>Running away</p> <p>Hiding</p> <p>Avoiding</p>   | <p>Stomach churning</p> <p>Neck hunching</p> <p>Trembling/clenching jaw</p> <p>Shaking legs</p>                   |
| <b>Anger</b>         | <p>Someone did/ tried/plans to do something bad to me.</p>  | <p>Yelling</p> <p>Arguing</p> <p>Hitting things</p> <p>Slamming doors</p>                                 | <p>Stomach churning</p> <p>Clenching jaw</p> <p>Whole body trembling/tense</p> <p>Clenching fists</p>             |
| <b>Happiness/joy</b> | <p>Something is pleasing.</p> <p>I like it!</p> <p>It's good for me.</p>  | <p>Smiling</p> <p>Laughing</p> <p>Wanting more of it</p> <p>Jumping</p> <p>Running</p>                    | <p>Feeling light</p> <p>Full of energy/ strength</p> <p>Warm in the chest, arms, legs.</p>                        |
| <b>Sadness</b>       | <p>Something i need is missing/gone.</p> <p>I've lost something/someone.</p> <p>I'm going to lose something/ someone.</p> | <p>Crying</p> <p>Avoiding others</p> <p>Withdrawing</p> <p>Sleeping</p> <p>Drinking/drowning sadness.</p> | <p>Feeling of pressure in the chest</p> <p>Lack of energy</p> <p>Heaviness</p> <p>Pressure on the back/chest.</p> |

## Exercise 2: “Emotion Map”

Exercise for raising awareness of the physical aspect of emotion manifestation and normalizing this way of experiencing emotions through sharing. Learning about maladaptive coping mechanisms for individual emotions.

1. Each participant gets an A4 sheet of paper and basic color markers on which they should draw an outline of the human body and mark on the sketch, with the corresponding color, where they feel each emotion most in their own body. The color red represents anger, yellow represents joy/happiness, brown or black represents sadness, and green represents fear. If an emotion is felt in multiple places, then the participant should mark where it is felt most with more color or a larger area, and where it is felt less with less color or a smaller area. If participants are unsure or do not know, the trainer instructs them to do the assigned activity by guessing. The trainer draws a body model on the flipchart. Next to the emotion marked with a marker on the body, participants should write down an example of an event that triggers each of those emotions, according to their experience. Again, if participants are unsure, they can guess. If the group is motivated enough, the trainer gives them the task of writing down how they think it is best to cope with the marked emotion.
2. The trainer does the exercise together with the participants and shares their results without expecting others to share theirs. Participants do not have to share what they have written if they do not want to, and they can keep the paper for themselves.
3. After 30 minutes, the trainer marks the emotions on the sketch of the human body on the flip chart in the same way that the participants marked them on their own sketch of the body, using the corresponding color. If there are no volunteers, the trainer uses their own paper.
4. Discussion:
  - *How difficult was it for you to do this exercise? What was the hardest part for you?*
  - *How much attention did you pay to the reflection of emotion in your body before?*
  - *Did the exercise help you to become aware of/discover anything new about the emotions you experience?*
  - Ask if anyone would like to share what they wrote. If no one wants to share what they wrote, the workshop leader(s) can share what they wrote and ask the other participants for their opinion and whether anyone wrote the same thing or something completely different.
5. The participants, together with the trainer, fill in the last column in the table from the previous exercise (Bodily Sensations) based on their work and the answers they marked on the flip chart with the outline of the human body.

## Workshop conclusion

The workshop can be concluded by asking the participants what was most significant to them in this workshop and why.

**Important lessons:** Emotions have different aspects. Emotions are not just words; they have a physical component, they are accompanied by thoughts, and they often motivate us to behave in certain ways. It is possible to experience multiple emotions at the same time. Just like any other emotion, multiple emotions are accompanied by thoughts, bodily sensations, and motivations. We are not always fully aware of our emotions. Sometimes, it can be difficult to identify our emotions. When this happens, it is helpful to pay attention to how we are feeling in our bodies, what thoughts are going through our heads, and what we have a need to do. This may not always give us a definitive answer, but it will certainly bring us a few steps closer to understanding ourselves and others.

# Biological and Social Foundations of Emotions

## Workshop 1: Why do we feel the way we feel?

**Topic description:** This topic deals with the biological and social foundations of emotions. Understanding the biological foundations gives participants the opportunity to understand, normalize, respect, and accept different ways of expressing emotions, such as sensitivity to certain stimuli, intensity of certain reactions, and the long duration of emotions. Understanding the social foundations of emotions allows participants to become aware of the influence of the environment on the expression and experience of emotions, and to gain insight into the importance of adequate, respectful, and accepting communication for the experience and expression of emotions both in oneself and in others.

**Workshop objective:** To acquaint participants with the biological and social aspects of emotional functioning. Participants learn how biological factors and social factors influence the experience and expression of emotions.

### Workshop content:

- Introductory activity
- Presentation of the bio-social theory
- Exercise 1: “Graphs” - the influence of biology on emotions
- Exercise 2: “Modeling a Respectful Response” - the influence of the environment on emotions
- Activity for less experienced trainers
- Activity for more experienced trainers
- Conclusion

**Materials:** Flipchart, markers of different colors, A4 papers, blank papers of the same color, printed scripts for the “Theater of Disrespect” activity, containers for papers, Post-It notes

**Recommended time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise before the start of the workshop

## Introductory Activity

1. The trainer greets the participants and then says the following sentence in a slightly disinterested tone (the trainer should try to sound like they mean what they say and pay attention to the different reactions of the participants in order to use them in the discussion):

*"We have a lot to learn here today. Since you are here, you should learn all of this quickly, instead of your attention wandering all over the place. Anyway, you don't have anything better to do. I expect you to be 100% dedicated to this workshop."*

The trainer encourages the participants to discuss by asking them the following questions:

- *How did this comment make you feel?*
- *What were your emotions while I was saying this?*

**Note:** Pay attention to the different emotional reactions and use them in the further discussion.

2. Discussion:

- *Did you notice that you didn't all react the same way to the same sentence?*
- *Some of you were completely indifferent, some of you were more or less irritated by my introductory sentence, and some of you were even a little upset. How do you explain this?*
- *Both our biology, who we are, and our environment, how others treat us, influence how we will react emotionally (for example, to the sentence from the beginning).*

The trainer asks the following questions and gives the participants time to think and encourages them to give answers:

- *Who can tell us what "our biology" means?*
- *And what does our environment mean? Who is our environment?*

3. The trainer concludes this part of the discussion with the following conclusion:

**Biology** refers to the biological basis of our brain that determines how we experience and control emotions, drives, and the like. The **environment** or social environment is the people in our lives. For example, family and friends, mentors, teachers and professors, colleagues, neighbors...

## Exercise 1: “Graphs”

### Exercise on the Influence of Biology on Emotions

1. Together with the participants, the trainer defines the following concepts by asking questions, giving participants time to answer, and offering necessary explanations:

- **Emotional sensitivity** - *What does it mean when we say that someone is emotionally sensitive?*

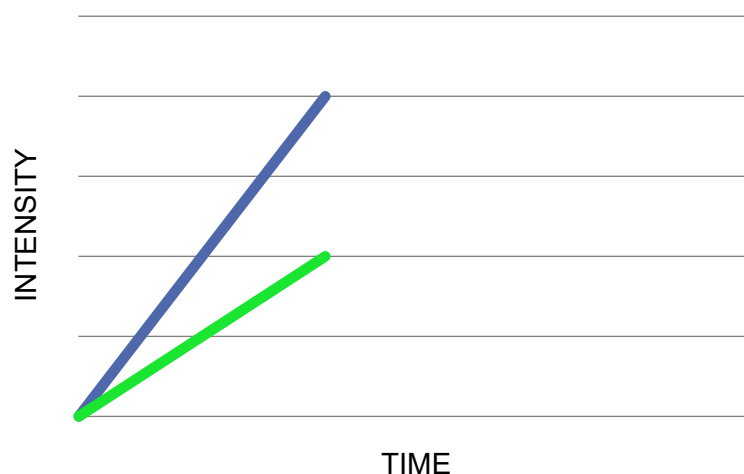
The trainer gives the following example (or their own example): *My friend, for example, is allergic to cats. And whenever he comes to my apartment, he starts to sneeze and his nose runs. You could say that he is "sensitive to cats." Well, just like an allergy, some of us are sensitive to pollen or dust, and some of us are not. Similarly, some of us are more sensitive to certain situations (like the sentence I started the workshop with) and react with more emotion to some events than others.*

- **Emotional reactivity** - *What does it mean when we say that someone is emotionally reactive?*

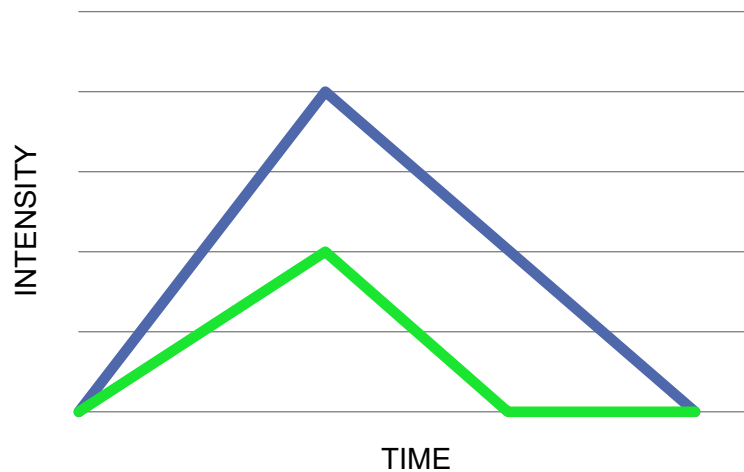
The trainer explains: *Some of us not only feel emotions, but we feel them very strongly. We're not just a little sad, we're almost depressed. We're not annoyed, we're enraged. We don't feel concerned, we panic.*

2. The trainer draws a graph with two axes on the flipchart. The vertical axis is labeled **intensity**, and the horizontal axis is labeled **time**. With one color (e.g., blue), the trainer draws a line from the bottom of the graph to the top and stops it at the height of the first third of the intensity axis. Then, with another color (e.g., green), the trainer draws a line from the same starting point to the top and stops it at a height slightly lower than the top of the intensity axis.

The trainer explains to the participants that some people react less intensely to various situations (shows the blue line), while other people who are more emotionally reactive react more intensely (shows the green line).



The trainer explains that not only are we emotionally sensitive and feel intense emotions, but some of us take a long time to calm down. (The trainer draws a line from the top of the green line all the way to the end of the horizontal axis.) This is unlike others who need 10-15 minutes to calm down (the trainer draws a line from the top of the blue line down to the first third of the horizontal axis), but some people may need much more time, such as an hour or even several hours.



### 3. Summary of the activity

*Often these types of emotions seem like a disadvantage, something negative. But in fact, if we learn to cope with these emotions it can be a great advantage. Intense emotions allow us to be passionate about things and motivated to do what we think is important. They can drive us to do what is significant to us. But, if we don't learn to recognize these emotions and cope with them, it can be problematic for us. It can lead to alcohol abuse, self-harm, risky behavior, and the like.*

4. Optional task: Each participant draws their own graph of emotions, that is, how their emotional sensitivity, reactivity, and calming down (return to initial level) looks.

## Exercise 2: “Modeling a Respectful Response”

### Exercise on the Influence of the Environment on Emotions

1. The trainer reminds the participants that our environment also influences our emotions, and asks the following questions to encourage discussion among the participants:
  - *What do you think is the influence of our environment on our emotions?*
  - *What does it mean to you when someone does not respect or accept you?*
  - *How do you feel when someone does not respect or accept you?*



### Theory that supports the discussion

Our environment can influence us by disrespecting or not accepting us. Our emotions, thoughts, or actions can be disrespected and unaccepted. Sometimes disrespect and non-acceptance can feel like rejection or punishment because the person thinks in a certain way or is emotionally sensitive, feels intense emotions, and has difficulty calming down. It happens to all of us that we sometimes disrespect someone else's thoughts, feelings, or actions. It would not be realistic to expect that this does not happen. What is important is that disrespect does not become the rule, the usual behavior towards someone. Therefore, it is important to practice respecting our own and other people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is also necessary to make a distinction between respecting and justifying. So, we can respect and accept someone's thoughts and behaviors, but that doesn't mean we have to agree with them.

2. 2. Modeling a Respectful and Accepting Response - Through self-disclosure and discussion, participants themselves model an accepting and respectful relationship.

The trainer refers to the beginning of the workshop and repeats the disrespectful sentence from the beginning: *"We have a lot to learn here today. Since you are here, you should learn all of this quickly, instead of your attention wandering all over the place. Anyway, you don't have anything better to do. I expect you to be 100% dedicated to this workshop."*

The trainer encourages participants to define an alternative respectful sentence.

After they have formulated a respectful sentence, the trainer asks questions:

- *How did this respectful comment make you feel?*
- *How did you feel while I was speaking in a respectful way?*

**Example:** *"I know it's hard to stay focused. This material is not easy. I believe there are other things that are bothering you. I can also imagine that some of you are not that interested in this. Some of you are probably hungry and tired. I think this is important for you to learn, so I would like to help you make it easier and more interesting for you to learn."*

The following activity can be carried out in two ways, depending on the experience of the workshop leader and their assessment of which method would be more suitable for the participants!

### Version 1: "Respectful and Accepting Messages"

1. Trainer explains to participants that the goal of the activity is to understand and recognize disrespectful and unaccepting messages, as well as to develop communication skills.

2. Brainstorming for 10 minutes, during which different disrespectful and unaccepting messages from the participants' experiences are listed. As many messages of disrespect and non-acceptance as possible are mentioned and each of these messages is written on a flipchart.
3. From the written messages, the trainer and the participants choose a few (between 5 and 15 of them, depending on how many there are).
4. The participants are divided into groups of at least 3 and at most 5 members and are instructed to come up with and write a respectful and accepting message for each of these messages on a sticker, which they will then stick over the written sentence on the flipchart. The estimated time for this exercise is 15 minutes.
5. The trainer reads what is written on the stickers on the flipchart and involves the other participants in commenting on the new respectful and accepting messages.
6. Debriefing:
  - *How difficult was it for you to come up with respectful and accepting messages?*
  - *How can you apply this skill in real life?*
  - *What did you learn from this activity?*

## **Version 2: "Theater of Disrespect"**

1. The trainer explains that the goal of the activity is to understand and recognize disrespectful and unaccepting messages, as well as to develop communication skills.
2. Brainstorming for 10 minutes, during which, together with the young people, different disrespectful and unaccepting messages from their experience are listed. Mentioning and writing as many messages of disrespect and non-acceptance from their experience on a flipchart as possible.
3. From the written sentences, the trainer and the participants choose a few and write them on pieces of paper (each sentence on a separate piece of paper).
4. The trainer puts the folded pieces of paper with the sentences in one container and the folded pieces of paper with the scenarios from the prepared appendix 2 in another.
5. The participants are divided into several groups with at least 3 and at most 5 members.
6. One participant from each group draws one piece of paper from each container.
7. The trainer instructs the participants to divide roles and devise a scene lasting 5 to 10 minutes based on the invalidating message and scenario they have drawn.
8. The scene must have an antagonist (the person who sends the disrespectful message), a protagonist (the person who receives the disrespectful message), and supporting roles who actively participate in the scene in a way that they design.

9. Each group will perform the devised play in front of the other participants.
10. 15 to 30 minutes should be given to the groups to prepare the improvisation, after which each group performs their play.
11. After each group has performed their play, a debriefing is conducted by asking the following questions:
  - *How did you feel while in your roles?*
  - *How did the protagonist react to the invalidating messages?*
  - *How did the supporting roles react and support the protagonist?*
  - *What assertive communication strategies were used?*
  - *How can you apply this experience in real life?*
  - *What did you learn from this activity?*

## **Workshop Conclusion**

The trainer concludes the workshop by summarizing what the participants have learned.

**Key takeaways:** Emotions are complex and influenced by both our biology and our environment. Intense emotions can be both beneficial and harmful, depending on how we understand and cope with them. It is important to create a supportive environment where people feel respected and accepted. Regardless of whether we agree or disagree with others, it is important to respect and understand them.

# Biological and Social Foundations of Emotions

## Workshop 1: How does our environment shape our emotions?

**Topic description:** This topic deals with the biological and social foundations of emotions. Understanding the biological foundations gives participants the opportunity to understand, normalize, respect, and accept different ways of expressing emotions, such as sensitivity to certain stimuli, intensity of certain reactions, and the long duration of emotions. Understanding the social foundations of emotions allows participants to become aware of the influence of the environment on the expression and experience of emotions, and to gain insight into the importance of adequate, respectful, and accepting communication for the experience and expression of emotions both in oneself and in others.

**Workshop Objective:** To provide participants with a deeper understanding of the social aspects of emotional functioning and the different ways in which the environment affects our experience and expression of emotions.

### Workshop Content:

- “Pros and Cons” Activity
- Different Ways of Non-Acceptance and Disrespect
- Conclusion

**Materials:** Flipchart, markers of different colors, blank pieces of paper of the same color

**Recommended Time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum Number of Participants:** 20

**Note:** It is recommended to conduct this workshop with participants after conducting the first workshop on this topic.

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise with participants before the start of the workshop.

## Activity: "Pros and Cons"

In this activity, through argument-based discussion, participants gain a clearer picture of what is and is not disrespectful.

1. The trainer reminds participants of the conclusion of the previous workshop.
2. The space in which the workshop is being held should be clearly divided into two parts so that all participants can stand on one side.
3. One half of the floor is marked with FOR and the other with AGAINST (with a marker on A4 size paper).
4. The trainer instructs the participants that they will be doing an exercise called "Pros and Cons". They explain to the participants that they will be read some sentences, and their task is to express whether or not the sentence is disrespectful/unaccepting/critical by going to the half marked with FOR (if they think it is) or the half with AGAINST (if they think it is not). Once they have taken their places on the halves of the floor, their task is to convince those on the other half to cross over to their side by trying to explain as convincingly as possible why they believe they are right.
5. If the participants understand the instructions, the trainer starts reading the sentences and gives them enough time to decide and express themselves after each sentence.
6. For each sentence, the trainer asks questions of one participant at a time to explain their point of view in order to convince those on the other side to cross over to their side.
7. Debriefing:
  - *How did this activity make you feel?*
  - *When was it most difficult for you to decide which side of the room to stand on? Why?*
  - *Was anyone able to change your mind? How?*
  - *Did anything leave a particular impression on you? What? Why?*

### Sentences that are read to the participants:

- *How you're feeling doesn't make much sense.*
- *Why are you so worried, it's not that bad.*
- *I would never do it like that.*
- *If you think you know better, then do it that way.*
- *I don't think things are going so well.*
- *I don't like your behavior.*
- *I don't like it when people say things like that.*
- *That's much easier than you think.*
- *Only you feel that way.*
- *You're imagining things, it's not that important.*

- *I don't think what you did was right.*

8. Conclusion on different ways of non-acceptance and disrespect:

- a. On a flipchart, the trainer draws three columns and writes the following text at the top of each column:
  - Non-acceptance of someone's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
  - Ignoring or punishing mild emotions and paying attention to escalating emotions
  - Simplifying and underestimating the problems the person is facing
- b. The trainer explains to the participants that these are three ways of non-acceptance and disrespect, and asks them to give their own examples for each of them.

**Note:** If it is assessed that the participants have not generated enough answers, it is possible to categorize the sentences from the "Pros and Cons" activity into these three categories together with them, or to classify them into a fourth category "not non-acceptance and disrespect". The trainer encourages discussion until the participants reach consensus on each sentence.

## Theory Supporting the Discussion and Guidelines for Facilitating the Discussion:

Explanation and examples of different types of non-acceptance and disrespect are given below. After each example is given, the trainer asks the participants the following questions and gives them time to discuss:

- What is the non-acceptance and disrespect here?
- What are the consequences of this non-acceptance and disrespect?

(Additional questions: How might the person feel about themselves? What thoughts do they have? What emotions do they experience? How do they behave?)

Types of non-acceptance and disrespect can be broadly divided into three categories:

### 1. Non-acceptance of someone's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors

**Example:** A girl is left by her partner. She feels very sad and doesn't understand why the breakup happened. Others tell her: "It's your own fault, you didn't try hard enough in the relationship" or "Stop crying, there will be others, it's just one relationship, you'll have more."

*What is the non-acceptance and disrespect here?* The problem is that these statements do not respect the feelings of the girl who has been left by her partner. The first sentence seems to say that if she did something wrong, she has no right to feel bad. The second message says that feeling bad is wrong.

**Consequences:** The person begins to doubt themselves, wondering if it is normal to feel that way. They start to berate themselves for such thoughts and feelings and the belief that they are wrong, which can lead to depression.

### 2. Ignoring or punishing mild emotions, giving more attention to them when they escalate

**Example:** The same example with the girl. Others tell her "you're exaggerating, it's not that bad". She gets angry, shouts, throws things, threatens to hurt herself. When they see this they say to her "okay, let's go somewhere for dinner, maybe that will help you calm down".

*Why is this non-acceptance and disrespect?* Normal intensity emotions are not respected or accepted. But when they escalate, they are respected and accepted.

**Consequences:** The message is sent that only strong emotions can be respected and accepted. This further leads to the regular escalation of emotions whenever a problem arises in order for the person to feel respected and accepted. Others see this as excessive behavior and may further disrespect and not accept such expression of emotions, which further leads to even greater feelings of rejection from others and, consequently, feelings of shame, guilt, and depression.

### 3. Simplifying and underestimating problems

**Example:** The same example with the girl. Others tell her "it's easy to get over it, it's not that big of a problem" or "it's easy to make up, just need to...".

*What is the non-acceptance and disrespect here?* To tell someone who doesn't see the reasons or solutions that the solution is easy and they just need to do something is to disrespect the difficult situation the person is in, as well as to disrespect their view of the situation.

*Consequences:* The person may feel like they can't reason properly, like they're incapable of making adequate conclusions and solving problems like others can. As a result, this leads to self-reproach, self-criticism, self-deprecation, lack of self-confidence, and can consequently lead to feelings of shame and depression.

### Workshop Conclusion

The workshop can be concluded with a question of what was most significant to the participants in this workshop and why. After that, the trainer summarizes everything that was learned from the previous activities and ends the workshop.

**Key takeaways:** We come into this world and grow up with very little capacity to manage our emotions. If there is a lack of respect and acceptance in our environment, we do not have the opportunity to learn that these emotions are normal, but rather learn that they are not okay and that something may be wrong with us. This acts as adding fuel to the fire, making emotions even more intense, us more sensitive to them, and making it harder to calm down. If the environment is still disrespectful and unaccepting, this leads to further agitation and more intense emotions, which in turn leads to even more disrespect and unacceptance. Thus, emotions become even more intense and long-lasting. Now, the wider environment does not accept or respect this way of expressing feelings, which continues the vicious cycle. If we are aware of how disrespect and non-acceptance can affect us, we can be more mindful of how we talk to ourselves and others. This may not always be enough to calm our own and others' strong and unpleasant emotions, but sometimes it will. Therefore, not only can we help ourselves feel less bad, but we can also help others and improve our communication with them.



# How Our Mind Works

## Workshop 1: Emotional and Rational Mind

**Topic Description:** Through the metaphor of the three minds, participants learn to recognize how emotions affect our daily functioning and decision-making, and what role rational thinking plays in all of this. They learn to recognize that neither emotions without rational thinking and consideration of facts, nor rational thinking without emotions, are sufficient for adaptive functioning on their own. Participants learn how emotions and reason work together in balance, and how to manage their own emotions.

**Workshop Objective:** To help participants understand different aspects of mental functioning. How emotions and reason influence decision-making and everyday functioning. How to balance these two aspects of mental life.

### Workshop Content:

- Guided fantasy
- Introduction to the story of the three states of mind
- Activity “Connecting”
- Exercise “Consequences”
- Conclusion

**Materials:** Flipchart x 3, markers of different colors

**Recommended Time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum Number of Participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise with participants before the start of the workshop.

## Guided Fantasy

1. The trainer explains to the participants that they will be doing an activity called guided fantasy. The trainer tells a story, and their task is to make themselves comfortable in their chairs (or wherever they are comfortable), close their eyes, and try to immerse themselves in the story as if it were happening to them. Once everyone is ready, the trainer begins the story:

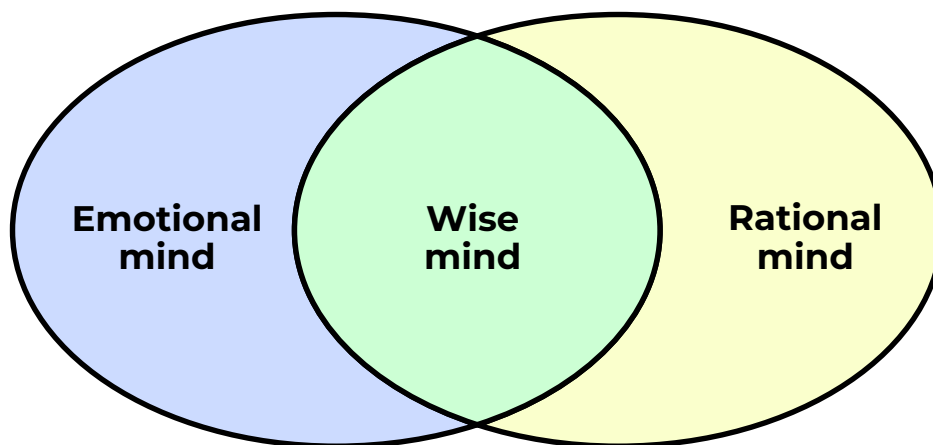
*Imagine that you have gotten a new job. You are working as an assistant manager in an elite restaurant. You like your job and want to prove yourself and advance in your career. You are working hard to be the best employee possible. One day, your boss asks you to transport new crystal glasses from the store to the restaurant for a private dinner party that the restaurant is hosting. You go to the store, pick up the glasses, put them in the trunk of your car, and start driving back to the restaurant. You are driving carefully in the right lane, not only because you are a cautious driver in general, but also because you don't want the glasses to break. At one point during the drive, near the restaurant, the car behind you starts to overtake you. You are driving slowly and let it overtake you, but during the overtaking, it suddenly swerves in front of you into the right lane and cuts you off. Afraid of colliding, you slam on the brakes and at that moment you hear a crash from the trunk. You start to feel agitated. You think about how you're being careful, paying attention, putting in the effort, and then some idiot in traffic just ruins your effort and nearly kills you. You start to feel angry. You think about how "he shouldn't get away with that, he needs to get what's coming to him." You start chasing him to try to stop him and show him who's boss. In your anger, you try to catch up to him and at one point, in order to overtake the car in front of you, you suddenly swerve back into your lane and cut off the car you overtook. You hear the screech of tires behind you and see that the car you cut off had to stop to avoid colliding with you. You think "now I'm the one who nearly killed someone." You realize what you've done and pull over into a parking lot to calm down and then continue driving after you've calmed down because you realize that you're not driving very carefully, that you nearly hit someone, and that the few glasses that may have remained whole have now broken during the chase.*

2. The trainer guides the participants into a discussion about emotions by asking them the following questions:
  - *Did you feel any anger at any point during this story?*
  - *At what point did you feel anger?*
  - *What do you think this reaction is? Is this reaction rational? If not, what is it?*

**Note:** The trainer allows the participants to discuss and come up with the answers themselves. If necessary, the trainer can suggest that it is an emotionally driven reaction. After that, the trainer asks the participants what is the opposite of the emotional part of us / the emotional part of our mind? The participants should come up with the answer through discussion, and if necessary, the trainer can suggest that it is the rational, or the rational mind. Finally, the participants are asked how the story would continue if only the rational part of us existed. The correct answer would be to continue driving without getting upset and as if nothing had happened, and to deliver the remaining glasses to the restaurant. If the participants do not come to the correct conclusion on their own, the trainer can suggest this answer to them.

## Introduction to the Story of the Three States of Mind

1. The trainer uses the recommended conclusions and introduces the participants to the three states of mind: the rational mind, the emotional mind, and the healthy/wise mind.
2. The trainer draws a Venn diagram to illustrate the three states of mind. The first circle is labeled "Emotional Mind." The second circle is labeled "Rational Mind" and overlaps with the first circle slightly. The place where the two circles overlap is labeled "Healthy/Wise Mind."



3. The trainer explains the following to the participants:

**The emotional mind** is what we feel is true. When we behave or think solely on the basis of emotions, without much logic, reason, or thought about the consequences. As in our example, when we react angrily in traffic, it is coming from the emotional mind.

**The rational mind** is what we think is true. When we think or behave without the presence of emotions. Like some kind of calculating mind. As we discussed earlier, what our reaction would look like without emotions.

**The wise mind** is located at the intersection of these two. It equally includes our intuition, the feeling of whether something is right or wrong, and the rational, logical part. Let's talk about this in a little more detail.

4. The trainer asks the participants if any of them have an idea of what the reaction from the wise mind would look like in our story?

**Note:** Allow the participants to give some answers, but do not direct them. If they have nothing to say, continue with the workshop.

## Activity: “Connecting”

World Cafe Method is a way to facilitate the creation of friendly and cooperative conditions in which different perspectives can be connected, shared discoveries made, and insights from different participants heard.

1. On three flipcharts in the room, spaced apart from each other (on 3 different walls, or on 3 tables), the headings "Rational Mind" on one, "Emotional Mind" on another, and "Wise Mind" on the third should be displayed. The participants are divided into three equal groups and given markers/pencils and stickers.
2. The trainer explains to the participants that they will be doing an activity called World Cafe because a cafe is a friendly place, a place where we come to talk in a relaxed atmosphere, meet up with friends, chat, but sometimes also share knowledge.
3. The trainer gives instructions that each flipchart represents a table around which a group gathers to discuss, exchange knowledge, and come up with solutions in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. The participants should write on the stickers they have received as many decisions and behaviors as they think belong to the part of our mind written on the board. The trainer explains that through discussion, the participants should generate as many examples as possible of when they themselves or someone else reacted emotionally, rationally, or wisely. The trainer can give examples (for the rational mind, this could be "copying/pasting" in a Word document or looking up the number of a building on a street, for the emotional mind, it could be "breaking things in anger", etc.). It is important to note that this exercise is not a knowledge test, but rather a learning tool, so participants do not have to worry about whether their answer is correct or not.
4. Each group stays at each flipchart for 5-10 minutes, and then each group will move on to the first next flipchart. When they reach the next flipchart, they should try not to write the same things on the stickers that are already there.
5. Participants return to their seats when all three groups have passed through all three flipcharts, after a total of 15-30 minutes.
6. Once everyone is seated, representatives from each group approach one flipchart at a time and read aloud what is written on the stickers.
7. After the exercise is over, the trainer debriefs by asking the following questions:
  - *Do you have any comments on what you heard on the flipcharts? Did anyone hear something that belongs on a different flipchart?*
  - *How did you find this activity?*
  - *How did you come up with examples for the wise mind? How were you able to recognize examples of the wise mind?*
  - *Did anything leave a special impression on you? What? Why?*

## Exercise: “Consequences”

Exercise on the ways emotions motivate us to engage in different maladaptive behaviors. In this exercise, participants generate a list of maladaptive behaviors that can arise as a result of different emotions.

1. The trainer writes one emotion at a time on a flipchart. After each emotion is written, the trainer asks the participants how we behave when we feel that way. For each emotion, the trainer writes down what the participants say next to it.

Example:

- Anger: I slam doors, break things
  - Sadness: I lie in bed, cry constantly, use drugs and/or alcohol
  - Shame: I want to disappear, I'm suicidal
  - Love/infatuation: I have unprotected sex, I neglect my studies, work, etc.
  - Fear: I avoid what's good for me
  - Happiness and excitement: I spend money impulsively
  - Guilt: I apologize too much
  - Worry: I constantly check things
2. The trainer asks the following questions and encourages discussion among the participants:
    - *Do you think these behaviors are good for us? Why? Why avoiding exams because we are afraid of failing is not good for us? Why lying in bed and withdrawing from others when we are sad is not good for us? Why breaking things or attacking someone when we are angry is not good for us?*
    - *Does anyone have an example of when the emotional mind is good? For example, when we attend a beautiful event, such as a friend's wedding, we cannot relax and enjoy ourselves if we don't have an emotional mind. Or when we watch a game and we get into it and cheer.*
    - *What is the rational mind, then? The rational mind is the complete opposite of the emotional mind. Now that we have talked about the emotional mind, what would you say the rational mind is?*
    - *Does anyone have an example of the rational mind? The rational mind is when we act or think about something but without emotions. For example, solving logical and mathematical problems, planning... (it is possible that someone will say that they do not like to do that and that they get nervous when they do math, for example. Accept such a comment and say that even though it makes us nervous, we solve logical problems and that this is a good example of the wise mind, but that you will talk about that later). The rational mind is very useful for performing many tasks, but not all of them. For example, what if we only used the rational mind to choose a partner? Who would you ask out on a date? When choosing who to go on a date with, isn't it enough to know that someone is healthy, smart, has a job, and that's it? Or for choosing a career? Shouldn't those decisions be made rationally since they are important? Isn't it enough that the job pays money and that's it? Are emotions important in making any of these decisions?*

## Workshop Conclusion

The workshop can be concluded by asking the participants what was most significant to them about the workshop and why. After that, the trainer summarizes everything that was learned from the previous activities and concludes the workshop.

**Important Lessons:** Both emotions and reason play an important role in decision-making, but neither reason nor emotions alone are sufficient for healthy and adaptive functioning. Only together can they give the desired result. In fact, the skill of using the wise mind, which involves respecting both emotions and reason simultaneously, is one of the important components of emotional intelligence. It enables us to better manage our own emotions and behavior, and thus function in a healthier, more mature, and more adaptive way.

# How Our Mind Works?

## Workshop 2: Wise Mind – Balance Between Emotions and Reason

**Topic Description:** Through the metaphor of the three minds, participants learn to recognize how emotions influence our daily functioning and decision-making, and what the role of rational thinking is in all of this. They learn to recognize that emotions without rational thinking and consideration of facts, nor rational thinking without emotions, are not sufficient for adaptive functioning on their own. Participants learn how emotions and reason work together in balance, i.e., how to manage their own emotions.

**Workshop Objective:** To help participants understand different aspects of mental functioning. How to balance the emotional and rational aspects of psychological life. Participants will learn about the wise mind, i.e., what it looks like when we make decisions based on both emotions and reason.

### Workshop Content:

- Introduction to the wise mind story
- Activity: "Story with an alternative ending"
- Conclusion

### Materials:

- Flipchart
- Markers of different colors
- Printed unfinished stories for the activity "Story with an alternative ending"
- Papers and pencils

**Recommended time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Note:** It is recommended to conduct this workshop with participants after conducting the first workshop on this topic.

**Recommendation:** Before starting the workshop, conduct a short mindfulness exercise with the participants.

## Introduction

1. The trainer reminds the participants of the three minds metaphor and introduces them to the story of the wise mind in the following way:

*The wise mind is a combination of the rational mind and the emotional mind. We all possess this wise part, it's just a matter of how to access it. Have you ever noticed that you "feel something in your stomach" or "have intuition"? But if what we feel is also reasonable and rational (logical and follows from facts), then we are talking about the healthy/wise mind, not the emotional mind. Imagine the following scenario, for example: You have a partner who you love, but you often fight, your relationship is not going well, you feel like you can't communicate at all. You love your partner, but something in your gut tells you that you need to break up with them. This could be a good example of the healthy/wise mind. Has something similar ever happened to you? (Allow participants to discuss if they wish). So, despite your emotions, you have a feeling that it is better not to be in the relationship. Then the emotional and rational minds together give the wise mind. Or for example, you have a strong urge not to go to a job interview because something is scaring you. But at the same time, you feel like it is better for you to go to that job interview. This is also the wise mind.*

2. The trainer tells the participants the following story and asks the following questions to stimulate discussion:

*How many of you here love animals? Imagine that you have two dogs at home. On your way home from work, you stop by the animal shelter where you got your two dogs and where you occasionally donate pet food. There you see two golden retriever puppies. You look at them and they start whining and jumping around wagging their tails when they see you. They are irresistibly cute.*

- *What does your emotional mind say? ("How cute they are. They're so pathetic locked up in this little cage. I have to adopt them, they can't stay here.")*
- *What does your rational mind say? ("I already have two dogs. It's expensive to take care of two more. I need to buy food, vaccinate them, and take them to the vet regularly. And I live in a very small apartment. And I'm not at home most of the day because I'm at work. Who knows how my two dogs will get along with these puppies. And they're not trained to go to the bathroom outside, they'll go to the bathroom in the apartment while I'm at work.")*
- *What does the wise mind say in this situation? What decision could it make?*

If participants have difficulty coming up with an answer, the trainer can offer the following solution:

**Example:** *The wise mind says: "Given the circumstances that the rational mind has pointed out, I can't adopt them. But since I don't have the heart to leave them here either, maybe I could try to get them adopted as soon as possible." Then you take pictures of the dogs, post their pictures on social media and ask who can adopt them as soon as possible. You hope that one of your friends who doesn't have pets will adopt them. To encourage them to adopt, you offer them the dog bed that your dogs no longer use, offer to teach them how to train them to live in the apartment and to walk them occasionally when you walk your dogs. By doing this, you are respecting both the*



*emotional and rational mind. The wise mind respects both your desires and emotions, but also reality.*

### **Activity: “Story with an Alternative Ending”**

Activity for discovering strategies for accessing the wise mind through cooperative work of participants

1. The trainer instructs the participants and divides them into three or four groups.
2. Each group is given an unfinished story<sup>1</sup> and it is explained to all participants that the task is to finish the story in three scenarios:
  - How would the story continue and end if they only used the rational mind?
  - How would the story continue and end if they only used the emotional mind?
  - How would the story continue and end if they used the wise mind?
3. Also, after finishing the stories in three scenarios, each group has the task of stating/defining a strategy that allows access to the wise mind.
4. 15 minutes are provided for group work, after which the participants return to their seats.
5. Representatives of the teams first present their endings to the story, and then the strategies for accessing the wise mind that they have devised. The trainer encourages all participants to comment after each story is read.
6. Debriefing:
  - *How difficult was it for you to come up with an ending to the story from the perspective of the wise mind together?*
  - *How did you come up with a strategy for accessing the wise mind?*
  - *Did anything leave a special impression on you? What? Why?*

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<sup>1</sup>Stories are included in Appendix 3

## Workshop Conclusion

The workshop can be concluded by asking the participants what was most significant to them about this workshop and why. After that, the trainer summarizes everything that was learned from the previous activities and finishes the workshop.

*Important Lessons:* We need both the rational and emotional mind for important decisions. Decisions about career, job, college, partners, and the like require us to use both minds. When choosing a job, a partner, a career, or a place to live, it is important to consider both rational thinking and emotions. Otherwise, we may be very unhappy with our decision. It's great to have a job that pays well, a successful career, a good neighborhood to live in, or a smart partner, but what good is that if we don't like it too? On the other hand, we may have a job that we like but doesn't lead anywhere and we can't make a living from it, a partner that we like but isn't good for us, and so on. Therefore, reason without emotions or emotions without reason do not lead to something good for us. That's why the healthy/wise mind is important. Decision-making that respects both emotions and reason simultaneously gives us the opportunity to better assess situations, not react impulsively, rashly, or suddenly, and to make better decisions for ourselves and our relationships. All of this leads us to a more satisfying life, the kind of life that makes more sense to us and is in line with what is important to us. It is not always easy to access the wise mind, and sometimes our emotions will pull us to their side. It would be too much to expect that this will not happen to us. But what we can do is to practice this skill and try to use the wise mind whenever the opportunity presents itself.

# Acceptance

## Workshop 1: Winning Without a Fight

**Topic Description:** Acceptance is a strategy for developing emotional flexibility. Participants learn to accept their own and others' unwanted emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and the unfavorable circumstances that surround them, rather than controlling or avoiding them.

**Workshop Objective:** To introduce the concept of accepting one's own emotions, thoughts, conflicts, and inner processes in general. To help participants become aware of their resistance to emotions and thoughts and to develop greater emotional flexibility.

### Workshop content:

- Opening exercise – short mindfulness exercise
- Introduction activity
- Activity “Tug of war”
  - Version 1 of the activity “Tug of war”
  - Version 2 of the activity “Tug of war”
- Conclusion

### Materials:

- Flipchart and markers
- Thick hemp rope or fabric tape
- Printed role for the activity “Tug of Wars” (Handout 3)

**Recommended time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise with participants before starting the workshop.

## Introductory Activity

1. The trainer reminds participants of what they have learned about emotions in previous workshops, such as how they are created, what they are for, and how we feel them. With the conversation about how to deal with unwanted emotions and emotional problems already underway, the trainer also reminds participants of the exercise from a previous workshop where they wrote about how they deal with emotions on a piece of paper with an outline of the human body.

Suggested introduction:

*Sometimes we try to get rid of fear or anger by avoiding certain situations. Or sadness or guilt by drinking or using drugs. But these ways of coping with emotions often do not provide a long-term solution and often make the problem worse. To a greater or lesser extent, we have all had the experience of trying to solve some emotional problem, but it is still there, perhaps even bigger than before.*

2. The trainer gives participants the following example from their "own" life:

*I was on my way to work in the morning for an important meeting when I saw that someone had hit my car in the parking lot. I got furious and could only think about how to find that person and explain a few things to them. That was actually my way of coping with the anger I was feeling, of finding the person who hit my car and giving them what they deserved. I thought about whether there was a camera around so I could find the person who hit my car, but there was no camera anywhere. The more aware I became that I couldn't do anything, the more irritated I got and raged with anger because I couldn't resolve the situation the way I wanted. And then I remembered that I had an important meeting soon and I thought about how I couldn't go into the meeting so angry. I wouldn't be able to concentrate because of the anger, I would get confused, I would do something wrong. And then I got really anxious about the possibility of making a mistake in the meeting, and also ashamed of the fact that I, a grown man, couldn't control my emotions at work. I thought about what to do, I even thought about having a drink before the meeting to calm down. But then I would smell like alcohol and that wouldn't look good. What would you do?*

3. The trainer encourages discussion among the participants and writes their answers on the flipchart.
4. Instead of a conclusion, the trainer proposes the "Tug of War" activity, which is designed to help individuals recognize the internal conflicts and struggles they feel within themselves. Tug of war is a metaphor for our long-standing and not-so-successful struggles with various unwanted thoughts and emotions. On one side of the rope is us, and on the other side are the thoughts or emotions with which we have been struggling for a long period of time. These struggles can sometimes be exhausting and discouraging, and as a result, we often find ourselves feeling hopeless, helpless, or trapped in the tug of war. This tool is designed to help us understand the mechanisms of resistance to unwanted emotions or thoughts, so that we can achieve greater flexibility of mind and emotional freedom.

## Activity: “Tug of War”

This activity can be conducted in two ways. The first suggested method is for trainers with less experience, while the second, more challenging method is for trainers with more experience!

### “Tug of War” Version 1

Provide a comfortable and quiet space for the activity. It is desirable for the participants to be physically separated from each other so that they can focus on their inner processes.

1. The trainer introduces the “Tug of War” exercise to the participants. The purpose of the exercise is to explore the internal conflicts and struggles that they feel within themselves. The trainer also emphasizes that this is not a competition and that it is not important “who will win”, but that the focus is on understanding their own processes.
2. The trainer instructs the participants to imagine that they are in a tug of war game. They need to imagine that they are holding one side of the rope and that their opponent, who represents the emotion, thought, or repressed feeling that the person wants to free themselves from (e.g., fear of failure), is holding the other side of the rope. Between them is a chasm into which they are trying to pull each other. The participants are given 30-60 seconds to imagine this image.
3. The participants should imagine how every attempt to pull their opponent into the chasm actually represents a strategy that they use in real life. For example, every avoidance or every attempt to do something perfectly and flawlessly is one way to pull their opponent (fear of failure) into the chasm. They should try to imagine all the strategies they use in real life to pull their opponent into the chasm. The trainer gives them 30–60 seconds to imagine this image.
4. The trainer instructs the participants to try to visualize this inner “struggle” and to notice how they feel while observing it.
5. Then, questions are asked to the participants, and their task is to try to answer the questions within themselves and for themselves. For each question asked, they are given 30-60 seconds to think about their answer. Questions are asked that will help the participants to explore their internal conflicts in more depth:
  - How do you feel while observing this “struggle” within yourself?
  - Which side looks stronger? Why?
  - How long has this struggle been going on?
  - How much energy and time have you invested in this struggle so far?
  - What new things could you try? Remember, letting go of the rope would be surrender, and we don't want that.
  - Now imagine that you let go of that rope and let it fall to the ground, that you won't fight anymore. What happens then? How do you feel?
  - Imagine that you turn around and walk freely, that you are no longer tied to one place where you were standing to fight. How does that feel?

- Imagine that, as you walk freely, your opponent follows close behind and offers you your end of the rope, but you refuse. How do you feel?
- What new things do you gain by letting go of the rope and stopping pulling on your side?

### “Tug of War” Version 2

This version of the activity is conducted by the workshop leader with one participant, while the others observe and, when the leader asks them to, participate.

1. The trainer asks the participants if any of them would like to be the protagonist in this exercise and play the role that will be assigned to them. If none of the participants volunteer, the protagonist can be someone from the team that is leading the workshop.
2. The protagonist is given a paper with instructions for the role<sup>1</sup> and is instructed to try to get into character as much as possible. The protagonist is free to improvise the given role, but it is important that they understand it and represent it clearly.
3. After the protagonist is prepared, they return to the room and the trainer explains the rules to the participants:
  - The trainer takes one end of the rope with one hand and gives the other end to the protagonist. They explain that they will be playing the game of “tug of war” together.
  - The trainer clearly emphasizes to everyone that the protagonist is playing a person who has a problem, and that the trainer is the problem that they are “tugging” and fighting with.
  - The rules of the game are as follows: there is a chasm between the two of them, and the goal is to pull the other person into the chasm. The protagonist's attempts to free themselves from the fear of disapproval in this game are attempts to pull the trainer into the chasm.
  - The participants observe what happens on the “scene” and imagine that they are in the protagonist's place, and that some emotional problem that they are dealing with (fear of failure, sadness and loneliness, anger at someone, feeling of shame...) is on the other side of the rope, i.e., in the place where the workshop leader is.
  - The trainer should emphasize that the rope is not pulled with all one's strength because the goal of this activity is not to see who is stronger, but to metaphorically show what our struggle with emotions can sometimes look like. If everyone understands the rules, the tug of war can begin:
    - The protagonist introduces themselves and states the problem that they have been struggling with for years (e.g., fear of disapproval and rejection).

<sup>1</sup> Instructions for the role are included in Appendix 4

- The trainer introduces themselves to the protagonist as their problem, i.e., as the fear of disapproval and rejection, and asks them in what ways they have tried to get rid of it. The trainer instructs the protagonist to pull the rope towards them each time they mention one of the ways, and when they do, the trainer will also pull the rope back towards them. During the tug of war, the trainer should give the protagonist enough time to remember as many ways as possible, and it is also allowed to remind the protagonist of strategies from the script as well as the creativity of the protagonist and trainer to come up with and add their own ways.
- After a few pulls, the trainer/problem asks the protagonist the following questions and keeps pulling the rope towards their side all the time:
  - Have any of those methods been successful in the long term and has any strategy been able to permanently eliminate the fear of disapproval? The expected answer is none. Some may have been successful for a time, but none have been able to permanently eliminate the fear of disapproval.
  - How long has the trainer/problem been present in their life? To state that they have been struggling and spending energy to deal with it for many years.
  - Is it likely that this fear will ever completely go away? The expected answer is no.
  - Does the protagonist have any idea what they could do then? If they say that they can pull harder, the trainer pulls harder on the rope and says that they/the problem are not going anywhere, just like they have not before. The protagonist can say that they will give up, but point out to them that this means that they will lose, and that is not the goal. The expected answer that the protagonist should come to on their own is to let go of the rope.
  - If they don't come to this answer on their own, the trainer asks: does anyone in the audience have a better solution? (They will probably already be giving suggestions by then). When someone says to let go of the rope, the trainer/problem advises the protagonist to try that. If they let go of the rope, the trainer picks up their end and offers it back to them.
  - If the protagonist accepts the other end, the trainer pulls their section and continues the “fight”.
- The trainer/problem asks the protagonist what they plan to do now. It is likely that the group will suggest that they let go of the rope again and this time not accept the offered rope back into their hands. The trainer/problem suggests that the protagonist does just that.

- When the protagonist lets go of the rope again, the trainer/problem suggests that they move freely around the room. As they move, the trainer/problem follows them holding their end of the rope and offering it to them. If they take the rope again, the trainer should repeat the previous step. When they finally let go of the rope, the trainer asks them if they can now walk freely even though the trainer/problem is following them? Do they feel freer when they walk freely and don't take their end of the rope in their hands? Do they spend less energy on fighting with the trainer/problem? Can they choose what to do without regard to the trainer/problem following them? The trainer should involve the other participants in the discussion<sup>1</sup>.

4. The trainer summarizes the activity with the following words:

*Acceptance is a skill, the ability to experience emotions, sensations, or thoughts without trying to control or avoid them. It is a choice that a person makes consciously, not something that just happens.*

5. Debriefing:

- *Would anyone like to share their impressions of today's workshop?*
- *How did you understand today's activity*
- *If you were in the protagonist's place, what would you have done differently?*
- *How applicable is what you have seen to real life?*
- *In your opinion, what are the obstacles to applying the skill of acceptance in real life?*

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<sup>1</sup>An example scenario for this version of "Tug of War" exercise is included in Appendix 5



## Workshop conclusion

The workshop can be concluded with the question of what was most significant to the participants in this workshop for them and why. After that, the trainer summarizes everything that was learned from the previous activities and ends the workshop.

**Important lessons:** We are all tormented by different internal conflicts. Various strong emotions, thoughts, and various behaviors of ours that we do not like. And we all try to defeat them in some way. For example, we may feel a strong fear of exams, and then we may maniacally study before the exam so that there is no chance that we will make a mistake or not know something. Or we may avoid taking the exam altogether. Fear of error and failure can sometimes be very strong.

In some cases, our strategies for dealing with emotional problems cause more harm than good. We know this because we have been struggling with a problem for years and have not been able to overcome it. Sometimes, some fears, moods, and conflicts are a part of ourselves that is difficult to change, so perhaps the best strategy is to accept that they exist and not fight them. Sometimes it is better to accept that there will be anger that will prevent us from thinking clearly, but instead of fighting it, we can accept that it will be there and go to that meeting.

Sun Tzu, the author of *The Art of War*, said that “the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” It seems that this philosophy can also be applied to our internal enemies, and that the weapon with which we can win without fighting is precisely acceptance.

Of course, we are talking about problems that cannot harm ourselves or someone else. If we cannot control our anger and there is a danger that someone will suffer, if we are so scared that fear paralyzes us from doing something, or if we are depressed, suicidal, or self-harming, this skill is not applicable. Then it is important to reach out to a professional.

# Acceptance

## Workshop 2: Towards Emotional Flexibility

**Topic description:** Acceptance is a strategy for developing emotional flexibility. Participants learn to accept their own and others' unwanted emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and unfavorable surrounding circumstances, instead of controlling or avoiding them.

**Workshop objective:** To introduce the concept of accepting one's own emotions, thoughts, conflicts, and inner processes in general. To help participants become aware of resistance to emotions and thoughts, and to develop greater emotional flexibility.

### Workshop content:

- Activity: "Exhibition of Pocket Problems"
- Benefits of acceptance
- Conclusion
- End-of-workshop task

### Materials:

- Flipchart, markers
- Paper in different colors, pencils, markers, staplers, paper glue, scissors, old magazines and newspapers, other materials that can be used to make small-format drawings, figures, and collages

**Recommended time:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Conduct a short mindfulness exercise with participants before starting the workshop.

## Activity: "Exhibition of Pocket Problems"

Raising awareness of one's own inner struggles through creative expression, but also an additional opportunity to learn acceptance.

1. The trainer explains to the participants that they will be working with art during this activity. Art is one of the most effective channels for raising awareness and safely sharing one's inner content. Many artists have used their skills for the purposes of catharsis - emotional expression that would help them to make their own suffering clearer, less threatening, and more acceptable to themselves. In this activity, all participants will try to use art for the same purposes. The good thing about this is that they will be able to show others how they feel without sharing any of their own personal content, because the message can be hidden in the work of art.
2. The materials are arranged in several piles in the room, and the participants are asked to make/draw something that would represent what they have not been able to successfully cope with for some time. It could be procrastination, sadness, loneliness, fear, anger, perfectionism, lateness, inertness, avoidance... They can represent this problem in any way they want - by drawing, origami, collage, making a figure out of glue, staplers, paper... What is important is that what they make is pocket-sized, i.e. that it can fit in the pocket of a jacket, pants, or the like. Each work must have a title that cannot be the name of what it is supposed to represent, but some creative name that associates the artist with what it represents. (For example, a work that represents anger could be called "fist". A work that represents avoidance or fear could be called "run, run" and so on). The work can be very simple, or it can be complex, whatever the artist wants. It is important that the artist knows what the work represents to them.
3. While the participants are working for 30 minutes, the trainers should prepare an exhibition space where the works will be displayed.
4. When they have finished creating their work, the participants are invited to place their work in the exhibition space, and then to walk around the exhibition and reflect on what each work represents to them. The artist does not need to explain their work to others, but to leave the observer to experience it as they wish. It is up to the observer to understand the work as they wish.
5. Debriefing:
  - *How did you feel while doing this activity?*
  - *Was there anything particularly difficult?*
  - *Which other artist's work made a special impression on you? Why?*

After the debriefing, the exhibition remains where it is placed, and the trainer continues the workshop by conducting two short exercises to help participants better understand the concept of acceptance and to see that trying to suppress or avoid their unwanted thoughts, emotions, and problems is not an effective way to cope with them.

## Exercise 1

The trainer tells the participants the following story:

*We will continue to talk about acceptance. I will give you an interesting metaphor. Imagine that you are in a swimming pool, and let the pool be a metaphor for your life. We can swim freely in this pool, but there are different balls in the pool. The balls are a metaphor for our thoughts, emotions, and various problems that we have difficulty dealing with. And imagine that you are trying to get rid of these balls by pushing them under the surface and holding them there.*

Trainer asks participants the following questions without expecting answers:

- *Have you ever tried to hold a ball under the surface of water?*
- *How long did you manage to hold the ball under the surface of the water?*
- *Was it easy or difficult?*
- *Would you be able to enjoy swimming while holding the ball under the surface of the water?*
- *And how much effort did it take to hold the ball under the surface of the water? Would it be worth it to put all your effort into it knowing that the ball will float up as soon as you let go?*

## Exercise 2

The trainer suggests that the participants do a small mental experiment.

The trainer explains that all that is needed is to listen carefully to the trainer's instructions and do what they are told. They don't need to say anything, just get comfortable and follow the instructions:

*Imagine a pink giraffe. Imagine it with as much detail as possible. Observe its hooves, legs, body, tail, long pink neck, the patterns on its fur, head, ears, and nose. Imagine the whole giraffe pink. Observe it. Maybe it's doing something, or maybe it's just a picture. But hold it in your mind and look carefully. When I give you a sign, you will completely stop thinking about it for 30 seconds. It must not cross your mind once. Not even once, not in any way. Three, four – now!*

The trainer lets 30 seconds pass regardless of the participants' reactions. Some may rebel, some may laugh, but only after 30 seconds does the trainer ask if anyone has managed not to think about the pink giraffe for even a millisecond. Most participants will say that it is not possible. If someone says that they have succeeded, they should be asked to explain their strategy in detail to the others. It is very likely that they will not be able to, but the trainer should allow the participants to discuss. The conclusion that the trainer should direct the participants towards is that as long as they give themselves the directive not to think about the pink giraffe, it will be there somewhere in their mind.

The trainer allows the participants to come to the conclusion on their own that when they stop thinking about it, when they accept that it is there and allow it to be there for as long as it wants, then they will forget it. The trainer should also check if the participants see any parallels with the story of the pool and the balloons.

## Advantages of acceptance

The trainer discusses with the participants the advantages of accepting the following situations:

- *Rainy weather when you have an important job to do outside;*
- *Your friend is always late for appointments and can't seem to change that;*
- *Someone stole your wallet in transit and there is no way to get your money and documents back;*
- *The relationship that you were very attached to is over and there is no hope of it being renewed;*
- *We are simply biologically prone to anxiety and by nature fearful (or, for example, prone to melancholy).*

At the end of the discussion, the trainer conducts a short debriefing by asking the participants questions:

- *Does acceptance seem to you like a skill that you can apply in some areas of your life?*
- *Which ones?*

## Workshop conclusion

The trainer clarifies to the participants the important aspects of acceptance and writes the following text in bold on the flipchart:

- ***Acceptance is one way (not the only way) to cope with unpleasant emotions and not make the situation worse.***

The trainer emphasizes that there are many other ways to cope with unpleasant emotions and asks the participants if they have any ideas about what other ways they are. He encourages discussion among the participants and concludes that there are a variety of strategies for coping with emotional problems, some of which are less effective and some more effective. Some bring more benefits, while others bring more harm. Acceptance is just one of the strategies.

- ***Acceptance is a decision that we make, our choice, not a feeling.***

The trainer emphasizes that the good news is that we can choose to accept, and the bad news is that things won't change overnight. It takes reminding ourselves over and over again to "let go of the rope" so that it becomes habitual for us.

- ***Acceptance is a skill that is practiced.***

The trainer emphasizes that we need to be constantly reminded to let go of our part of the rope and that we often won't succeed, but when we realize that we're doing it, we can let go.

- ***Acceptance is not the same as surrender, approval, or non-reaction.***

The trainer emphasizes that acceptance does not mean defeat, surrender, or avoidance. It simply means that we accept the present situation as it is. Unlike defeat and surrender, “letting go of the rope” is something that we can choose to do on our own. When we accept, we can focus on a goal while respecting the circumstances. For example, we can accept that it is raining outside even though we don't like it, and instead of fighting the rain by shouting, getting angry, or trying to build a cloud-breaking machine and wasting precious time, we can take an umbrella, waterproof shoes, and go to see our loved ones.

- ***Acceptance does not mean indifference and non-reaction.***

On the contrary, acceptance still means that we feel angry because someone has deceived us, afraid of losing our job, sad because of the loss of a friend, but that we accept that such a possibility exists. If there is a meaningful way to solve the problem (e.g., we try to fix a mistake at work or apologize to a friend if we made a mistake), we should do that. Acceptance means that we accept, rather than running away and not trying to control the circumstances or our emotions.

## **Final assignment**

At the end, the trainer instructs the participants to each take their pocket problem with them and carry it with them for a week. The task is to put the problem in the pocket of the clothes they always wear, or in their wallet or phone case, or hang it on a bracelet or necklace, and carry it with them at all times, but not to deal with it. Of course, it will sometimes bother and frustrate them that it is there and that they can't get rid of it (at least for those seven days), but they should not try to, but simply continue with their daily activities while carrying their pocket problem with them. In this way, they can remind themselves that they can still do what they set their minds to and carry out their planned activities without dwelling on the problem more than necessary, even though it is with them all the time.

# Empathy and Compassion (with self and others)

## Workshop 1: In Someone Else's Shoes

**Topic description:** Participants develop the ability to put themselves in the position of another person, to understand the reasons for their behavior, and to see the world from their perspective. They learn to accept the perspectives of others and to see the reasons for behaviors that they do not approve of, instead of criticizing them. In addition, participants learn to feel stable, strong, and motivated to help the person they empathize with. They learn to develop a compassionate relationship with themselves and others and to observe their own and others' emotions and behaviors in this way.

**Workshop objective:** To understand the concept of decentration, i.e., to develop the ability to see a situation from the position of another person.

### Workshop content:

- Cinderella – “in someone else's shoes”
- Conclusion

### Materials:

- Printed shortened version of the fairy tale “Cinderella” in 3 copies<sup>1</sup>
- Blank sheets of paper (minimum 9 sheets)
- Pens

**Recommended time:** 60 to 90 minutes depending on the number of participants.

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Before the start of the workshop, conduct a short mindfulness exercise with the participants.

<sup>1</sup>The story is included in Appendix 6

## Cinderella - in someone else's shoes

1. At the beginning of the workshop, the participants are divided into three smaller groups and sit in groups, next to each other.
2. The trainer checks to see if the participants are familiar with the story of Cinderella and gives them instructions that each group should tell the story from a different perspective. The first group tells the story from the father's perspective, the second from the stepmother's perspective, and the third group from the sisters' perspective. The trainer emphasizes that it is important to tell the story entirely from the perspective of the character they have been given. If they feel that some details are missing or that there is no explanation for some of their decisions in the story, they can come up with those parts of the story as a group and complete it. The trainer instructs the participants to think about what happened to their characters before the story, how they grew up, and what their life path looked like.
3. The trainer gives the groups a copy of the story, blank paper and pens so they can retell the story. One representative from each group will later read the story to the entire group.
4. When creating stories from the perspective of different characters in Cinderella, it is important to avoid labeling the characters as "evil stepmother" and "evil sisters" as is common when talking about this fairy tale, and to emphasize that it is important to get answers for the actions of the characters that the groups have been given, which are not in the original version of the story. After all the groups have finished their work, the participants return to the "big circle" and the group representatives come out one by one and read their version of the story. After each version of the story is read, the trainer asks the group questions:
  - *How did you come up with this version of the story?*
  - *How did you perceive your character in the original version of the story?*
  - *What is different in your version from the original?*
5. After the readings are finished, the trainer asks the whole group the question: "Why did we do this workshop?"
6. If one of the participants says, "to see how things look from another perspective/in someone else's shoes", note that the answer is correct and that this is de-centration.



## Workshop conclusion

The workshop can be concluded by asking the participants what was most important to them in this workshop and why. Afterwards, the trainer summarizes everything learned from the previous activities and concludes the workshop.

*Important lessons:* Decentration, as the key concept of the workshop, is the ability to see things from outside one's own perspective, which is essential for developing deeper relationships and understanding with others. Decentration helps us primarily in developing empathy, understanding, and interpersonal skills.

# Empathy and Compassion (with self and others)

## Workshop 2: Compassion Act

**Topic description:** Participants develop the ability to put themselves in the position of another person and to understand the reasons for their behavior and see the world from their perspective. They learn to accept the perspectives of others and to see the reasons for behaviors that they disapprove of, instead of criticizing them. In addition, participants learn to feel stable, strong, and motivated to help the person they empathize with. They learn to develop a compassionate relationship with themselves and others and in this way to observe their own and others' emotions and behaviors.

**Workshop objective:** To develop compassion and empathy for oneself and others. Learning communication skills with oneself and others

### Workshop content:

- Introduction to compassion
- Activity: "Method Acting"
- Conclusion

**Materials:** Flipchart, flipchart markers, handout with a description of the acting method

**Recommended time:** 60 to 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 20

**Recommendation:** Before the start of the workshop, conduct a short mindfulness exercise with the participants

## Introduction to compassion

The trainer starts the workshop with the following question and encourages discussion among the participants:

*Can anyone explain what the term "compassion" means to you?*

After the discussion, the trainer reads the following definition of compassion to the participants:

*Compassion is defined as an emotional response that involves feeling sorry for and caring about the pain, suffering, or difficulties of others. It is the ability to understand and feel the pain of others, as well as the desire to help or ease that pain. Compassion encompasses empathy, emphatic understanding, and a genuine desire to provide support and assistance to alleviate the suffering or difficulty that others are experiencing. This emotional response stems from a deep understanding of human interconnectedness and the need for support and understanding in difficult times.*

The trainer asks the participants for their thoughts on compassion as defined in this way and asks them if they can see any benefit in compassion. They encourage discussion.

After the discussion, the trainer conducts the "Method Acting" activity.

### **Activity: "Method Acting"**

An activity for raising awareness and practicing alternative ways of coping with one's own and others' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. The participants are given direct instructions on how to model a healthy and nurturing relationship with themselves and others.

1. The trainer explains to the participants that the acting method is one of the most effective ways to learn a skill that you don't have. In this activity, the participants will try their hand at using this method in the role of a compassionate person. The trainer emphasizes that the focus is not on acting, but rather on the participants feeling what it is like to be in that role.
2. Together with the participants, the trainer defines the basic concepts by asking them if they have ever heard of the acting method. The trainer invites the participants to discuss. If any of the participants know what the acting method is, they explain it to the others. If no one is familiar with this method, the trainer distributes the text "Method Acting"<sup>1</sup> to everyone and explains it in more detail. The text can be translated in its entirety, and below is a shorter explanation of the acting method:

*Method Acting, also known as the Stanislavski method, is an approach to acting that focuses on a deep understanding of the characters' emotions and motivations. Actors use their inner experience to authentically express the character's emotions and motivations. This approach emphasizes physical action, imagination, and creating real life on stage. The acting method has become the basis of modern acting expression and has a strong influence in the theater and film industry.*

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<sup>1</sup>The text is included in Appendix 7

Actors often play characters who are completely different from themselves in every way in their private lives. So how do they manage to play characters who are the opposite of themselves? They do this by imagining what it would be like to be that way themselves. They ask themselves questions like: How does this person feel? What do they think? What is their body language like? What is their energy like? What would be motivated to do?

3. The trainer, together with the participants, identifies the characteristics of a compassionate person using the acting method. Participants should approach the exercise as actors who have to play one of the main roles in a film or play.

The trainer writes the following questions on the flipchart:

- **How does this person feel?** (benevolent, caring, stable, strong, capable)
- **What do they think?** (how to help others, how hard it is for someone, how to know how to help)
- **What is their body language like?** (straight, upright, head held high, straight spine)
- **What kind of energy do they have?** (calm, settled, strong, positive)
- **What would they be motivated to do?** (to help, to lend a hand, to support)

**Note:** Some of the characteristics that it is desirable to reach with the participants are: motivation to help, wisdom, self-confidence, dedication, courage in facing difficult emotions, stability, warmth, gentleness. If the participants do not propose any of these characteristics, the facilitator suggests them themselves and asks the participants if they think they also belong to a compassionate person.

4. The trainer summarizes the characteristics of a compassionate person:

*A compassionate person is one who possesses the wisdom that all emotions are human and that it is normal to feel them. They are not afraid of strong emotions, they understand pain and they want to help. They are dedicated to helping. They feel stable and grounded in the face of strong emotions. They are patient, gentle and warm.*

5. After identifying the characteristics, the trainer moves on to instructions for using the acting method to get into the role of a compassionate person:
  - *To make this easier, I'm going to ask you to sit comfortably and close your eyes, or if it's uncomfortable for you to focus on one point in the room and not look away. If you're having trouble imagining what it's like to be that person, you can imagine someone you know or an imaginary person (from a movie, book, etc.) you think has that quality, and then imagine yourself being that person.*
  - *To start, try to clear your mind and, as we do at the beginning of each workshop, focus your attention on the contact of your feet with the ground, your hands with the surface you're leaning on, hear the sounds, smell the smells, feel the temperature and the flow of air in the room. (the trainer gives the participants 30 seconds of silence and then begins with the instruction:)*

- *First, imagine that you feel calm and safe, filled with warmth and strength. Be that person, calm, safe, filled with warmth and strength. Feel what it looks like (wait about a minute)*
  - *Then imagine that, with this warmth, strength and serenity, you want to help those who are suffering, who are upset. Feel how this desire to help fills you, how you feel like you have a purpose - to ease the pain of others. (wait about a minute)*
  - *Now imagine that you are filled with wisdom, the understanding that there are different lives and different experiences. That you understand that everyone is fighting their own battle. This understanding that there are different experiences gives us the ability to observe different emotions, thoughts and behaviors that people have in a non-judgmental and respectful way. (wait about a minute)*
  - *Then feel that you feel confident, sure of yourself in dealing with different emotions, thoughts and behaviors. Feel how self-confidence and/or belief in yourself fills you. Feel the courage that comes from it. You are filled with the desire to use this self-confidence and this courage to help someone. To think “whatever comes of emotions, thoughts, behaviors, I can respect that.” (wait about a minute)*
  - *Now turn your attention to what it feels like in your mind and body when you are calm, strong, confident, wise, and want to help. (wait about 30 seconds)*
  - *Imagine that you are observing the world around you as a deeply compassionate being. How would you feel (wait 5 seconds), what thoughts would you have (wait 5 seconds), what would you be motivated to do (wait 5 seconds)*
  - *Now that you have stepped into the shoes of this compassionate person, imagine that you are sitting across from a person who is suffering. And as a compassionate person, you look at the person across from you and know that they are suffering for some reason and that it is difficult for them. Say to them (in your head) that you understand how they are feeling, that you understand that they are suffering and that you are sorry. Tell the person across from you that you are there for them and that you want to help them. If you want, you can hug them or pat them on the shoulder. Or hold their hand. Feel the stability, warmth, and understanding that is present as you sit across from this person. Now imagine that the person sitting across from you is you. Repeat all of this while looking at yourself. Give the participants 3 minutes. Then tell them that when they are ready, they can open their eyes.*
6. At the end of the activity, the trainer conducts a debriefing by asking the following questions:

*How do you feel after this exercise? How difficult was it to get into the role of a compassionate person? How did you feel while observing the person across from you? Did you imagine someone you know or someone unknown? Was it difficult for you to imagine yourself across from you? How was that experience for you? Do you feel differently about the events you wrote down? In what way? What helped you the most? How can this skill help you? And how can it help you in communicating with others?*

7. After the debriefing, the participants are given a task for the end of the meeting. They are to write a letter to a person of their choice, but from the perspective of the compassionate person they learned about in the previous workshop. They can choose someone from their private life, another participant, or the workshop facilitator, or a fictional person (from a novel or film). They work individually and the letter will not be shared with other participants (unless they specifically want to). After the letter is finished, the trainer conducts a short debriefing by asking the following questions:
  - *How did you feel while writing the letter?*
  - *Did anything leave a special impression on you?*
  - *Which part was the hardest for you?*

**Note:** The following part of the task can be very beneficial for the participants, but it can also evoke more intense emotional reactions. This way of addressing oneself can lead to the realization that they have never, or rarely, had the opportunity to be addressed in this way, which can make them sad. It is recommended that this part of the activity is only assigned if there is good group cohesion, and if none of the participants have shown signs of significant distress or unpredictability in the previous course of their work together. Otherwise, this activity can be the last one in the workshop, after which you will conclude the workshop.

8. The participants are given the task of reading the same letter to themselves, but this time addressing themselves instead of the person they chose. They have 5 minutes to do this. Afterwards, the trainer asks them the following questions:
  - *How did you feel while reading the letter?*
  - *Did anything leave a special impression on you?*
  - *Which part was the hardest for you?*

## Workshop conclusion

The workshop can be concluded with the question of what the most significant thing for the participants in this workshop was and why. After that, the trainer summarizes everything that was learned from the previous activities and concludes the workshop.









# Appendices



# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Mindfulness exercises

### Conscious walking

Ask the participants to stand up and arrange themselves in the room so that there is enough space between them to walk forward and backward or in a circle. Tell them that this exercise is called conscious walking. Their task is to focus on their own steps, or rather on the moment when their feet touch the ground, and to try to stay focused on that alone. If their mind wanders, or something else distracts them, tell them that their task is to notice that their attention has wandered elsewhere and to consciously, without self-criticism or self-flagellation, return their attention to walking. They do not have to change the way they walk just to be aware of the steps they are taking, but can simply walk naturally and at the pace they normally do. Sometimes participants like to change their walking speed to see how it affects their focus, but this is up to them. Tell them that counting their steps can help them focus.

### STOP exercise

Explain to the participants that there are three things that always bring us back to the present moment: sound, breath, and body. These three safe havens for our attention can help us to connect with ourselves, return to the present moment, and calm us down in stressful situations. No matter where we are during the day, while doing different activities with different people, we can always do the STOP exercise, even for just a few minutes a day. It is done as follows:

- a. We stop what we are doing (say “STOP” out loud),
- b. Take a deep breath in and out, and
- c. Observe the present moment and focus on:
  - The sounds we notice,
  - Our breathing, and
  - How our body feels.

After this brief moment of focusing on the “here and now”, we Proceed with what we were doing.

We can also do this exercise by setting a reminder or alarm every 3 hours to remind us to stop and do the exercise. We can also do it whenever we feel the need for it, but it is also very useful in moments when we are feeling anxious.

## Weather forecast

(This exercise is best used after the first thematic unit has been completed)

If you decide to do this exercise, it would be good to do it at the beginning and end of each workshop, and participants can also do the exercise in the evening before going to bed and the next morning when they wake up. The idea of this exercise is for participants to notice how their feelings and moods change throughout the day.

Ask participants to sit comfortably and pay attention to the sounds they hear, the smells they smell, the temperature of the air, and the texture of what they touch with their fingers (similar to the first mindfulness exercise). Then tell them to imagine their current mood/feelings as weather conditions - do they feel like a sunny day, a warm cloudy day, a rainy day (or night), stormy or foggy weather...

## Mindful eating

For this exercise you will need chocolate candies or sweets (but ones that are wrapped in foil), or raisins. Explain to the participants that it is very important to do this exercise in silence and that the goal is to focus on the different senses. Give them 5 to 15 seconds for each step in the exercise.

Ask each participant to take one candy but not to open it. Then tell them to carefully observe the packaging the candy is wrapped in - the colors, the material, the folds... (give them 5 to 15 seconds to do this). Then ask them to close their eyes for the rest of the exercise and tell them to turn the candy around with their index finger and thumb near their ear and listen to the sounds it makes (give them 5 to 15 seconds to do this).

Then tell them to slowly open it and feel the packaging under their fingers, and then, once it is open, feel the candy itself under their fingers (give them 5 to 15 seconds to do this). Then tell them to bring it to their nose and smell it (give them 5 to 15 seconds to do this). Tell them to pay attention (without saying anything, but each to themselves) to whether they start to salivate, whether they have the thought that they like the smell or not, whether they are looking forward to eating it or not. Then they can put the candy in their mouth and pay attention to the tastes they feel (give them 5 to 15 seconds to do this). Again, tell them to pay attention to the thoughts they have about the taste they are feeling (give them 5 to 15 seconds to do this). Finally, after they have eaten the candy, tell them to pay attention to the thoughts they have - do they like it, do they want another one, do they not like it, do they feel disgusted, etc.

## Appendix 2: The scenes for the activity “Theater of Disregard”



**Scene 1:** A teacher and students are in a high school classroom during the last class of the day. It is a gloomy and cold day outside, and the classroom is warm. The teacher is visibly annoyed by something. The students came to class with mostly good moods

**Scene 2:** Patients are waiting in a doctor's waiting room. There is mostly silence in the waiting room. You can hear coughing and sneezing, and the sound of a TV hanging on the wall. The doctor and nurse are in the examination room, waiting for the next patient.

**Scene 3:** A young financial advisor who is doing well after breakfast at a nearby cafe is walking to work. He arrives on time at a leisurely pace. On his way to work, he runs into construction work and must go around the entire block. The workers are in a deep hole that has been dug due to a water main break.

**Scene 4:** A 45-year-old woman comes to pick up her car from the repair shop. She is waiting for someone to receive her and take possession of her car. It is raining outside, and the wind is blowing strong. The mechanic had a lot of problems with her car and barely managed to fix the problem that brought the car in.

**Scene 5:** A father and his 7-year-old daughter are in a shopping mall. They are going to buy clothes for their daughter for the first day of school. The father has limited money because he lost his job 4 months ago and they now must save to get through the period until his new job starts in a month.

**Scene 6:** Two friends at a party are talking about panic attacks that one of them usually has. He hasn't been able to deal with them for a while now and is thinking about what to do. He is usually quite anxious and often avoids various situations that he is afraid of.



## Appendix 3: The stories that the participants need to complete

**Story 1:** Stefan is graduating from high school and is not sure in what direction he should continue his education. He doesn't have enough money and it is important to him that the profession he chooses allows him to earn enough money to be financially secure. He loves to read, especially classic works of world literature. He can spend hours reading when he doesn't have other obligations. However, he is also good at math, which he doesn't really like. The day has come when he must make a decision about how to continue his education. Although he is undecided, he can no longer postpone that decision. What did Stefan do? (Continue the story with three scenarios)

**Story 2:** Marija works at a local bakery. The salary is not bad and it is important for her to keep the job because without it she would not be able to afford to pay for her apartment and she would end up on the street. However, her boss sometimes causes problems. He often gives her unrealistic tasks (to make 100 croissants in a shift, even though she can only make 50 in a shift), so Marija often stays at work longer. Several times, the boss has praised his nephew who works in the bakery with Marija, even though Marija is the one who is most responsible for those successes. One day, the boss assigns the task of making 50 pastries in 3 hours. Marija tried hard to finish the job, but the boss's nephew did not do his part and the job was not finished. When he noticed this, the boss criticized Marija but did not say a word to his nephew. What did Marija do? (Continue the story with three scenarios)

**Story 3:** Tarek's life is not what he wants it to be. He doesn't have the opportunity to get an education, to find a good job, and to provide himself with a life that would suit him. He realized that if he wants to achieve this, he needs to move out of the country because there is no future for him there. He believes that he would be better off in another country, that it would be easier for him to find a job and a normal life, and that he could build the life he needs for himself. He is not yet sure which of the few countries he is considering would be the best choice for him. On the other hand, he does not want to leave his family and friends, to whom he is very attached. He has a partner with whom he has been in a relationship for 2 years and with whom he has a good relationship. Friends are like a second family to him, he often spends time with them and they are the most important reason why he had not thought about leaving before. Tarek is in a big dilemma about what decision to make. What did Tarek do? (Continue the story with three scenarios)

**Story 4:** Petra loves her boyfriend Filip very much. He loves her too, but they have a lot of problems in their relationship. Petra has struggled for herself all her life, even though she comes from a poor family with a lot of problems. She is a good student and has a promising career ahead of her. She has a good circle of friends who love her and whom she loves. Filip has problems with alcohol and drugs. Petra tries to get him to solve the problem, but Filip refuses. Things are getting out of control and they have had several serious conflicts, the last of which resulted in physical violence. Petra wonders what she should do with the relationship. What did Petra do? (Continue the story with three scenarios)

## Appendix 4: Role for the activity “Tug of War”

“Your problem is the fear of making mistakes. You have not been able to deal with this problem since you were 15 years old. At the beginning of your schooling, you did not have many problems. The problems started in high school.

You started avoiding all situations where you could make a mistake. You chose to do things that you know you are very good at (and then the chances of someone not accepting you are small), or to avoid doing something so that a mistake does not happen. In school, you tried to get the highest grades. The high demands that you set for yourself helped you to control your fear in this way. But if it would not have been possible to meet your high demands, you would have avoided taking exams and thus avoided scary situations. For example, you would only take exams if you knew that you had learned everything in detail, otherwise you would look for a way to avoid it. Sometimes you pretended to be sick so you wouldn't go to school. Once you even put a thermometer in your tea so it would look like you had a fever, and everyone around you was worried because the thermometer showed that you had 42 degrees Celsius of fever. You almost ended up in the hospital healthy.

With your peers, you even avoided participating in any sports activities, pretending that you were always in pain and that you had injured something, so that others would not see that you were not good enough at it... or more precisely, perfect and that you do not make mistakes.

After high school, you decided to continue your education, but that didn't work with your strategies. You took some easier exams with the highest grade because you studied to the point of exhaustion, and there you were able to have control over the situation. But on the more difficult exams where there was always the risk that you didn't know everything, you didn't even show up. And not only that, but you stopped going to lectures for fear that the professors would call you out because you didn't show up for exams.

Now you work a job that is far below your capabilities, but even there you struggle with the same problem. The new strategy for dealing with the fear of making mistakes has become numbing the fear. You started smoking marijuana before work to numb that fear a little. But now you are afraid that your colleagues will find out that you are high and that it will cause disapproval on their part. And even when you are not high, you are afraid that you have made a mistake while working under the influence of marijuana. You are now 30 years old and have been struggling with the fear of disapproval for 15 years. It is still the biggest fear in your life, you have not been able to get rid of it.”

## Appendix 5: Proposal for a scenario for the “Tug of War” activity

- **Facilitator:** *We're going to play a game of tug-of-war. Imagine that there's a chasm between us, and whoever is stronger will pull the other one into the chasm. You're on this side, and I'm on the other side, and I represent what you're struggling with.*

If the participant tells you about a specific life problem, direct them to the emotion by asking, “How do you feel about that?” If it's difficult for the participant to identify an emotion, suggest one from the list of emotions from previous workshops. “It could be your anxiety, depression, anger, shame, jealousy... whatever you want. What will it be in your case?” The person across from you might tell you that it's anxiety, for example.

- **Facilitator:** “What's the hardest thing about anxiety for you?” This question can help the person become more aware of what is actually bothering them when they feel anxious. If you think this step is too big for the participant, you can just focus on the anxiety. If the participant tells you what's difficult about anxiety (for example, “the constant feeling of tension in my body” or “I keep thinking about what could happen”), you can use what they say for the rest of the exercise, otherwise it can be anxiety or another emotion mentioned or what they are struggling with.
- **Facilitator:** “In this exercise, I'll be representing your anxiety” (pull the rope a little). “How long have I been in your life, how long have I been doing this? How long have you been trying to fight and overcome the feeling of anxiety?” (pull the rope a few more times). After the answer, continue with “And have you managed to win, have I gone away?”
- **Facilitator:** “So, I've been in your life for years” (pull the rope). “You've tried different things to beat me” (pull the rope a few times). “And I'm still here. Would you like to tell us what you've tried so far?”

The participant might list various things (alcohol, exercise, drugs, therapy, medication...). Give them the instruction to pull the rope every time they mention a strategy, and you pull it back to your side after them. After each thing they say, you can pull the rope.

- **Facilitator:** “How hard did you try? Pull the rope harder if you think you tried harder.” Then the facilitator pulls the rope harder to their side.
- **Facilitator:** “And here we are again. It doesn't seem to have worked. As we've seen, you can do this for years, but it doesn't seem like anything will change if you keep doing it. Do you have any idea what else you could do?”

If the participant says “give up”, you can ask them if they have ever tried that. If they say yes, ask if it worked and keep pulling the rope to your side. If they answer no, you can't tell them that in that case you, their anxiety, will win because you will easily pull them to the other side. Then ask what else they can do. You can also ask the other participants for help if they haven't already joined in.

- When someone says “let go of the rope”, tell them to do so. When they let go of the rope, pick it up and give it to them to hold. If they take it, keep pulling it to your side and ask what else they can do. Ask the group. If the group says to let go again, support that answer. If no one has an answer, suggest that they let go of the rope again. When they let go again, offer them the rope again. The group will probably suggest that they don't take the rope again, but if they don't and they don't realize that they don't need to take the rope again, suggest that they don't need to take it.
- **Facilitator:** *“And how do you feel now that you've let go of the rope and don't have to struggle with me anymore? When you're not in an endless, exhausting battle?”*

If they say the same, or better/easier because they don't have to struggle with you, you can tell them:

- **Facilitator:** *“And I'm still here, I haven't gone anywhere”*

Then tell them to walk around the room freely without the rope, and you follow them with his end of the rope in your hand and offer it to them.

- **Facilitator:** *“I'm still here, but you're not stuck in. Can you now move freely and do what you want? Could you do it while you were holding the rope? Can you now do something other than struggling with me, even though I am following you and offering you the rope?”*

*“Your anxiety will not go anywhere, as you have seen all these years. It will follow you and you will be tempted to finally defeat it, but you will not succeed. Remember, our emotions are actually an integral part of our lives and we cannot live without them. That is why it is impossible to get rid of them completely. Sometimes it is possible to free yourself from them, but the price of it is too high at some point. And sometimes it is not possible to get rid of them completely. What we can do is to refuse to fight them and accept that they are there. It may not go away completely, but we will spend much less energy trying to defeat it, and it is likely that we will not feel helpless in the face of anxiety, but on the contrary, as if we can still do something about it. In the end, we will feel calmer, freer and have more space to do what we want and love. And this will certainly allow us to more easily include the wise brain that can help us solve the problem in the long run.”*



## Appendix 6: Cinderella – Abridged Version of the Story

In a faraway kingdom, hidden among the green hills and meadows, stood a large stone house. A young girl named Cinderella lived there. Her father, once a proud and strong merchant, had lost his first wife, Cinderella's mother, in a tragic accident. His heart was broken, but he wanted his daughter to have a family.

So he remarried, hoping that his new wife would bring joy into their lives. However, the stepmother was a cold and strict woman who brought two daughters from her previous marriage. These two sisters were spoiled and selfish, always looking for ways to mock and humiliate Cinderella. Instead of stopping them, the stepmother often encouraged their behavior, forcing Cinderella to do all the housework. The house that had once been filled with laughter and love had become a place of sadness and suffering for Cinderella. Her father watched his daughter suffer, but he was too afraid to stand up to his new wife. Instead, he would often secretly comfort her, bringing her small gifts or taking her for walks in the forest, where he would tell her stories of better times.

One day, the kingdom was abuzz with news of a grand ball to be held at the royal castle. The prince wanted to find his future wife and all unmarried girls were invited. The stepmother and sisters were thrilled at this opportunity. They spent days preparing their dresses, hair, and jewelry, while Cinderella served as their maid. In her heart, Cinderella dreamed of going to the ball as well. Her father, seeing her sadness, decided to surprise her. He secretly ordered a beautiful dress for her, with sparkling pearls and silk ribbons. When he showed it to her, tears of happiness welled up in her eyes.

However, on the day of the ball, as Cinderella was getting ready, the stepmother and sisters noticed her. In a fit of jealousy, the sisters ripped her dress to shreds, and the stepmother ordered her to stay home. The father was heartbroken, but he didn't have the strength to resist. As Cinderella cried in the garden, an old woman with a sparkling wand suddenly appeared. It was her fairy godmother. With a few waves of the wand, Cinderella was dressed in the most beautiful gown she had ever seen, and her old shoes became glass slippers. The fairy godmother told her that she had to return before midnight, or the magic would wear off. At the ball, everyone was enchanted by Cinderella. The prince spent the whole evening with her, dancing and laughing. But as soon as the clock struck midnight, Cinderella rushed home, leaving behind one glass slipper.

The prince was desperate to find the mysterious girl. He sent his emissaries to find the owner of the glass slipper. When they arrived at Cinderella's house, the stepmother and sisters tried to put on the slipper, but it was too small. When it was Cinderella's turn, the slipper fit her perfectly. The prince was overjoyed to have found his mysterious girl. He asked Cinderella to be his princess, and she happily agreed.

As the years passed, the kingdom prospered under the rule of the prince and Cinderella. Their love became a legend, a story that was passed down from generation to generation. Their reign was marked by justice, kindness, and understanding. The citizens of the kingdom felt safe and loved, knowing that they had rulers who cared about their well-being. Cinderella's father, although he was older, lived long enough to see his daughter become a beloved queen. His heart, which had once been filled with sadness and regret, was now overflowing with joy and pride. He would often sit in the royal garden and reflect.

The stepmother and sisters, on the other hand, did not have such luck. They were banished from the kingdom. Stories say that after years of wandering and suffering, they found refuge in a distant village. The kingdom continued to prosper, and the story of Cinderella became immortal. It served as a reminder to everyone that, no matter the hardships and obstacles, love and goodness can always prevail.

## Appendix 7: Method Acting

The Method, also known as the Stanislavski method or system, is an approach to acting and theater developed by Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski. This approach is considered to be one of the most influential and important in the development of modern acting and theater technique.

Stanislavski developed his method in response to the conventional and superficial approaches to acting that were prevalent at the time, placing emphasis on a deeper understanding of characters and emotional authenticity. The Method emphasizes the actor's inner experience, their ability to think deeply about the character and to fully identify with them.

Key characteristics of the Method Acting include:

- **Emotional foundation:** The actor strives to deeply understand the emotions and motivations of the character they are portraying. This includes analyzing the character's life context, their past, and their goals.
- **Emotional sincerity:** The actor is encouraged to access their own emotions in order to create authentic and truthful emotions in the performance.
- **The character's state and objectives:** The actor defines the character's state of mind, goals, and motivations in order to achieve consistency in the performance.
- **Physical action:** Stanislavski emphasized the importance of physical action as a way to express the character's inner emotions and motivations.
- **A sense of true life:** The Method aims to create realistic and lifelike performances that rely on genuine emotions.
- **The use of imagination:** The actor uses their imagination to create the conditions and situations that take place within the play.

The Method is widely used in theater and film, and many actors and directors around the world consider it to be an essential tool for developing deep and truthful performances. The Method has also influenced the development of other acting techniques and approaches, and although it can be adapted to different styles, its core remains in a deep understanding of characters and the emotions that are expressed through acting.

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