THE MMF KICKSTARTER TOOLKIT

A guide to support trauma-informed practice in youth work

Watch our videos here!

42ND STREET

www.42ndstreet.org.uk

FOREWORD:

I am continually inspired by the people who make up the Youth and Play sector within Manchester. There is an unwavering commitment to offering our young people safe, encouraging, empowering, supportive, and nurturing environments despite challenges that include precarious funding, a cost-of-living crisis, rising discrimination, hate crime and inequity, against a backdrop of fractured local, national and geopolitics. Youth and Play workers have never been more needed.

As a proud Youth and Community Worker myself for over 25 years, I recognise the need for, but often lack of, relevant training and reflective spaces for practitioners, especially for the amazing grass root organisations connecting with and part of the diverse and vibrant communities across Manchester. At 42nd Street we wanted the training we delivered to be more accessible and to reflect the diverse experiences of young people and our responses to them as professionals, which is why we co-created this handbook and these resources and videos with young practitioners, to capture your array of training needs .

This pack was created with you in mind; to help you to build on your understanding of how young people's past or present experiences are impacting on their well-being using the lens of trauma. Within this pack you will find useful information to help you be curious about the young people you work with and by extension yourself. We recognise how trauma can disrupt connection and how the consistency and humour of youth workers can contribute to overcoming this. We see this resource as giving words, shape and understanding to something you already do instinctively.

Use this resource in a way that suits you, your organisation, and the young people you support, share joy with, and learn from. Take sections and reflect as a team, watch related videos or reels, discuss them in supervision, or reflect on your own… do what's right for you - we all learn in different ways, there is never one right way.

Katrina Garg – Workforce Development and EDI Manager

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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is the culmination of two years delivering training for youth workers within the VCSFE sector who work with 11 - 25 year olds. This work has been funded as part of the Making Manchester Fairer Kickstarter Scheme *[Manchester City Council. (2024). Making Manchester Fairer Kickstarter Update – HWB June 24 [Report]. Manchester City Council.]*. Making Manchester Fairer (MMF) is Manchester City Council's five-year action plan to address health inequalities in the city focusing on the social determinants of health in Manchester.

The Kickstarter aims, in a very targeted way, to reduce inequalities in mental health and wellbeing support for CYP by :

a) building capacity within the Children and young peoples workforce to effectively support marginalised children and young people who are experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing

b) supporting mental health and wellbeing amongst some of the most marginalised and vulnerable Children and young people in the city

c) informing the future strategy for Children and young peoples mental health and wellbeing.

The training has been co-developed and co delivered with the MMF young practitioners and co-ordinator to grassroots and VCFSE organisations who work with children and young people, 11-25, from marginalised and/or racialised communities, in Manchester's 15 most deprived wards. The feedback from these trainings has yielded five main areas of focus that youth work staff have highlighted within their youth work settings. Based on this feedback and our observations from the youth workers of Manchester, we have developed this toolkit to make the learning more accessible - supporting those who are unable to attend the training in person by capturing and translating key themes, approaches and insights from the sessions into practical, easy-to-use materials.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS TOOLKIT

- **Core Concepts** — An introduction to the topic, explaining the key theory, research, and context.
- **Guidance Sheets** — Practical guidance that translates theory into real-world youth work practice.
- **Tools and Strategies** — Activities, techniques, and approaches that practitioners can use with young people.
- **Reflection Sheet** — A space for practitioners to reflect on their own practice, learning, and development.

USING THE TOOLKIT:

The resource pack is organised into thematic sections based on key areas identified by youth workers during training sessions. Each section focuses on an important aspect of trauma-informed youth work.The resource pack can be used in several ways:

- As a learning resource for individual practitioners.
- As part of staff training and professional development sessions.
- To support team reflection and discussions about trauma-informed practice.
- As a reference guide when supporting young people who may have experienced trauma.

Within internal or external supervision.

AIMS

- **Helping youth workers to Identify more vulnerable groups of young people in their communities and the needs that they have.**
- **Improving youth workers confindence around exploring trauma responses and emotions with their young poeple .**
- **Helping youth workers identify gaps in their personal self care and reflection in their practice to prevent De-escalation and burnout.**
- **Presenting the perspective of young people on Trauma, how it impacts their experience of services and their barriers to accessing support.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE?

The toolkit brings together important concepts such as trauma-informed practice, safeguarding, self-care, de-escalation, and digital safety to provide a clear and accessible guide that supports consistent, reflective, and safe practice when working with young people.

This resource has been designed to consolidate key knowledge, frameworks, and practical tools for those working with young people. It is intended for youth workers, grassroots practitioners, freelance facilitators, operational staff, managers, and organisations who support young people in community, educational, and youth work settings.

01. YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers can use this Toolkit as a practical framework to support their day-to-day work with young people. The sections help workers understand key concepts of safeguarding self care and de-escalation, recognise risk and protective factors, and identify possible crisis triggers. In practice, this can guide how youth workers respond to behaviour, plan activities, and create safe environments that support young people's wellbeing. Using a trauma-informed approach, workers are encouraged to look beyond behaviour and consider the experiences that may be influencing a young person's responses. The reflective questions around self care and personal practice can also support ongoing learning and help workers adapt their approach to meet individual needs.

02. MANAGERS AND SENIOR STAFF

Managers and senior staff can use this toolkit to support staff development, reflective practice, and supervision discussions. During supervision, the reflection frameworkw can help teams explore situations with young people, identify potential triggers or safeguarding concerns, and reflect on appropriate responses. It also provides a structured way to support staff wellbeing, recognising the emotional impact of youth work and promoting trauma-informed responses that prioritise safety, understanding, and consistency.

03. APPLICATION IN PRACTICE

Across all roles, this toolkit encourages practitioners to apply learning directly in their work with young people and within team reflection spaces such as supervision. By consistently using the reflective frameworks included throughout, youth workers and organisations can strengthen trauma-informed practice, improve safeguarding awareness, and ensure young people are supported in ways that recognise their experiences, promote safety, and build resilience.

04. ORGANISATIONS AND LEADERSHIP

Organisations can use this Toolkit to embed trauma-informed practice across training, service delivery and the supervisory relationships within your team. By providing a shared structure for understanding risk factors, protective factors, and best practice approaches, the template supports consistent responses across teams. It can also be used to design training sessions, guide programme development, and ensure staff and volunteers have the tools needed to support young people effectively and safely.

TRAUMA INFORMED PRINCIPLES

National Youth Agency (NYA)

> Trauma-informed practice, is an approach that acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma on young people's lives and adapts practices to create safe, supportive environments. It focuses on understanding that behaviors (such as disruption or disengagement) may stem from traumatic experiences (abuse, neglect, loss, violence) rather than being intentional misconduct.

Gov.uk working definition

> Trauma-informed youth work shifts the focus from "What is wrong with this young person?" to "What happened to this young person?.

Safety	Choice	Collaboration	Trustworthiness	Empowerment	Cultural Consideration
DEFINITIONS					
Ensuring physical and emotional safety	Individual has choice and control	Making decisions with the individual and sharing power	Task, clarity, consitency and interpersonal boundaries	Prioritising empowerment and skill building	Acknowledging the culture, histroical and gender contexts of Trauma
PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE					
Common areas and welcoming and privacy is respected	Individuals are provided a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities	Individuals are provided a significant role in planning and evaluating services	Respectful and professional boundaries are maintained	Providing an atmosphere that allows individuals to feel validated and affirmed with each and every contact at the agency	Respecting diversity and understanding the cultural and societal contexts that influence a person's experience of trauma.

Figure 1. Trauma-informed principles, showing safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness and empowerment as core values for trauma-informed practice. Adapted from Fallot and Harris' Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care framework (Fallot & Harris, 2009).

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflection is the process of thinking about your experiences, actions, and emotional responses to improve your practice and wellbeing. In youth work, it helps practitioners understand what went well, what could be done differently, and how situations have impacted them. Regular reflection supports learning, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, making it an essential tool for both effective practice and preventing burnout.

SCHON'S REFLECTIVE MODEL

Schön (1983) focuses on how practitioners reflect during and after practice.

Stages:

1. Knowing-in-action – using skills, experience and professional judgement automatically in practice.
- Example: A youth worker notices a young person has become withdrawn and "still", so they may use a trauma-informed, neurodivergent awareness approach.

2. Reflection-in-action – thinking and adapting while the situation is happening.
- Example: noticing a young person becoming dysregulated and changing your tone, pace or body langauge in the moment.

3. Reflection-on-action – thinking back after the situation has happened.
- Example: reviewing what went well, what escalated the situation, what you noticed, and what you would do differently next time.

Why it's useful in youth work:

Schön's model is useful because youth workers often need to adapt in the momen„ reflect afterwards through supervision, debriefs and professional development. Reflective practice supports safer, more responsive youth work and helps practitioners improve their approach over time (Schön, 1983; National Youth Agency, 2025).

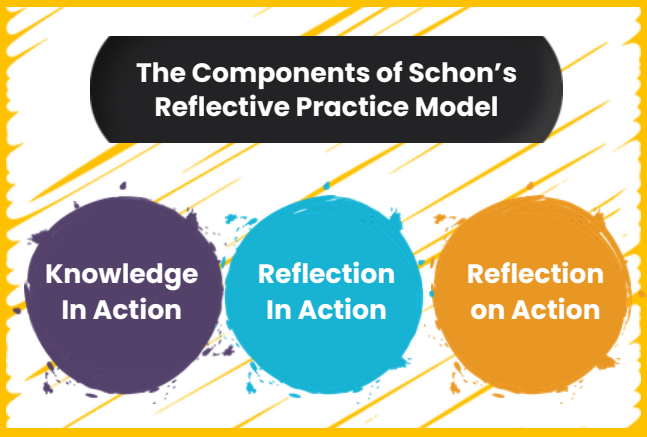


Figure 2. Schön's reflective practice model, showing reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as two key ways practitioners learn from experience and improve professional judgement. Adapted from Schön (1983)..

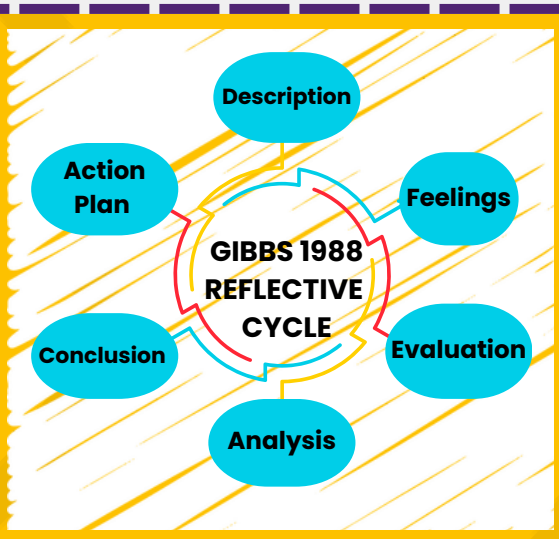


Figure 3. ' Reflective Cycle, showing the six stages of reflection: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. Adapted from Gibbs (1988)

GIBBS REFLECTIVE CYCLE (1988)

Gibbs (1988) provides a structured way to reflect by breaking experiences i clear stages. It helps you learn from situations and improve future practice.

Stages:

1. Description – What happened?
2. Feelings – What were you thinking and feeling?
3. Evaluation – What went well or not so well?
4. Analysis – Why did it happen this way?
5. Conclusion – What have you learned?
6. Action Plan – What would you do differently next time?

Why it's useful in youth work:

It provides a clear, step-by-step structure, making it easier to reflect a challenging situations and improve practice.

Figure 4. SMART goals model, showing how goals can be made specific, measurable, assignable/achievable, realistic/relevant and time-related/time-bound. Adapted from Doran (1981).

SMART goals model

The SMART goals model supports effective planning by encouraging goals to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (Doran, 1981).

SECTION 01 TRAUMA & ACE'S

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is not an eternal event but is about an internal wound....trauma is not what happens to you but is what happens inside of you.
Gabor talks about what doesn't happen as well – when core needs are not met

GOV.UK WORKING DEFINITION

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally the experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects, limiting the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.

WHAT ARE ACE'S?

1 in 3 diagnosed mental health conditions in adulthood are known to directly relate to adverse childhood experiences (YoungMinds, n.d.).

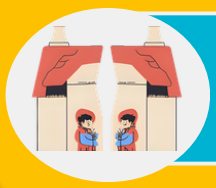
GABOR MATÉ DEFINITION

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events occurring before age 18—such as abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction—that Dr. Gabor Maté emphasizes act as the root cause of addiction, mental illness, and chronic physical disease. Maté argues these experiences create lasting emotional "fractures" that alter brain development and foster coping mechanisms (like addiction) that become destructive in adulthood.

WHAT ARE ACE'S?

MALTREATMENT
i.e abuse or neglect

VIOLENCE AND COERSION
i.e domestic abuse, gangs, victim of abuse



ADJUSTMENT
i.e migration, asylum, family seperation

PREJUDICE & DISCRIMINATION
i.e Minority groups

HOUSEHOLD OR FAMILY ADVERSITY
i.e substance misuse, generational trauma, deprivation or neglect

INHUMANE TREATMENT
i.e torture, modern day slavery, imprisonment and institutionalisation

ADULT RESPONSIBILITIES
i.e young carer or child labour

BEREAVEMNET & SURVIVORSHIP
i.e traumatic deaths, an illness or accident

Please note that there has been more discussion into other ACEs and experiences that could be classified as ACE's such as social media and the COVID pandemic due to their prolonged impact on young peoples mental health however this has not yet been defined as an ACE

Can you think of any other ACEs that could be included

Figure 5. Forms of adverse childhood experiences, including maltreatment, violence and coercion, adjustment difficulties, prejudice and discrimination, household or family adversity, inhuman treatment, adult responsibilities, and bereavement or survivorship. Adapted from YoungMinds (n.d.)

HOW COMMON ARE ACE'S?

AROUND HALF OF ALL ADULTS LIVING IN ENGLAND HAVE EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE FORM OF ADVERSITY IN THEIR CHILDHOOD OR ADOLESCENCE:

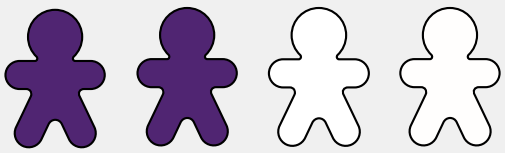
52% EXPERIENCED 0 ACEs

23% EXPERIENCED 1 ACE

52% EXPERIENCED 0 ACES

52% EXPERIENCED 4+ ACEs

(YoungMinds, n.d.).



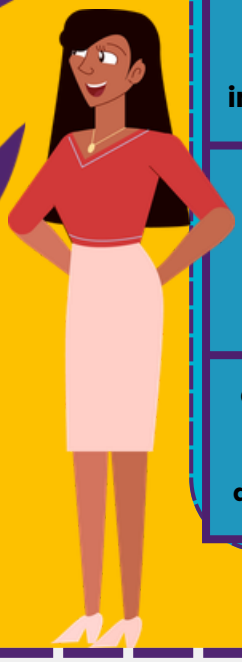
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACE'S & TRAUMA

ACEs are a type of trauma defined as stressful or harmful events that happen before age 18 and can affect a child's safety, stability, and development.

ACE's are also used as a way of recognising determinants of health and wellbeing as young poeple with ACE's are statistically more likely to develop unhealthy coping methods and life choices

WHERE AS

Trauma is the impact of an overwhelming event (or ongoing situation) that a person experiences as threatening or harmful, and that can leave lasting effects on how they feel, think, relate to others, and cope.



ACES	TRAUMA
Before the age of 18	Impact & experience the event caused a person
4 or more ACEs likelihood of higher impact on well-being	Heightened sense of threat/overwhelm
Increased risk of mental health in adulthood	Single/ or repeated or long-term
Commonly consists of abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction/instability	Lasting effects on body and mind

TOXIC STRESS

Toxic stress occurs when a young person experiences **prolonged stress without adequate support**. This can keep the body in a constant state of alert, impacting learning, behaviour, and health over time.

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to adapt, cope, and recover from adversity. It is not something a young person either has or doesn't have—it can be developed through supportive relationships, positive experiences, and safe environments.

RISK FACTORS OF ACE'S & TRAUMA FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

ACE's AND TRAUMA can increase the likelihood of negative outcomes if support is not in place:

·Gabor Maté's ACE's Impacts:

Dr. Gabor Maté identifies 7 Key Impacts of Trauma that represent how psychological wounds distort a person's life, shaping their present reality rather than just remaining in the past. He emphasizes that trauma is not just the event, but the internal "separation from self" that occurs.

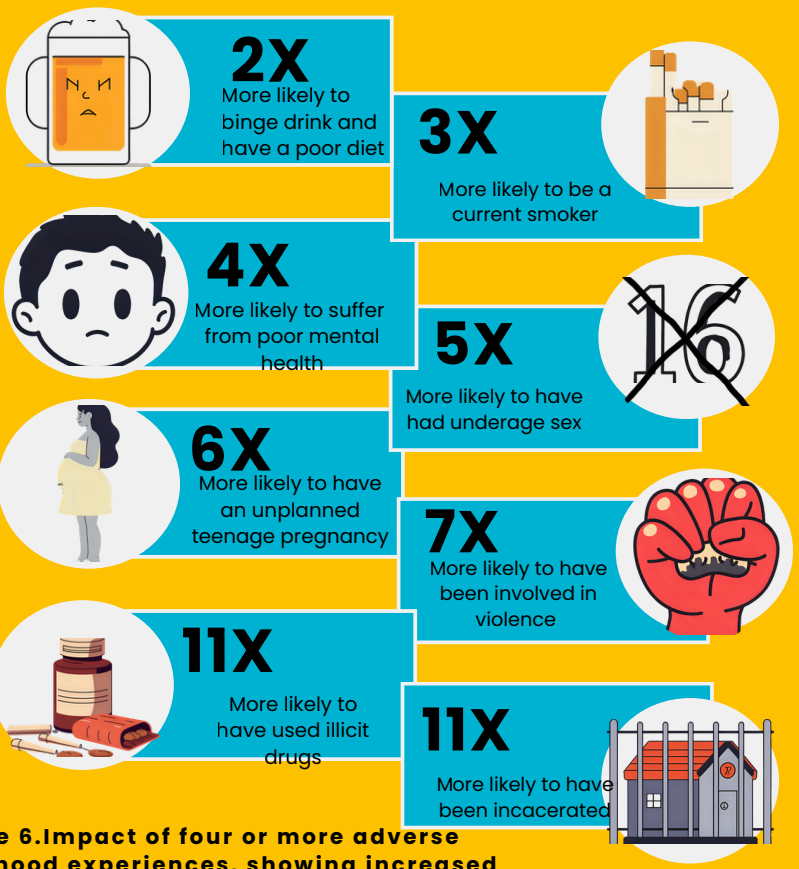


Figure 6.Impact of four or more adverse childhood experiences, showing increased likelihood of health-harming behaviours, low mental wellbeing, violence involvement, illicit drug use and incarceration. Adapted from YoungMinds (n.d.)

Key Aspects of the 7 Impacts:

- **Separation from Self**
- **Disconnection from Others**
- **Distorted Worldview**
- **Lifelong Pain**
- **Impact on Brain/Body Development**
- **Shame-Based View of Self**
- **Difficulty Being Present**

ACE'S PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND BENEFITS?

These help buffer the impact of trauma and support positive development:

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are conditions, relationships, or resources that help reduce the impact of risk and support positive development and wellbeing. They act as a buffer against stress, trauma, and adversity, helping young people to cope, build resilience, and achieve better outcomes.
In youth work, protective factors often include safe and supportive relationships, stable environments, positive role models, and access to support, all of which help young people feel secure, valued, and able to thrive.

EXAMPLES OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Stable, trusting relationships with at least one safe adult
- Safe and predictable environments where young people feel secure
- Positive role models who demonstrate healthy behaviours
- Access to be creativity, social action and personal development
- Access to support services (youth work, mental health, education)

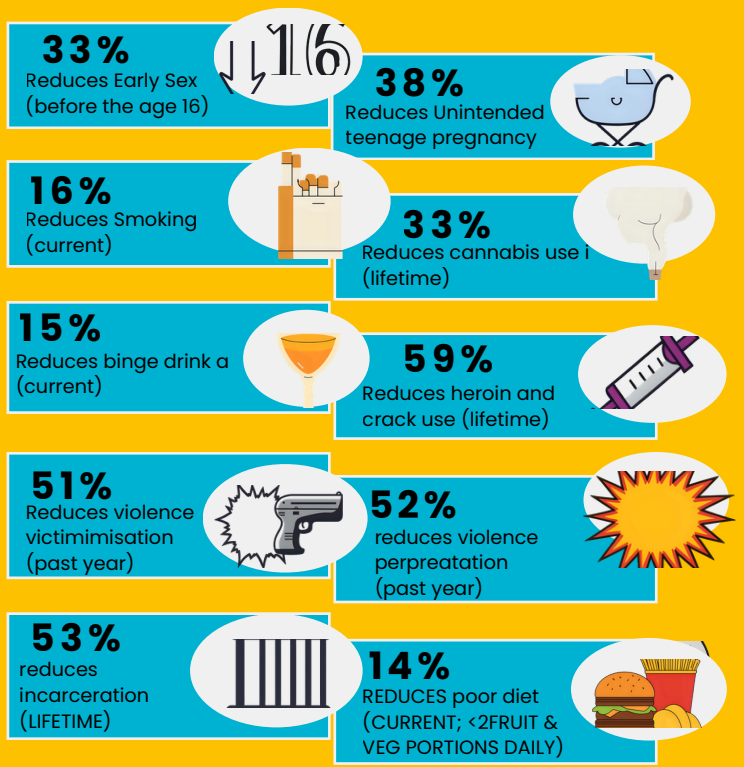


Figure 7. Estimated reductions in health-harming behaviours and social harms if ACEs were prevented, including early sex, unintended teenage pregnancy, smoking, cannabis use, binge drinking, crack/heroin use, violence victimisation, violence perpetration, incarceration and poor diet. Adapted from Ford et al. (2016).

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

- **Build trust and consistency**
Be reliable, predictable, and honest—relationships are key.

- **Use trauma-informed language**
Avoid blame or judgment; focus on understanding

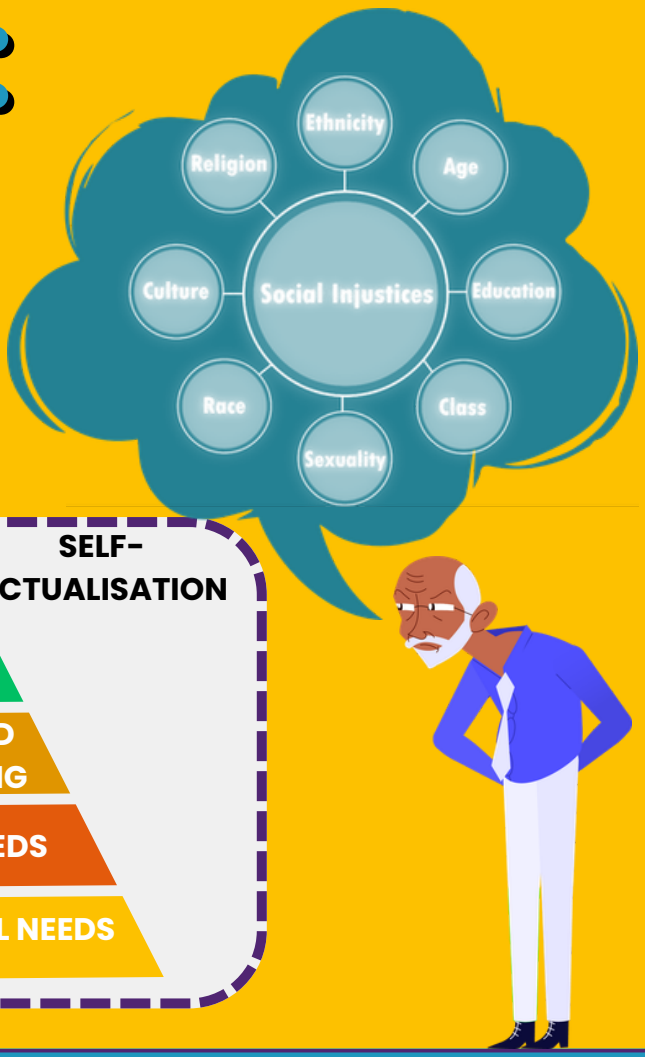
- **Avoid re-traumatisation**
Be mindful of triggers, tone, and power dynamics.

- **Focus on strengths and resilience**
Recognise what young people are doing well, not just difficulties

- **Prioritise safety and regulation**
Young people need to feel safe before they can learn or engage)

KEY MODELS:

The three key models below all highlight that young people's wellbeing is shaped by more than just behaviour—they emphasise the importance of basic needs, relationships, identity, and environment. Together, these models show that a strong sense of belonging, safety, and connection is essential for healthy development, emotional regulation, and engagement.



MASLOW'S HIERARCHY

Maslow's model explains that people need their basic needs (like safety and security) met before they can focus on relationships, confidence, and personal growth. The need to belong—through friendships and connection—is essential for young people's wellbeing, helping build self-esteem, resilience, and engagement.

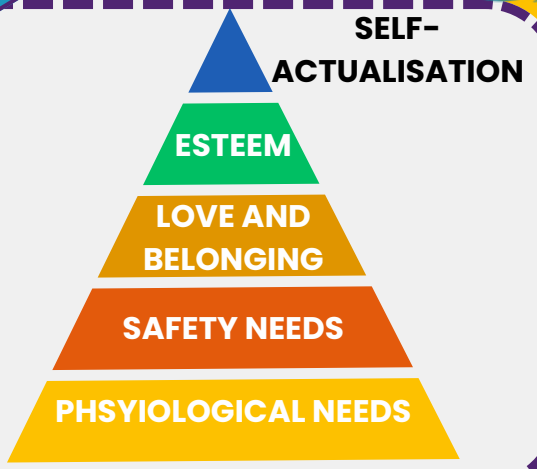


Figure 8. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, showing human needs progressing from physiological needs and safety to belonging, esteem and self-actualisation. Adapted from McLeod (2025).

THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL

The biopsychosocial model explains that a young person's wellbeing is shaped by the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. The need to belong sits within the social aspect but influences the whole system. Feeling connected and accepted supports emotional regulation, reduces stress, and builds self-esteem, while lack of belonging can negatively impact mental health and behaviour.

Figure 9. Engel's biopsychosocial model, showing how biological, psychological and social factors interact to shape health, illness and wellbeing. Adapted from Engel (1977).

FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEEDS

Max-Neef's model shows that needs such as affection, identity, participation, and protection are all equally important and connected. Belonging comes from feeling valued, included, and supported, which is key for young people's wellbeing, sense of identity, and positive development.

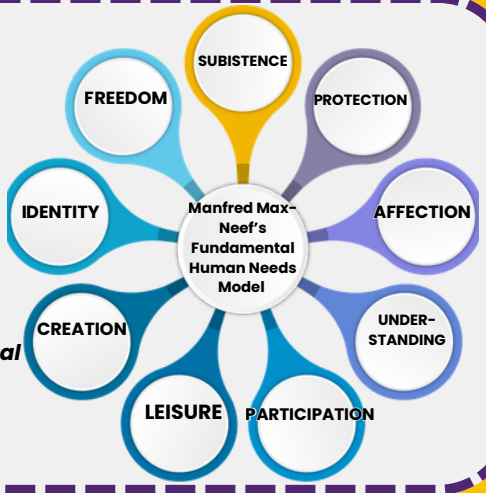


Figure 10 Max-Neef's Human Scale Development model, showing fundamental human needs such as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. Adapted from Hadebe (2015)..

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

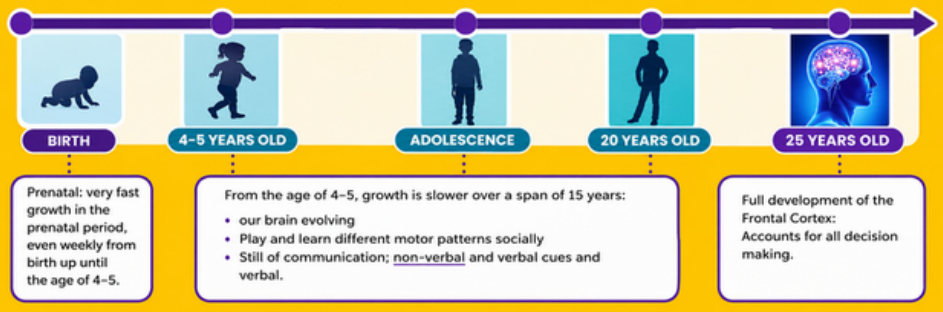


Figure 11. Early childhood and adolescent brain development timeline, showing key stages from birth to young adulthood, including rapid early brain growth, communication development and continued frontal cortex development into early adulthood. Adapted from Tierney and Nelson (2009).

ES Emotional Spark
-Moody/Irritable vs Passion

SE Social Engagement
– Safety in association with peers vs forsake morality for the benefit of membership (relationships will be the primary factor

N Novelty
– Dopamine drives you to risk/danger (research shows young people are 3x more likely to be hurt seriously or killed vs gets you ready to try on the unsafe so that you leave home and expand the population away from the family unit

CE Challenge The Status Quo
– look at what the rules are/pushing the boundaries, very disorientating – family are fallible – feeling really unsettled vs imagining a new world/innovation emerges from adolescence

Figure 12. Dan Siegel's ESSENCE model of adolescence, showing emotional spark, social engagement, novelty and creative exploration as core features of adolescent development. Adapted from Siegel (2014).

Dr. Dan Siegel defines the essence of adolescence (ages 12–24) not as a time of "raging hormones" or immaturity, but as a period of necessary brain remodeling designed for growth.
He uses the acronym **E.S.S.E.N.C.E.** to describe four core features that, while creating challenges, provide vital passion, social connection, and innovation.

CHANGES	EXPLANATION
BIOLOGICAL	Brain changes: Teen brains are very adaptable and learn from experience. The brain is constantly rewiring itself, removing unused connections and strengthening important ones. Alongside this, dopamine levels increase, leading to risk-taking and seeking new experiences.
PSYCHOLOGICAL	Emotions feel stronger meaning feelings can be intense and may be higher. Therefore, young people respond more strongly to rewards due to increased dopamine. Praise and rewards feel very powerful for teenagers. Cognitive development occurs, leading young people to think more creatively and understand complex ideas.
SOCIAL	During adolescence young people have an innate need for exploration, so trying new things and risk taking helps young people grow into adulthood. This is characterised by peers becoming more important, so being surrounded by friends and feeling a sense of belonging play a big role. Alongside many other life changes, adolescence includes many "firsts" and major developmental transitions.

TOOL & WORKSHEET QUESTIONS

TRAUMA AND ACES

DATE:

NAME:

APPLICATION TO YOUR ROLE

What Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have your young people experienced?

1. What is stressful or traumatic for the young people or young person you are working with?

2. How do you think this is impacting on the way the young people thinks about themselves, others and the world/community?

3. What kind of emotions and behaviours are you seeing?

How do these three areas interact and influence each other?

What consistent support can I provide?

Date:

Name:

Role:

TIP!
Use the Reflection Models on page 8 to guide the reflective process

ACES & TRAUMA REFLECTION SHEET

What are my current strengths e.g. Relationship with young people, links with the community and local partnerships etc.?

What are my current training needs? Do I need more training to understand Trauma, ACEs and the impact on the young people I work with?

What and where are my opportunities to reflect?

- S — SMART
- M — MEASURABLE
- A — ACHIEVABLE
- R — REALISTIC
- T — TIME-BOUND

Goals in your work:

SECTION 02 DE-ESCELATION & CRISIS

DE-ESCALATION AND CRISIS CORE CONCEPTS

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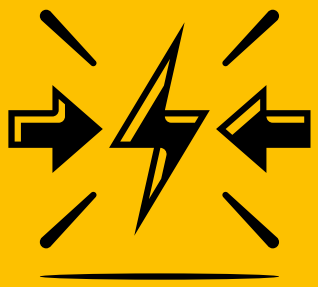
De-escalation is a key skill all youth workers should have to ensure effective practice

Crisis- National Youth Agency (NYA)

A crisis happens when a young person feels overwhelmed and struggles to cope, leading to strong emotional, behavioral, or physical reactions. During a crisis, the brain's threat system takes over, impairing clear thinking and emotional regulation. This may involve situations that threaten their safety or well-being, requiring urgent and calm actions to reduce harm and ensure safeguarding.



Conflict- National Youth Agency (NYA)

The National Youth Agency (NYA) in the UK defines conflict in the context of youth work as a range of challenging behaviors, including:
-**Confrontation:** Verbal, non-verbal, or physical actions that are disruptive or violent.
-Avoidance: Refusal to participate in activities.
-**Internal Struggle:** Emotional turbulence, anxiety, or feelings of being trapped.

De-escalation- National Youth Agency (NYA)

De-escalation is essential for managing challenging behavior. It involves recognizing signs of distress and using appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication to calm individuals and address the feelings driving their behavior. This process reduces tension and aggression, teaching young people to respond in a regulated manner.

Crisis Triggers

Crisis triggers are situations or experiences that cause a young person to feel overwhelmed, unsafe, or out of control, leading to strong emotional or behavioural reactions. These can include conflict, rejection, sudden changes, reminders of past trauma, feeling misunderstood, or loss of control. Triggers are often linked to previous experiences, meaning the reaction may be about more than the current situation. Understanding triggers helps youth workers respond with empathy, reduce escalation, and create safer, more supportive environments.

THREAT RESPONSES

Overview

Threat responses are automatic survival reactions that occur when a young person feels unsafe, overwhelmed, or threatened. These responses are driven by the brain and body, not conscious choice.

For young people who have experienced trauma or ongoing stress, this system can become overactive, meaning they may react quickly even in situations that are not actually dangerous.

Figure 13. Trauma survival responses, showing fight, flight, freeze, fawn, flock and flop as possible nervous-system responses to threat, stress or perceived danger. Adapted from trauma-informed practice theory and polyvagal-informed approaches (Porges, 2011; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022).

Window of Tolerance:

The window of tolerance describes the zone where a person feels calm, safe, and able to think and respond effectively. When someone experiences stress or trauma, they can move outside of this window. This can lead to hyper-arousal (fight or flight — feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or reactive) or hypo-arousal (freeze or shutdown — feeling numb, disconnected, or withdrawn). Understanding this helps us recognise that these responses are not behaviours to "fix," but natural survival reactions, and supports more compassionate, trauma-informed ways of responding.

FIGHT:"I need to take control"
The young person responds with aggression or confrontation to protect themselves.

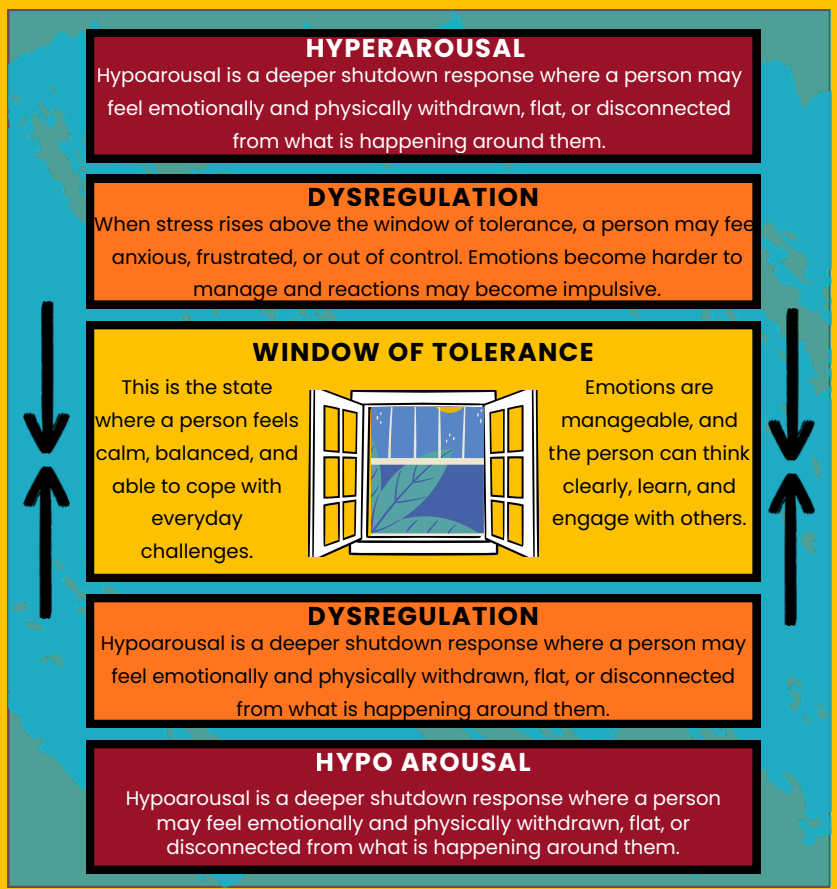
FLIGHT:"I need to get away"
The young person tries to escape the situation.

FREEZE:"I'm stuck"
The young person becomes immobilised or shuts down.

FLOP:"I've shut down completely"
The body goes into a collapse response when overwhelmed.

FLOCK:"I need safety in others"
The young person seeks safety through belonging and group connection.

FAWN:"I need to please to stay safe"
The young person tries to avoid conflict by pleasing others.



Key Concept:

Threat responses are not choices — they are automatic reactions to perceived danger. The goal is not to **"stop"** the behaviour, but to create enough safety for the young person to regulate.

Figure 14. Window of tolerance model, showing hyperarousal, hypoarousal and the optimal zone of emotional regulation where a person can think clearly, feel grounded and engage with others. Adapted from Siegel (1999) and National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (2017)

DE-ESCALATION STRATEGIES

THREE R'S REACHING THE LEARNING BRAIN

Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable child to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence.

Third: We can support the child to reflect, learn, remember, articulate and become self-assured

Second: We must relate and connect with the child through an attuned and sensitive relationship.

First: We must help the child to regulate and calm their fight/flight/freeze responses

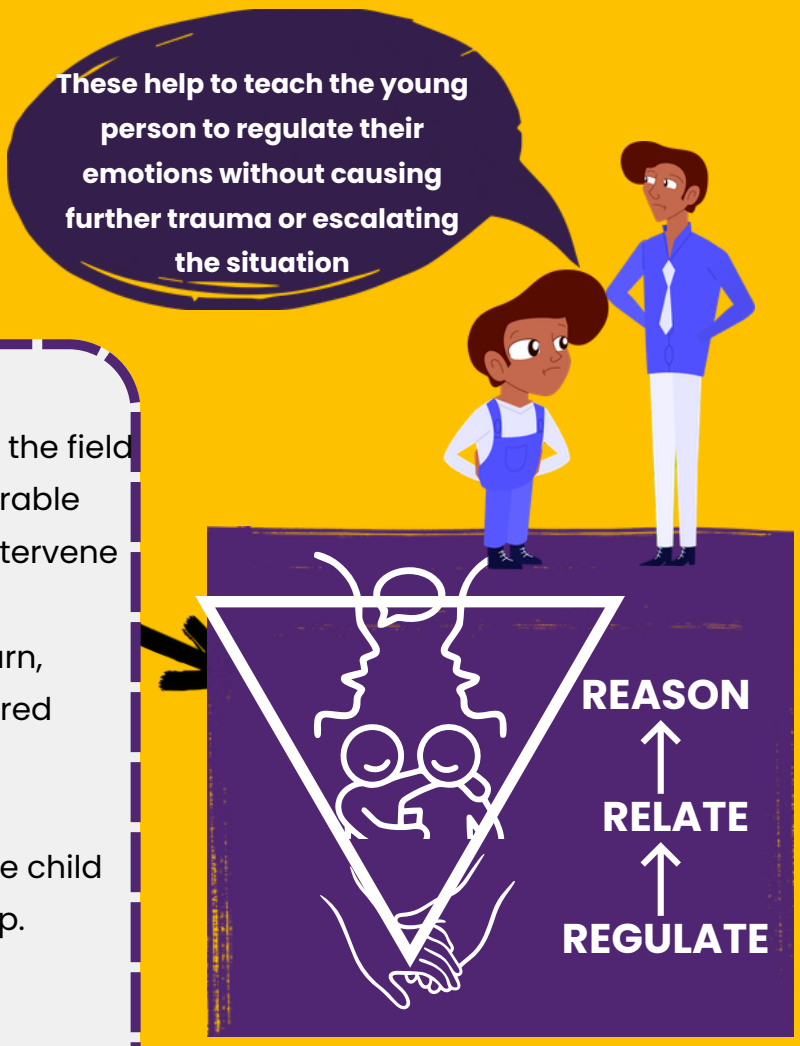


Figure 15. Regulate, Relate, Reason and Restore framework, showing how adults can support young people by first helping them regulate, then building connection, supporting reflection and repairing relationships. Adapted from Education Scotland (2025).

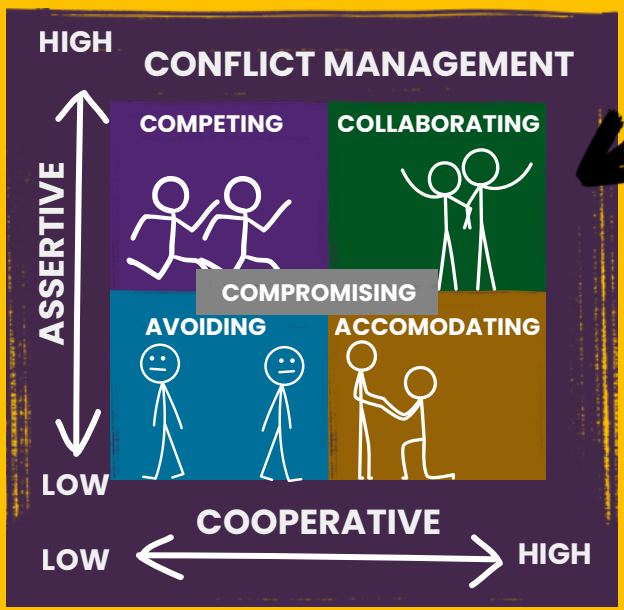


Figure 16. Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Model, showing five conflict-handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating. Adapted from Thomas and Kilmann (1974)

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Commonly when emotions are triggered in relation to conflict people adopt one of three attitudes relating to blame

- **You are okay** (I'm accommodating you but I'm not asserting myself) your needs are met but not mine
- **I'm okay** (you are asserting yourself I'm not cooperating) you aren't heard.
- **We are not okay** (neither of us are okay, we are avoiding dealing with the conflict) can feel hopeless and doomed to fail
- **We ok, we are both collaborating** (you are assertive and I'm cooperative)

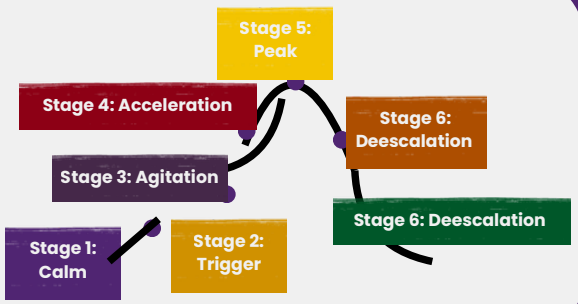
BEST PRACTICE:

The three key models below all highlight that young people's wellbeing is shaped by more than just behaviour—they emphasise the importance of basic needs, relationships, identity, and environment. Together, these models show that a strong sense of belonging, safety, and connection is essential for healthy development, emotional regulation, and engagement.

THE ESCALATION CURVE

The descalation curve is a framework that outlines the stages of behavioural escalation during conflicts or crises. It typically includes seven phases that represent different stages of escalation, helping to understand how behaviour changes over time and how to manage conflicts effectively before they reach critical levels.

Figure 17. Escalation curve, showing stages of behaviour escalation and staff intervention focus, including calm, trigger, agitation, acceleration, peak, de-escalation and recovery. Adapted from Colvin and Sugai (1989)



PAUSE

P **Pay attention to my body, thoughts, and feelings**
What is my body telling me?
Take a breath. Notice what I need.

A **Assess what is activating me**
What has upset me?
Do I feel unheard, misunderstood, or disrespected?

U **Understand the roots of my feelings**
What is this linked to?
What need or feeling is underneath this?

S **Set boundaries, separate, ensure safety**
What will help me feel safe right now?
Step away, create space, and protect my peace.

E **Empathize with those involved**
How might others be feeling?
How can we move toward understanding?

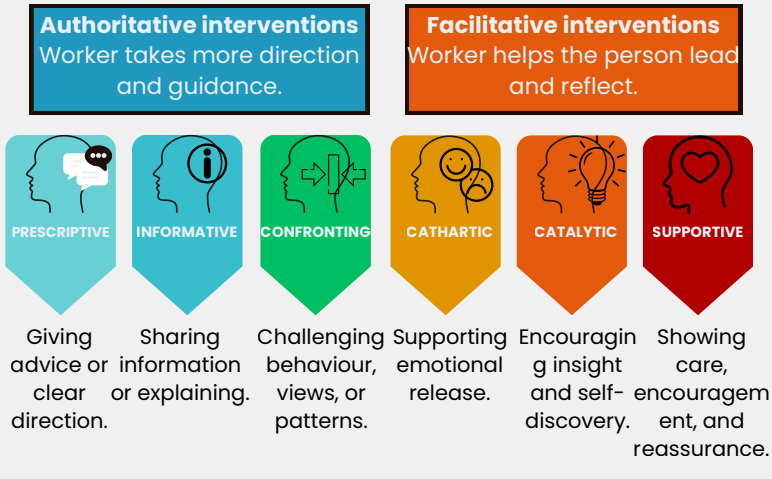
The P.A.U.S.E self de-escalation model is a step-by-step approach to help manage strong emotions and respond calmly. It encourages noticing what's happening in your body and thoughts, understanding what's triggering you, and exploring the deeper reasons behind your feelings. It then focuses on creating space and safety by setting boundaries, before ending with empathy — thinking about others' perspectives and responding with understanding and respect.

Figure 18. PAUSE model for emotional resilience, showing how pausing, awareness, understanding, self-regulation and empowered response can support emotional regulation. Adapted from Inspirational Guidance (2025).

HERONS 6 CATEGORIES OF INTERVENTIONS

Heron's Six Categories of Intervention describe different ways a practitioner can respond to support someone. They are split into two approaches: authoritative (more directive, giving guidance or challenge) and facilitative (more supportive, helping the person explore and find their own answers). The six types include giving advice (prescriptive), sharing information (informative), challenging thinking (confronting), encouraging emotional expression (cathartic), promoting self-reflection (catalytic), and offering reassurance (supportive).

Figure 19. Heron's six categories of intervention, showing authoritative interventions, including prescriptive, informative and confronting approaches, and facilitative interventions, including cathartic, catalytic and supportive approaches. Adapted from Heron (1976) and Ross (2017).



TOOL & WORKSHEET QUESTIONS

DE-ESCALATION AND CRISIS

DATE:

NAME:

APPLICATION TO YOUR ROLE

What Crisis have you seen for your young people ?

1. **How might this Crisis be affecting their body or brain?**

3. **What thoughts, emotions, or coping strategies might they be using?**

3. **What is happening in their environment (family, peers, community)?**

How do these three areas interact and influence each other?

What consistent support can I provide?

Date:

Name:

Role:

TIP!
Use the Reflection Models on page 8 to guide the reflective process

DE-ESCALATION & CRISIS REFLECTION SHEET

What Are my current Strengths e.g. De-escalation, Crisis, etc

What Are my Training Needs

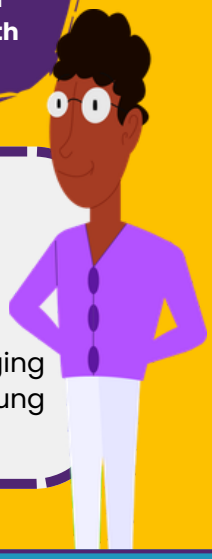
Opportunities to Reflect....

Goals in your work:

SECTION 03 SELF CARE

SELF CARE IN YOUTH WORK CORE CONCEPTS

Emotional Demnd in Youth Work: Youth work requires ongoing emotional engagement, including managing personal emotions while supporting others. This can be rewarding but also draining, particularly when supporting young people with complex needs.



SELF CARE

Merriam-Webster definition:

Care for oneself

-specifically : health care provided by oneself often without the consultation of a medical professional

Webster, M. (2018). Definition of SELF-CARE.

National Youth Agency (NYA) guidelines state:

-Self-care for youth workers is defined as a proactive, intentional, and ongoing process of managing personal well-being to maintain the capacity to work effectively, safely, and empathetically with young people.

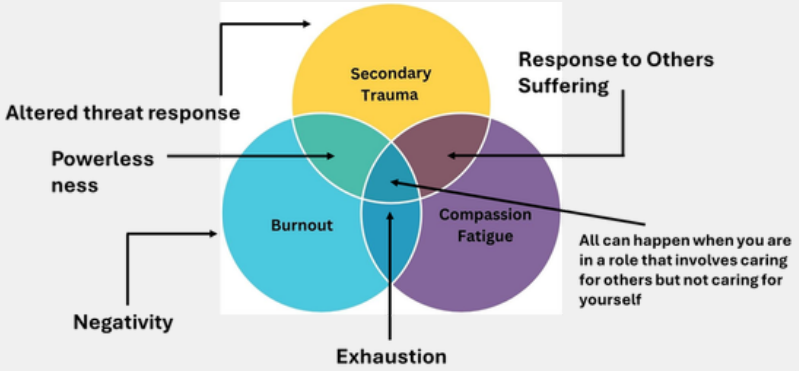
Raising the Bar Youth Work Practice Standards (NYA.)

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves in relationships. These have to be adjusted based on the person, place, and time in question. For example, what feels right with friends on the weekend might not feel appropriate with colleagues at work.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES IN YOUTH WORK

Boundaries are clear and appropriate limits within professional relationships that help maintain safe, respectful, and effective interactions between youth workers and young people. They are designed to create safe spaces, build trust, and prevent harm or dependency.



LACK OF SELF CARE LEADS TO...

Burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma are closely linked and often develop together in youth work due to the ongoing emotional demands of supporting young people, particularly those who have experienced trauma. Burnout builds over time through prolonged stress and workload pressures, while compassion fatigue and secondary trauma result from repeated exposure to the distress and experiences of others. Without effective self-care and support, these can reduce a practitioner's emotional capacity, impact decision-making, and affect the ability to engage safely and consistently.

Self-care acts as a protective factor, helping practitioners manage stress, maintain boundaries, and sustain their emotional wellbeing. In youth work, where relationships are central, this is essential. When practitioners prioritise self-care, supervision, and support, they are better able to remain calm, present, and responsive. This ensures they can provide safe, trauma-informed, and consistent support, ultimately improving outcomes for young people.

Figure 20. Venn diagram showing the overlap and differences between secondary trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue, highlighting how trauma exposure, workplace stress and emotional exhaustion can affect practitioners in helping roles. Adapted from Carolyn Spring's Avoiding Secondary Trauma course materials.

IMPACTS OF POOR SELF CARE FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Self-care (including organisational) prevents the probability of developing secondary trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue, which are often confused to be the same thing.

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion fatigue is a type of secondary traumatic stress, triggered by our natural, automatic threat response that seeks to protect us from harm. This can happen because of our exposure to those who are experiencing trauma, suffering, or emotional pain. It is the emotional and physical exhaustion that comes from caring for others in distress.

KEY SYMPTOMS

- **EMOTIONAL** : irritability, detachment, loss of motivation.
- **PHYSICAL:** Constant fatigue, sleep issues, frequent illness.
- **COGNITIVE:** Difficulty focusing, negative thoughts.
- **BEHAVIOURAL:** Withdrawal, reduced performance, unhealthy coping.

SECONDARY/ VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Secondary trauma (or secondary traumatic stress) is the "cost of caring," experienced when youth workers become overwhelmed by exposure to the traumatic events or stories of young people and the wider community.

KEY SYMPTOMS

- **EMOTIONAL:** Feeling overwhelmed, detached, or numb.
- **PHYSICAL:** Chronic fatigue, sleep issues, frequent illness
- **COGNITIVE:** Difficulty empathising, cynicism, or questioning purpose.
- **BEHAVIOURAL:** Withdrawal, loss of motivation, unhealthy coping.

BURNOUT

Burnout Is a state of chronic physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. The NYA specific focus is on the professional and emotional exhaustion that occurs when passionate youth workers are required to work with limited resources, unstable contracts, or long hours.

KEY SYMPTOMS

- **EMOTIONAL:** sadness, guilt, anger, feeling numb, and powerless
- **PHYSICAL:** Trauma response is triggered by the threat response of the other person
- **COGNITIVE:** Believing you are currently exposed to the same threat/trauma as the young person/change of world view
- **BEHAVIOURAL:** Observe and mirror the emotion someone else expresses.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves in relationships. These have to be adjusted based on the person, place, and time in question. For example, what feels right with friends on the weekend might not feel appropriate with colleagues at work

Organisational Boundaries (NYA Standards):

-The NYA emphasizes that organisational boundaries protect the reputation of the service and ensure consistent practice.

KEY SYMPTOMS

Practically, this means recognising your own triggers, noticing early signs of stress, and using strategies such as pausing, breathing, slowing down, or stepping back when needed. It also involves maintaining clear boundaries and understanding your limits. By regulating yourself in the moment, you protect your emotional wellbeing and remain effective in your role.

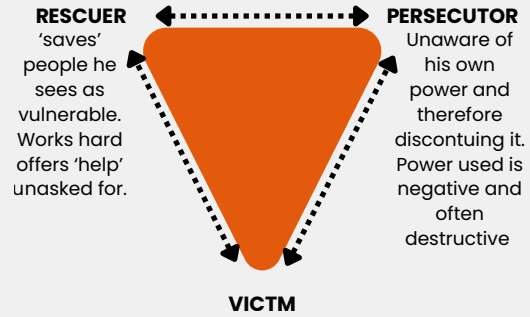


Figure 21. Karpman's Drama Triangle, showing the three common roles of rescuer, persecutor and victim that can appear in conflict, helping relationships or unsafe relational dynamics. Adapted from Karpman (1968).

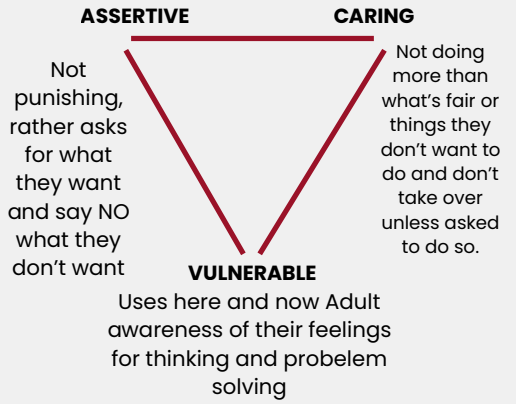


Figure 22. Choy's Winner's Triangle, showing healthier alternatives to the Drama Triangle through vulnerability, assertiveness and caring responses. Adapted from Choy (1990).

TYPES OF BOUNDARIES

- Physical – personal space, touch, safety
- Emotional – what you carry vs what belongs to the young person
- Time – hours, breaks, workload limits
- Mental / Intellectual – respect for opinions/ideas + not being "talked over", capacity to engage with certain activities
- Material/Financial – money, gifts, lending, transport
- Digital/Communication – contact rules like outside of work hours, social media, response times
- Relational –maintaining professionalism regardless of friendships/relationships, appropriate behaviour, language, and power dynamics

BENEFITS:

- Protect: Create a safe space for young people and staff/volunteers.
- Enable Empowerment in young people to be independent, rather than creating dependency.
- Structure Relationships: Clearly distinguish between personal and professional lives

SELF REGULATION:

The capacity to consciously monitor, manage, and adapt their own energy states, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in response to stressful or challenging situations.

Self-regulation is a key skill for youth workers and a vital protective factor against burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary (vicarious) trauma. It refers to the ability to manage your own emotional responses, stay calm under pressure, and respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, especially in high-stress situations.

Using the Winners Triangle helps practitioners:

- Avoid over-responsibility and emotional burnout
- Maintain healthy professional boundaries
- Recognise when they need support
- Respond calmly rather than reactively
- Support young people without becoming overwhelmed

It shifts practice from over-involvement and stress to balanced, sustainable, and trauma-informed support, making it a key protective factor for both practitioner wellbeing and effective youth work.

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

BREATHING BENEFITS

Breathing is one of the quickest and most effective ways to regulate your nervous system, reduce stress, and stay calm in challenging situations. As a youth worker, using breathing techniques can help you stay grounded, think clearly, and respond rather than react. Here are some methods which can be used in the moment.

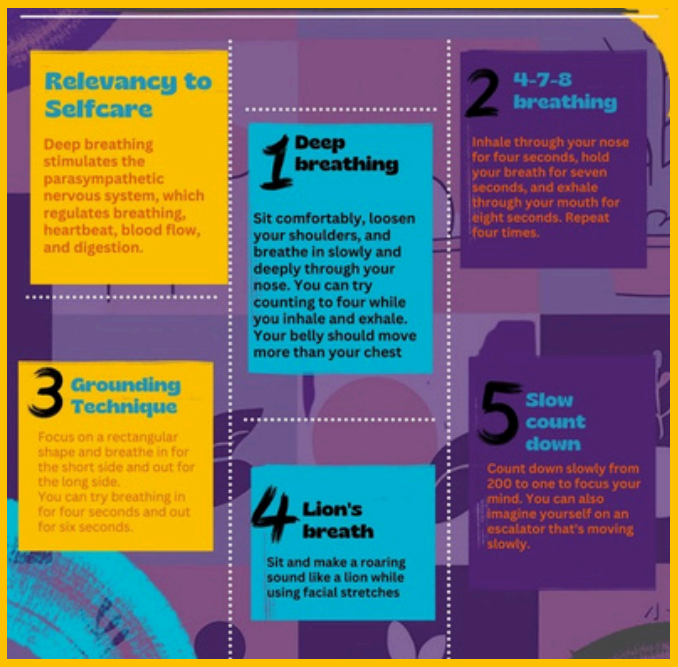


Figure 22. Breathing and grounding self-care techniques, including deep breathing, 4–7–8 breathing, grounding, lion's breath and slow count down. Created by Tashinga Ruzive and produced by 42nd Street, informed by evidence-based breathing, grounding and relaxation techniques (NHS, n.d.; NHS Inform, 2025).

Figure 23. STABLE self-care model, highlighting self-awareness, trauma resolution, aligned boundaries, balancing dysregulation, living in the present and emphasising positivity. Created by Tashinga Ruzive and produced by 42nd Street, informed by trauma-informed practice, self-care and emotional wellbeing guidance (NHS, n.d.; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022).

ONGOING / PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES IN WORK

- Set clear boundaries. Know what your responsibility is and what is not. Turn off your phone after work and do not check your emails
- Check in with yourself daily
- "How am I feeling today before/after work?"
- Use supervision properly and reflect all the time.
- Be honest about how the work is impacting you
- Build small routines
- e.g. breathing before sessions, resetting after sessions
- Taking an hour after work by yourself
- Tatch for favourite shows/ movies
- Taking breaks away from the office

STABLE METHOD

- Self-awareness: Understand your capacity to work with trauma. Due to our lived experience, we may have different triggers and capacity when working with trauma. There may be limits to exposure to trauma.- The capacity to work with trauma can be temporary or permanent.
- Trauma resolution: What support do you have around your own trauma, especially when you are working with young people? Think about how you stay calm and present when working with your young people (it's ok if you move away from this)
- Align boundaries: How do you discuss and implement boundaries on a personal level as well as an organisation? Know when you are holding too much
- Balance dysregulation: Look at strategies to help you regulate or stay regulated. Self-regulation and co-regulation.
- Live in the present: How can you, your team and your organisation help you to stay as present as possible
- Emphasise positivity: Focus on the positives in life to foster growth and resilience.

MY SELF CARE PLAN

What is one small action you can take each day to reduce stress (e.g., a 5-minute mindfulness exercise)?

What Hobbies/Interests make you happy?

What do you like most about youth work?

What are three things you're proud of in your practice?

How can you celebrate these accomplishments and future ones?

Who in your life (personal/professional) can you turn to for encouragement or support when needed?

Date:

Name:

Role:

TIP!
Use the Reflection Models on page 8 to guide the reflective process

SELF CARE REFLECTION SHEET

Think of a time when you have noticed Burnout in yourself or colleagues?

What are my current training needs? Do I need more training to understand Self Care and Burnout and it's impact myslef and on the young people I work with?

What and where are my opportunities to reflect? (Using Schon's Model?)

- S — SMART
- M — MEASURABLE
- A — ACHIEVABLE
- R — REALISTIC
- T — TIME-BOUND

Goals in your work:

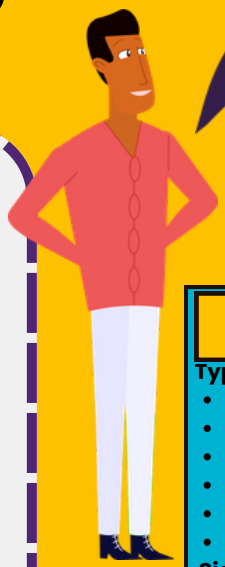
SECTION 04 SAFEGUARDING

www.42ndstreet.org.uk

RADICAL SAFEGUARDING CONCEPTS

42 ND STREET

The protection of young people is based on the principles outlined within **the Children's Act 2004** and the United Nations Declaration on the **Rights of the Child and Working Together 2018 Guidance**.



SAFEGUARDING

Every organisation and individual staff member has a duty of care to protect young people from unnecessary risk and/or harm. Safeguarding practice is underpinned by key legal and policy frameworks, including the Children Act 2004, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance (Children Act 2004; United Nations, 1989; HM Government, 2018).

SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

Types of abuse

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse anxiety, or fear
- Sexual abuse or exploitation (CSE)
- Neglect
- Criminal exploitation (CCE)
- Online harm

Signs to Be Aware Of

- Sudden changes in behaviour or mood
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Increased aggression or distress
- Missing episodes or disengagement
- Fear, anxiety, or reluctance to go home
- Changes in appearance, attendance, or engagement

RADICAL SAFEGUARDING

Radical safeguarding moves beyond the conventional deficit-based model of protection to recognize young people's agency, resilience, and right to participate in decisions affecting their safety. This approach acknowledges that true safety emerges not just from policies and procedures, but from strong relationships, community connections, and young people's own understanding of their rights and power..

PRINCIPLES OF SAFEGUARDING

- Information we already know / don't know?
- What do we need to learn? How?
- Do I know enough to make a decision?
- Who else knows about the risk?
- What could happen if we do nothing / something?
- What does the young person want / not want to happen?
- What are our options?
- Are some concerns more important than others? If so, why?

DEFENSIBLE DECISION MAKING

Defensible decision- making means recording a clear rationale for the decisions you make and the discussions that led to the decision(s). Your decisions in practice should withstand 'hindsight scrutiny' should something go wrong.
Kemshall (2009): 'Decisions that will withstand the harsh scrutiny of hindsight bias in the event of a risk failure.... informed, balanced, proportionate and just risk decisions. (Smith, P. (2026, February 22). Defensible Decision-Making in Governance)

TYPES OF TRAUMA PREVENTING A CONNECTED COMMUNITY - BARRIERS TO SAFEGUARDING

WHAT IS A THRIVING, CONNECTED COMMUNITY?

A thriving, connected community is one where people feel safe, supported and empowered to engage with each other and their surroundings. This reflects trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022).

CULTURAL TRAUMA: WHEN IDENTITY IS ERASED

Cultural trauma can occur when a group experiences collective harm that affects shared identity, memory and belonging, including experiences linked to colonisation, racism, religious persecution and forced displacement (Alexander, 2004; Hirschberger, 2018).

GENERATIONAL TRAUMA: WHEN PAIN IS PASSED DOWN

Generational trauma (also called intergenerational trauma) happens when trauma isn't healed but instead passed down from one generation to the next.
Can be caused by domestic violence, war, poverty, and forced displacement etc (Nichol et al., 2025)..

POLITICAL TRAUMA: WHEN GOVERNMENTS AND SYSTEMS HARM COMMUNITIES

Political trauma can occur when laws, policies, conflict, discrimination or state violence create harm for particular communities, especially where power is used to exclude, control or marginalise groups (Hirschberger, 2018; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022).

YOUTHWORK MODEL OF RISK

THE YOUTH WORK MODEL OF RISK (NYA)

The Youth Work Model of Risk focuses on balancing safety with developmental benefits, prioritizing a "risk-benefit analysis" over strict risk elimination. It ensures hazards are managed reasonably, maximizing opportunities for young people to build resilience, decision-making skills, and independence. The approach emphasizes identifying hazards, assessing likelihood, and implementing proportional control measures. (National Youth Agency. (2024). Risk Assessment Process Procedure.)

HAZARDS

- Conflict and Dilemas
- Ethical
- Community
- Personal
- Professional
- Organisational

Key Considerations in the Risk Assessment Process:

- Identify the hazards: What could cause harm?
- Decide who might be harmed: And how.
- Evaluate risks and decide on precautions: What measures are in place?
- Record findings and implement them: Documenting safety plans.
- Review and update: Constantly updating assessments as situations change.

HOW TO ASSESS HIGH RISK OR LOW RISK

- **How risky is it to not discuss safeguarding referrals as a team?**
- **How risky is it to discuss the impact of a safeguarding case on a worker?**
- **How risky is it to become desensitised to risk?**

BARRIERS FOR ADDRESSING HAZARDS

- Challenges and Considerations?
- Institutional Resistance
- ·Requires more time and resources
- Demand significant organisational change
- May seem riskier than traditional approaches

KEY FACTORS IN PREVENTING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING:

42ND STREET

SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS:

- CHILD EXPLOITATION
- CARE RESPONSIBILITIES
- PHYSICAL ABUSE
- EXTREMISM
- NEGLECT
- SEXUAL ABUSE
- HOMELESSNESS
- MENTAL HEALTH
- DOMESTIC ABUSE
- FEMALE GENITAL MUTILIATION

INTERNAL CONFLICT

- **EMOTIONAL:** sadness, guilt, anger, feeling numb, and powerless
- **PHYSICAL:** Trauma response is triggered by the threat response of the other person
- **COGNITIVE:** Believing you are currently exposed to the same threat/trauma as the young person/change of world view
- **BEHAVIOURAL**: Observe and mirror the emotion someone else expresses.

CREATING SAFE SPACES

- Involve youth in setting rules and establishing behavior agreements while creating avenues for raising concerns and ensuring spaces are accessible and inclusive.
- Build critical consciousness by addressing systemic inequalities, educating youth on their rights, supporting youth-led campaigns, and facilitating discussions on power, consent, and boundaries.
- Engage in transformative practice by reflecting on personal power, challenging oppressive practices, using trauma-informed approaches, and fostering respectful relationships.

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

TRANSPARENCY
PARTNERSHIP WORK
CALL THE CONTACT CENTRE
SHOWCASE GOOD PRACTICE AND CHALLENGE BAD PRACTICE
ADVOCATE MAKE COMPLAINTS/ STRONG REFERRAL
DEBRIEF AS A TEAM AND WITH THE BOARD
-HIGHLIGHT WHAT WORKS WELL
HIGHLIGHTING TRAINING NEEDS

BEST PRACTICE

HAZARDS

- Conflict and Dilemas
- Ethical
- Community
- Personal
- Professional
- Organisational

THE YOUTH WORK MODEL OF RISK (NYA)

The Youth Work Model of Risk focuses on balancing safety with developmental benefits, prioritizing a "risk-benefit analysis" over strict risk elimination. It ensures hazards are managed reasonably, maximizing opportunities for young people to build resilience, decision-making skills, and independence. The approach emphasizes identifying hazards, assessing likelihood, and implementing proportional control measures. (National Youth Agency. (2024). Risk Assessment Process Procedure.)

Key Considerations in the Risk Assessment Process:

- Identify the hazards: What could cause harm?
- Decide who might be harmed: And how.
- Evaluate risks and decide on precautions: What measures are in place?
- Record findings and implement them: Documenting safety plans.
- Review and update: Constantly updating assessments as situations change.

LOW RISK/ HIGH RISK:

- **How risky is it to not discuss safeguarding referrals as a team?**
- **How risky is it to discuss the impact of a safeguarding case on a worker?**
- **How risky is it to become desensitised to risk?**

BARRIERS FOR ADDRESSING HAZARDS

- Challenges and Considerations?
- Institutional Resistance
- ·Requires more time and resources
- Demand significant organisational change
- May seem riskier than traditional approaches

TOOL & WORKSHEET QUESTIONS

SAFEGUARDING

DATE:

NAME:

APPLICATION TO YOUR ROLE

What types of safeguarding concerns have you encountered for your young people and/ or colleagues ?

1. What Biases within yourself may worry and prevent you from making a safeguarding referral ?

2. How do you think political, generational and cultural trauma impact the safeguarding process in your role ?

3. How can radical safeguarding be an effective tool to rationalise the worries and reservations of making a safeguarding referral?

How do these three areas interact and influence each other?

What consistent support can I provide or be provided with?

Date:

Name:

Role:

TIP!
Use the Reflection Models on page 8 to guide the reflective process

SAFEGUARDING REFLECTION SHEET

What Are my current Strengths e.g. types of safeguarding concerns, NYA model of risk, radical safeguarding etc.

What Are my Training Needs

What and where are my opportunities to reflect? (Using Schon's Model?)

- S — SMART
- M — MEASURABLE
- A — ACHIEVABLE
- R — REALISTIC
- T — TIME-BOUND

Goals in your work:

SECTION 05 SOCIAL MEDIA & AI

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

42ND STREET

Of young people aged 13–17 say social media helps them feel closer to their friends.

72%

OFCOM DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to online platforms and applications that allow people to create, share, and interact with content and communicate with others in digital communities. These platforms enable users to connect, share information, express themselves, and build relationships through text, images, videos, and messaging. (Ofcom, 2025, Adults Media Lives)

WHAT IS AI?

The term "artificial intelligence" first gained prominence in 1956 during a conference at Dartmouth College. McCarthy defined AI as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines," (Ivezic, M. (2017, March 3). The 1956 Dartmouth Workshop)

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF AI

- Generative AI, or gen AI, is a type of artificial intelligence that creates original content—such as text, images, videos, audio, or software code—based on user prompts.
- Narrow AI, known as Weak AI, refers to AI systems designed for specific tasks or closely related tasks.
- Artificial superintelligence (ASI) is a hypothetical AI with cognitive abilities surpassing human intelligence, exhibiting advanced thinking skills beyond human capability. (Muhammad Tuhin. (2025, April 27). What Is Narrow, General, and Super AI? Science News Today.)

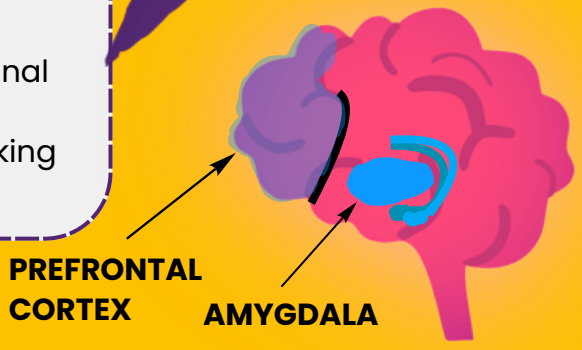
SOCIAL MEDIA & AI CORE CONCEPTS

Social Media Impact on Early Childhood Development

Frequent social media use during adolescence may affect brain development, especially in areas related to emotional regulation, social rewards, and impulse control, potentially impacting mental health.

- Amygdala: Supports emotional processing and can become more sensitive to social rewards or rejection through social media use.
- Prefrontal Cortex: Supports impulse control and emotional regulation. As the adolescent brain is still developing, frequent social media use may influence decision-making and wellbeing.

Social media is integral to young people's lives, often starting in early childhood. It offers benefits like connection and support but also poses risks such as harmful content and bullying. Professionals should engage in routine, non-judgemental discussions about it.



SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

INSTAGRAM
47% of users aged 8–17

WHATSAPP
82% of users- 13-15 and 84% 16-17

TIKTOK
80% of users- 13-15 and 83% 16-17

YOUTUBE
90% of users- 13-15 and 86% 16-17

REDDIT
44% of users are aged 18–29

SNAPCHAT
46% of users aged 8–17

THE GREAT REWIRING

The Great Rewiring 2010-2015 was the rise of Social Media

As life got busier, and the cost of living got higher more younger people were turned to rely on TV and tablets

Remember these statistics are self reported and inaccuruate as young peope may increase their actual age to stop restrictions to content they can see

SOCIAL MEDIA RISK FACTORS

THE COMMUNICATION MODEL

Social media has changed how young people communicate, allowing them to stay connected, share experiences, and build relationships quickly and easily. While this can support social connection and access to communities, communication online often relies on short messages, images, and emojis, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or reduce deeper conversations.

Over time, heavy reliance on digital communication may affect the development of face-to-face communication skills and how young people manage relationships and conflict in adulthood. Supporting young people to develop balanced online and offline communication skills is therefore an important part of youth work.

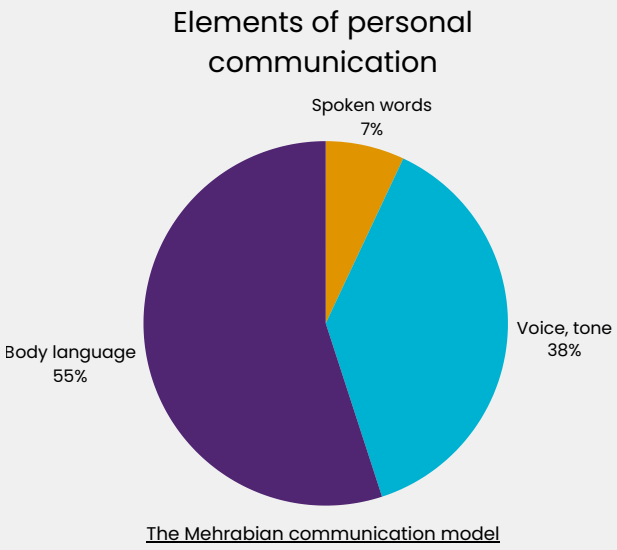


Figure 24. CounselorAid. (2024, June 25). Mehrabian's 7-38-55 Rule: The Art of Non-Verbal Communication

SOCIAL MEDIA RISKS

- **Online Grooming:** Individuals may build relationships with young people online in order to manipulate, exploit, or abuse them. Grooming often starts with friendly conversation and gradually builds trust, secrecy, and dependence.
- **Anonymous Chat Platforms (e.g., Omegle):** Sites that allow communication with strangers without identity verification increase risks of exposure to inappropriate content, grooming, and contact with adults posing as young people.
- **Stranger Connection Apps (e.g., Yellow / Yubo):** Some apps allow young people to connect with strangers nearby, which can increase risks of unsafe contact, exploitation, or manipulation if not properly monitored.
- **Exposure to Harmful Content:** Young people may experience harassment, exclusion, or bullying online, which can impact mental health, confidence, and wellbeing.
- **Cyberbullying:** Young people may experience harassment, exclusion, or bullying online, which can impact mental health, confidence, and wellbeing.
- **Pressure to Share Personal Information:** Young people may be pressured to share personal details, images, or location information that can put them at risk.
- **Online Exploitation:** Some individuals may attempt to manipulate young people into sharing images, engaging in unsafe behaviour, or meeting offline.

RISKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Less face-to-face practice: fewer chances to learn tone, turn-taking, and non-verbal cues.
- Attention & self-regulation: fast, high-stimulus content can make sustained focus harder.
- Sleep & routine: late-night scrolling/alerts can disrupt sleep quality, mood, and learning.
- Play & movement: more screen time can crowd out active play, which supports motor and social skills.
- Habits & wellbeing: "reward" features (likes, short videos) can encourage habitual checking and comparison.

SOCIAL MEDIA BENEFITS

MAX NEEF'S MODEL

Max-Neef's Fundamental Human Needs model highlights that affection, participation, identity, and understanding are essential for thriving. Social media can support these needs for young people by providing platforms to connect, share interests, and explore identity, helping them feel recognized and included. Online spaces also foster creativity and participation, allowing youth to engage, communicate, and find support, especially for those feeling isolated or marginalized.
For youth workers, recognizing the positive contributions of social media can guide strategies to help young people build confidence and connections in both digital and real-world communities. However, reliance on digital communication can hinder the development of face-to-face skills and emotional regulation.

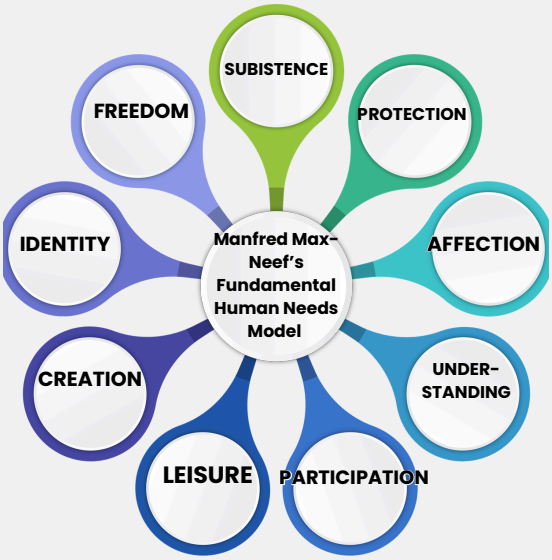


Figure 10 Max-Neef's Human Scale Development model, showing fundamental human needs such as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. Adapted from Hadebe (2015).

SOCIAL MEDIA BENEFITS

- **Connection and Belonging:** Social media helps young people stay connected with friends, family, and communities, supporting their sense of belonging and social support.
- **Self-Expression and Identity Development:** Online platforms allow young people to express their interests, creativity, and opinions, helping them explore and develop their identity.
- **Access to Information and Learning:** Social media provides access to educational content, news, advice, and resources that can support learning and personal development.
- **Community and Support Networks:** Young people can find communities with shared interests or experiences, which can be especially helpful for those who feel isolated or marginalised.
- **Creativity and Skill Development:** Platforms allow young people to create content such as videos, artwork, music, or writing, helping develop digital and creative skills.
- **Opportunities for Participation:** Social media enables young people to engage with social issues, campaigns, and discussions, encouraging civic participation and awareness.

AI'S IMPACT PROS & CONS

> **Artificial Intelligence is already being widely consulted for mental health support in the UK, with more than one in three adults (37% saying they've used an ai chatbot for their mental health**
> (Orpwood, G. (2025, November 18). Over one in three using AI Chatbots for mental health support)

The Government Digital Sustainability Alliance's (GDSA) report highlights that AI is predicted to lead to an increase in global water usage from 1.1bn to 6.6bn cubic metres by 2027. This is equivalent to more than half of the UK's total water usage.
Kenny, R. (2025, September 17). AI's thirst for water

Kenny, R. (2025, September 17). AI's thirst for water – UK Government Sustainable ICT.

Pros and cons

PROS	CONS
Anonymity and Impartiality AI platforms can allow young people to ask questions or seek support anonymously. This can reduce feelings of judgement or stigma, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as mental health, identity, or personal challenges. AI can also provide responses without **bias linked to personal opinions.**	**AI Can Be Paywalled** Some AI tools require paid subscriptions for full access. This may create inequalities where young people from lower-income backgrounds cannot access the same level of support or information.
24/7 Access to Information and Support Unlike traditional services, AI tools are available at any time. Young people can access information, advice, and support instantly, which can be particularly helpful outside of school hours or when services are closed.	**AI Is Not Trauma-Informed or Culturally Sensitive** AI systems do not always fully understand personal experiences, trauma, cultural contexts, or emotional complexity. As a result, responses may sometimes lack empathy or appropriate understanding compared to human support.
Support from Anywhere AI tools can be accessed through smartphones, laptops, or tablets, allowing young people to receive guidance or information regardless of their location. This can be especially beneficial for those who may face barriers to accessing in-person services.	**Environmental Impact of AI** Developing and running AI systems requires large amounts of computing power and data storage, which consumes significant energy and water resources. This contributes to the environmental footprint of digital technologies.

MENTAL WELLBEING IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Young people often turn to social media and AI tools for mental health support because they are easy to access, familiar, and available at any time. Online platforms can provide quick information about emotions, mental health conditions, and coping strategies, helping young people better understand what they may be experiencing.

Many young people report, digital spaces can feel less intimidating than speaking to adults or professionals face-to-face. The ability to ask questions anonymously helps reduce feelings of judgment or stigma, especially when discussing sensitive topics like anxiety, identity, relationships, or trauma.

Social media can also provide peer support and foster a sense of belonging, allowing young people to see others sharing similar experiences and realize they are not alone. Additionally, AI tools can offer immediate responses, guidance, or suggestions for coping strategies when other support is unavailable.

Youth Work Relevance

For youth workers, social media and AI present both **opportunities** and **challenges**. By supporting digital literacy, encouraging healthy boundaries online, and promoting critical thinking, youth workers can help young people **engage safely, confidently, and positively in digital spaces while protecting their emotional and mental wellbeing**.

However, while these tools can provide information and reassurance, they should be considered a starting point rather than a replacement for professional or trusted human support. when needed.
Youth workers play a crucial role in helping young people access accurate information and encouraging them to seek the appropriate help when needed.

Importance of Critical Thinking

Supporting young people to develop critical thinking and digital literacy is essential. This includes helping them to:

- Question the accuracy of information online
- Recognise credible sources.
- Understand how algorithms influence what they see.
- Know when to seek help from trusted adults or professionals.

AI and the Lack of Human Understanding

Although AI can provide information quickly, it does not replace human understanding, empathy, or professional support. AI systems may not fully recognise trauma, cultural context, emotional nuance, or safeguarding concerns. Because of this, young people may receive responses that are inaccurate, oversimplified, or not appropriate for their situation.

What are AI Chatbots used for in the mental health space?

AI-powered chatbots are virtual assistants that offer mental health support through text-based or voice conversations. Some examples include Woebot, Wysa, Replika, and AI-driven crisis helplines.

These chatbots are often recommended over others, such as ChatGPT, because they do not impose limits on the amount of conversation before requiring a subscription payment.

ONLINE SAFETY ACT 2025

ORIGIN AND DEFINITION

Builiding on the 2023 Act, platforms have a legal duty to protect children online. They are now required to use highly effective age assurance to prevent children from accessing pornography, or content which encourages self-harm, suicide or eating disorder content. This also includes harmful and age-inappropriate content such as bullying, hateful content and content which encourages dangerous stunts or ingesting dangerous substances.

REGULAR COMPLAINTS

The main reported concern with the Online Safety Act is its punitive nature rather than being preventative. The anonymity of social media complicates user identification for law violations. Additionally, some believe it restricts access to content, especially identity-based content like LGBTQ+ groups, which may now require age verification.

PURPOSE

The Online Safety Act 2023 protects children and adults online by imposing new legal duties on social media companies and search services. They must implement systems to reduce risks of illegal activity and remove illegal content when it appears. (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. (2025, July 24). Online Safety Act. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/online-safety-act)

DID YOU KNOW?
When the new age verification processes came in, Almost immediately tutorials were posted online on how to bypass them, one of which was uploading Spongebobs' ID,

BEST PRACTICE- RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

42 ND STREET

@@bmm.uk.official
CONTENT: Free therapy sessions, access to culturally appropriate therapy

@ Dr Kirren Schnack – Clinical Psychologist
CONTENT: Relationship psychology, boundaries, and attachment styles.

@Dr Alex George – NHS Doctor & Youth Mental Health Ambassador
CONTENT: Mental health awareness, wellbeing, and resilience for young people.

@ Dr Ally Jaffee – NHS Doctor
CONTENT: Mental health education and emotional wellbeing.

@Dr Emma Hepburn – Clinical Psychologist
CONTENT: Visual explanations of mental health, self-care, and emotional health.

PRACTICAL STEPS

- Youth workers help create community – They can encourage their young people to use social media and digital platforms to amplify their voices.
- Co-creating content: Organizations can work together to co-creating informative content that can benefit young people.
- Encourage Open Communication: Create an environment where young people feel comfortable discussing their social media experiences. Regularly check in with them about what they see and feel online.

@The Oxford Psych – Clinical Psychologist
CONTENT: Psychology education and mental health topics.

@Teresa Lewis – Psychotherapist
CONTENT: Trauma-informed psychology and emotional regulation.

@ UK Therapy Guide – Therapists & Psychologists
CONTENT: Conversations about therapy, relationships, and mental health.

@Mental Health UK – Mental Health Charity
CONTENT: Mental health education and wellbeing resources.

Following qualified professionals on social media can help young people access reliable mental health advice, coping strategies, and wellbeing resources. It also supports digital literacy by helping them identify credible information and use social media in a more positive and informed way.

TOOL & WORKSHEET QUESTIONS

SOCIAL MEDIA & AI

DATE:

NAME:

APPLICATION TO YOUR ROLE

What Challenges within Social Media & AI have you seen for your young people ?

1. **How might exposure to Social Media & AI be affecting young people's brain and body?**

2. **What thoughts, emotions, or coping mechanisms might they be using due to exposure?**

3. **What might be happening in their environment (family, peers, community)?**

How do these three areas interact and influence each other?

What regular support can I provide?

Date:

Name:

Role:

TIP!
Use the Reflection Models on page 8 to guide the reflective process

SOCIAL MEDIA & AI REFLECTION SHEET

What Are my current Strengths e.g. knowledge of Social Media, AI, etc

What Are my Training Needs

Opportunities to Reflect....

- **S** SMART
- **M** MEASURABLE
- **A** ACHIEVABLE
- **R** REALISTIC
- **T** TIME-BOUND

Goals in your work:

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LIST OF FIGURES

- ***Figure 1:****Trauma-informed principles, showing safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness and empowerment as core values for trauma-informed practice. Adapted from Fallot and Harris' Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care framework (Fallot & Harris, 2009). , (Oxford Safeguarding Adults Boards) https://www.osab.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Key-Principles-of-the-Trauma-Informed-Approach.pdf*
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- **Figure 21.** Breathing and grounding self-care techniques, including deep breathing, 4–7–8 breathing, grounding, lion's breath and slow count down. Created by Tashinga Ruzive and produced by 42nd Street, informed by evidence-based breathing, grounding and relaxation techniques (NHS, n.d.; NHS Inform, 2025). NHS. (n.d.). Breathing exercises for stress. https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/NHS Inform. (2025, December 9). Grounding exercises.
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