

Name of the workshop Mental Health in Youth Work	Duration 90 min	Number of participants/group formation Plenary, individually, in small groups
Aim of the activity The aim of this session is to help participants understand mental health as an important part of youth work, not as a distant clinical topic, but as something connected to everyday realities of young people. The session builds directly on the previous day's Hidden Layers Quest, where participants explored how visible behaviour can hide deeper emotions, needs, pressures, or struggles. Now participants move from noticing hidden layers to understanding the wider context around young people: school pressure, family expectations, social media, loneliness, identity, uncertainty, financial stress, exclusion, digital overload, and lack of support. The session should help participants understand that youth workers are not therapists and should not diagnose or "fix" young people. However, youth workers can create spaces where young people feel seen, respected, included, and supported. The session follows the programme idea that Day 2 should approach mental health through lived experiences, everyday realities, interactive exercises, storytelling, anonymous reflection and facilitated discussion, rather than clinical or academic input By the end of the session, participants will: · understand mental health as connected to participation, identity, relationships, belonging, pressure, and everyday youth work practice; · identify different factors that can influence young people's well-being; · reflect on the realities young people face in their own communities; · understand the difference between the role of a youth worker and the role of a mental health professional; · explore how youth workers can notice, listen, support, adapt activities, and refer young people when needed; · prepare for the next session on safe spaces and emotional safety.		
Materials needed for the activity · flipchart papers; · markers; · sticky notes in several colours; · tape or blu tack; · prepared flipchart with the sentence: "What we see is not always the whole story." · prepared flipchart with the title: The Map of Youth Realities; · prepared flipchart with three zones: · What youth workers can do · What youth workers should be careful with · What youth workers cannot do alone · printed fictional youth persona cards; · optional: Mentimeter, Padlet or Google Form for anonymous word cloud; · visible Playground Rules from Day 1; · optional: calm background music during individual writing.		
Preparation needed for the implementation of the activity (preparation of the environment/space, or personal preparation, if any) Before the session, prepare the room with chairs in a circle and enough wall space for flipcharts. Keep visible from Day 1: · Our Playground Rules; · portals or symbols created during Day 1, if possible; · the sentence from the Hidden Layers session: "What we see is not always the whole story." Prepare 5 fictional youth persona cards. These should not be too dramatic or stereotypical. They should represent realistic everyday youth situations.		
Instructions Opening: Re-entering the Journey — From Hidden Layers to Youth Realities (0–15 min) + energizer Step-by-step instructions 1. Invite participants to sit in a circle.		

2. Welcome them to Day 2 of the MindPlay journey.

3. Remind them briefly of the previous day:

“Yesterday we entered the MindPlay journey, created our playground, and opened the first hidden layers. We explored that what we see in young people’s behaviour is not always the whole story.”

4. Point to the flipchart:

“What we see is not always the whole story.”

5. Continue with the bridge:

“Today we ask a new question: if we know that young people carry invisible pressures, emotions and needs, what does that mean for us as youth workers?”

6. Explain that this session is not about therapy, diagnosis, or solving everyone’s problems.

7. Say clearly:

“We are not here to become therapists. We are here to understand how mental health connects with youth work, participation, belonging, communication, safety and support.”

8. Remind participants that they do not need to share personal experiences. They can speak through fictional examples, youth work realities, or things they have observed in their communities.

Activity 1: The Map of Youth Realities 15–55 min

Step-by-step instructions

1. Divide participants into 5 small groups.

2. Give each group one fictional youth persona card and one flipchart paper.

3. Ask them to draw their young person in the centre of the paper. Around the person, they should create a **Map of Youth Realities**.

4. Give them the following categories to include around the young person:

- **Inner world** — emotions, thoughts, self-image, fears, hopes;
- **Relationships** — family, friends, peers, romantic relationships;
- **School / work / future** — expectations, success, uncertainty, failure;
- **Digital life** — social media, gaming, comparison, online identity, overload;
- **Community and society** — money, transport, discrimination, isolation, opportunities;
- **Youth work space** — what could help this young person participate and feel included?

5. Ask groups to discuss:

- What pressures may this young person carry?
- What needs may be hidden?
- What could adults or peers misunderstand?
- What could help this young person feel safer and more included?
- What should a youth worker notice?

6. Give groups 20 minutes to work.

7. Facilitators move around the room, observe and support groups with questions, but avoid giving “correct answers.”

8. After 20 minutes, each group presents their map in 2–3 minutes.

9. After each presentation, ask one short question:

“What is one thing a youth worker should not assume too quickly in this case?”

Activity 2: Where Does Youth Work Stand? (55–80 min)

Step-by-step instructions

1. Place the prepared flipchart with three zones in the centre:

What youth workers can do

What youth workers should be careful with

What youth workers cannot do alone

2. Give each group several sticky notes.

3. Ask them to think about their persona and write possible youth worker responses or actions.

4. Examples can include:

- listen without judgement;
- notice changes in participation;
- offer a break;
- adapt the activity;
- ask gentle questions;
- respect the right to pass;
- create belonging;

- talk privately after the session;
 - inform the team if there is serious concern;
 - refer to professional support;
 - avoid diagnosing;
 - avoid pushing personal disclosure;
 - avoid promising secrecy in serious risk situations.
5. Ask groups to place their sticky notes in one of the three zones.
 6. Once all notes are placed, facilitator reads several examples and helps clarify the distinction.
 7. Facilitator highlights:

Youth workers can:

- create safe and inclusive spaces;
- notice signals;
- listen;
- support participation;
- adapt methods;
- encourage connection;
- know where to refer young people.

Youth workers should be careful with:

- interpreting behaviour too quickly;
- asking too personal questions in front of the group;
- turning workshops into therapy;
- using games that create pressure or shame;
- promising confidentiality when safety is at risk.

Youth workers cannot do alone:

- diagnose;
- provide therapy;
- handle crisis situations without support;
- replace parents, schools, psychologists, doctors, or protection systems;
- carry responsibility for everything by themselves.

8. Connect this clearly with the next session:

“If youth workers are not therapists, then one of their strongest tools is the space they create. That is why our next session will focus on safe spaces and emotional safety.”

Debriefing and Closing Bridge (80–90 min)

Step-by-step instructions

1. Invite participants back into a circle.
2. Start with experience-based questions:
 - How was it to work with fictional young people instead of personal stories?
 - Did this make the topic easier or safer to discuss?
 - Which persona felt closest to young people you work with?
3. Move to meaning:
 - What does this activity show us about mental health in youth work?
 - Which pressures are most present among young people in your communities?
 - Which pressures are often invisible?
 - What do adults often misinterpret as laziness, resistance, lack of motivation, or bad behaviour?
4. Move to the role of youth workers:
 - What can a youth worker realistically do?
 - Where are the boundaries of our role?
 - Why is it important not to diagnose or try to “fix” young people?
 - What kind of support can exist inside a youth work setting?
5. Close with one sentence round. Ask each participant to complete:

“One thing I want to remember about mental health in youth work is...”

6. Thank the group and introduce the next session:

“We have now mapped some of the realities young people carry. In the next session, we will explore what kind of space makes it possible for young people to participate, express themselves, stay protected, and feel respected.”

Expected outcomes

- participants understand that mental health is connected to everyday youth realities, not only to clinical problems;
- participants identify different visible and invisible pressures young people may carry;
- participants connect mental health with participation, belonging, identity, relationships, digital life and community conditions;
- participants understand the basic boundaries of the youth worker role;
- participants recognize that youth workers can support young people without diagnosing or becoming therapists;
- participants are prepared for the next session on safe spaces and emotional safety

MAP OF YOUTH REALITIES

Empathy Map

Choose a fictional young person or persona. Use this map to explore their everyday realities, visible behaviour, hidden pressures, needs, and possible support.

1

What do they THINK & FEEL?

What might be on their mind?
What emotions might they carry?
What hopes or fears may be present?

2

What do they SEE around them?

What is happening in their daily environment?
What influences them online and offline?
What realities surround them?

3

What do they HEAR?

What messages do they hear from family, peers, school, society?
What advice, pressure, or expectations do they receive?

4

What PRESSURES do they carry?

What stressors may affect them?
What might they carry silently?
What feels heavy right now?

5

What do others NOTICE?

What visible behaviour can be seen?
How might they appear in a group?
What could adults misunderstand?

6

What may be HIDDEN underneath?

What needs, emotions, or struggles may not be visible?
What should we avoid assuming too quickly?



The young person

7

What do they NEED to feel safe & included?

What would help them participate?
What conditions would make the space safer?
What support might help?



Reminder: Stay curious, not judgmental. Do not diagnose. Focus on realities, needs, and hidden pressures.