



LET'S TALK

Developing gender sensitive mental health program for young people

No one is you!



LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Mental Health

WORKBOOK FOR YOUTH



Co-funded by
the European Union

IMPRESSUM

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We hope that you are well, and we congratulate you on your courage to dive into your own growth. :)

This workbook is designed to support you in your reflections on the important issues you face in your life - whether it's growing up, relationships, your desires or the possibilities that you may have. Through short exercises, asking introspective questions, as well as creative parts, we want to enable you to take a better look at yourself, and see what you yourself can do to feel good or even better, to focus on important areas and actions for you, as well as to offer some strategies on how to get to what is important to you and who can support you in that.

The workbook consists of several chapters that provide space for talking about mental health, relationships, identity and gender, communication and creativity, and creating and achieving goals. You can see this workbook as your kind of diary and inspiration, but also as an indicator of who can be useful in your environment for your personal growth and development.

Our wish is to open up these important topics for all of us, in order to connect, communicate and understand our emotions in a better way, but also to think about what and where our strengths can be.

This workbook is designed as an auxiliary tool through which you can check your understanding of the topic of mental health or as an additional support when talking to a professional (meeting with a youth worker, psychologist or teacher and discussing the exercise with them).

Good luck! 

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The time of adolescence and young adulthood is a time of great change, because, from the child's world and self-concept, we slowly step into the world of adults, and thus feelings of fear, anxiety, confusion, but also feelings of high independence, belonging to a peer group, individuality, uniqueness and own significance.

There is the first question of one's own identity, sexuality, belonging, searching for an answer to the questions: *Who am I? What do I want?*

We encounter first relationships, but also the breakups of friendships, changes in the school environment and physical changes and sensations. The image of one's own body changes and there is a greater preoccupation with appearance, attractiveness, but also a great desire for independence, freedom and competence. One of the most exciting periods of life for sure.

If you recognize yourself in some of these quotes, know that everything is fine, it's simply a sign that you're growing up¹ :)

seeking a balance
between responsibility,
independence and autonomy

questioning the norms, rules,
and not accepting them

seeking freedom from
the authority of adults

the desire to make
independent decisions

increasing conflict with
parents/guardians/teachers

new relationships
with peers

defiance
of authority

getting to know our sexuality
and sexual experimentation

Growing up causes and offers us the opportunity to get to know each other better, to slowly discover what we love, what we feel, how we define ourselves. It also enables reflection on desires and goals, as well as one's own meaning and influence.

The following exercises and activities can bring you guidelines, new insights, but also new views on how we can take care of ourselves, but also the people important to us, and how we can achieve what we want and be well.

¹ Quotes adopted according to <https://www.poliklinika-djeca.hr/aktualno/teme/adolescencija-izazovi-odrastanja/>





first romantic relationships
but also the pain of first loves

anxieties, fears, questioning,
strong overwhelming emotions,
intense experience of reality,
shame ...

the first shocks caused
by a change of school
or environment

insecurities about
our changing bodies

the need for an audience
(real, imagined or virtual)

dissatisfaction with one's
appearance, comparison

exploring different interests
and behaviours as part
of identity development

great preoccupation with
other people's opinions



1.1 WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

There is a lot of talk about mental health and how it affects our overall functioning and well-being. There are many definitions of good mental health. The most quoted one is given by the World Health Organization.

But, we chose one that is defined by Center for Disease Control and Prevention²:

„Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.“

But each of us has our own specific definition of good mental health and well-being :)

*** What is mental health for you? You can write down your own definition**



*** With your definition, you lay the first foundation for personal and social growth and development. You can better see what you have and what you are missing and how to strengthen yourself.**

² <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.html>



1.2 MY WELL-BEING

When talking about mental health and well-being we often forget the other areas of ourselves that are interconnected with our mental health. Knowing that mental well-being is just one of the four well-being areas and that it is an integral part of your overall health can help you to see in which areas you can make some differences, where your resources are, and who can help you.

*** Areas of my overall well-being**



PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Sleep, diet,
physical activity,
hygiene,
relaxation,
play,
eating well



MENTAL WELL-BEING

Sleep, diet,
physical activity,
hygiene,
relaxation,
play,
eating well



EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Recognition of the
emotional state,
recognition of
the emotions,
expressing emotions







SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Family,
friendships,
romantic
relationships,
communication,
social competencies

*** Fill in areas of your well-being, write what you find relevant for you for a specific area:**



			
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1.3 MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH²

Study the most common myths about mental health and identify those that you may believe in or that you encounter in your environment.

MYTHS ❌ & FACTS ✅

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p><i>❌ If a person has mental health problems, it means that something is "wrong" with them or that they do not know how to help themselves.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>Mental health problems can occur in anyone, regardless of intelligence, gender, age, socio-economic status. However, not everyone recognizes or wants to admit to themselves that they need help and support, so mental health problems last much longer than necessary.</p> |
| <p><i>❌ Only people who have difficulties with mental health should take care of it.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>Everyone should take care of their mental health and actively contribute to their well-being; just as physical health should be taken care of constantly, not when it is already impaired.</p> |
| <p><i>❌ Mental health problems are nothing special in teenagers; they have mood swings caused by hormones anyway and behave mostly in a way that they want to get our attention.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>Teenagers have frequent mood swings, but that does not mean their mental health is not important. The frequency of mental health problems among girls and boys between the ages of ten and nineteen is 13.2 % in the world, 16.3 % in Europe, and 11.5 % in Croatia (49,272 girls and boys).</p> |
| <p><i>❌ There is nothing we can do to protect ourselves from developing mental health difficulties.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>Many factors can protect our mental health: developing social and emotional skills, seeking help and support, developing warm, supportive and loving family and love relationships and friendships, a positive school environment, healthy sleeping habits, physical activity and changes in some habits that no longer serve us.</p> |
| <p><i>❌ Difficulties with mental health are a sign of weakness; if a person was stronger, they would not have these problems.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>No one chooses to have these difficulties, nor are they related to weakness; moreover, it takes great strength and courage to recognize difficulties and seek support.</p> |
| <p><i>❌ Adolescents who get good grades in school and have many friends may not have mental health problems because they have no reason to be depressed or anxious.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>Depression is a common mental health disorder that can affect anyone, regardless of what their life may seem like. Depression occurs as a combination of social, psychological and biological factors. In addition, for young people who excel in school, it is possible that they feel pressure to succeed, which can eventually lead to anxiety or problems at home.</p> |
| <p><i>❌ Some parents' poor parenting skills are the reason children have mental health difficulties.</i></p> | → | ✅ | <p>Many factors contribute to mental health difficulties. It is wrong to blame parents for their children's mental health problems, but they need to be supported because they play a key role in the growth, development and recovery of their children.</p> |

² Worksheet adopted according to Teacher's guide to the magnificent Mei and friends series. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization; 2021 (WHO-UNICEF Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) initiative).



* Think about mental health and fill in next sentences:



Which myths have I encountered?

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What myths do I believe in?

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What myths do people in my surroundings believe in?

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Which myths do I find true and why?

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What did I learn new and what brings me a better understanding of the topic?

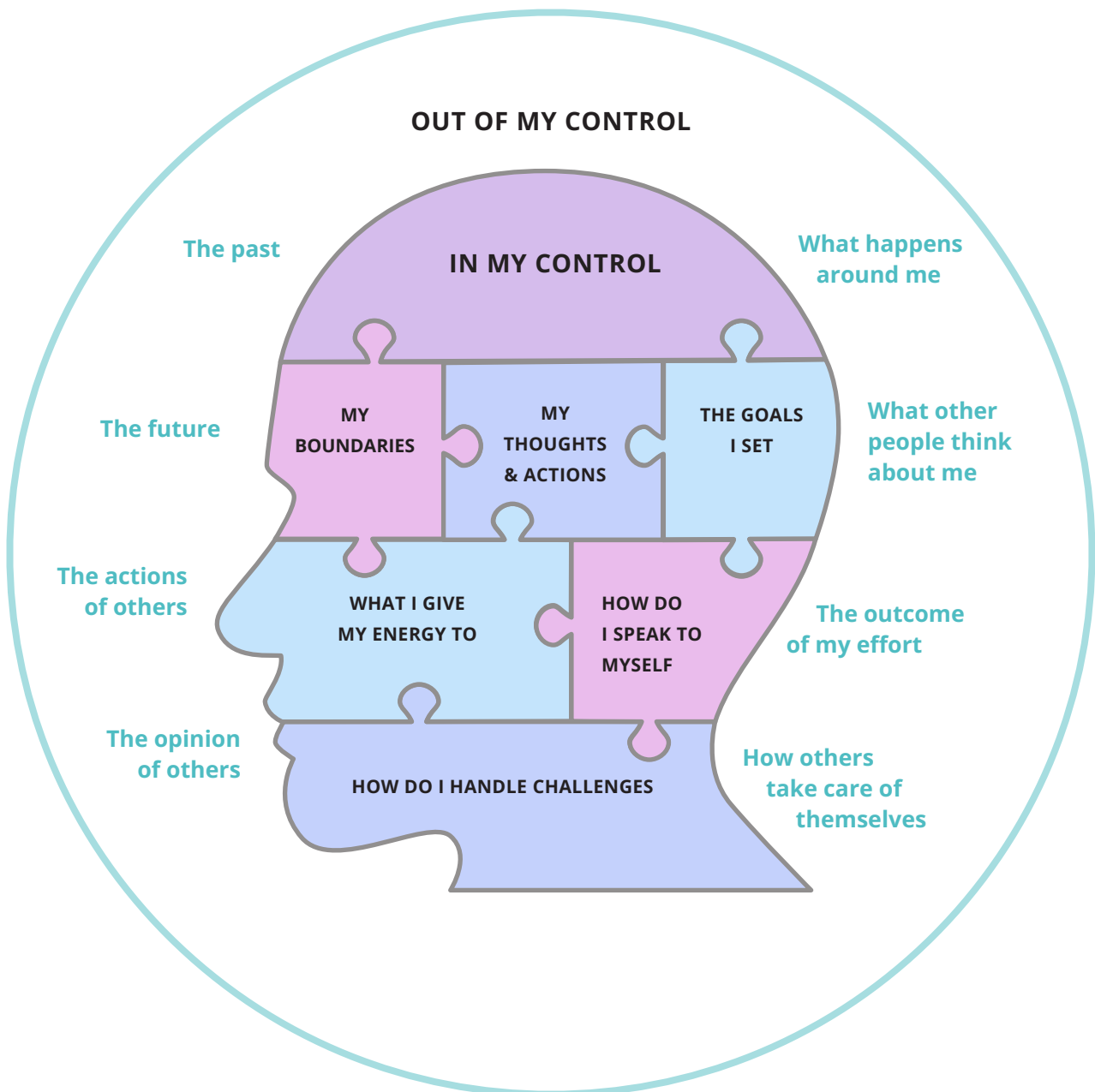
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1.4 IN MY CONTROL – OUT OF MY CONTROL

One of the good mechanisms to look at and even to help us let go of some worries and preoccupations is to be aware of what is in our control and what is not. Changing our perception of the environment, situations and behaviour of others can help us feel more “in control” and also understand and take control over personal well-being by seeking help.

The way we react in circumstances that we cannot control can worsen or improve our perception and the feelings that come from it. We cannot control the threats that surround us, but we can control our behaviour and reactions. At the same time, it is important to understand what causes feelings of anxiety or depression in us, what triggers us.



*** Answer the questions below and identify your triggers:**



When do I get anxious or in a bad mood?

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What do I think is causing that state?

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Do I have any external triggers for it, e.g. watching the news, talking to others about the pandemic (or earthquake, war events)...?

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Do I have any sensations in my body that act as a trigger?

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Do I have any thoughts that act as a trigger?

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What can I change?

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What can't I change?

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How can I deal with what I can't change?

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How will understanding what I can change help me cope better with what I can't?

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1.5 WHAT CAN WE DO, WHEN WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING?³

There are many situations that we cannot influence or change. However, we can influence and change our thoughts - it is our greatest power, that we are often unaware of or do not use enough. With our thoughts, we can think about the same situation in a different way and thus feel better. Not only will we feel better, but at that moment we will also come up with some new possibilities for action.



SCHOOL

You learned a foreign language the best you could. However, before the exam, you are starting to feel anxious. What can you tell yourself before the exam?

Last year you participated in competition for the best school's mathematician, but you didn't achieve the success you wanted. Now you are going to the competition once more. What can you tell yourself before the competition starts?

You saw a group of students drawing on a classroom wall. The teacher asks you to tell which students did it. You want to tell the truth, but you fear that they will be mad at you.

What will you say to yourself?

You have been assigned to read something publicly in front of your class (public performance). You know you read well, but you have never read in front of a large group and got nervous. What can you say or imagine to yourself to reduce your anxiety?

You got a negative grade, and today is the parents' meeting where your dad/guardian will find out about that grade. You worry because you know he will be angry. How can you comfort yourself and ease the stress of talking to him?



SPORT

In the last game you missed the goal from a free kick. Because of that, your team lost. How can you support yourself in not taking the blame?

You want to get on the basketball team of your school. However, the trainer told you that they would not accept you this year.

What can you tell yourself?

You are learning to swim. You feel more confident in swimming, but today the coach wants you to go swimming in the deeper part of the pool. Fear gripped you.

What can you say to yourself in that situation to encourage yourself?

You are the goalie at an important hockey game. The opponent's best player is heading towards you.

What can you tell yourself to meet him confidently?

Your lap time is great. However, at tomorrow's competition there will be other competitors who have a better passing time than yours.

What will you say to yourself to encourage yourself and do your best?



FRIENDS

A group of peers from your street mock you. It angers you, but also scares you.

How can you help yourself?

You and your friend agreed that you are going to the cinema. At last minute a friend told you that she/he/they are going with her/his/their partner, who returned from the journey.

What will you tell yourself?

Your friend talked bad about you and now you were not included in the class team.

What can you say to yourself so you do not feel rejected?

Walking down the street you ran into ice and fell. Your peer group laughs at you.

What can you say to yourself at that moment to reduce stress and embarrassment?

New trend jackets have appeared. All your friends got it, but you can't buy it right now.

What positive and supportive things would you say to yourself?

³ Worksheet adapted from Bognar, L. (1998.) Govor nenasilja (Non violent communication)





NEW SITUATIONS

Your family moved to another town, and today is your first day at a new school.

What can you say to yourself to support yourself?

You are at your first choir rehearsal and you hardly know anyone. You feel uncomfortable.

What will you tell yourself to reduce the discomfort?

You are travelling by plane. This is your first time. It is a bit too uncomfortable for you.

What can you do to feel better and encourage yourself in this situation?

Over the holidays, you get a job in a coffee shop. As you've never worked before, you feel nervous while you go to work on your first day. How can you support yourself?

You are going on a first date. You are very excited. But you are also afraid that the person with whom you need to meet up maybe won't come. What can you say to encourage yourself?



CONFLICTS

You need to wash your hair and you are in a hurry. But your sister used up all the hot water.

How can you explain the situation to yourself without getting angry or stressed?

You want to dance, and your friend wants to go to the cinema. You have a feeling that you are always giving in and that makes you angry. What can you tell yourself to reduce anger?

You and your opponent are playing chess. Your opponent makes a move that will bring victory. However, suddenly withdraws it. How can you look at the situation positively, which will bring you further focus on the game?

You are watching a documentary, and your sister switches to a TV series. You beg her to give up, but she says that she waited enough and now it is her turn to watch what she wants.

What will you say positively to yourself without getting into an argument with her?

You agreed with your mum/guardian that you will use the computer today. But your brother says that today it is his turn.

What can you say positively without getting angry or feeling wronged?



PARTY

You like to dance, but they play the music you don't like. You already told them that, but they did not react or change the music. What can you tell yourself to not get frustrated and still have fun?

You're at a party and your friend approaches you and asks: "What is that that you are wearing?"

What you can think positively at that point?

You are at a dance and suddenly the power goes out. There was a big uproar and it was embarrassing because you could not find your friend anymore.

What can you say to yourself in that situation?

You are at a birthday party, and your best friend met someone and now you are standing alone.

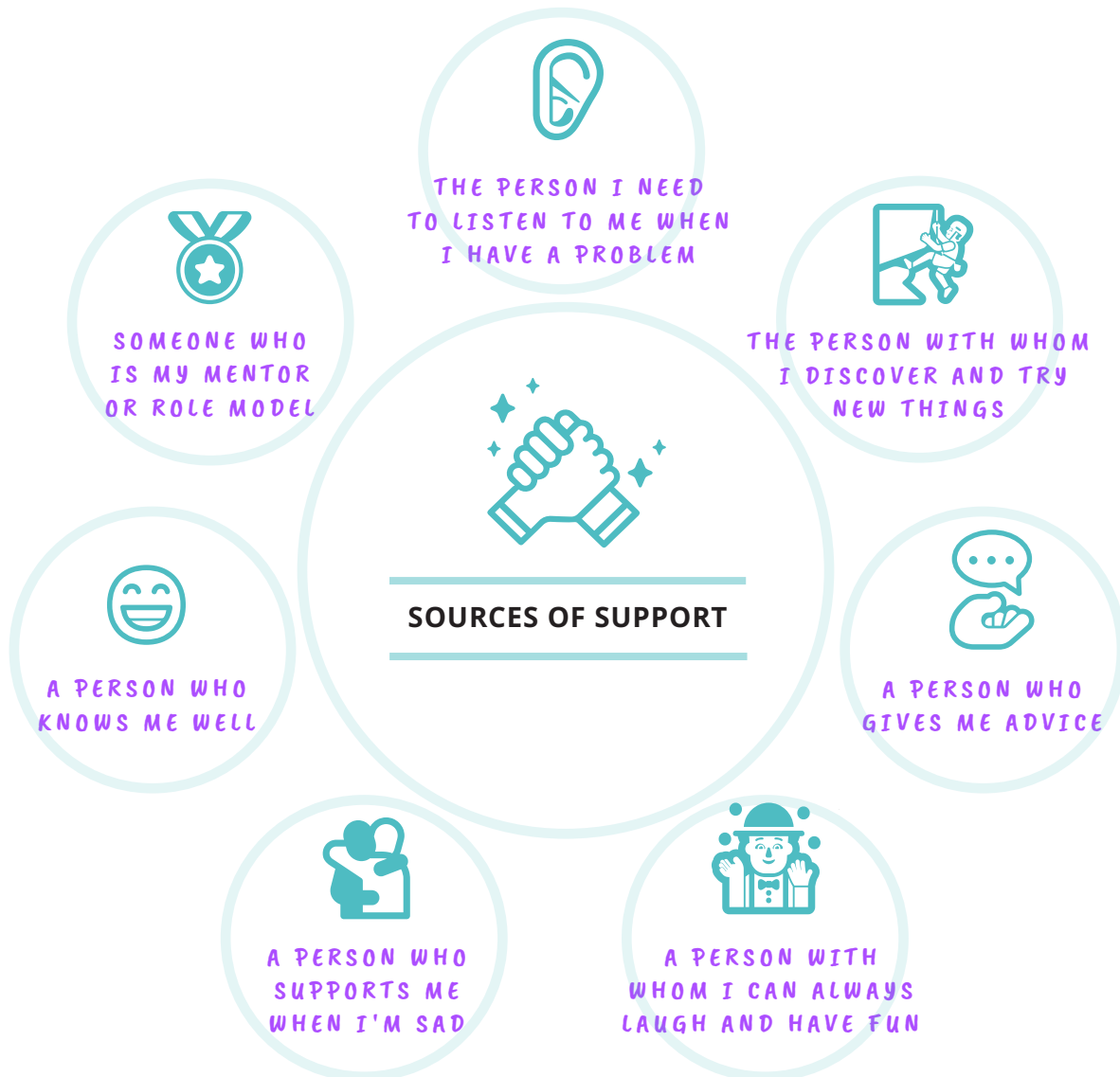
What positive thing can you think at that moment so that you would not feel neglected?

You come back from the party and notice that your phone is missing. What can you say positively at that moment without going into fear, anger or shame?



1.6 MY CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND TRUST⁴

Although it seems to us that sometimes we do not need others or that it is easier to be alone, occasionally we all need support from others, especially when we have a problem or when we're facing difficulties. There are various people in our life, and therefore various ways of support they can provide us.



Note! Sometimes we can feel very lonely and believe that we are alone and that we have no one close enough to rely on. Loneliness often hurts and we feel that we don't belong. It is very important to become aware of this and seek support in order to learn to build relationships and create intimate and close connections. The good thing is that being close in relationships is a skill we can learn. We definitely suggest that you contact a school psychologist, class teacher, youth worker or another adult who can help you with this.

⁴ Worksheet adopted according to Kožić Komar V., Minivrana A. (2022) "22 IDEJE ZA OTPORNOST" zbirka nastavnih listića za razvoj emocionalne otpornosti i suočavanja s krizom. Zagreb: Ured UNICEF-a za Hrvatsku

FILL IN YOUR CIRCLE OF SUPPORT AND TRUST

- Central circle** — put your name :) because you can be a great support and friend to yourself.
- 2nd** — names of people who support you at home - close family members, guardians...
- 3rd** — names of extended family members, neighbours, acquaintances with whom you are close.
- 4th** — close friends you can rely on.
- 5th** — school employees or youth workers you can always turn to.
- 6th** — persons outside the circle of school or family.
- 7th** — civil society organisations, institutions, clubs, youth services you know can support you.



SOURCES OF SUPPORT

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*** Think:**



Are you using all the support you can count on? If not, what prevents you from doing so?

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Do you think you could ask for more support from people around you?

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If you don't get someone's support, what can you do?

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Whose support do you currently need additionally?

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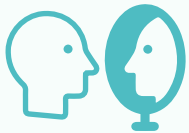


2.1 LITTLE BIT ABOUT EMOTIONS

Emotions are the first indicators of our inner state. We can also say that emotions are the language of our body. So as in life, if we want to communicate better with others, we need to know their language. If we know what our body is telling us, we will also know what it needs:

The word emotion is derived from the latin word 'emovere' meaning to move - move out or move through. Essentially, emotions are a movement.

Being in contact with our emotions, understanding how emotions and behaviours are linked and being in touch with our needs, we can say that we are on the right path of managing our emotions. We can also understand how emotions affect our relationships and what we can do about them?



SELF-AWARENESS

Recognizing and being aware of your own emotions, strengths and virtues, feeling of self-worth and self-confidence



SELF-MANAGEMENT

Good impulse control, coping with stress, goal setting and motivation



RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability for evaluation and reflection, your own personal responsibility and ethics



SOCIAL AWARENESS

Empathy, respect for others, perspective-taking into account



RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Cooperation, asking and providing help and support, communication, assertiveness

Note! There is a great distinction between managing and expressing emotions and our emotional states. Often we think that NOT expressing our emotions is managing them. Sometimes we can hear someone say: *'That person is good at managing their emotions as they do not express them.'* This is a wrong belief that often brings the painful consequences of frustration, pain and anger which remain in us. Perhaps a good comparison is with pleasant emotions. We express pleasant emotions in an easy way and do not question too much about their expression, but also about their management. However, when unpleasant emotions arise, we often either suppress them (so we say that we know how to control our emotions), or we take them to the other extreme and explode (so we say that we do not know how to control our emotions). The good thing is that we can learn to manage emotions and their expressions in an appropriate way. We are talking about the development of emotional competences that enable us to notice our emotions, name them, see what to do with them and express them in an appropriate way.

But we hear you ask How? Below are some of the ways. :)

Note! If you are interested in deeper understanding about social and emotional learning visit CASEL: Advancing Social and Emotional Learning : <https://casel.org/>

BON VOYAGE!



2.2 MYTHS ABOUT EMOTIONS¹

Study the most common myths about mental health and identify those that you may believe in or that you encounter in your environment.

MYTHS X & FACTS ✓

X There is a right way to feel in every situation

- ✓ There is no right or wrong, good or bad emotions. Emotions are actually allies that speak to us and give us signals and signs that guide us and prepare us for a certain response. But in order to respond adequately, we need to know how to recognize them and learn to manage them. There are individual differences in the experience and intensity of emotional states. That is why it is very important that we talk and share our emotional states, as well as our perceptions, so we can get different perspectives that can help us see and experience a certain situation differently.

X Letting others know I am feeling bad is a weakness

- ✓ We all experience unpleasant emotions - not because we are weak - but because emotions are an essential part of our functioning. Through emotions we gather information about the circumstances in which we find ourselves. What is it that pleases us and where we are good, and what is it that does not suit us and we want to change. If we accept acknowledging and expressing uncomfortable emotions appropriately as our greatest strength, rather than vulnerability, it can put us in a significantly improved position to take effective action and move our lives forward.

X I can't control how I feel

- ✓ Given that we talk little about emotions and do not learn to manage them and understand what they are telling us, we tend to assume that emotions happen to us or blame others for our conditions - something outside triggers us, becomes our trigger - e.g. "She made me angry.", "Because of him I'm sad." etc. However, emotions appear based on our experiences of situations and other people, and this is where our greatest power lies. By learning and discovering where our triggers are, what makes us angry, sad, we can learn and regulate these states. Or symbolically - we can control how much we increase or decrease emotions - just like the light switches.

X Negative emotion is bad and destructive, or will cause some harm

- ✓ We have already said that there are no good or bad emotions. They are all there for a reason and a purpose. It is important to learn and practise managing emotions the same way we practise riding a bicycle or playing the guitar. But, if emotions overwhelm us, then it is a sign that we need help and support in better understanding what is happening. It's okay to be angry, and we all have a right to be. We need to learn how to clearly express the right to anger and allow ourselves to do so without hurting ourselves or another person. Emotions will not cause us any physical harm, but if we do not become aware of what they are telling us and how to manage them, we can later harm ourselves or others.

X Emotions happen for no reason, or are completely irrational

- ✓ All emotions have their purpose and are there to serve our protection and survival. They appear based on our perceptions, tell us about our environment, motivate us, help us to move on. Emotions are not there to torment us, to be long-lasting, but to move us to some goal. If you feel an unpleasant emotion for a long time or are unable to make positive changes for a long time, it would be good to seek the support of a person who can help you understand your condition and change it for the better. The good thing is that it's all correct! But sometimes it is necessary to seek help. You don't have to do it all yourself! There are people who would be happy to help you 😊 It is called empathy!

¹ Worksheet adopted according to <https://m1psychology.com/myths-of-emotions/>



X Some emotions are not allowed like sadness or anger

- ✓ There are no allowed or forbidden emotions. All emotions are welcome, because they send us an important message. And that's: how I am, what I need, and what I (don't) want. Although it is often believed that men should not cry or that women should not get angry, this leads to further imbalance and poor mental health. We all have the right to our emotions, but it is important how we express them and how we manage them.

X Some emotions are stupid and useless.

- ✓ All emotions have a function. They help us to better perceive the world and the people around us. We wouldn't survive without them. They warn us or make us aware of the existence of certain problems, obstacles, challenges, dangers. So, for example, anger tells us what is important to us, what we want to change, what motivates us, tells us to fight for ourselves; fear warns us of danger and activates our organism to fight or defend against danger; sadness gives us important information that we need help or comfort, tells us what is valuable to us, brings us closer to other people. Also, it leads us to accept and cope with new circumstances. Staying with these emotions for a long time should be important information to seek the help of other people to help us pass through emotional states.

X If others do not agree with how I feel then I must be wrong

- ✓ People often experience different emotions after the same event. And they react differently to the same event. There is no right or wrong feeling in such a situation. Emotions just are, and so is your emotional reaction. It is only yours and brings you important information. So it's very important not to feel isolated because of our emotional state, but to acknowledge it, embrace it and see what it brings us. If we can't do it alone, it's good to talk to someone to help us. And it is also important to know that some emotional states take longer to change. And that's fine!

X I feel it so it must be true

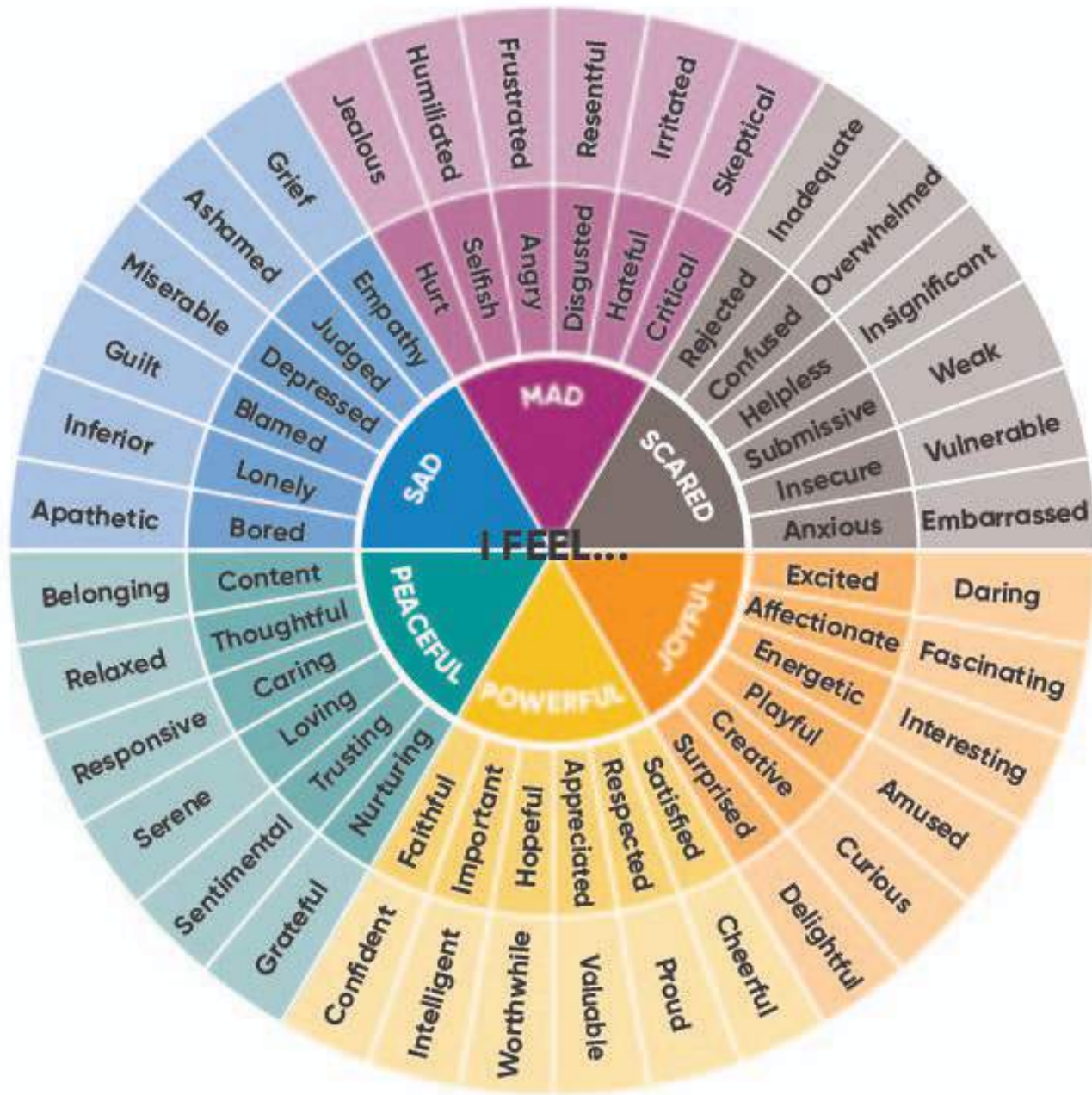
- ✓ Sometimes emotions feel so strong or overwhelming that you believe they must be true. If you feel helpless, it doesn't necessarily follow that you are helpless. If you feel anxious, it doesn't always mean that you are in danger. But it is important to see what is going on with you. Why I feel what I feel. This is a place from which you can grow. As long as we don't want to face emotions and what they bring us, we can't get better.

NOTE! If you feel some unpleasant emotion or emotional states for more than two or three weeks, see who can help you and give you support in going through them. Think about who you feel good next to, who you trust, who can hear and see you. If you do not have such a person in your environment, we definitely encourage you to contact professional counsellors and therapists, youth workers or youth centres who can provide you with professional support.



2.3 HOW CAN I RECOGNIZE HOW I FEEL?

Psychologist R. Plutchik can help us in recognizing and naming our emotions - he developed a Wheel of emotions with 6 basic emotions in the middle. Combining those basic emotions results with complex emotions or emotional states such as: love, remorse, aggression, optimism, disappointment, etc. This can help us to find out the basic emotion and lead us to better understand and manage our emotions and better communicate our emotions to others.



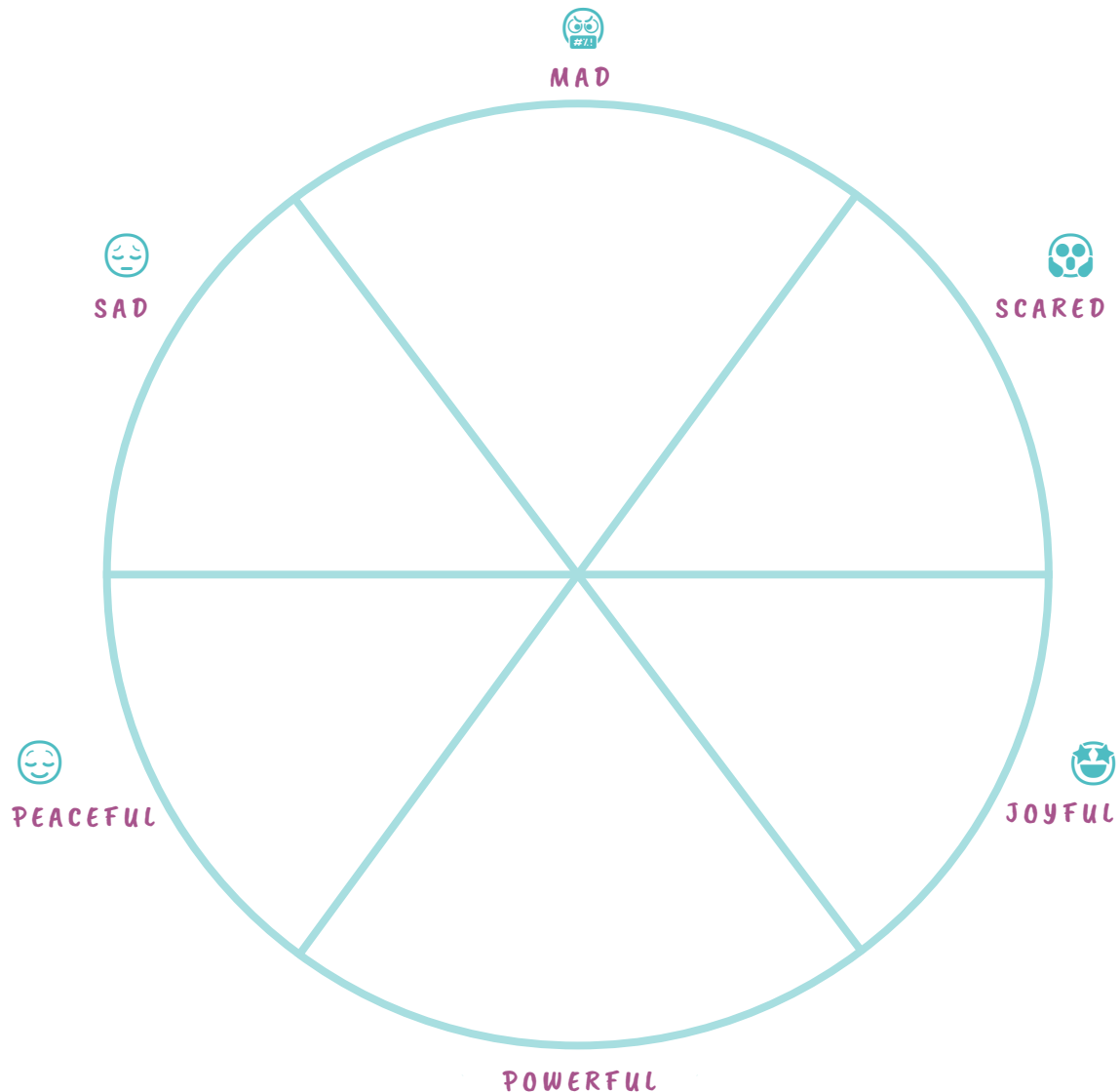
Source: <https://artclasscurator.com/emotional-literacy-art-education/>

Note! There is no good or bad emotion. Each emotion has its own purpose and gives us very important information about ourselves. The main purpose of emotions is to encourage us to see what we can do for ourselves and who to ask for help in order to be in balance again.



HOW AM I FEELING TODAY?

Fill in the space of basic emotions with concrete situations and events, circumstances and relationships where you felt the mentioned feelings. Think about what happened or what you experienced or believed to make you feel that way.



GREAT! This is the first step in understanding and managing emotions 🙌

Note! Often when we feel one emotion, we don't see how we can feel another. However, notice how it is a continuum. From sadness, we can enter joy, just as from shame or fear we can enter pride and self-confidence. Now, to get there, it is necessary to understand that emotions are on a continuum and that by changing our perception of emotions, we will reveal the steps that lead us through the magical path of emotions.



FIRST AID! If the emotions are overwhelming:

- find somebody with whom you can talk to
- write a diary; writing helps a lot in venting emotions
- go outside to run, walk, ride a bike, dance, exercise
- pound the pillow, scream into the pillow, especially if you feel mad
- take a pillow and hug it, if you're feeling alone or scared



2.4 WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MY EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS?

How we feel is linked to how we behave. But sometimes we are behaving without awareness of how we feel, and we are not in connection with our emotions. Since we know that our emotions and behaviour are connected we can see how we can change our behaviours to feel better.

	<i>When I feel it, I often behave like...</i>	<i>In that moment I need:</i>	<i>What can I say to myself?</i>
PEACE	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
FEAR	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
JOY	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
POWERFUL	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



2.5 ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Many young people (and adults) face symptoms of anxiety and depression at some point of their lives. In a way, it is a normal part of the process of growing up, as young people are facing hormonal changes, new social expectations, as well as their own, and sometimes turbulent romantic relationships and friendships as well. Very often symptoms of anxiety and depression can disappear after an exam, open communication with someone, introducing some new activity or hobby, ending or starting a new relationship, or experiencing something new.

However, if you notice a change in your behaviour such as withdrawing from relationships, reduced food intake, a drop in energy, not caring about hygiene or things that usually brought you joy and this lasts continuously for a minimum of 3 weeks, it would be preferable to turn to whomever you trust for help.



Important! Not all symptoms of anxiety and depression are caused by poor mental health and not all symptoms occur because of anxiety or depression; sometimes it is also a matter of physical imbalance that manifests itself in this way. Thus, it is important to monitor your mental health and seek help in time (from your family, doctor, teacher, youth worker, friend or a psychotherapist)!

Some of the symptoms of anxiety and depression (Majkić, 2023):

ANXIETY



- restlessness and impatience
- negative thoughts about different situations and other people
- forgetfulness and lack of concentration
- indecisiveness and difficulties in completing tasks
- difficulty falling asleep
- quickly tiring
- constant care
- feeling of panic, fear and resistance
- irritability

DEPRESSION



- constant sadness
- hopelessness, lack of meaning
- feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- loss of interest in society and entertainment
- lack of energy and constant fatigue
- lack of concentration and indecisiveness
- insomnia or too much sleep
- frequent headaches or body aches, stomach problems, back or chest pain
- irritability
- thoughts of self-harm or suicide



WHAT NOW?

If you notice that you feel anxious or depressed for a longer period of time, our advice is to find an adult you can trust and share your worries with them. These can be parents/guardians, teachers, (school) psychologists, family friends or another important adult. You can also confide in a friend and tell them that you need help.

Often underlying distressing feelings such as sadness, anger, shame or fear are hidden beneath the symptoms of anxiety or depression. That is why it is important to talk to a reliable person in order to find the cause of the mentioned conditions.

In case a friend confides in us, it would also be good to seek the advice of an adult. There are also a number of online counselling services, and we can contact them as well.¹



Concrete support for youth who are in some acute conditions

- If you recognize some of the above signs in others, it is important to react!
- Do not judge, insult or force a person to talk if they do not feel safe
- Clearly tell the person that their well-being is important to you, that you can withstand their feelings and that they can rely on you (do not do this if you are unable to do it - in that case, find someone who can talk to that person)
- Recognize how they are feeling, let them know you're there, and offer to seek help



What to do if you recognize that you are in this situation:

- It is important to know that it is okay to ask for help
- It is sometimes difficult to open up and talk about our emotions and feelings, but it is vital for our health - both mental and physical
- Try to reach out to people you can trust and who can offer you support, assistance and guidance
- In case you are still reluctant to seek help or talk to somebody about how you're feeling, try to think of your mental health and think of it as if it was physical: would you be reluctant to ask for help if you hurt or broke your arm? You would probably immediately ask for help, so try to do the same with your mental health issues as well

¹ Worksheet adopted according to <https://www.kakosi.hr/2021/11/09/samoubojstvo/>





The story I believed:

What do these emotion call me to do:

FEAR

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SHAME

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ANGER

This is what my sadness looks like: (draw it!)





What makes me angry is when (write down 3 things or situations) ...?

.....
.....
.....

Finish the sentences; what do you connect with these words...?

Irritating...

Nervous...

Frustrating...

Someone..

Something..

Nothing...

Is anger good?

Yes, it is! It helps you set boundaries to others, defend yourself, stand up for yourself, and recognize your importance. It helps you raise your energy and get you moving, but also to work on yourself and develop as a person. If you are an emotionally open person, you will get at least a little angry every day. And then get un-angry and forgive - often with someone you care about. And that's OK, as long as you know how to manage it.

The problem with anger can happen:

- when we hurt others
- when we feel enraged
- when we lack empathy
- when we lose relationships
- when we start being egoistic and selfish...

In these cases, it would be wise to cool it off a bit, reframe, and put things into perspective. Think of some cool thoughts that can help you with your anger. We give you 5, and you can add 5 more of your own:

1. Wow, I really don't like anything here!
2. They don't really care about others. It must be tough to live like this.
3. Maybe I should do or say something?
4. Is this even worth the hassle?
5. There are all kinds of people. I guess everyone has their bad day or moment
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.



SADNESS

This is what my sadness looks like: (draw it!)





What makes me sad is when (write down 3 things or situations) ...

.....
.....
.....

Finish the sentences; what do you connect with these words...?

Down...

Mellow...

Desperate...

Someone..

Something..

Nothing...

Is sadness good?

Yes, it is! It helps you deal with loss, gives you time to understand what happened and accept it, to mourn, to heal yourself and rest before starting a new phase in your life. It also helps you to understand yourself better and develop as a person.

If you are an emotionally open person, you will get at least a little sad every day, over something or someone. And then you will get better and move on. And that's OK, as long as you know how to accept it and deal with it.

The problem with sadness can happen:

- when we're sad all the time or very often,
- when it prevents us from doing important things and live our life normally,
- when we deny our sadness and refuse to mourn,
- when we don't really know ourselves and what makes us sad,
- when we deny ourselves the time and space for it.

When sadness happens, it would be wise to take a moment, face it and, if necessary, reach out to someone we trust or to mental health professionals.

Think of some soothing thoughts that can help you with your sadness.

We give you 5, and you can add 5 more of your own:

1. This made me really sad - and that's completely normal.
2. What made me especially sad is.....
3. It is OK to cry. Everybody hurts sometimes.
4. This too shall pass.
5. There are many beautiful and happy things, people and hopes in my life.....
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.



FEAR

This is what my fear/anxiety looks like: (draw it!)





What makes me scared and anxious is when (write down 3 things or situations) ...

.....
.....
.....

Finish the sentences; what do you connect with these words...?

Afraid...

Worried...

Tense...

Someone..

Something..

Nothing...

Are fear and anxiety good?

Yes, they are! They help us recognize danger and avoid it, be wise and careful when necessary (protect us, even save our life!), prepare for something demanding, plan ahead, and gather energy. They also help us understand ourselves and others better while maturing as a person. If you are emotionally aware and mindful, you will get at least a little anxious every day, over something or someone. Then you will deal with it and when the challenge is over, you will be relaxed again and even positively excited about something. And that's completely OK, and it doesn't mean you're sensitive or that there's something wrong with you.

The problem with anxiety and fear can happen:

- when we deny fear and go into dangerous situations that can hurt us or others,
- when we pretend like "it's nothing" and don't really deal with it,
- when we don't prepare for challenging situations or avoid them,
- when we feel anxious all the time, even over minor things or in situations with no real danger,
- when we don't ask for help when we need it,
- when it prevents us from doing important things and live our life,

Then it would be wise to reflect on our fears and see which ones are helpful, which are not, and see how we can support ourselves better. Or ask for help. There are some great techniques that can help us with anxiety. Think of some relaxing thoughts that can help you with your anxiety.

We give you 5, and you can add 5 more of your own:

1. This is making me anxious. Wow, let's see what it is!
2. I'll take a few deep breaths and take a moment to rest.
3. It's completely OK to feel like this. This too shall pass.
4. I support and understand myself. I can get through this
5. I think what would help me now is.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.



SHAME

This is what my shame looks like (draw it!)





What makes me ashamed is when (write down 3 things or situations) ...

.....
.....
.....

Finish the sentences; what do you connect with these words...?

Self- conscious

Unworthy...

Wrong...

Someone..

Something..

Nothing...

Is shame good?

Yes, it is! It helps us become more aware of ourselves and others, recognize our values and ideal self-image, reflect on something we did, face the society's and peers' values and decide on whether we want to follow them or not. It also shows our feelings of morale and ethics and sensitivity to others' opinions.

If you are an emotionally mature and sensitive person, you will occasionally feel shame. You can even feel shame for other people. In situations of shame, you will also be able to reflect on whether there is something to be ashamed about or not. You can decide the shame was never on you, but on other people's wrong expectations. Or you can apologise if you feel you hurt someone. Then you can move on and be positive about yourself as a whole person. The problem with shame can happen:

- when we feel there is something to be ashamed of about ourselves, but this is something we cannot change (age, race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, looks, general characteristics...),
- when it affects how we overall see ourselves • when we feel it limits us in some way
- when others shame us • when it prevents us from being joyful and living our life to the fullest.

When shame happens, it would be good to reflect on our shame and see how we can start accepting and loving ourselves as we are. Or heal a part of ourselves that generates this shame, truly start supporting ourselves and even ask for help if necessary. Unfortunately, we cannot heal the whole society that generates inequalities and support systemic violence, but we can learn about it and be prepared and empowered. Think of some uplifting thoughts that can help you with your shame. We give you 5, and you can add 5 more of your own:

1. Huh, OK, this feels bad. How can I get through this?
2. This is something I cannot change (right now) about myself.
3. Everyone feels ashamed sometimes. This can happen to anyone.....
4. People who shame others have serious issues.
5. I am worthy and valuable, no matter what.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.



Self-esteem, identity and self-experience

3.1 SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is the way we see our personality and ourselves; it is an individual's experience of oneself (Tomić-Koludrović and Knežević, 2004). Growing up, you develop self-esteem, primarily through relationships with others. Self-esteem includes different dimensions and affects your well-being, and it is interconnected with our mental health (feelings, thoughts, and behaviours) and body image.

How I see myself?

.....

.....

Who I am ?

.....

.....

What am I like ?

.....

.....

My self-experience

.....

.....

The feeling of myself

.....

.....

The way I think others see me

.....

.....



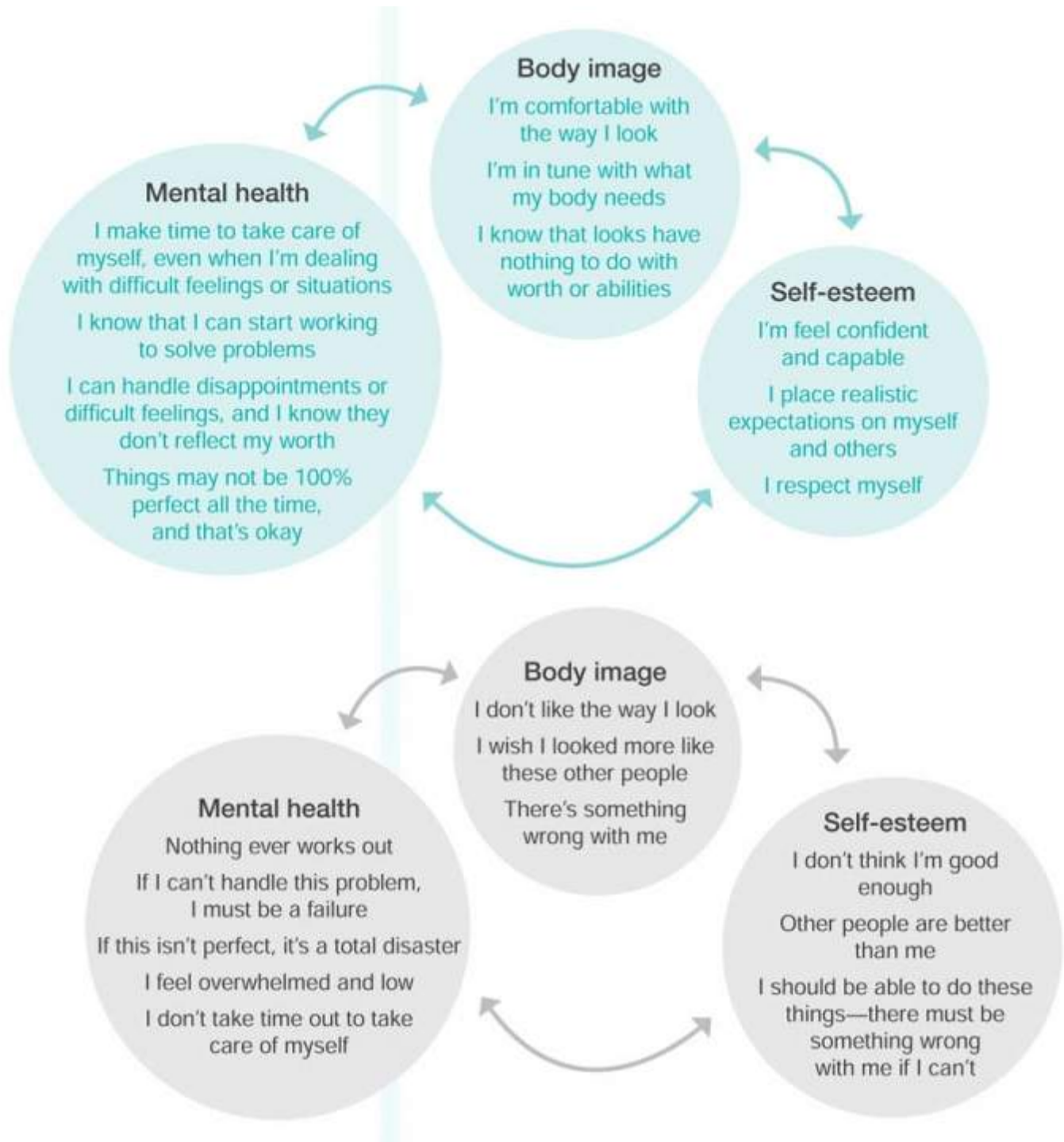
Note! If you have a problem with answering some of the statements or if you are aware that your view of yourself is negative, find somebody who you trust (friend, some adults), and share your thoughts and feelings. Also, if your friend has negative thoughts of themselves, encourage them to talk or help them in further seeking help.



SELF-ESTEEM, BODY IMAGE AND MENTAL HEALTH¹

Body image and self-esteem are interconnected and influence your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. If you don't like your body (or a part of your body), it's hard to feel good about yourself. The reverse is also true: if you don't value yourself, it's hard to notice the good things and give your body the respect it deserves.

Good body image, self-esteem and mental health are not about making yourself feel happy all the time. It is really about respecting yourself and others, thinking realistically and taking action to cope with problems or difficulties in healthy ways.



¹ Worksheet taken and adopted according <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/body-image-self-esteem-and-mental-health>



STEPS TO ENCOURAGE A HEALTHIER BODY IMAGE



- ✓ Eat well-balanced meals and exercise because **it makes you feel good and strong**, not as a way to control your body.
- ✓ Notice when you are judging yourself or others based on weight, shape, or size. Ask yourself if there are any **other qualities you could look for** when those thoughts come up.
- ✓ **Dress in a way that makes you feel good** about yourself, in clothes that fit you now.
- ✓ Find a short message that helps you feel good about yourself and write it on mirrors around your home to remind you to **replace negative thoughts** with positive thoughts.
- ✓ **Be aware** of how you talk about your body with family and friends. Do you often seek reassurance or validation from others to feel good about yourself? Do you often focus only on physical appearances?
- ✓ Remember that **everyone has challenges** with their body image at times. When you talk with friends, you might discover that someone else wishes they had a feature you think is undesirable!
- ✓ **Write a list of the positive benefits** of the body part or feature you don't like or struggle to accept.
- ✓ The next time you notice you're having negative thoughts about your body and appearance, take a minute to **think about what's going on in your life:**
 - *What do you believe you would have if you were what you imagine yourself to be?*
 - *What are you doing to yourself because of this pressure?*
 - *Are you feeling stressed out, anxious or low?*
 - *Are you facing challenges in other parts of your life?*
- ✓ When negative thoughts come up, think about **what you'd tell a friend** if they were in a similar situation and then take your own advice.
- ✓ **Be mindful of messages you hear and see** in the media and how those messages inform the way people feel about the way they look. Recognise and challenge those stereotypes!
- ✓ **Raise awareness and critically look at advertisements and social media.** What message are they sending? They send the message - you are not good enough. Because that's the best way to use the services and products they offer.





Same but different. Authors of the concept: students from the high school Gimnazija „Fran Galović“, 2018

(IM)PERFECTION, SUCCESS AND FAILURE

If you look at these two terms as the endpoints of the continuum of our own growth and development, of happiness and satisfaction, think about what lies in between?



Do you know about the WD – 40, one of the most famous sprays used in households and beyond? WD is short for Water Displacement, and the number 40 indicates the number of attempts before the formula was finally discovered. 🧪

This is a great indicator and reminder that there is no success without mistakes, creativity, persistence, patience, self-belief, frustration, anger and ultimately fun :)



3.2 WHEN IT IS DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING...

WHAT SELF-IMAGE DO I NURTURE?

FIXED MINDSET/INNER SPEECH			GROWTH MINDSET /INNER SPEECH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm just not good at it! • I give up! • I'll never be smart enough • Can't get any better than this • I made a mistake • And this is good enough 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will try to overcome it using different strategies. • I'll keep trying. • This will take time and effort. • With a little support, I can learn it! • I'm on the right track! • What am I missing? • Mistakes help me improve. • Is this the best I can do?

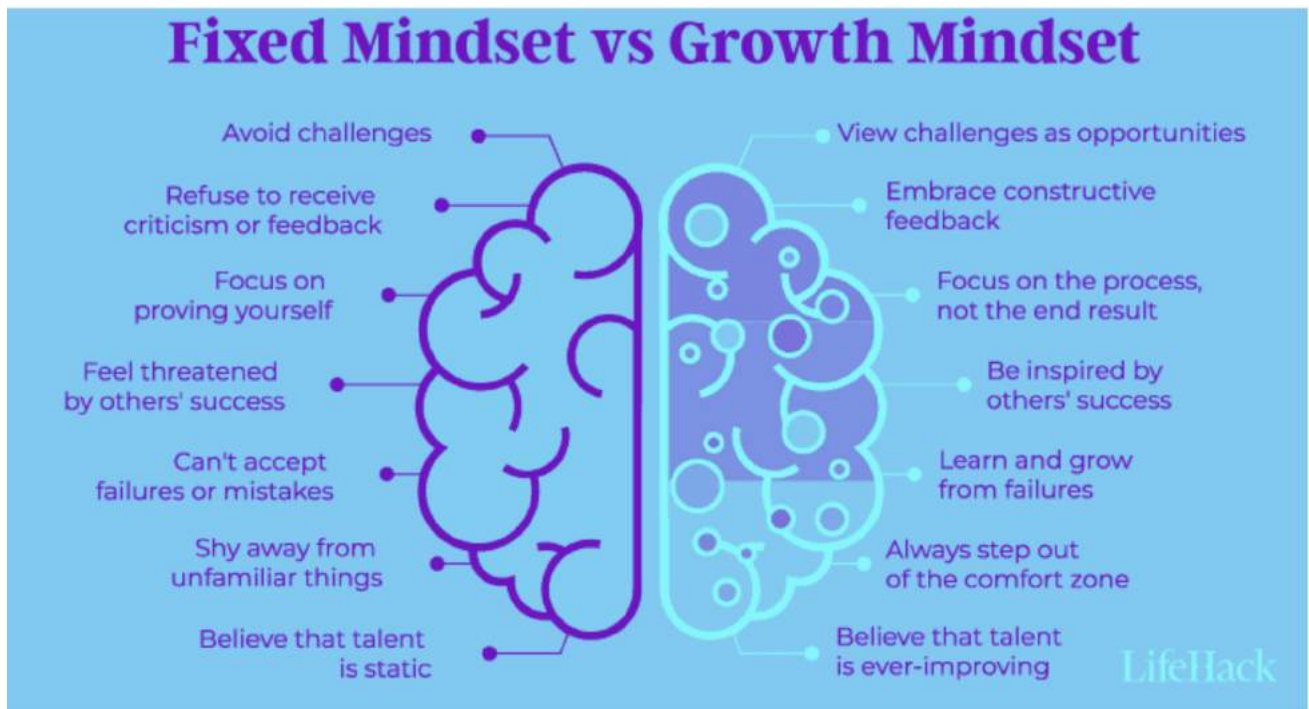
If you notice that you have more of the fixed mindset, think about how you can change it. What can you use to replace the negative conversation you have with yourself into something constructive and supportive? This is not an easy process, but it is necessary to achieve a better balance and is a very important step towards good mental health.

Some of the ideas to help myself when I am stuck in negative thoughts:

- becoming aware that I am in a fixed mindset,
- practising gratitude (the more we are aware of the blessings we have around us, the more we will see them in the future),
- believing that even if the current situation might be challenging or uncomfortable, it can lead to something good if we stay true and kind to ourselves - directs our attention and focus to acceptance and new solutions,
- reframing your thoughts and the situation to more positive attitude - stop generalising your failures or mistakes; stop catastrophizing regarding one simple mistake or an issue in your life,
- journaling (materialising our words leads to new possibilities),
- physical activities (jumping, cycling, boxing, hiking, swimming, anything that helps to get negative energy out of the body, while also being constructive)
- talking to a friend, family member or even a pet :)

Note! We often have a tendency to be very critical of ourselves when we are not doing well, or when we feel that we have not succeeded in something. And less often we celebrate our victories and are aware of the efforts we made to achieve something. It is important to celebrate our victories, our good days, because then they serve as a starting point for us in bad days. Then positive attitudes become a great resource that helps us in challenges.





Find more about the Growth Mindset in Carol Dweck's book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*.

3.3 WHAT DOES IDENTITY CONSIST OF?

Our identity is greatly shaped by how we see ourselves. This image develops throughout our lives, particularly during childhood and adolescence. It consists of experiences, relationships, character traits and how we interpret these things. Some of the 'pillars', i.e. identity features, are listed here, and how important they are varies throughout our lives.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Sex • First and last (family) name • Appearance: physical characteristic (height, weight, hair colour and style...), what we wear • Origin: your family, nationality, religion, language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School you attend(ed) • What you do • Your neighbourhood • Financial status • Friendships • Relationships (boyfriend/girlfriend, partnerships) • Health and physical condition... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality traits • Behaviour and decisions • Hobbies, interests, lifestyle • Values and goals (what is really important to you and what you are working towards) • Historical and geographical context of the place you live in |
|--|---|---|

Some of our identities or parts of our identities are called personal (hobbies, interests, choices we make) and most of them can be changed and we have control over them. However, most of the parts that are called social identities (like ethnicity, your mother tongue or other family legacy parts) are fixed and out of our control.

Note! Although there are parts of our identities that we cannot change, we can change the way we look at them. And we build identities that we have influence over. In this way, we balance the parts of our identities that we can and cannot influence and/or change.



MY IDENTITIES

* Take some time and write down your 6 identities that are most important to you.



What did you list as your main personality traits (also called "pillars" of identity)?

.....

What do you think about people who treat people badly because of their personality?

.....

What are your favourite parts of your identity?

.....

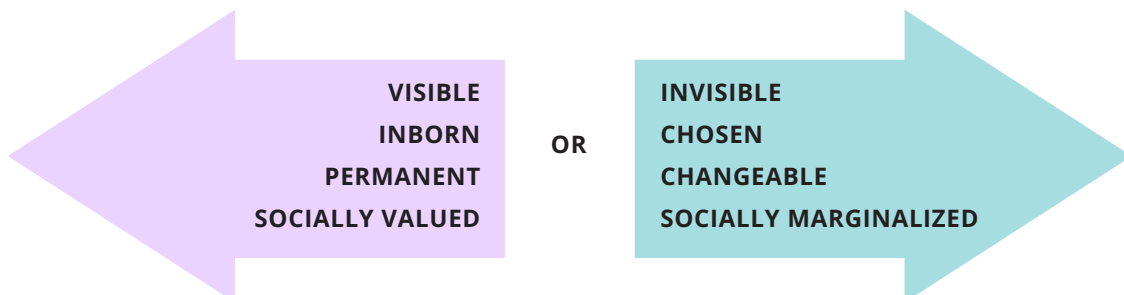
Which aspects of your identity do you take for granted and do not think about?

.....

What can you improve, change, and what do you want to keep just like it is?

.....

Now think about your identities and ask yourself what parts of your identity do you choose to share and with whom? What parts of your identity remain hidden and why?





4.1 GENDER GLOSSARY

"The power of language to shape our perceptions of other people is immense. Precise use of terms in regards to gender can have a significant impact on demystifying many of the misperceptions associated with gender."

<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/language-of-gender>

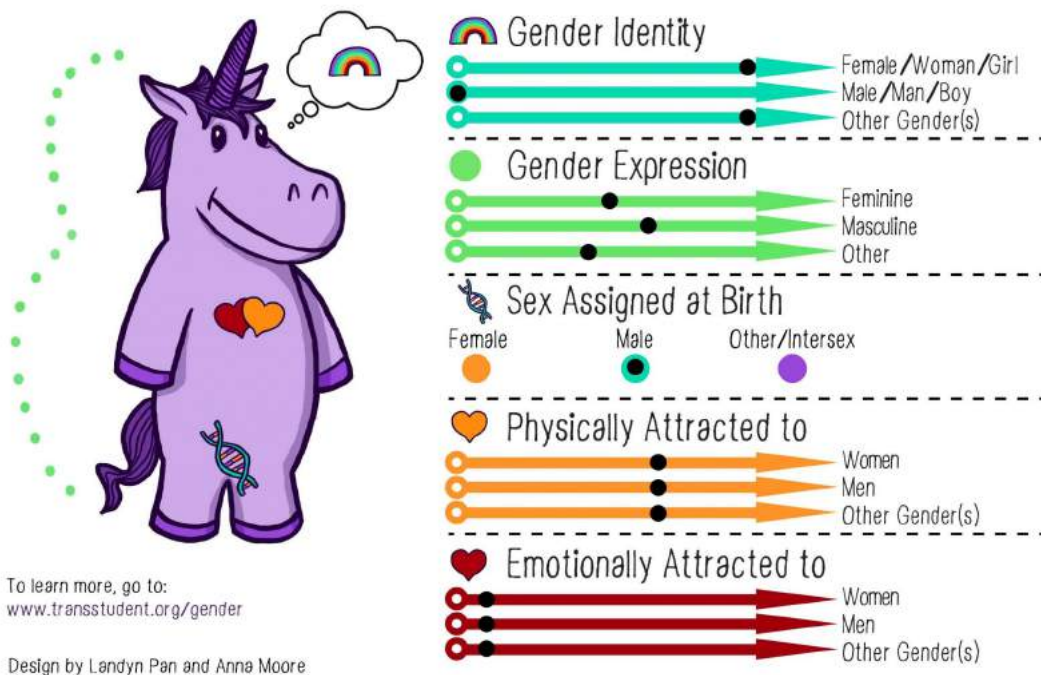
Gender identity — our deeply held, internal sense of self as masculine, feminine, a blend of both, neither, or something else. Identity also includes the name we use to convey our gender. Gender identity can correspond to, or differ from the sex we are assigned at birth.

Transgender — Sometimes this term is used broadly as an umbrella term to describe anyone whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex. It can also be used more narrowly as a gender identity that reflects a binary gender identity that is "opposite" or "across from" the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression — This is our "public" gender. How we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Gender expression is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

Gender role — The set of functions, activities, and behaviours commonly expected of boys/men and girls/women by society.

Gender literacy — The ability to participate knowledgeably in discussions of gender and gender-related topics. Gender literacy is not about expertise so much as it is about a stance of openness to the complexity of gender and the idea that each person determines for themselves their own identity.





SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

Sex Assigned at Birth: The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. It is used to divide human beings into two strict categories: "male" and "female".



GENDER & GENDER IDENTITY

Gender is a spectrum. Generally, we consider that there are only two poles of gender (male and female) because our society has constructed gender in a binary way. However, many gender possibilities fall between the two poles "female-male", or outside the "male-female" spectrum, for example, non-binary people. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. These people often prefer to use neutral pronouns to address them.

Gender identity refers to how someone defines oneself, it is the gender with which a person identifies. When gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned at birth, we call them cisgender people. But it can be different, as is the case for transgender people.

Trans/transgender is an inclusive umbrella term referring to those people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. It includes but is not limited to: people who identify as trans, transgender, genderqueer, agender, gender variant, or with any other gender identity and/or expression, which is not a cisgender person.

Genderfluid people are those who prefer to remain flexible about their gender identity rather than identifying with a single gender. They may fluctuate between genders or express multiple genders at the same time.

Genderqueer refers to people who transcend distinctions of gender, regardless of their self-defined gender identity, i.e. those who identify as 'queer' gender, expressing it non-normatively, or overall not conforming to the binary genders.



GENDER EXPRESSION

Gender expression: the way in which people manifest themselves in a gendered way, for example through appearance and behaviour. This can be but is not necessarily linked to the person's sex assigned at birth, or gender identity.

Gender nonconformity: it refers to people whose gender expression does not match their society's prescribed gender roles or norms for a given gender identity. Gender non-conformity transcends societal or psychological expectations of perceived gender assignment, through a presentation, behaviour, identity or other means.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Attraction to other people can be **emotional**, **romantic** and/or **sexual**.

Sexual orientation is the sexual attraction or the absence of sexual attraction towards another person. An individual can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, etc.

Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity



4.2 MYTHS ABOUT GENDER¹

Study the most common myths about gender and recognize those that you may believe in or that you encounter in your environment.

MYTHS X & FACTS ✓

X A person is only transgender if they declare it at a very young age.

- ✓ Many people have a general feeling of being “different” but don’t connect that feeling to their gender until they are exposed to new language or find role models in whom they can see themselves reflected. Sometimes a transgender or non-binary person will come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual before recognizing that it is their gender, not their sexuality, that they are struggling with. Stigma, lack of knowledge and fear of rejection by family and peers can keep transgender people from sharing their gender as children or teens.

X There are only two genders.

- ✓ The two most common genders are boy and girl (or man and woman), and often people think that these are the only two genders. But gender is a spectrum, and not limited to just two possibilities. A person may have a non-binary gender, meaning they do not identify strictly as a boy or a girl – they could identify as both, or neither, or as another gender entirely.

X Many transgender youth “change their mind” about their gender

- ✓ Given the limited vocabulary we provide children and youth with for gender, it can take some time for them to find the language that fits for them when it comes to gender identity. What we know from medical and mental health experts as well as from research in the area is that transgender children are at least as certain in their gender identity as other children are in theirs. The longer an identity persists, especially one that is consciously considered and consistently asserted, the less likely it is to change.

X Being transgender or non-binary is a sign of mental illness

- ✓ Being transgender or non-binary is not a mental illness. Some people who are transgender can experience gender dysphoria “which refers to psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity”(American Psychiatric Association). Minority stress factors often take a toll on transgender and non-binary youth, who then experience levels of depression and anxiety as a result of the harassment, discrimination, bullying and stigmatisation they’re subjected to. Outside of these minority stress factors, research indicates that gender-diverse youth who have parental support and are affirmed in their gender have similar mental health profiles as their cisgender peers.

X Transgender and non-binary people are doomed to live unhappy lives

- ✓ While it is true that transgender and non-binary youth are at significantly higher risk for suicide, non-suicidal self-injury, substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety and depression, compared to their cisgender peers, there are known factors that can improve their mental health and well-being. The most significant factor in a gender-expansive young person’s well-being is the support of family. Transgender and non-binary people of all ages find love, create families, and live fulfilling lives.

¹ Worksheet adopted according to <https://genderspectrum.org/articles/myths/>





4.3 I IDENTIFY AS...

This is a self-reflective activity that will make you comfortable with the subject of gender and gender stereotypes. The main phrase that you will consider is: **“I identify as X and.....”**

Read the following statements and consider what you think about them.



Examples of statements:

- *I identify as a woman and I love to play football!*
- *I identify as a boy and I cry when I watch romantic movies.*
- *I identify as non-binary and I like to cuddle.*
- *I don't identify as any gender!*

What do you think about these statements? Do you have any experience with these kinds of stereotypes? Try to consider other examples of your life based on gender stereotypes.

Note: You can consider examples of stereotypes or broken ones.



WHO IS THE PROFESSIONAL?

The socially constructed ideas around professions might influence your career decisions or your attitude towards someone who defies these notions. Often in society, some of the occupations (as well as hobbies) are "reserved" to men or women.

These are some of the examples: Nail artist, plumber, mechanic, hairdresser, ballet dancer, professional footballer, doctor, physicist...

*** Think about these occupation and answer the following questions:**

What is the gender of these professionals?

.....

.....

Do you think the idea that there are female and male occupations could influence young people?

.....

.....

Do you think that if a man does a 'female job', he will have a different treatment or vice versa?

.....

.....



Note: As it mentioned above, there are other genders beyond the binary of female and male. Hence, we can use an inclusive and not gendered way to refer to professionals. For example, instead of cleaning ladies, and policemen we should use cleaning staff or police officers.





5.

LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Communication & relationships

5.1 A LITTLE BIT ABOUT COMMUNICATION

The most important life skill includes the transfer of data and information in different ways and through different channels. There are 4 basic types of communication: writing, reading, speaking, listening.

We can communicate verbally, and also non-verbally (by choosing certain clothes, using art, music, gestures...). We develop communication throughout our lives and through relationships with others (Good or bad? Consciously or unconsciously?)

"The final aim of the act of communication is the empowerment of all the people involved in the process, who, at the end, become "more aware of themselves"."

Danilo Dolci, Italian nonviolent activist, sociologist, popular educator and poet



The word "**communication**", comes from latin *cum-munus*, which means *gather gifts*.

* Think about your relationships and the way you communicate, and then answer the following questions that will help you in your self-assessment:

How do I communicate with other people?

.....
.....
.....

Is it more important for me to hear the other person or to tell my side of the story?

.....
.....
.....

What would I like to change in my communication with others?

.....
.....
.....



5.2 MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION:



ACTIVE LISTENING

Paying attention to the other person, content and manner of what was said.

Interpretation: how we "translate" and interpret what the person says.

Remembering what we heard: we take into account what the person said and apply it in a later situation.



PARAPHRASING

Briefly repeating the content or core of what the other person is saying; in this way, we **reduce misunderstandings**, as well as assumptions; Examples:

"So, if I understood correctly..." "You want to say..." "Just let me check..."



QUESTIONS

Questions are such powerful tools that allow us to see the situation more clearly, find out what the other person thinks and feels, and make communication easier for ourselves. **When you don't know what to do, ask a question.** In this way, we better connect and get to know each other, but also show a genuine interest in the other person and their perspective.

Probing questions usually used at the beginning of the conversation:

"What about...?" "Tell me more about..."

Questions for better understanding during the conversation, to check:

"What sense does it have for you..."

"What does it mean to you... that behaviour with regard to..."

Questions with which we encourage action and behaviour:

"What do you think you can do..." "How do you think I can help you?"

Kadushin, 1990

And now... go find some person and start the conversation 😊

SELF-OBSERVATION AND SELF-EVALUATION

Then think about how you conducted the conversation and write down the most important insights. This will help you become aware of what you are doing well, and what you can still work on.



During this conversation I applied:

ACTIVE LISTENING



.....
.....

PARA-PHRASING



.....
.....

QUESTIONS



.....
.....



5.4 ASSERTIVENESS?

Another very important element of communication and good relationships is assertiveness.

Assertiveness is a behaviour where we **openly and honestly stand up** for our rights, wishes, interests and needs. We are aware of our wishes in a certain situation and we are able to express them – by behaviour, attitude, in speaking or in writing. When we are assertive, we approach others and engage with them, and we express ourselves openly without fear.



Assertive behaviour is a completely different strategy from a passive or aggressive approach, mainly due to setting boundaries and respecting other people's boundaries.

Passive people have weaker boundaries which allows aggressive persons to take advantage of them. Also, they are wary of trying to influence others.

On the other hand, **aggressive people** don't respect other people's boundaries and often hurt them when they try to influence them.

We can become assertive by overcoming the fear of expressing our own opinion and by trying to influence our surroundings in a way which respects other people.





☑ LET'S TAKE A QUIZ! – HOW ASSERTIVE AM I?¹

1. You suspect someone of harbouring a grudge against you, but you don't know why. You would:
 - a) Pretend you are unaware of their anger and ignore it, hoping it will correct itself.
 - b) Get even with the person somehow so they will learn not to hold grudges against you.
 - c) Ask the person if they are angry, then try to be understanding.

2. You take your games console to a shop for repairs and receive a written estimate. But later, when you pick it up, you are billed for additional work and for an amount higher than the estimate. You would:
 - a) Pay the bill since it must have needed the extra repairs anyway.
 - b) Refuse to pay, and then complain to the head office or the Better Business Bureau.
 - c) Indicate to the manager that you agreed only to the estimated amount, and then pay only that amount.

3. You invite a good friend to your house for a dinner party, but your friend never arrives and neither calls to cancel nor to apologise. You would:
 - a) Ignore it, but manage not to show up the next time your friend invites you to a party.
 - b) Call your friend names and complain about them to other friends.
 - c) Call your friend to find out what happened.

4. You are in a group discussion about a project at school that includes your teacher. A work mate asks you a question about your work, but you don't know the answer. You would:
 - a) Give your work mate a false, but plausible answer so your teacher will think you are on top of things.
 - b) Do not answer, but attack your work mate by asking a question you know they could not answer.
 - c) Indicate to your work mate you are unsure just now, but offer to give them the information later.

¹ Workshop taken from <https://www.compasstoolkit.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Assertiveness-Quiz-Tips-Individual-Activity.pdf>

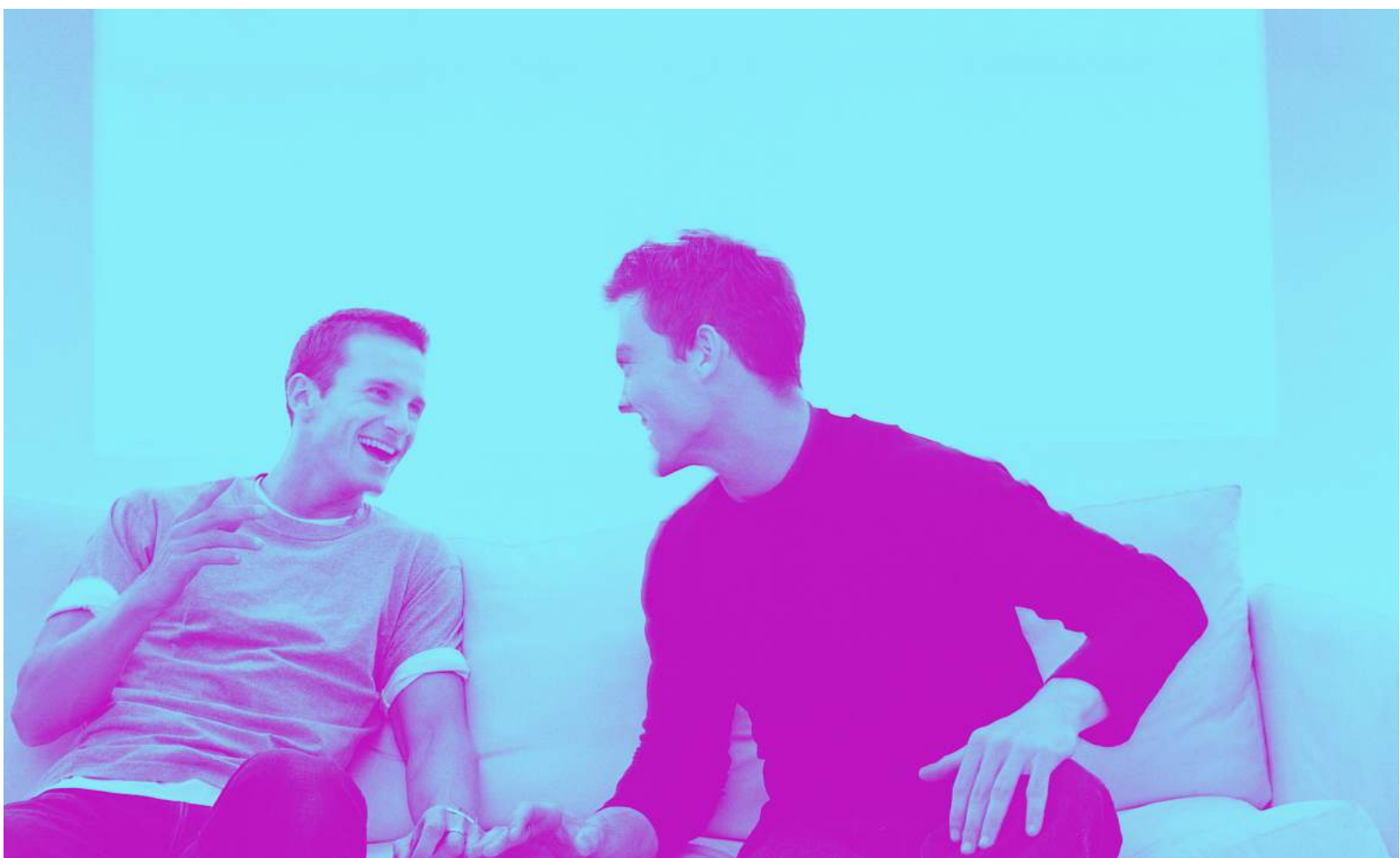
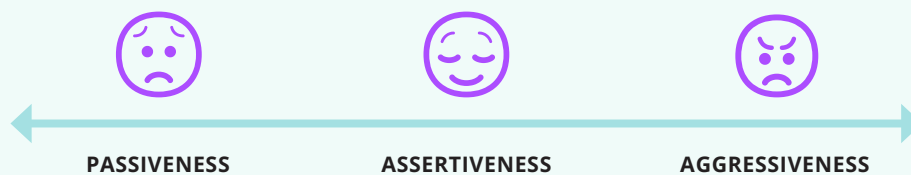




SCORE INTERPRETATION KEY

In general, there are three broad styles of interpersonal behaviour: a) passive, b) aggressive and c) assertive.

- **A** choices in the quiz are representative of the Passive style. Thus, the more A choices you make, the more passive you are. Six or more A choices suggest you are probably passive in your interpersonal behaviour.
- **B** choices in the quiz are representative of the Aggressive style. Thus, the more B choices you make, the more aggressive you are. Six or more B choices indicate you are most likely aggressive in your interpersonal behaviour.
- **C** choices in the quiz are representative of the Assertive style. Thus, the more "c" choices you made, the more assertive you are. Six or more "c" choices suggest you are probably assertive. Look at the "c" answers again. If you move your everyday behaviour closer to the "c" style of response, you will likely experience an increase in feelings of self-esteem and a decrease in feelings of stress.



HOW ASSERTIVE AM I?²

TO WORK ON BEING LESS PASSIVE AND MORE ASSERTIVE:

- Pay attention to what you think, feel, want, and prefer. You need to be aware of these things before you can communicate them to others.
- Notice if you say *"I don't know," "I don't care,"* or *"it doesn't matter"* when someone asks what you want. Practice saying what you'd prefer, especially on things that hardly matter. For example, if someone asks, *"Would you like green or red?"* you can say, *"I'd prefer the green one — thanks."*
- Practice asking for things. *"Can you save me a seat?"* This builds your skills and confidence for when you need to ask for something more important.
- Give your opinion. Say whether or not you liked a movie you saw and why. Practice using *"I"* sentences such as: *"I'd like..." "I prefer..."* or *"I feel..."*
- Find a role model who's good at being assertive — not too passive and not too aggressive. See if you can imitate that person's best qualities.
- Remind yourself that your ideas and opinions are as important as everyone else's. Knowing this helps you be assertive. Assertiveness starts with an inner attitude of valuing yourself as much as you value others.

EVEN NATURALLY ASSERTIVE PEOPLE CAN BUILD AND EXPAND THEIR SKILLS:

- Find role models who are good at being assertive — not too passive and not too aggressive. See if you can imitate their best qualities. (You'll notice this is the same tip we give for helping with a style that's too passive or too aggressive. That's because we never stop learning!)
- Notice where you are best at being assertive. People behave differently in different situations. Many people find that it's easy to be assertive in certain situations (like with friends) but more challenging in others (like with teachers or when meeting new people). In tough situations, try thinking, *"What would I say to my close friends?"*
- When you speak assertively, it shows you believe in yourself. Building assertiveness is one step to becoming your best self, the person you want to be.

TO WORK ON BEING LESS AGGRESSIVE AND MORE ASSERTIVE:

- Try letting others speak first.
- Notice if you interrupt. Catch yourself, say: *"Oh, sorry, go ahead!"* and let the other person finish.
- Ask someone else's opinion, then listen to the answer.
- When you disagree, try to say so without putting down the other person's point of view. For example, instead of saying: *"That's a stupid idea."*, try: *"I don't really like that idea."* Or instead of saying: *"He's such a jerk."*, try: *"I think he's insensitive."*
- Find a role model who's good at being assertive — not too passive and not too aggressive. See if you can imitate that person's best qualities.

2 Workshop taken from <https://www.compasstoolkit.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Assertiveness-Quiz-Tips-Individual-Activity.pdf>

5.6 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication is something we learn our whole life. It is not enough that we know how to talk, but it is necessary to learn how to communicate well. There are a number of books and courses on how to communicate well. In addition, here we bring only a small part of communication skills that can help you to enter this, we can safely say, one of the most important topics of relationships.

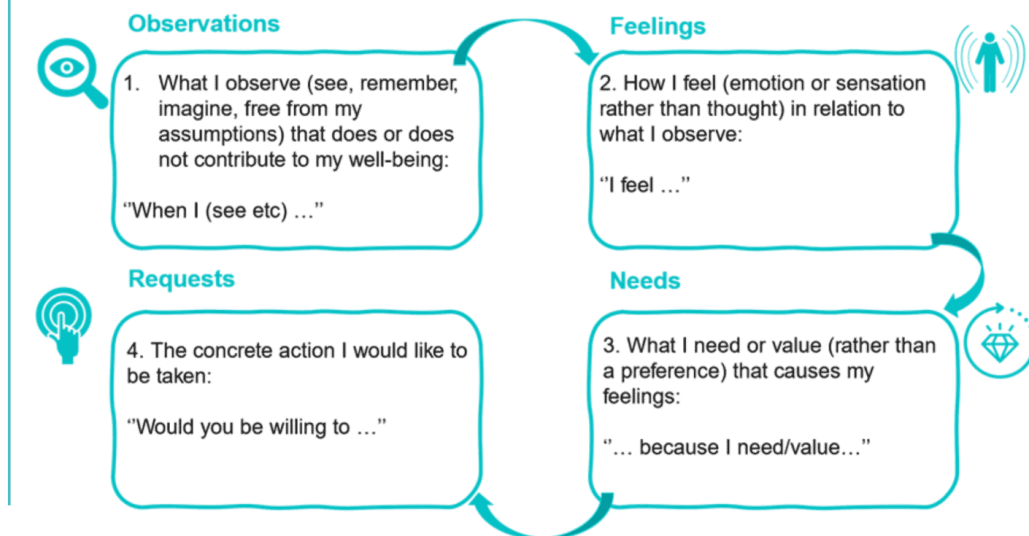
One of the most famous communication experts is Marshall Rosenberg, founder and director of the Center for Nonviolent Communication. He developed a tool for peaceful conflict resolution on a personal, professional and political level known as a nonviolent communication – theory that brings all people towards peace, cooperation, mutual respect and understanding. The idea is that instead of focusing on what the other party has done; let's see what it actually awakens in us. Why did it bother us, how do we feel, and what do we need from the other side and clearly communicate our desire? In doing so, we should be open to hearing the other side as well.



4 KEY COMPONENTS of Communication in Relationships

1. **OBSERVATION** – we perceive and describe what others do, without automatic judgement.
2. **FEELINGS** – let's become aware of our reactions: happiness, anger, worry, surprise...
3. **NEEDS** – what are our needs in that situation or from that person: respect, recognition, time, support, trust...
4. **REQUEST** – what we want and what is important to us.

How to use
NVC process



Example:

"You are always late!" —condemning and attacking message which opens conflict, resentment and further dissatisfaction. Instead, we can say what it does to us:

"When you don't come at the time we agreed —observation—, I feel disrespected —feeling— because my time is very valuable to me —need—. Could you let me know next time that you will be late or suggest some solution? —request."



LET'S... PRACTICE



ANOTHER PERSON IS TO BLAME	WHAT I ACTUALLY NEED FROM YOU
You are putting pressure on me
You don't know what you want
You never call
You never clean the dishes!
You are really irresponsible



Quick tips and tricks 😊

- ☑ According to T. Leimdorger (Once upon a conflict: A fairytale manual of conflict for all ages, 1992), a successful way of solving problems is to approach the conflict situation as problematic through the following 4 questions:
 - *What's the problem? What happened?* · *How do you feel about that?*
 - *What do you want to happen?* · *What can really be done*



How to build relationships with all that knowledge?

- ☑ Let's go with a positive attitude about ourselves and about the other person.
- ☑ We're talking about facts, feelings, thoughts, needs, wishes, expectations and requests!
- ☑ We take responsibility for our part of the "story" (our reactions).
- ☑ We speak concretely and specifically, without circumlocution.



5.7 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEALTHY AND TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are places that can serve us for personal growth and development, be a place of support, make us feel seen and respected, but unfortunately also places where we do not feel good and comfortable. It is important to recognize the kind of relationship we are in so that we can better understand what we need and what we want.

Sometimes we can find ourselves in a toxic relationship without even realising it at first. We feel that something is not right, but we do not see what it really is.

It's good to do a self-assessment of your relationship to know if it's worth the investment of time or if it's time to walk away from it.

Majkić, 2023

MAYBE IT'S OVER AFTER ALL...



- Does the relationship itself or the partner's behaviour negatively affect my mental health?
- Is the partner's behaviour or the relationship itself in complete opposition to my value system?
- Have I repeatedly been promised that my partner's behaviour will not happen again (especially physical or psychological abuse, addictions, fraud), but it still happens?
- Will what is happening leave me with long-lasting and strong resistance or pain?
- Is there something going on in my relationship that I fundamentally disagree with and am not okay with? (e.g. adultery that is justified by the fact that it is so and that it is okay)
- Is what is happening opening up some emotional wounds or traumatic experiences for me?

IT IS STILL WORTH INVESTING



- Can what bothers me be resolved and I and my partner have the capacity to talk about it and hear each other?
- Is the partner's behaviour unexpected, but I know it is out of character for him/her/them? And can we talk about it when we calm down?
- Does the partner take responsibility for their behaviour (as well as me) and are they ready to make an effort to solve it?
- Is what is happening something I can accept and does not deviate so much from my value system?
- Can I understand that my partner has a different perspective and can I understand it?
- Can I talk openly with my partner without fear that he will leave me, make fun of me or diminish my views?

Note! Being in a relationship does not mean that everything has to be perfect and good. There are two of us in a relationship and it takes a lot of patience, communication, open conversation and understanding and will on both sides for the relationship to be successful and a good place for both. However, if you are in a relationship where you feel bad for a long time, it is time to think about whether it is worth continuing to invest in it. Especially if there is verbal or physical violence, forcing one partner to do something the other party does not want, or if there is insecurity and lack of trust.





6.

LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Our voice, impact and plans

6.1 MY VOICE¹

"It means having a sense of initiative stemming from the belief that others will hear us and that we will be able to influence our surroundings. Young people who have a 'voice' are youth with a strong sense of identity. They speak openly and are not easily intimidated. They accept the inevitable frustrations and failures as an integral part of life and move on. They are not afraid to try new things and take certain appropriate risks. Talking to them is interesting."

Voice of children

Let's start the journey of finding your own voice. Think about your growing up and your present life. Then think about how you are expressing your thoughts, ideas, but also your boundaries, assertiveness, feelings, behaviours.

How much "voice" do you have?

.....

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To what extent are you able to express yourself? Where and with whom?

.....

.....

Who loves to listen to you? With whom can you speak freely and about anything that is happening to you?

.....

.....

What part of yourself can you freely express (in terms of feelings, arguments, attitudes, words)?

.....

.....

What are you not able to express? What do you need to feel more open and more confident in expressing yourself?

.....

.....



Some suggestions: Sometimes we need some new experience or to work on our own social and personal competencies. There are many ways you can feel more confident in expressing yourself. These are some of the possibilities: developing communication skills, interpersonal skills, but also, writing diaries, poems, stories, singing, dancing, taking acting classes, joining debate clubs, speech schools, volunteering...

¹ Taken and adapted from Munivrana A., Perak J., Pavlović V. (2021) The Voice of Children – creating space and starting the change: manual for adults. Zagreb, Forum for Freedom in Education.





6.2 MY IMPACT²

Let's have a quick quiz! Decide to which extent each of these statements apply to you. Rarely? Sometimes? Moderately? Often or Very often? The statements to which you replied "Rarely" or "Sometimes" show the areas with space for improvement

STATEMENTS	WHAT CAN HELP ME
1. I can offer good and clear arguments.	Debate clubs, speech schools.
2. I like to compliment and notice when someone does something good.	Awareness of empathy, compassion, communication skills, how to give feedback.
3. I talk openly about my feelings and reactions with other people.	Emotional learning, assertiveness.
4. I can give clear and concise suggestions.	Communication and interpersonal skills, learning about cooperation and teamwork, developing your own creativity and finding your flow.
5. When someone's support is important to me, I will offer something in return and negotiate.	Debate clubs, speech schools, negotiation skills and dialogue skills, assertiveness.
6. I show and tell others what I need in a clear way.	Emotional learning, learning about my needs, communication skills (active listening, paraphrasing, assertiveness, patience).
7. I ask others to participate in the discussion.	Debate clubs, speech schools, negotiation skills and dialogue skills, assertiveness, communication skills.

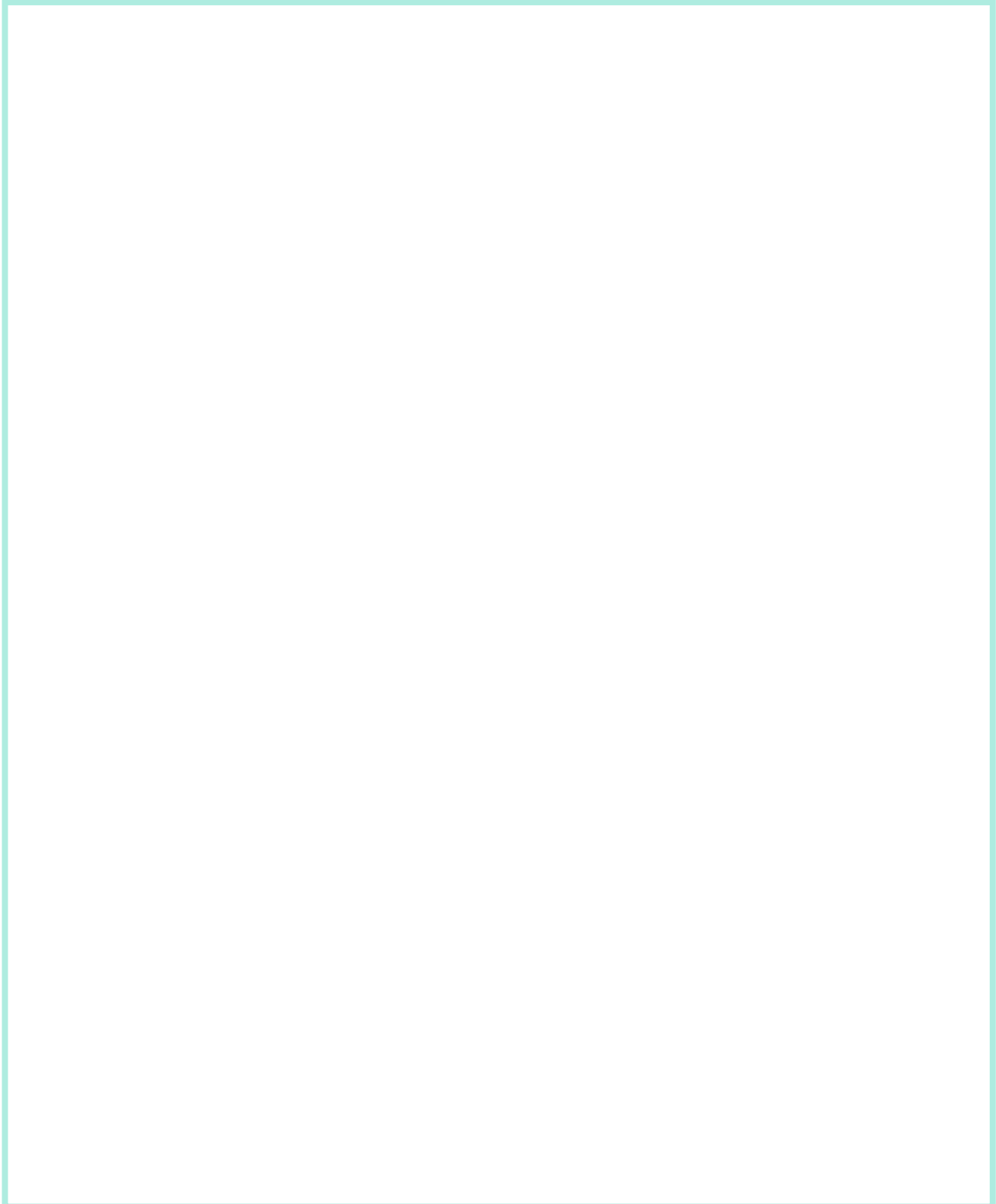
² Taken and adapted from Munivrana A., Perak J., Pavlović V. (2021.) The Voice of Children – creating space and starting the change: manual for adults. Zagreb, Forum for Freedom in Education



6.3 WISH BOARD

In this section, search for pictures from newspapers, from the Internet, or draw your own wishes, dreams and joys. Visualisation is a magical tool that can help you direct your actions towards goals that are important to you, as well as direct you in thinking and analysing what you need for their realisation, who can help you with that, what you can do to get closer to their realisation, but also give you the opportunity to fantasise about how you will feel when you achieve them!

Enjoy exploring your plans and goals! :)





MY FLOW

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly in his book **“Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience”** (1990) discusses how to release one’s creativity, affirming that we all experience pleasure in a certain activity because of the FLOW. A FLOW is a state of complete involvement in some activity, state of creativity and enjoyment, when a person is completely immersed in what they are doing (Pavlović, et al. 2017). Knowing where is your FLOW in relation to other states that you can feel, gives you a certain security and control to help you feel good and at the same time do what motivates you, cheers you up, fills you up and helps you feel alive.



What is my flow?

.....

How I feel and what I believe about myself when I am doing what is my passion?

.....

How can I put more of the flow state in my everyday life?

.....

.....

DISCOVER YOUR OWN ELEMENT

The concept of ‘element’ is based on the book **“The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything”** by Sir Ken Robinson (2010). The element is the point at which natural talent meets personal passion. It is here that people feel most themselves, inspired and able to achieve their highest levels. Discovering your own element, what you like to do, what you get lost in and what you feel good and competent in is very likely something you should be doing in life.



I LOVE

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I AM GOOD AT

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I AM KEEN ON

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I NEED HELP WITH /
I HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO

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6.4 HOW CAN I DECIDE WHAT I WANT?³

Take time to think and write down the answers on these questions. If you currently don't have answers to some questions, don't worry. Put it aside and come back to the questions in a while. We believe that the questions themselves and thinking about them in the following days will bring some of the answers. In different periods of life, we will be at the crossroads and making decisions about where to go now. It's an integral part of life. :)



What is your goal now? Choose one you would like to think about today.

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Imagine your ideal future! Keep imagining!

How do you see yourself after achieving your goal? What does it exactly look like?

.....
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.....

How are you getting there? What is your way of accomplishing it?

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.....

What will you do first (starting today or tomorrow) and who will help you?

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.....
.....

³ Worksheet taken and adopted from Munivrana, A., Morić, D., Pijaca Plavšić, E., Bajkuša, M., Rastović, M. and Kožić, V. (2021) WORKSHOP COLLECTION "START THE CHANGE!" 40 working ideas with children and young people in the areas of diversity. Zagreb: Forum for Freedom in Education



6.5 LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR FUTURE

We often talk about the future and future plans with friends, siblings, cousins, etc.. So the next time you meet, help each other to see your plans and future more clearly through an inspiring interview. Find out as much as you can about your partner and ask questions to help the person you are talking to (a friend, a sister, a cousin) define their goal and plan. Follow the four sections:



GOAL

What is the goal you would like to work on right now?

If your partner has problems defining their goal, ask them one of the following questions:

- *What do you enjoy the most? What makes you happy and what do you find interesting?*
- *Is there something you completely lose yourself in while you are doing it? When do you feel you are exactly where you should be?*
- *What are you best at? What others think is your strong suit? What do you think your goal is now?*



VISION

Imagine your ideal future where you have achieved your goals completely!

- *What does it look like?*
- *What are you doing, what do you look like, who is there?*
- *What is next?*



ACCOMPLISHMENT

Now make a plan – What is the most important thing to do to achieve your goal?

- *What do you need to learn, do and practise to accomplish it?*
- *Which skills should you develop?*
- *What is your path and how do you really see yourself achieving your goal?*



FIRST STEPS

And now - let's start! – Think of the first steps you should take.

- *What will you do first? Who can help you?*
- *Who should you talk to first? And what then?*
- *How much time will you need?*
- *What might be a challenge now, and what later? How will you resolve this?*

Then, switch roles! 🗨️





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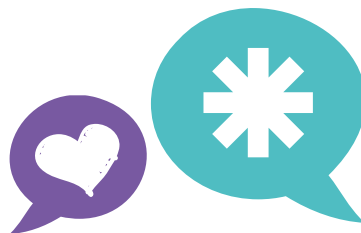
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