



YOUTH GOING
BACK TO NATURE

YOUTH AT RISK GOING BACK TO NATURE

TOOLKIT

FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE OUTDOOR
ACTIVITIES



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About the Project “Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower”

The project “Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower”/YGBN/ is dedicated to young people with fewer opportunities and environmentally sustainable outdoor activities. The aim of the project is to promote and contribute to reaching the EU Youth Goals set by young people in Europe.

Concrete actions will be taken in order to Engage, Connect and Empower the youth community to reach those goals and return to nature. The first toolkit “*Young Women Going Back to Nature*” is already available on the project website www.outdoorportal.eu.

In April 2024, The partners in the YGBN project designed a set of environmentally sustainable outdoor activities for youth at risk, during a Learning Exchange Event organized in Italy.

Professionals from the six partnering organizations – **Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation** (Bulgaria), **OAZA** (Croatia), **Trekkify** (Italy), **the Lithuanian Sea Museum** (Lithuania), **QUEST**(Belgium) and **Equilibre** (Estonia), generated innovative approaches to facilitate nature-based activities for youth at risk. The results of the event are gathered in the present toolkit.



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INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of this toolkit?

The toolkit is the result of the cooperation efforts among various expertise and **provides practical sustainable activities that can be easily replicated outdoors and in nature environments**, fostering inclusion and social cohesion. Moreover, the activities take into account the possible needs and challenges that youth at risk face, and provide practical exercises that can favor safe and stimulating interactions with the environment.

Today, 1 third of young people in Europe are at risk of social exclusion and poverty, marginalization and overlapping discriminations, **fostering inclusion through outdoors and in nature activity can be a powerful way to address these multifaceted challenges.**

Who are Youth at Risk ?

According to the European Commission, "Youth at Risk" refers to young individuals who **face substantial barriers to achieving positive life outcomes** due to a variety of factor, including but not limited to socio-economic disadvantages, family dysfunction, educational challenges, mental health issues, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (*EU Youth Goal #3 Inclusive societies*). Youth at Risk often come from backgrounds characterized by poverty, family instability, and limited access to quality education and healthcare, and to supportive networks, collectively hindering their development and potential for future success. These **vulnerabilities can overlap and lead to adverse outcomes and further exclusion**, including low academic achievements or school drop-outs, engagement in risky behaviors, and experiencing mental health issues and deterioration of wellbeing.

The resulting marginalization of Youth at risk is a major concern for the growth and development of truly inclusive societies and according to the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, **addressing the needs of these youths is critical to build social cohesion and ensure that youth from all background have equal opportunities to engage and participate in society.**

Inclusion through Outdoors Experiences

Engaging Youth at Risk in outdoors and in nature settings presents a unique opportunity to create connections among the community and the environment, thus promoting inclusion.

It's also important to understand and address the barriers that hinder young people's access and benefit from outdoors and natural environments, and how these intersect with the previously mentioned factors of exclusion.

Moreover, the wide range of activities that can be conducted and easily replicated in outdoors and natural settings allows for a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted needs of the youths involved.



Benefits of Outdoors Activities for Youth at Risk

The benefits of these activities for Youth at Risk are manifold and well-documented by research and experiences. They include improved physical health, enhanced mental well-being, development of social skills, and increased self-esteem. Moreover, outdoor activities foster resilience, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of belonging, which are critical for the positive development of Youth at Risk.

- **Physical Health and Well-being**

Participation in outdoor activities significantly enhances the physical health of young people. Regular physical exercise is associated with improved cardiovascular health, better weight management, and increased overall fitness. For youth at risk, who may have limited access to regular and structured physical activity, outdoor programs provide essential opportunities to engage in health-promoting behaviors (Biddle & Asare, 2011).

- **Mental Health and Emotional Resilience**

Outdoor activities have been shown to foster mental well-being and emotional resilience. Exposure to natural environments and physical activity can reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, while enhancing mood and self-esteem. For youth at risk, who often grapple with high levels of psychological distress, these benefits are particularly crucial. Nature-based activities can offer therapeutic experiences that promote emotional healing and resilience.



- **Social Skills and Community Engagement**

Outdoor activities inherently involve social interaction, teamwork, and collaboration. These settings provide youth at risk with valuable opportunities to develop social skills, such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution). By engaging in group activities, young people can build positive relationships with peers and mentors, fostering a sense of belonging and community connectedness. This social integration is critical for mitigating the isolation and marginalization that many at-risk youth experience.

Sustainability is Key!



Youth at risk often experience scarcity of resources (economic and material), outdoors and in nature environments provide an opportunity to conduct sustainable activities requiring minimal resources available and making them accessible to those in urban or economically disadvantaged areas. This inclusivity is vital for ensuring that all young people, including those at risk, can benefit from and contribute to sustainability efforts.

Engaging in sustainable activities outdoors and in natural settings can foster a deeper connection with the environment and a sense of belonging and responsibility towards it. By participating in sustainability projects, youths develop a sense of agency, realizing that their actions can make a tangible difference in their communities and the broader world. This can be particularly empowering for Youth at Risk, who often face challenges that make them feel powerless or disconnected from positive societal contributions.

How can you use this toolkit?

This toolkit has been created to engage youth, in particular those at risk, in engaging and meaningful outdoors and in nature activities. The toolkit can be used by various professionals and specialists working with youth and interested in exploring the benefits of nature in terms of inclusion, in a playful and engaging way. Following a list of suggestions:

- **Therapists**

Nature-based interventions can promote mental health and well-being, leveraging the calming effects of nature to reduce stress and anxiety.



The exercises proposed in the toolkit promote the exploration of the natural surroundings through mindfulness and focus exercises that can help young people reduce anxiety and improve their attention. By integrating nature-based activities and exercises into their practice, therapists can offer a holistic approach to therapy that supports mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

- **Counsellors & Social Workers**

Youth counsellors and social workers, who often work directly with at-risk youth to provide support and interventions aimed at improving their well-being, might use the exercises to build trust and rapport, and engage young people in engaging outdoors activities. Nature settings can help break down barriers and facilitate open communication. Outdoor activities can be utilized as part of holistic interventions, addressing both the **social and emotional aspects of the well-being of youth at risk**. The exercises in the toolkit can be employed to further develop and adapt outdoors programs tailored for youth at risk and in cooperation with them.

- **Youth Mentors:**

Youth Mentors and coaches, providing guidance and support to young people in navigating challenges and achieving personal goals, might use the toolkit to suggest exercises and activities that can support young people navigating various challenges and developing holistically. Outdoors activities can help young people set personal goals and reflect on their progress, fostering self-awareness and a forward-thinking mindset. Outdoors group activities involving participants from different backgrounds can be an opportunity to develop leadership skills.

- **Teachers & Educators**

Teachers and educators can use nature-based activities to complement traditional classroom learning, especially for students who may not thrive in conventional academic settings. Outdoors activities can promote young people's holistic development, fostering skills development, teamwork, and personal growth.

The toolkit presents ideas and exercises that engage participants in game-based activities in nature, fostering social skills, problem-solving abilities and critical thinking. Outdoors learning can be an opportunity to foster a sense of respect and responsibility towards the environment, and group challenges such as obstacle courses or cooperative games can enhance teamwork and communication skills.





- **Community Organizations**

Non-profit organizations and community groups can employ the exercises in the toolkit to create opportunities of engagement and participation for young people with fewer opportunities. Creating programs fostering the cooperation among different actors across society through outdoors and in nature activities can create meaningful moments of community-building, fostering a collective sense of belonging. The exercises in the toolkit can guide practitioners and encourage them in involving youth from different background, creating engaging opportunities for social interactions, exchange and connection.

Connect with other specialists and find other resources on our website.



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OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT

The 9 Sustainable Outdoors Activities for Youth at Risk



1. Mapping Green Areas to understand barriers to nature for youth.

Understanding challenges and barriers to access green areas for young people, in particular youth at risk living in low-income neighborhoods.



2. Building Awareness of Personal Space and Boundaries

Building safe spaces where individual and collective boundaries are expressed, acknowledged and respected. Developing an atmosphere of safety and encouragement, where individuals experience a sense of validation and empathy.



3. In Nature: From Presence to Dual Awareness

Observing and acknowledging internal experiences while remaining aware of the external environment and how we interact with it. The experience in nature becomes a sensorial discovery and opportunity for self-reflection.



4. Building Trust & Confidence through Horse Therapy Exercises

Creating trust relationships builds confidence and leadership.

Opportunity to exercise focus and inner strength when assuming a leader position and fostering also the ability to trust with "closed eyes" others when following them.



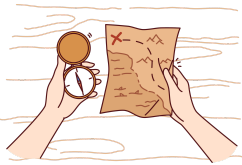
5. Building Trust through Climbing outdoors

Climbing is a challenging outdoor activity that can suit different groups and allows creating relationships of trust and cooperation among people. Problem-solving skills are developed through physical exercises, improving general wellbeing and resilience.



6. Understanding Access to Green Areas with Card Game

Rise awareness on disparities through a race with obstacles in order to experience the frustrations and understand the difficulties in accessing green areas. Understanding green access inequalities through a game that fosters solidarity and empathy



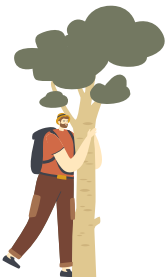
7. Treasure Hunt to discover Nature surrounding

Discover local natural areas playfully, engage with the local community and cooperate with a team. Adventure in nature following a map, discover the territory through the path and enjoy your surroundings.



8. Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises have profound effects on physical and mental health. They are valuable for managing stress, improving relaxation, and enhancing overall well-being.



9. Tree Therapy

Creating connection with nature through Ecotherapy exercises, exploring the theoretical effects of nature. Fostering empathy and a relationship with the natural environment promotes care and ownership.

All activities developed during the Learning Exchange Event can also be seen in the YGBN documentary **'Youth at Risk Going Back to Nature'** available here.



**"YOUTH AT RISK GOING
BACK TO NATURE"
DOCUMENTARY**



1. MAPPING GREEN AREAS - UNDERSTAND BARRIERS TO NATURE FOR YOUTH.

Meaning & Essence of Mapping Green Areas

Young people at risk, including those from low-income families, minority communities, or unstable home environments, are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of urban living.

Access to green spaces can play a crucial role in mitigating these risks by providing safe areas for physical activity, social interaction, and respite from the stresses of urban life. However, Young people at risk living in low-income areas often experience obstacles in accessing green areas on their territory, especially in urban settings.

This simplified mapping exercise allows to **gain insights into the spatial distribution of green spaces in relation to socio-economic disparities in urban areas**. Barriers such as highways, railways, and industrial zones can significantly impede access to green spaces for young people at risk.

The exercise helps understand the specific challenges faced by vulnerable youth and informs the development of targeted interventions. The process involves the identification of critical gaps, encouraging reflections on actionable solutions in cooperation with youth, to improve equitable access to green spaces, promoting environmental justice and well-being in cities.



Key Objectives of the Mapping exercise



- **Increased Awareness:** Participants gain awareness of the distribution and quality of green spaces in their community, fostering a deeper understanding of their local environment.
- **Community Engagement:** Encourages youth to actively participate in community initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

- **Sense of Belonging:** Understanding the intersectionality of exclusion factors in accessing green spaces fosters empathy and solidarity among participants, promoting a more inclusive community environment.
- **Problem-Solving Abilities:** Analyzing barriers to accessing green spaces cultivates critical thinking and problem-solving skills among participants, enabling them to identify and propose solutions to community challenges.
- **Promotion of Environmental Justice:** By identifying areas lacking green spaces, the exercise advocates for equitable access to nature, addressing environmental justice concerns in urban settings.

How to set up and implement?



Location: Delimited territory to analyze



Materials:

- Demographic and Geographical Maps,
- Data sources,
- Urban Plans,
- Transportation Maps.



Duration: 3 Hours and above

The Mapping Green Areas exercise step by step

The mapping exercise can be adapted to every territory (city, municipality, neighborhood) to understand possible barriers faced by young people in accessing green areas, and the quality of the green areas present. Involving young people in the process through consultations, on site visits, and interviews can provide a rich angle and promote engagement.



The activity develops in 3 parts: (1) Data Collection, (2) Data Analysis, (3) Action.

STEP 1: Data Collection

The first step in this exercise involves gathering data, including geographic information on green spaces, socio-economic conditions, and demographic data focusing on youth populations. Involving and consulting youth on the territory can be key to analyze the information and gain further insight. This data is crucial for identifying where young people at risk live and how far they are from accessible green spaces

STEP 2: Analysis

Analysing accessibility involves **pinpointing disparities in access and identifying neighborhoods that are underserved in terms of safe, accessible green areas** for young people. It is important to bear in mind that the mere presence of a green space does not guarantee its use; access to green space depends not only on the geographic proximity or accessibility (i.e., the presence of green space within a reasonable distance from home), but also on green space quality (i.e., presence and quality of facilities and amenities).

STEP 3: Action:

The ultimate goal of this exercise is to understand the barriers to green areas that young people at risk might particularly experience, focusing on the intersectionality of exclusion factors and reflecting on **actionable plans on ways to overcome them**. Including youth in this process can inform the data collected with their insights and perspectives.



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2. BUILDING AWARENESS OF PERSONAL SPACE AND BOUNDARIES

Meaning & Essence of personal Space & Boundaries

Acknowledging personal boundaries is crucial in cultivating an atmosphere of **safety and encouragement, where individuals experience a sense of validation and empathy.** The deliberate exercise of recognizing one's own spatial boundaries not only enhances self-awareness and self-control but also acts as a safeguard against exhaustion, ensuring the facilitator's sustained support. Simultaneously, demonstrating respect for the personal space of young individuals **fosters an environment conducive to trust and mutual regard.**



Encouraging the young persons to also sense their own and others' personal space further enhances their interpersonal skills, promoting empathy and understanding. This, in turn, enhances the effectiveness of interventions and fosters constructive relationships, laying the groundwork for positive outcomes.

This exercise involves the **deliberate development of enhanced presence, sensitivity, and understanding of personal boundaries.** Experiencing and drawing attention to how personal and public spaces interact is an activity that can easily be done in outdoors natural environments with a group of people. This activity can enable participants to assert and be aware of each other's boundaries.


Key Objectives of Space and Boundaries Exercise



- **Building Trust and Respect:** Acknowledging and respecting personal boundaries creates a safe and supportive environment where young people feel validated and understood. This fosters trust in relationships with peers and facilitators.

- **Empathy Development:** Through the exercise, young people gain insight into how their actions affect others, enhancing empathy and perspective-taking abilities.
- **Empowerment and Agency:** By asserting their own boundaries and respecting those of others, participants gain a sense of empowerment and agency over their personal space and interactions. This empowers them to advocate for themselves in various social contexts.
- **Promotion of Healthy Relationships:** Learning to assert and respect boundaries contributes to the development of healthy relationship dynamics, both personally and professionally.
- **Improving Non-Verbal Communication:** The exercise encourages participants to interpret and respond to non-verbal cues effectively, enhancing communication skills.

How to set up and implement?

 **Location:** Outdoors Environment



Materials:

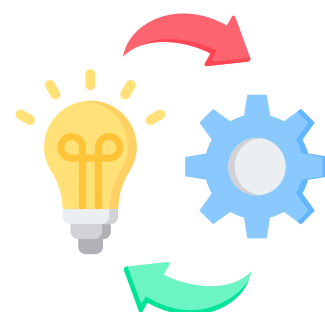
- A timer
- A sound signal



Duration: 30 Minutes and above

Building Awareness of Space and Boundaries exercise step by step

This exercise can be done in open air outdoors environments, participants will be grouped in pairs and have **an approaching role** (testing the spatial boundary) and **a stationary role** (asserting the spatial boundaries). The facilitator will invite to listen to the body reactions and to reflect on how boundaries can be perceived. The exercise develops in 3 steps that allow the participants to reflect on their boundaries and those of others.



STEP 1: Preparation

The group is divided into pairs. Each pair stands approximately 20 meters apart or adjusts based on available space. One person remains stationary while the other approaches. The stationary person raises their hand when they sense the partner entering their personal space. Both individuals then take a moment to internally assess their feelings and awareness of this energetic interaction without sharing their experiences.

STEP 2: Approaching Spaces

The approaching person moves towards their partner again. This time, the stationary person raises their hand when they sense slight discomfort in the distance between them, indicating a preference for the approaching person to stop. Both individuals stand still and observe the energetic shift in their bodies and senses.

STEP 3: Asserting Boundaries

The approaching person moves towards their partner once more. This time, the stationary person raises their hand when the approaching person can no longer come any closer, establishing the final limit. Both individuals pause, taking a moment to sense their internal reactions.

STEP 4: Feedback

Pairs discuss their experiences first, then the entire group engages in a discussion about the exercise. This moment can be developed also through artistic creations (like drawing) where participants can represent the different perception of spaces they experienced.



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3. IN NATURE: FROM PRESENCE TO DUAL AWARENESS

Meaning & Essence of Presence, Attunement and Dual Awareness

Practicing **mindfulness exercises** that encompass various grounding techniques, present moment awareness, deeper listening skills, and dual awareness can have profound effects on one's overall well-being and interpersonal interactions.

Dual awareness, or the **ability to simultaneously attend to both inner experiences and external stimuli**, is cultivated through mindfulness practices that explore the interplay between sensations, emotions, and thoughts.

This activity entails the **observation of the internal and external environments**: by observing and acknowledging internal experiences while remaining aware of the external environment, individuals develop a greater capacity for self-awareness, emotional resilience, and adaptive coping strategies. This heightened awareness also enables individuals to discern the instant impact of communication in relationships.

The activity involves introspection and reflection and develops through observation of the inner and outside world, stimulating creativity and sense of awareness.



Key Objectives of Dual Awareness exercises



- **Improved Self-Awareness:** By observing internal experiences (thoughts, emotions, sensations) without judgment, individuals develop a deeper understanding of themselves.
- **Strengthened Emotional Resilience:** Practicing dual awareness—simultaneously attending to internal experiences and external stimuli—helps individuals manage emotions effectively and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Fosters a Sense of Connection:** Shared experiences and reflections within the group foster a sense of community and belonging, enhancing overall well-being.
- **Facilitates Personal Growth:** Reflection and introspection during and after the exercises encourage personal growth and self-development.



- **Supports Adaptive Coping Strategies:** Learning to maintain dual awareness allows for adaptive responses to challenges, improving problem-solving abilities and resilience.
- **Heightened Sensory Awareness:** Participants develop sensitivity to sensory input from both their bodies and the surrounding environment, fostering a richer perception of their surroundings.

How to set up and implement?



Location: Outdoors / In nature Environment



Materials:

- A Timer
- sound signal
- Drawing materials



Duration: 45 Minutes and above

Presence & Dual Awareness exercise step by step

The group is instructed together, and each member then finds their most favorable place in the space, either standing or sitting.

There will be three rounds with different tasks, each lasting about 5-10 minutes in complete silence. After each round, the facilitator calls the group together for a brief debriefing, preferably using a mild sound instrument to signal the end of the round.



STEP 1: Presence

Sit or stand and focus on all sensory awareness without any attachment, desire, or intention to change anything about the experience.

STEP 2: Attunement

Sit or stand and focus on scanning the internal landscape of the body, including all sensations, feelings, and emotions, without any attachment, desire, or intention to change that experience.

STEP 3: Dual Awareness

Sit or stand and focus on sensory awareness outside of the body and in the environment (step 1), then on the internal landscape (as in Round 2). Begin deep breathing softly and be aware of both inner and outer awareness while observing how they influence each other. Optionally, perform this exercise while moving slowly around.

4. BUILDING TRUST AND LEADERSHIP THROUGH HORSE THERAPY EXERCISES

Meaning & Essence of Horse Therapy exercises

Young people at risk face many challenges in their personal and professional developments often associated with lack of focus, confidence and difficulties in building relationships with others. The activity aims to help them **build up that confidence** in themselves and can serve as a useful tool in the learning process of **establishing a healthy relationship with others**. It is a great practice for **staying focused** in the present moment and be aware of yourself, the others, and the environment rather than thinking about issues that are not relevant.



The main purpose of this activity is to highlight the importance of focus and inner strength when assuming a leader position and the ability to trust with “closed eyes” others when following them.


Key Objectives of Horse Therapy exercises



- **Building Confidence:** Participants gain confidence in their abilities as they navigate obstacles with closed eyes, relying on their leader's guidance and their own instincts.
- **Promoting Trust and Dependability:** Participants experience both trusting others (as the person being led) and being trusted (as the leader), reinforcing the importance of trust in relationships.
- **Improving Focus and Attention:** By staying present in the moment and focusing on the task at hand, participants develop mindfulness and awareness of themselves, others, and their environment.

- **Developing Leadership Skills:** Leaders learn to make decisions, take responsibility, and guide others effectively through challenges, which are essential leadership qualities.
- **Team Building:** Working in pairs encourages cooperation, teamwork, and mutual support, reinforcing the importance of collaboration in achieving common goals.
- **Physical Coordination:** Handling ropes and navigating obstacles challenges participants' physical coordination and motor skills, contributing to overall physical development.

How to set up and implement?

 **Location:** Small and big outdoor spaces. Ideal environment is an equine center surrounded by horses, in order to eventually include them in the exercise.

Materials:



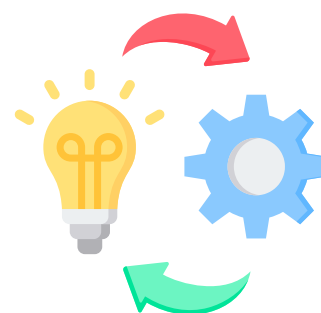
- a Halter (alternatively a smaller rope can be used),
- Lead rope,
- Materials for obstacles (poles, ones, ropes, etc.) In the outdoors the surroundings such as trees, branches, etc. can be used as obstacles, so no additional materials will be necessary then.



Duration: 1 or 2 hours

Building Trust with horse therapy exercises step by step

The exercise consists of pairing 2 people - one leading and the other being led with closed eyes. The person being led holds a horse halter acting as a horse would and closes his/her eyes. The leader brings the person through obstacles using a lead rope.



STEP 1 : Preparation of the participants

The participants are paired, preferably not knowing each other. If they know each other the facilitator should take into consideration their personal relations and profiles. The participants are introduced to the rules of the activity:

Each pair has 2 roles – leader and “horse” that is being led. The leader holds a lead rope attached to a horse halter. The person playing the horse puts his/her hands straight in front of the body and crosses their fingers forming the horse’s nose. The horse halter is put on the shoulders and hands of the “horse” person. The leader takes the “horse” through a series of obstacles in a way they want using the lead rope.

The leader cannot talk to the “horse” and can only touch the nose of the “horse”. The person playing the horse closes his/her eyes at the beginning of the exercise. The facilitator turns each pair in circle before the leading begins. After going through all obstacles the roles are reversed.

STEP 2: Leading and being led

The leader should take the other person through a series of obstacles. Usually they look easy to overcome but having to lead someone with closed eyes through them often turns out more difficult. The leaders become cautious of the others and how they direct them. They remain focused on the other person as they are solely responsible in the situation.

On the other hand, the person being led needs to resist the temptation of opening their eyes whenever it is not clear what to do next or have any doubt in the leader. It gives an opportunity to be in a dependent situation and feel all emotions without fear of the outcome. That person also practices being focused on the present situation as they follow their leader.

STEP 3: Reflection and self evaluation

The reflection after the activity is one of its important aspects. Depending on the participants the facilitator can have them share their experiences or ask a number of questions and leave time and space to the participants to reflect on the activity by themselves. The evaluation both from each participant in their roles as leaders and “horses” and the facilitator as observer are key to allow for building up on the strengths and weaknesses of the participants.



Advancing the exercise by including horses

Whenever possible it is recommended to advance the exercise with the same participants including horses. If such opportunity is available, the participants should be prepared with the respective safety rules of being around horses and the facilities. The facilitators should be either equine professionals or work with one to ensure the activity is safe and meets its objectives.

The activity in that advanced stage requires each participant to actually lead a horse through obstacles using only a halter and a lead rope to connect with the horse. In that advanced stage the participants become aware of the importance of being focused on what they want to achieve – for example having the horse jump over a piece of wood. The horse acts best if the leader is confident and focused, easily alarming the participants what they need to work on.

More Resources Online



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5. BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE THROUGH CLIMBING OUTDOORS

Meaning & Essence Climbing Outdoors exercises

Outdoors climbing can be a powerful experience for young people and an interesting opportunity to know the rocks and mountain environment surrounding. This challenging sport can offer numerous benefits, in particular for youth at risk it provides not only an opportunity to practice physical activities but also to improve resilience and foster connections with nature.



Climbing is an activity where communication is very important, the challenge of climbing a mountain can trigger different emotional and physical reactions, therefore focusing on the creation of a trustful relationship among the participants can boost their self-esteem and confidence.


Key Objectives of the Climbing exercises





- **Improves physical fitness:** climbing promotes strength, flexibility, and coordination, providing a full-body workout.
- **Builds confidence:** Conquering climbing routes fosters a sense of achievement and boosts self-esteem. For young people at risk who may struggle with self-confidence or have faced setbacks in other areas of their lives, successfully completing a climb, also with the help of an instructor, can be a powerful confidence-building experience.
- **Problem-solving skills:** from analyzing routes to finding the best hand and foot placements, climbers must use critical thinking and problem-solving skills to navigate the wall. For young people at risk, this can be translated in improving problem-solving skills in other aspects of their lives, such as academics or personal relationships.

- **Enhances teamwork:** climbing often requires support from others, encouraging teamwork and communication skills.
- **Helps overcoming fears:** Facing challenges and heights in a controlled environment can help participants overcome fears and develop resilience. In this regard, see the last section (Important to consider!)

How to set up and implement?

 **Location:** Outdoor climbing area with routes suitable for beginners.

-  **Materials:**
- Climbing gear: Harnesses, helmets, climbing shoes, and ropes. Please remember to inquire about the shoe size of each participant ahead of time.
 - Safety equipment: Crash pads, belay devices, and carabiners.

 **Duration:** Half-day or full-day

Climbing Outdoors exercise step by step

STEP 1: Choose a location:

- Select a climbing area that is safe and accessible for the participants.



STEP 2: Plan logistics

- Determine the date, time, and duration of the climbing activity
- Contact an expert climbing instructor (or more than one, depending on the number of participants) to ensure the safety and proper supervision of participants during the activity. The instructors will provide valuable expertise in setting up climbing routes, conducting safety briefings, and offering guidance on climbing techniques. Their presence adds an extra layer of assurance, allowing participants to engage in the climbing experience with confidence.

STEP 3: Conduct safety briefing:

- Start with a safety briefing covering climbing basic techniques, equipment usage, and rules.

STEP 4: Enjoy climbing

- Instruction: provide basic climbing instruction, including how, to communicate with the instructors
- Practice session: allow participants to practice climbing on easy routes while supervised by instructors.
- Cool-down: end the activity with a cool-down period and stretching exercises.

Important to consider: It's essential to consider the individual needs and comfort levels of all participants, including those who may experience height-related challenges such as vertigo or fear of heights. For these participants, it's crucial not to force them into climbing activities that may cause discomfort or anxiety. Instead, provide alternative activities that still offer engagement and a sense of inclusion while the rest of the group is climbing. Before the climbing activity begins, discreetly inquire if any participants have a height-related break or suffer from vertigo. This allows you to be proactive in accommodating their needs.



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6. UNDERSTANDING ACCESS TO GREEN AREAS WITH RACE GAME

Meaning & Essence of a Race Game exercise

Exploring the surrounding environment can be also an engaging opportunity to understand urban planning and reflect on the distribution of green areas. Creating playful opportunities that combine physical activity, teamwork and problem-solving benefits the overall wellbeing of the participants and fosters deeper connections.



This exercise is Race Game that can be easily recreated and adapted according to the needs and purposes of the group. The youth community can be consulted and cooperate in the preparation phases of the game, contributing with their experiences and perspectives on the challenges they know. This game can engage young people from different backgrounds and can be a way to promote empathy and promote inclusion.

Key Objectives of the Race game exercises



- **Awareness of Disparities:** understand and reflect on real-life obstacles that youth face in accessing green spaces, rising awareness on social inequalities and environmental justice.
- **Empathy Building:** by experiencing simulated challenges empathy can be developed towards those that face these barriers, fostering deeper understanding and care.
- **Problem Solving-Skills:** navigating through the obstacles requires for finding solutions to challenges that enhance participants creativity and hand-on problem solving competences.
- **Teamwork & Solidarity:** some challenges require participants to work together, promoting solidarity and collaboration and enhancing communication, providing an opportunity for cooperation among participants.

How to set up and implement?



Location: Any outdoors Environment.



Materials:

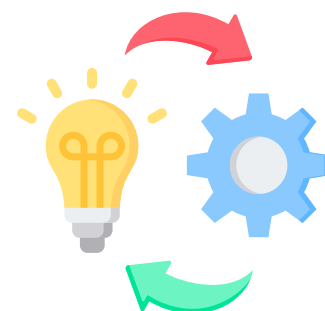
- A map where the path is drawn
- A deck of cards containing the penalties/obstacles/challenges to overcome
- Ribbons/Recycled materials to signal penalty points in the path.



Duration : 1 Hour and above

The Race Game exercise step by step

The exercise consists in a race with obstacles, where participants will be given a map and invited to reach a final destination following a path. However, in order to reach the final destination, participants need to overcome a series of challenges.



The challenges, which will be drawn from a deck of cards, represent real obstacles to access nature and green areas experienced by young people on the territory, and will be corresponding to penalties that slow down the race. Some of the obstacles will require the help of other participants, while others will simply delay the race.

STEP 1: Game Preparation

- **Identify a list of challenges and obstacles:**

For each challenge, find a penalty that the participants need to experience and overcome.

The penalties can consist in physical and mental challenges, time and resource constraints, and actions that require support and help from others.

Transform the challenges and penalties into a deck of cards, you can create and personalize the cards by printing them out on paper and reuse them!

Examples of Challenges and Penalties that could be used:

Challenge	Penalty
You don't have the right clothing for a full day in nature!	Take off your shoes, put your socks inside out and put back your shoes.
None of your friends don't want to come for an adventure in nature.	Find someone in the game with the same card!
You don't speak and understand the local language!	Decipher: 14. 15. 23 25. 15. 21 3. 1. 14 7. 15
You don't have money for the bus, you need to walk!	You need to wait for someone from another group to high-five you in order to start walking again!
Fear of harassment or discrimination: you don't like how people treat you in a public green area!	Cross this area on your tip toes!
You need to take 4 public transport lines to get to the forest!	Do 5 push-ups.
Inadequate lighting and safety measures in parks, especially after sunset!	Jump to the next point on one foot!

- **Identify a path on your territory**

Begin with a starting point (possibly in a non-green area) and a final destination (in a green area).

Identify Stop-points on the path, mark them with a sign visible to the participants.

STEP 2: The race

Divide participants in pairs or small groups. Provide them with the path map and the deck of cards with the challenges & penalties.

Explain to the participants that they need to reach the final destination, however, for each STOP POINT they see on the path they need to draw a penalty from the deck they are provided. Each card corresponds to a challenge that needs to be solved or an obstacle that needs to be overcome in order to pass to the next point and reach the final destination.

STEP 3: Feedback

Ask the participants how they felt in experiencing the challenges and obstacles, if they were aware and knew the existence of these barriers, and what actions they have taken to overcome them.



7. TREASURE HUNT TO DISCOVER NATURE

Meaning & Essence of the Treasure Hunt to Discover Nature

Participating in a treasure hunt to explore the local outdoor area can be an activity that can offer **numerous benefits** for young people at risk. It provides engaging and exciting activities that promote physical activity, problem-solving skills, and social interaction. By navigating through their surroundings and working together as a team to solve clues and complete challenges, participants develop a **deeper connection to their community and build trust and relationships with their peers.**



The sense of accomplishment and empowerment gained from successfully completing the treasure hunt boosts participants' self-esteem and confidence, while also fostering a sense of curiosity and appreciation for their environment. Treasure hunts serve as a fun and impactful way for young people at risk to **discover, learn, and grow within their local area.**

Key Objectives of Treasure Hunt exercises





- **Promotes Physical Activity:** the game encourages movement and exercise in a fun, engaging way, enhancing overall health, improving fitness and boosting energy levels.
- **Enhances Problem-Solving Skills:** participants can develop critical thinking and cognitive abilities through clue-solving and navigation through the map clues.
- **Fosters Social Interaction:** the game promotes teamwork and cooperation among participants, providing opportunities to build peer relations and collaboration.
- **Builds Community Connection:** strengthens connections with local area through exploration and interaction within it, building a sense of belonging and ownership of the territory.

- **Boosts Self-Esteem and Confidence:** Increases feelings of accomplishment and empowerment through successful task completion and participation in the race.
- **Stimulates Curiosity and Environmental Appreciation:** Encourages exploration and appreciation of nature and local environment, increasing appreciation of surrounding and promoting environmental awareness.

How to set up and implement?

 **Location:** An outdoor Area

-  **Materials:**
- Clue cards or sheets to guide participants from one location to another.
 - Containers for clues such as small boxes, envelopes, or jars.
 - Pens or pencils for participants to write down answers or solve questions
 - Maps of the treasure hunt area, if needed, to help participants navigate.
 - The treasure or reward that participants will receive upon completing the treasure hunt (a prize, certificates, etc)
 - Safety equipment such as first aid kits, flashlights, or whistles may be necessary.
 - Markers or signs to indicate the start and end points of the treasure hunt, as well as each location along the way.

 **Duration:** 1 hour and above

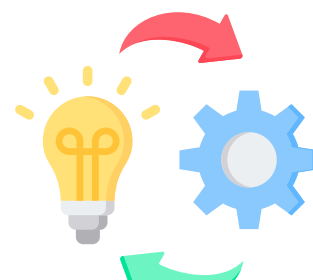
Treasure Hunt exercise step by step

STEP 1: Choose a location

- Select an area that is safe and accessible for the participants. Consider the size of the area based on the length of the treasure hunt and the mobility of the participants.

STEP 2: Design the treasure hunt

- Create a storyline or theme for the treasure hunt that will capture the participants' interest.
- Develop clues or riddles that lead participants from one location to another
- Determine the final treasure or reward that participants will receive upon completing the treasure hunt.





STEP 3: Plan logistics

- Determine the date, time, and duration of the treasure hunt.
- Obtain any necessary permissions or permits for using the chosen locations.
- Choose an area where participants don't need to use transportation.

STEP 4: Roles

- Enlist volunteers to help with organizing and facilitating the treasure hunt
- Select a facilitator for each group to ensure smooth operation.

STEP 5: Prepare materials

- Create clue cards or sheets with instructions for each location.
- Gather any props or materials needed for the challenges or tasks.
- Prepare the final treasure or reward.

STEP 7: Start the Treasure Hunt

- Group the participants into teams
- Begin the treasure hunt by providing participants with the first clue or riddle.
- Encourage teamwork and collaboration as participants work together to solve clues and complete challenges.
- Offer guidance and support to participants as needed, especially if they encounter difficulties, with a facilitator assigned to each group to help throughout the treasure hunt.

STEP 8: Award the treasure

Once all clues have been solved and challenges completed, gather participants at the final location. Present the final treasure or reward to the participants as a token of their accomplishment.

STEP 9: Feedback and reflection

- After the treasure hunt, facilitate a feedback session to reflect on the experience.
- Encourage participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the treasure hunt, including what they enjoyed and what they learned.

8. BREATHING EXERCISES IN NATURE

Meaning & Essence of Breathing in Nature

Breathing exercises are valuable for managing stress, improving relaxation, and enhancing overall well-being. **For young people at risk this can be incredibly beneficial for their overall well-being.**

Breathing exercises regularly can have profound effects on your physical and mental health. They offer valuable tools for managing stress, improving relaxation, and enhancing overall well-being. Experiment with each technique to find the ones that resonate most with you, and incorporate them into your daily routine for maximum benefit.

The following 5 breathing exercises can be easily employed in natural and outdoors environments according to the needs and goals of the group.



Key Objectives of Breathing in Nature exercises



- **Promotes and Facilitate Relaxation:** Mimics natural rhythms, can help youth stabilize breathing patterns, reducing respiratory distress and overall aiding stress reduction and anxiety by calming the nervous system. Fresh air and natural surroundings boost physical well-being.
- **Improves Respiratory Function:** Strengthens respiratory control and efficiency. Activates the Diaphragm and efficient breathing and oxygen exchange.
- **Enhances Mindfulness:** Encourages present-moment awareness and reduces rumination.
- **Deepens Connection to Nature:** Enhances sensory engagement with the environment, fostering a sense of peace.
- **Enhances Body Awareness:** Encourages mindful body connection, aiding emotional regulation.

How to set up and implement?



Where: Natural/ Outdoors Environment



Materials:

- A Timer
- A Sound signal



Duration: 15-35 min

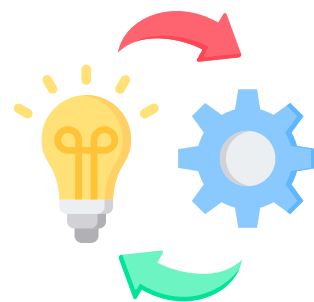


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5 Breathing in Nature exercises step by step

• SQUARE BREATHING

Instruct participants to imagine tracing a square with their breath. Have them inhale deeply for a count of four as they trace the first side of the square. Then, hold their breath for a count of four as they trace the second side, exhale for a count of four as they trace the third side, and finally, hold their breath again for a count of four as they trace the fourth side. Repeat this pattern several times.



Benefits: Square breathing promotes relaxation and mindfulness.

STEPS:

1. **Find a Comfortable Position:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, with your spine straight but relaxed. You can place your hands on your lap or by your sides.
2. **Begin by Inhaling:** Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose, counting to four as you do so. Visualize tracing the first side of a square with your breath.
3. **Hold Your Breath:** Once you've completed the inhale, hold your breath for a count of four. Imagine tracing the second side of the square as you hold your breath.
4. **Exhale Slowly:** Now, exhale slowly and completely through your mouth, counting to four as you do so. Visualize tracing the third side of the square with your breath.
5. **Hold Your Breath Again:** After exhaling, hold your breath for another count of four. This completes the square as you trace the fourth side with your breath.
6. **Repeat:** Continue this pattern of inhaling, holding, exhaling, and holding for several rounds. Focus on maintaining a slow, steady rhythm and deepening your relaxation with each breath cycle.

- **OCEAN BREATHING:**

Guide participants to imagine the ebb and flow of ocean waves with their breath. Have them inhale deeply through their nose, imagining the incoming tide filling their lungs with air. Then, exhale slowly and completely through their mouth, visualizing the waves receding back into the ocean. Encourage them to focus on the sound and sensation of their breath, mimicking the gentle rhythm of ocean waves.

Benefits: Ocean breathing encourages rhythmic breathing and relaxation.

STEPS:

1. **Find a Comfortable Position:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, ensuring that your spine is straight but relaxed. You can close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so.
2. **Begin by Inhaling:** Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose, imagining the breath as the incoming tide of the ocean. Feel your lungs filling with air as you take in the breath. Try to make your inhale last for a count of four or five, whatever feels comfortable for you.
3. **Exhale Slowly:** After completing your inhale, exhale slowly and completely through your mouth. Visualize the breath as the ocean waves receding back into the sea. Allow your exhale to be long and gentle, releasing any tension or stress with each breath out. Again, aim for a count of four or five for your exhale.
4. **Focus on the Rhythm:** As you continue to breathe in this manner, focus on the rhythm of your breath. Imagine the steady ebb and flow of the ocean waves, matching your inhales and exhales to this natural rhythm. Allow your breath to become smooth and effortless, like the movement of the waves.
5. **Repeat:** Continue ocean breathing for several minutes, allowing yourself to become fully immersed in the calming sensation. If your mind wanders, gently guide your focus back to the rhythm of your breath and the imagery of the ocean.

- **BELLY BREATHING:**

Instruct participants to place one hand on their chest and the other hand on their abdomen. Encourage them to take slow, deep breaths, focusing on filling their abdomen with air rather than their chest. As they inhale, have them feel their abdomen rise, and as they exhale, feel it fall. Encourage them to continue this belly breathing pattern for several breaths, allowing each breath to become deeper and more relaxed.

Benefits: Belly breathing activates the diaphragm and promotes deep relaxation.





STEPS:

- 1. Find a Comfortable Position:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. You can place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest if it helps you to feel the movement of your breath.
- 2. Relax Your Body:** Take a moment to relax your body and release any tension you may be holding. Let your shoulders drop away from your ears and allow your muscles to soften.
- 3. Inhale Deeply:** Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, allowing your abdomen to expand like a balloon. Feel your diaphragm moving downward as your lungs fill with air. As you inhale, try to keep the hand on your chest as still as possible, focusing the movement on the hand on your abdomen.
- 4. Exhale Completely:** After taking a full breath in, exhale slowly and completely through your mouth. Feel your abdomen gently contract as you exhale, expelling all the air from your lungs. Again, try to keep the hand on your chest still while focusing on the movement of the hand on your abdomen.
- 5. Continue the Pattern:** Continue to breathe in this manner, focusing on the deep, rhythmic movement of your abdomen with each breath. Inhale deeply, allowing your belly to rise, and exhale fully, allowing it to fall. Try to make each inhale and exhale last for a count of four or five, whatever feels comfortable for you.

Practice Regularly: Practice belly breathing for several minutes each day, gradually increasing the duration as you become more comfortable with the technique. You can incorporate belly breathing into your daily routine, such as before bedtime or when you wake up in the morning, to help promote relaxation and reduce stress.

- **ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING:**

Have participants sit comfortably with their spine straight. Instruct them to use their thumb and ring finger to alternate closing their nostrils as they breathe. Start by closing the right nostril with the right thumb and inhaling deeply through the left nostril. Then, close the left nostril with the ring finger and exhale completely through the right nostril. Continue this pattern, alternating nostrils with each breath.

Benefits: Alternate nostril breathing, or Nadi Shodhana, is a calming breathing technique that balances the flow of energy in the body. Here's how to practice alternate nostril breathing without visualization: Alternate nostril breathing balances energy and promotes relaxation.

STEPS:

1. **Find a Comfortable Position:** Sit comfortably in a chair or cross-legged on the floor, with your spine tall and shoulders relaxed. You can rest your left hand on your left knee with your palm facing up, or in Chin Mudra by touching your thumb to your index finger, and your right hand by your nose.
2. **Prepare Your Hand Position:** Use your right hand to manipulate your nostrils. Place your right thumb on your right nostril and your right ring finger or pinky finger on your left nostril.
3. **Close Your Right Nostril:** Begin by gently closing your right nostril with your right thumb, blocking off the airflow.
4. **Inhale through Your Left Nostril:** With your right nostril closed, inhale slowly and deeply through your left nostril. Focus on the sensation of the breath as it enters your body.
5. **Switch Sides:** After you've completed your inhale, release your right nostril and gently close your left nostril with your right ring finger or pinky finger.
6. **Exhale through Your Right Nostril:** With your left nostril closed, exhale slowly and completely through your right nostril. Focus on the sensation of the breath leaving your body.
7. **Inhale through Your Right Nostril:** Keeping your left nostril closed, inhale slowly and deeply through your right nostril.
8. **Switch Sides Again:** After completing your inhale, release your left nostril and gently close your right nostril with your right thumb.
9. **Exhale through Your Left Nostril:** With your right nostril closed, exhale slowly and completely through your left nostril.
10. **Repeat the Cycle:** Continue alternating between inhaling through one nostril and exhaling through the other nostril. Each time you complete a full cycle (inhaling and exhaling through both nostrils), consider it one round. Aim to complete five to ten rounds, or whatever feels comfortable for you.

5. THE 4-7-8 BREATHING (modified):

Guide participants to inhale deeply through their nose for a count of four. Then, instead of holding their breath for a count of seven, have them simply exhale slowly and completely through their mouth for a count of eight. Encourage them to focus on the extended exhale, allowing tension to release with each breath out. Repeat this cycle several times.



Benefits: 4-7-8 breathing induces relaxation and reduces stress.

Modified 4-7-8 breathing is a relaxation technique that focuses on extending the exhale to induce calmness and reduce stress. Here's how to practice it:

STEPS:

- 1. Find a Comfortable Position:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, with your spine straight but relaxed. You can place your hands on your lap or by your sides.
- 2. Relax Your Body:** Take a moment to relax your body and release any tension you may be holding. Allow your shoulders to drop away from your ears and soften your facial muscles.
- 3. Begin by Exhaling:** Start by exhaling completely through your mouth, making a gentle whooshing sound as you do so. Empty your lungs as much as possible.
- 4. Inhale Quietly:** After exhaling fully, close your mouth and inhale quietly and gently through your nose for a count of four. Focus on filling your lungs with air, allowing your abdomen to expand as you breathe in.
- 5. Hold Your Breath:** Once you've completed the inhale, hold your breath for a count of seven. Keep your breath comfortably held, without straining or tensing your body.
- 6. Exhale Slowly:** After holding your breath, exhale slowly and completely through your mouth for a count of eight. Make a gentle whooshing sound as you release the air from your lungs.
- 7. Repeat the Cycle:** After completing the exhale, immediately begin the next cycle by inhaling quietly through your nose for a count of four. Continue the pattern of inhaling for four counts, holding for seven counts, and exhaling for eight counts. Aim to complete four full cycles of breath.
- 8. Maintain a Rhythm:** As you practice modified 4-7-8 breathing, try to maintain a smooth and steady rhythm. Focus on the sensation of your breath as you inhale, hold, and exhale, allowing yourself to become fully present in the moment.

Practice Regularly: Practice modified 4-7-8 breathing regularly, especially during times of stress or anxiety. It can be a helpful tool for promoting relaxation, reducing tension, and calming the mind.



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9. TREE THERAPY

Meaning & Essence of Tree Therapy & Eco Therapy

In the rapidly advancing world of the 21st century, where digital connection often replaces physical interaction, the mental health of individuals worldwide has increasingly become a cause for concern. Stress, anxiety, depression, and a myriad of other psychological disorders have surged in prevalence, prompting health professionals and researchers to look beyond traditional, medicine-oriented interventions.



Ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, is a broad term that encompasses a range of treatment strategies involving activities conducted in a natural environment. It also involves experiences such as guided immersion in a forest environment, focusing on mindfulness and sensory engagement. It's not about exercise or specific activities but **presence, immersion, and connection with the natural world**. Getting started with forest therapy does not require formal training or specialized equipment. Even incorporating small moments of nature interaction into daily life can be beneficial. This could be as simple as taking a walk in a local park, planting a home garden, or even just spending a few moments each day observing the natural world from your window.

This exercise focuses on one specific aspect of ecotherapy: the therapeutic power of trees. The facilitator invites the participants to explore the forest and their natural surroundings focusing on slowing down and immersing their senses in the experiences.

Key Objectives of the Tree therapy exercises



- **Stress Reduction:** Spending time among trees has been shown to lower cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress. This reduction in stress hormones contributes to a sense of calm and relaxation.
- **Mindful Awareness:** Engaging with trees encourages mindfulness, allowing individuals to disconnect from digital distractions and cultivate awareness of their immediate surroundings. This practice promotes mental clarity and reduces the mental chatter associated with daily stressors.

- **Non-verbal Communication:** Engaging with trees fosters non-verbal communication skills, allowing participants to intuitively connect with another living entity. This experience promotes empathy and sensitivity to natural rhythms.
- **Holistic Healing:** By addressing mental, emotional, and physical dimensions simultaneously, Tree Therapy supports holistic healing. It provides a comprehensive approach to well-being that integrates nature's therapeutic benefits.
- **Biophilic Connection:** The exercise nurtures a deep connection with nature, aligning with the biophilia hypothesis that humans have an innate affinity for natural environments. This connection enhances emotional resilience and provides a sense of belonging.

How to set up and implement?



Location: A place in the forest with trees. A quiet place with natural sounds is recommended, possibly away from urban sounds.



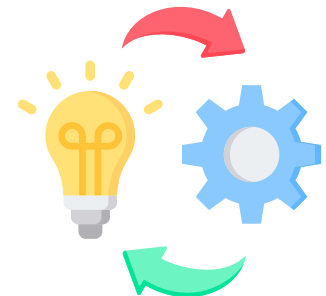
Material: No material is needed except trees.



Duration: 1 Hour or longer

Tree therapy exercise step by step

STEP 1: Preparation



- Sit or lie on the ground and do 5 minutes of breathing exercises. Take three deep breaths and after the third exhalation, begin to exhale normally.
- With every inhalation we feel our body being filled with pure energy. With every exhalation, we expel all the negative stress tension in the muscles, bones, and joints from the body. If you are lying down, be careful not to fall asleep.
- After that, stretch slightly, become aware of your surroundings, and stay in peace in your body.

STEP 2: Choose your Tree

- Observe the space around you and choose the trees that attract you. In the beginning, it is sometimes challenging to approve the tree; however, with practice and experience, the process will become easier and more accessible.
- Approach the tree you have chosen at a distance of about 40 cm. Stand still before the tree, open your shoulders, stretch your arms, and relax. The goal of this step is for the guests to feel the tree's energy and establish communication with them. The feeling of connection with the tree depends on the state of mind, body and soul as well as the experience. If necessary, close your eyes. This step takes from 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the person and the tree.

STEP 3: Connecting with the Tree

- When you feel connected with the tree, slowly place your palms on the bark and feel that the tree is a living being. In this step, you can also use your hearing to hear the tree or the sounds around it.
- Stay in the relationship with the tree as long as you are comfortable. With practice, the period can be several hours. In this step, you can lean most of your body against the tree hug it. It is essential to follow your inner voice, which would be the most favorable thing to do.
- When you feel the need to become aware of your surroundings slowly. Thank your tree for the trust and love it has given you.



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Some considerations to keep in mind!

To effectively leverage the benefits of outdoor activities for youth at risk. Specialists need to be aware and prepared on the individual and collective needs of the participants, the risks and safety plans in place and on their role as facilitators. Following a list of considerations we think is important to keep in mind!



- **Safety and Preparedness**

Risk Assessment: Conduct a risk assessment of the activity and the location. Identify potential hazards (uneven terrain, water bodies, wildlife). Develop a risk management plan that includes emergency procedures.

First Aid and Emergency Plans: Ensure that at least one facilitator is trained in first aid and CPR. Have a well-stocked first-aid kit and know the nearest medical facilities. Inform the participants on the emergency contact numbers available on the territory.

Weather: monitor the weather forecast, prepare for sudden changes but bringing appropriate clothing and gears.

- **Inclusive and Engaging e Activities**

Consider different range of needs: Activities should be designed to be inclusive and adaptable to the diverse needs of youth at risk. This includes considering physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities and providing accommodations and providing materials as necessary. Activities should be varied and flexible, allowing for individual choice and progression at different paces.

Cultural sensitivity: is crucial when working with diverse groups of youth. Be aware of and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of the participants, respecting cultural practices and traditions. Include activities and materials that reflect the diverse backgrounds of the youth, promoting inclusivity and cultural pride.



- **Building Relationships**

Establish Boundaries and Expectations: Clearly communicate and invite youth to express their expectations and know others. This helps to create a structured and safe environment.

As Facilitators: Trust, respect, and consistent support are key elements that can help. It is important to consider emotional and psychological needs of the youth, using a trauma-informed approach and focusing on the creation of safe and supportive environments.

Collaborative Approach: involving multiple stakeholders, including educators, youth workers, community organizations, environmental and youth organizations, can be fruitful in designing accessible activities and promoting understanding and empathy. Involving the community can also allow access to more resources and provide additional support to youth in need, enacting true solidarity chains.

- **Environmental Stewardship**

Leave no Trace: emphasize the importance of respecting nature and minimizing the environmental impact of the activities. Foster reflections among the participants and adopt sustainable practices (reusing materials, minimizing waste, respect wildlife). Provide tools and material in order to ensure that no waste from the activity is left behind, and encourage youth to reflect on environmental pollution.

- **Reflection and Feedback**

Communication pre-activity: Clearly communicate the plan, expectations, and rules before the activity begins. Make sure all participants understand and agree to them.

Debriefing Sessions: Hold debriefing sessions after activities to reflect on experiences, discuss what was learned, and provide feedback. This helps reinforce learning and personal growth.

Feedback from Participants: Encourage participants to provide their own feedback and reflections on the activities.



Conclusion

The toolkit **“Youth at Risk Going Back to Nature”** is designed to provide a thoughtful and impactful approach to engaging youth at risk with nature and outdoor activities. This toolkit offers a varied set of activities that can be easily replicated in outdoors environments and adapted to the needs of the participants group. It is a part of a broader set of practical materials developed within the “Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower” (YGBN) project, all available for free on the portal www.outdoorportal.eu.



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