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YOUTH GOING
BACK TO NATURE

YOUNG WOMEN 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 project aims to promote and inspire reaching the EU Youth Goals set by the young people of Europe.

Concrete actions will be taken and project results will be created to Engage, Connect, and Empower the youth community to reach that goal and go back to nature. The partners in the YGBN project developed environmentally sustainable outdoor activities during a Learning Exchange Event organized in September 2023. Professionals from the six partnering organizations – Equilibre /Estonia/, the Lithuanian Sea Museum /Lithuania/, Trekkify /Italy/, OAZA /Croatia/, QUEST /Belgium/ and Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation /Bulgaria/ generated innovative approaches to facilitate nature-based activities for young women. The results of the event are gathered in the present toolkit.



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All activities developed during the Learning Exchange Event can be seen in the YGBN documentary 'Young Women Going Back to Nature' available at [here](#) .



**“YOUNG WOMEN GOING
BACK TO NATURE”
DOCUMENTARY**



More tools, resources, and information can be found on the portal www.outdoorportal.eu developed during the project “Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower”.

WWW.OUTDOORPORTAL.EU



INTRODUCTION

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is specially designed for specialists who work with the young women at risk. Young women in our society may grapple with a range of complex issues, including mental health challenges, peer pressure, body image, and self-esteem concerns, academic stress, relationship challenges, family dynamics, financial insecurity, substance abuse, gender inequality, experiences of violence and abuse, trauma, social exclusion, and more. Addressing these multifaceted challenges through support, education, and accessible mental health resources is vital in promoting the well-being and empowerment of young women in our society, enabling them to navigate life's complexities and realize their full potential.

The immersive power of nature and outdoor experiences

Engaging young women in outdoor activities offers profound advantages that are truly transformative. Through the immersive power of nature and outdoor experiences, we have a rare opportunity to not only connect with these individuals but also to empower them, leaving a strong positive impact on their lives. Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress, lower cortisol levels, and offer a calming and rejuvenating environment for those facing life's stressors. The serenity of natural settings provides an ideal backdrop for emotional healing and recovery, granting individuals a space to process their emotions



and find solace. Engaging in outdoor activities and embracing nature's beauty can elevate mood and alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Accomplishing outdoor goals, such as conquering a challenging hike, has the power to boost self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Physical fitness, promoted through outdoor pursuits like hiking and sports, becomes a cornerstone of overall well-being. Nature encourages mindfulness and being fully present in the moment, which can be profoundly therapeutic, particularly for those battling anxiety or rumination. Confronting the rigors of outdoor activities can fortify the resilience of young women, imparting invaluable coping skills that can be applied to life's challenges. Participating in outdoor group activities fosters social interaction and the formation of supportive relationships, which are often lifelines for individuals at risk. Nature serves as a haven for individuals healing from trauma, offering a sense of safety and empowerment on their journey to recovery.

Time spent in nature is linked to enhanced focus and cognitive function, a boon for academic or career pursuits. Nature provides respite from the isolation some young women at risk may feel, effectively combating loneliness. Overcoming outdoor challenges bestows a sense of accomplishment and empowerment, translating into heightened self-confidence and self-belief. Outdoor activities necessitate problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability, equipping young women with vital life skills. Fostering a connection to nature instills stewardship and environmental awareness, imparting a sense of responsibility toward our natural environment.

It is essential to approach these activities with sensitivity to the unique needs and limitations of young women. Professional guidance, a safe and supportive environment, and meticulous planning are pivotal to maximizing the positive impact of these activities. In this holistic approach, young women are not only engaged within a supportive community but also deeply connected with nature. This powerful connection empowers them to enhance their mental health, self-esteem, social skills, and overall well-being. Nature-based activities offer a distinct and healing environment for nurturing personal growth and resilience, transcending limitations, and lighting the path toward a brighter future.

Focus on environmental sustainability

The toolkit prioritizes environmental sustainability through thoughtful choices in activity recommendations and materials. Emphasizing eco-friendly outdoor activities, the toolkit encourages users to engage with nature responsibly, minimizing their ecological footprint. This includes promoting practices aligned with Leave No Trace principles and selecting sustainable materials if physical components are part of the toolkit. It also aims



at achieving the [Youth Goal #10](#) for sustainable green Europe.

Additionally, the toolkit embraces a digital-first approach to reduce paper usage, offering resources and information in digital formats. By fostering a connection between users and the environment and promoting awareness of environmental issues, the toolkit contributes not only to the well-being of young women but also to the long-term health of the ecosystems they explore. This dual focus on personal development and environmental stewardship ensures that the toolkit aligns with principles of sustainability throughout its design and implementation.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT

Application of the toolkit by therapists, counselors, social workers, and educators

The toolkit with specific exercises aimed at supporting young women, particularly those at risk, is designed for various professionals involved in their well-being. This includes therapists, counselors, social workers, and educators. These professionals can use the toolkit in the following ways:



Therapists can integrate the toolkit exercises into their sessions to complement traditional therapeutic approaches. Outdoor activities can provide a unique and dynamic environment for therapeutic interventions, fostering a deeper connection between the therapist and the young women they are supporting.

Counselors can use the toolkit to design structured programs that align with the specific needs and challenges of young women at risk. These programs can include outdoor activities tailored to address mental

health, self-esteem, and resilience, offering practical and experiential interventions.

Social workers can incorporate the toolkit into their support plans for individuals or groups. Outdoor activities can be utilized as part of holistic interventions, addressing both the social and emotional aspects of the well-being of young women. The toolkit can aid in creating comprehensive support strategies.

Educators working with young women can integrate the toolkit exercises into educational programs. This approach promotes a holistic development that goes beyond traditional academic learning, fostering life skills, teamwork, and personal growth through outdoor activities.



Youth Mentors: Professionals serving as mentors for young women can use the toolkit to design mentoring programs that include outdoor experiences. These activities can strengthen the mentor-mentee relationship, providing opportunities for shared challenges and achievements.

Recreational Therapists: Those specializing in recreational therapy can leverage the toolkit to design therapeutic recreation programs. These programs use outdoor activities as a means of promoting physical, emotional, and social well-being, aligning with the goals of supporting young women at risk.

Community Organizations: Non-profit organizations and community groups can utilize the toolkit to create outreach programs. These programs can engage young women in outdoor activities as a means of building community, fostering a sense of belonging, and providing positive outlets for personal development.

More resources are available:

WWW.OUTDOORPORTAL.EU



The 6 environmentally sustainable outdoor activities

The toolkit encompasses a collection of six carefully curated activities. These activities serve as a progression, crafted to guide participants through a journey, starting with straightforward ice-breaking exercises and progressing toward more intricate tasks to facilitate a profound level of self-discovery and self-awareness among the participants.

The order of these activities is as follows:

- 1. Creating safety and curiosity:** These initial activities of icebreaking exercises serve as a foundation for creating a comfortable and welcoming environment. Icebreakers promote interaction, help participants get to know each other, and establish a sense of safety. This is essential, particularly when working with individuals who may be hesitant or apprehensive.
- 2. Who am I and How do I relate to others?** The Treasure Hunt exercise encourages participants to explore their surroundings, collaborate with others, and solve problems collectively. This interactive activity promotes self-discovery as individuals navigate the treasure hunt, learn about their strengths and preferences, and understand how they fit into a team dynamic. It provides a practical and engaging way to explore personal identities and interpersonal relationships, making it a valuable tool for self-reflection and social skill development.
- 3. Building Trust:** As the group becomes more accustomed to each other and the environment, trust-building exercises should be integrated. Trust is a crucial element in any therapeutic or growth-oriented setting. These activities can help participants trust not only their peers but also themselves and the process.



4. Personal and deeper perspective: Once the group is more at ease, metaphor cards can be introduced. These cards often contain images or symbols that allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings symbolically. This encourages creativity and deeper self-expression, which can be particularly meaningful for young women at risk.



5. Opening up for Self-Awareness: In the context of outdoor activities, sensory integration can involve activities that engage the senses such as touch, sight, and sound. This approach can enhance the participant's connection to the natural environment and promote mindfulness. Sensory experiences can be especially beneficial for those who may have experienced trauma, as it allows them to reconnect with their bodies and surroundings.

6. Meaningful Experiences: The culmination of the process involves designing activities that are both meaningful and relevant to the participants. This could include challenges, team-building exercises, or activities that tie into personal growth goals. These experiences should be purposeful and reflective, providing opportunities for self-discovery and growth. Throughout the journey, participants are likely to have "AHHAs" - moments of clarity, realization, or personal insight. These insights can be facilitated by guided discussions, reflection, and processing of their experiences. These moments are often profound and represent the culmination of the transformative journey.

By following this logical progression, we create a structured and supportive environment that gradually leads young women through a process of self-discovery, personal growth, and empowerment. Each step in the sequence builds upon the previous one, contributing to a holistic and meaningful outdoor experience.



CREATING SAFETY AND CURIOSITY

1. CREATING SAFETY AND CURIOSITY - ICE BREAKING EXERCISES

The meaning and essence of an Ice breaking exercises

Icebreaking exercises are foundational components of group interactions, workshops, and team-building sessions. Their purpose is to set a positive and inclusive tone within a group while preparing participants for more substantial activities. The essence of icebreaking exercises lies in fostering a comfortable and open environment, reducing tension and anxiety, and cultivating interpersonal connections among participants.



At the core of icebreaking exercises is the intention to create a space where participants feel at ease, valued, and heard. They are designed to be inclusive, allowing individuals of diverse backgrounds and personalities to participate comfortably. These exercises can take various forms, from simple introductions where participants share their names and fun facts about themselves to more complex team-building challenges that require collaboration.

Icebreaking exercises serve as the initial step in the group's journey, setting the stage for meaningful interactions and discussions. They are not merely games or activities; they are the first building blocks of a positive and productive group dynamic.

Key Objectives of the Ice-breaking Exercises



Building Rapport: Icebreakers catalyze building rapport among participants. By engaging in these activities, individuals begin to break down social barriers and establish a foundation of trust, which is essential for effective communication and collaboration.

Reducing Anxiety: Many people experience anxiety in new group settings, especially when they are unfamiliar with the other participants. Icebreakers are strategically designed to alleviate this anxiety and make the environment more welcoming.



Promoting Engagement: Participants who feel comfortable with their fellow group members are more likely to actively engage in discussions and activities. Icebreakers create an atmosphere where everyone feels valued and heard.

Enhancing Communication: Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful group interactions. Ice-breaking exercises encourage participants to communicate, listen actively, and establish an atmosphere of open dialogue.

Team Building: In team-oriented settings, icebreakers are instrumental in fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among group members. These activities help individuals recognize their common goals and shared values, which are crucial for effective teamwork.

The purpose and essence of icebreaking exercises revolve around creating an atmosphere of trust, reducing anxiety, promoting engagement, enhancing communication, and fostering teamwork. These exercises set the stage for more meaningful and constructive interactions, making them an indispensable part of various group settings.

How to build up and implement this exercise?

'Two Truths and a Lie' icebreaker activity



Location: Anywhere in nature.



Materials: your mobile phone or laptop.



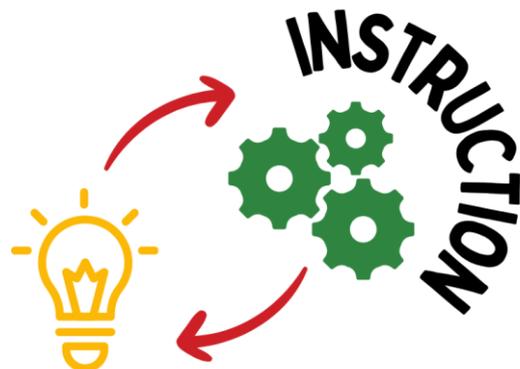
Duration of the activity: 15/20 minutes (depending on the number of participants).

The activity can be adapted to different topics (personal life; hobbies; outdoors; sustainable personal habits)

This funny ice-breaking game consists of the following steps:

1) Give each participant time (approx. 5 minutes) to write on a computer or mobile phone three statements about themselves: two of them must be true, but the third one must be an outright lie.

2) In turn, each participant will stand and share his/her statement





3) Then, the other participants will try to guess which statements are true and which statement is a lie.

4) There will be a short discussion and at the end, the speaker will state which statement is the lie.

This activity allows participants to learn facts about group members and lays the foundations for an environment of trust between each participant

Tips for playing:

- Speak slowly
- When guessing the lies, watch for small changes (e.g. changes in the tone; rate of speech; body language; etc)

Example:

- I am a climbing champion, I won many awards
- I am a member of a trekking association with 3000 members
- I prefer to walk rather than use the car



WHO AM I AND HOW DO I RELATE TO OTHERS?

2. WHO AM I AND HOW DO I RELATE TO OTHERS? - TREASURE HUNT

The Meaning and Essence of the Treasure Hunt Exercises

A Treasure Hunt is a recreational and team-building exercise that combines elements of exploration, problem-solving, and collaboration. Its primary purpose is to promote teamwork, critical thinking, and a sense of adventure among participants. Its essence lies in exploration, self-reflection, and collaboration. Participants embark on a journey to uncover hidden treasures, through the clues described. The activity encourages creativity and communication, and it often involves a competitive or cooperative element. Treasure hunts are not only enjoyable but also serve as a powerful tool for personal and group development.



Key Objectives of the Treasure Hunt Exercises



Exploration: Treasure hunts often involve exploring a physical space, whether indoors or outdoors. Participants embark on a journey to discover hidden clues or treasures, fostering a sense of curiosity and discovery.

Problem-Solving: Participants encounter challenges or puzzles at each step of the hunt. These challenges may require logical thinking, creativity, and collaboration to solve. Problem-solving is at the heart of the exercise.

Teamwork: Treasure hunts are typically conducted in teams or sometimes in pairs. Participants must work together, combining their strengths and skills, to successfully navigate the hunt and uncover clues or treasures. Team dynamics and communication are crucial.



Competition or Cooperation: Treasure hunts can be designed to encourage competition between teams or to emphasize cooperation. The choice depends on the goals of the exercise, with some hunts promoting friendly rivalry and others focusing on mutual success.

Creativity: In many treasure hunts, creativity is encouraged both in designing the hunt itself and in how participants approach and solve the challenges. Creative thinking adds an element of fun and innovation to the exercise.

Time Constraints: Treasure hunts often include time limits to create a sense of urgency and excitement. Participants must manage their time effectively to complete the hunt within the given timeframe.

Relevance: While treasure hunts are enjoyable and adventurous, their content and challenges are often tailored to align with specific learning objectives or organizational goals. This ensures that the exercise has a meaningful purpose beyond mere entertainment.

Enjoyment: Above all, treasure hunts are designed to be a fun and engaging experience, leaving participants with lasting memories and a sense of accomplishment.

The essence of a treasure hunt lies in the combination of these elements to create an engaging and memorable experience. Participants are not only entertained but also challenged to think critically, communicate effectively, and collaborate with their team members. Whether used as a team-building activity in a corporate setting, an educational tool in schools, or a recreational event, a well-designed treasure hunt can instill a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie among participants.

How to build up and implement this exercise?

This activity unfolds in three parts: (1) self-reflection moment, where participants will observe, and elaborate their thoughts, (2) hunting moment, where participants will read the clues and find the treasures, and (3) a feedback moment, to share perceptions and ideas.



Location: Anywhere in nature.



Materials:

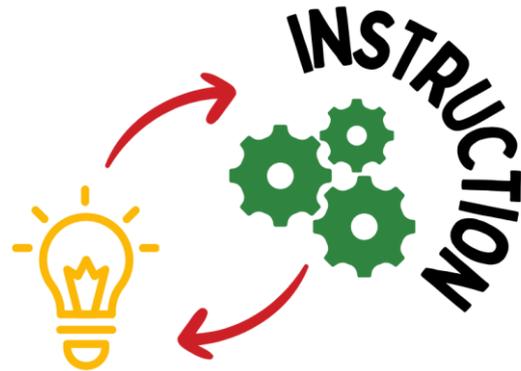
- Use all available materials (e.g backpacks, bags, ribbons, branches) to define the area.
- Whistle, bell, to call the attention of the participants.
- Pens and papers (participants can be encouraged to bring their own diary/notebook, pens, pencils)
- Timer.
- Speaking tool for feedback moment.



Duration: ≈1h, it can be adapted according to needs (e.g breaking the activity in multiple days).

Set up

- Participants gather together in a circle at the beginning of each phase. Part of the activity is carried individually, or in pairs.
- Define and agree on the perimeter where the activity will take place.
- Define and agree on a meeting area and a sound to define the end of each phase.



1. Self -Reflection

In a circle, ask the participants to:

Explore the area and find 3 elements that prompt a reflection on how they feel connected with themselves, with the others, and with the world. *A connection can be a bond made in the past, a meaning linked to the characteristics of an element, or a symbol of how we perceive ourselves in relation to our surrounding.*

Write down a description of the characteristics of each element found. Use your 5 senses: *What is the colour? The texture? Does it have a sound, a taste or smell? Remember: do not specify what is it or why you choose it.*

2. The Hunt

Gather back in a circle:

- Group the participants in pairs. Each pair will exchange the descriptions of the elements found.
- Read the description of your partner and try to understand what is the element referred to.
- Write down the possible answer.

3. Feedback

Gather back in a circle:

- With your pair, exchange your answers. Did you find the treasures of your partner? Did you find others?



- The participants can share their thoughts and reflections on the treasure hunt. Why they choose to describe the elements, how they tried to understand what was referred to.

BUILDING TRUST

3. BUILDING TRUST - CREATING A MANDALA

The Meaning and Essence of a Reciprocal Roof Exercise

Building relationships – relationships in the building: Reciprocal Roof. The phrase "good relationships are consciously built" conveys the idea that positive and meaningful relationships do not develop by chance. Instead, they require intentional effort and attention from all parties involved. Consciously built relationships are characterized by a series of principles.



First and foremost, building strong relationships demands effort. It involves an investment of time, energy, and resources, with individuals actively engaging and prioritizing the relationship. Effective communication is another essential element. It includes listening, clear expression, and open and honest dialogue.

Understanding each other's perspectives, needs, and expectations is crucial. Trust is also integral, built through consistency, reliability, and dependability. Consciously built relationships address conflicts constructively, fostering understanding and growth. Empathy and compassion play a key role, as does the identification and nurturing of shared values and common goals.

Respect for each other and an appreciation of unique qualities further strengthen relationships. Consciously built relationships are the result of ongoing, purposeful efforts to create and maintain meaningful connections. They involve deliberate choices and actions that contribute to the growth and sustainability of the relationship.

The concept that "good relationships are consciously built" parallels the principles of designing a reciprocal roof in construction. In both cases, intentionality and purposeful effort are central. When constructing a reciprocal roof, each supporting beam relies on the others in a mutually supportive fashion, much like the interdependence seen in strong relationships. The components must be carefully chosen and assembled, mirroring the importance of clear communication, understanding, and shared values in nurturing good relationships. Trust is a cornerstone in both contexts. The construction of a reciprocal roof,



relies on the reliability and strength of each supporting beam, while in relationships, it is built on consistency and dependability.

Just as conflicts are inevitable in relationships, challenges can arise during the construction of a reciprocal roof. Consciously built relationships address these conflicts constructively, while in the construction process, they are resolved with problem-solving skills. Moreover, empathy and respect, which are pivotal in building strong relationships, play a role in valuing the unique qualities of each component in a reciprocal roof, contributing to the overall strength of the structure.

In essence, the construction of a reciprocal roof and the cultivation of good relationships both underscore the importance of intentionality, effort, trust, understanding, and collaboration. They exemplify how intentional, purposeful actions result in lasting, interdependent structures that can weather challenges and stand the test of time.

Key Objectives of a Mandala Structure (reciprocal structure)



The key objectives of constructing a reciprocal roof are closely linked to the quality of relationships, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, trust, and effective communication. Here are these objectives and their relationship to building strong relationships:

Structural Integrity: A fundamental objective of a reciprocal roof is to ensure structural integrity. This is akin to the trust and reliability required in relationships. Just as the structural components of the roof must depend on each other, individuals in a relationship depend on one another for support and trust.

Collaboration: Constructing a reciprocal roof involves collaboration between the components, as they support each other in an interconnected system. Similarly, successful relationships depend on collaboration and mutual support. Working together and relying on each other's strengths contribute to the quality of the relationship.

Clear Communication: Effective communication is essential in constructing a reciprocal roof to ensure that each component aligns correctly. In relationships, clear and open communication is crucial for understanding, trust, and resolving conflicts.

Interdependence: The components of a reciprocal roof are interdependent, much like the interdependence seen in strong relationships. Each part relies on the others for support and stability. In relationships, interdependence fosters mutual support and strength.

Problem-Solving: Challenges may arise in both construction and relationships. The ability to address and solve problems constructively is a shared objective. Just as issues in constructing the roof need solutions, conflicts in relationships require resolution through problem-solving.



Trust and Reliability: Building trust is a central objective in constructing a reciprocal roof. Trust in the strength and reliability of each component mirrors the trust and dependability required in relationships.

Respect for Uniqueness: Each component of a reciprocal roof is valued for its unique qualities, contributing to the overall structure's strength. Similarly, recognizing and respecting the individuality of each person in a relationship strengthens the bond.

The key objectives of constructing a reciprocal roof align with the principles of building strong relationships. Collaboration, trust, clear communication, problem-solving, interdependence, and respect for uniqueness are essential in both contexts, emphasizing how the qualities that make successful construction projects also apply to fostering healthy, lasting relationships.

How to build up and implement this exercise?

Mandala Creation with a Group



Location: Anywhere in nature.

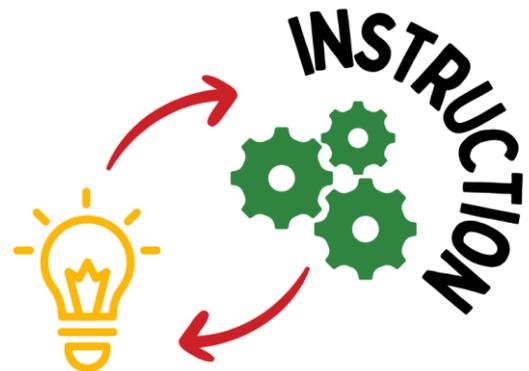


Materials: Tree branches or longer sticks – 1 per 2 participants.



Duration: 20 minutes and above (depending on the number of participants).

1. The group is divided into pairs, and each pair is given a tree branch or a longer stick.
2. Pairs gather around a trainer in a circle, each pair having their tree branch, with one end pointing towards the center.
3. The trainer is given the tree branch of the first pair, leaving the rear end behind.
4. The next pair supports their tree branch's end on the first pair's tree branch in the trainer's hand. Then, the following pair places their tree branch's end on the previous pair's tree branch.
5. All pairs do the same, and the last pair's tree branch is placed on top of the tree branch given to the trainer at the beginning.
6. The trainer lets go of the tree branch in their hand, and the tree branches in the circle interlock with each other.
7. This creates a mandala made of tree branches.



PERSONAL AND DEEPER PERSPECTIVE

4. PERSONAL AND DEEPER PERSPECTIVE - METAPHOR CARDS

The Meaning and Essence of the Metaphor Cards

Metaphor cards represent a valuable therapeutic instrument within the domain of mental health support. Their primary function is to offer individuals an avenue for expressing intricate thoughts and emotions indirectly through the utilization of symbolic and visual metaphors. This nonverbal medium proves particularly useful when individuals encounter difficulty in articulating their emotional states explicitly. Practitioners, including therapists and counselors, as well as individuals engaging in self-reflection, harness the potential of metaphor cards to foster self-awareness, promote constructive dialogues, and delve into the underlying psychological facets associated with mental health. In essence, metaphor cards catalyze exploring, comprehending, and addressing the complexities of mental health, ultimately contributing to the process of healing and recovery. Additionally, metaphor cards can incorporate the aspect of values. By engaging with these cards, individuals can explore and express their core values, beliefs, and aspirations, which are pivotal in shaping one's mental health and well-being. This process allows individuals to align their values with their actions, fostering a sense of authenticity and meaning in their lives.



Practitioners recognize the potential of metaphor cards as a means to promote self-awareness, facilitate constructive dialogues, and delve into the underlying psychological facets related to mental health, values, and the harmony between the two. In essence, metaphor cards provide a holistic approach to mental health support by considering both emotional expression and the alignment of one's values, contributing to the process of healing, recovery, and personal growth.

Key Objectives of the Metaphor Cards



Symbolic Imagery: Metaphor cards typically feature images, symbols, or scenes that represent various concepts, emotions, and experiences. These images serve as metaphors that participants can relate to and use as a means of self-expression.

Non-Verbal Communication: For young women who may find it challenging to express their thoughts and emotions verbally, metaphor cards offer an alternative form of communication. Participants can select and work with cards that resonate with

their feelings, making it easier to convey their inner world.

Personal Interpretation: Metaphor cards allow for personal interpretation and exploration. Each individual may view and relate to the cards differently, based on their unique experiences and perspectives. This open-ended nature encourages participants to tap into their creativity and imagination.

Metaphorical Insights: The process of selecting and discussing metaphor cards can lead to profound insights and self-awareness. Participants can use the imagery to explore their emotions, experiences, and aspirations in a non-threatening and metaphorical way.

Empowerment and Choice: Participants have the autonomy to choose metaphor cards that resonate with them, granting them a sense of control and agency in the therapeutic or educational process. This empowerment can be particularly beneficial for young women at risk.

Safe and Supportive Environment: Metaphor cards create a safe and supportive environment for self-expression and exploration. This is crucial for individuals who may have experienced challenges or traumas, as it allows them to engage at their own pace and comfort level.

Connection to Nature: When used outdoors, metaphor cards connect participants with the natural world. The images often feature elements from nature, fostering a deeper appreciation of the environment and promoting a sense of harmony and connection.

In essence, metaphor cards are a versatile and creative tool that encourages young women to explore their emotions, experiences, and aspirations in a symbolic and non-verbal way.





Their essence lies in the transformative potential of symbolic imagery and personal interpretation, making them valuable instruments for personal growth and self-discovery in the context of outdoor activities.

How to build up and implement this exercise?



Location: Anywhere in nature.

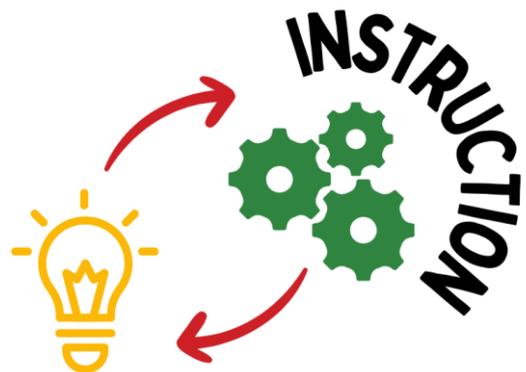


Materials: at least 2 cards with images per participant.



Duration: 30 minutes and above depending on the number of participants.

1. For the exercise it is necessary: to make cards on which elements from nature are shown, for example, plants, animals, etc.
2. The number of cards depends on the number of participants in the group. Each participant should receive at least two cards.
3. Place the cards on the mat so that they are not visible to the participants and each participant chooses two cards.
4. The participant for the selected cards should recognize at least one value per card that the object on the card has.
5. Participants need a minimum of 15 minutes to think about how the recognized value can positively affect their lives.
6. After completing the self-reflection, participants in the group share their thoughts and experiences.



OPENING UP FOR SELF-AWARENESS

5. OPENING UP FOR SELF-AWARENESS - SENSORY STIMULATION EXERCISES

The Meaning and Essence of Exercises for the Sensory Stimulation Exercises

In the context of working with young women, sensory stimulation exercises offer a valuable approach that engages the senses to foster heightened awareness and therapeutic benefits. These activities encourage participants to explore the world through touch, sound, sight, taste, and smell, creating vivid sensory memories. They provide relaxation and stress reduction, empowering these young women to manage challenges and navigate their unique journeys of personal growth and self-discovery.



Moreover, sensory stimulation exercises extend beyond personal well-being to encompass educational and environmental dimensions. In educational settings, these exercises enhance learning and memory, aligning with the holistic development of young women. In natural outdoor environments, sensory stimulation fosters a profound connection to the Earth, nurturing environmental awareness and stewardship. This comprehensive approach, intertwined with empowerment and connection to nature, equips young women at risk with valuable tools for personal growth and a deep appreciation of the world around them.

Exercises for sensory stimulation are designed to engage and activate the five senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Their purpose is to provide a multisensory experience that can be both therapeutic and enriching.

Key Objectives of the Sensory Stimulation Exercises



Heightened Awareness: Sensory stimulation exercises encourage individuals to be fully present and attentive. By engaging the senses, participants become more aware of their immediate surroundings and sensations.

Exploration: These exercises promote exploration of the sensory world. Participants may touch various textures, listen to different sounds, observe colors and shapes, taste various flavors, and experience scents, encouraging a sense of curiosity

and discovery.

Stress Reduction: Sensory stimulation exercises can have a calming and stress-reducing effect. Engaging the senses mindfully can lower anxiety and promote relaxation.

Enhanced Learning: In educational settings, sensory stimulation can enhance learning and memory. By involving multiple senses in the learning process, information is more likely to be retained and understood.

Therapeutic Benefits: Sensory stimulation exercises are often used in therapeutic contexts to address sensory processing issues, cognitive impairments, and emotional well-being. They can be part of sensory integration therapy and can help individuals with sensory sensitivities.

Sensory Memory: Engaging the senses can create lasting sensory memories. These memories are often vivid and can be linked to specific emotions or experiences.

Cultural and Artistic Expression: In art and culture, sensory stimulation is used to create and appreciate various forms of art and cultural expressions. It's a way to evoke emotions and connect with others.

Connection to Nature: Engaging the senses in nature allows individuals to connect more deeply with the environment. It fosters a sense of belonging and appreciation for the natural world.

In essence, exercises for sensory stimulation are about exploring the world through the senses, heightening awareness, and creating meaningful, sensory-rich experiences. They serve various purposes, from relaxation and therapeutic benefits to enhancing learning and fostering a deeper connection with the environment and culture. These exercises celebrate the richness and complexity of human perception and the world around us.



How to build up and implement this exercise?



Location: Anywhere in nature.

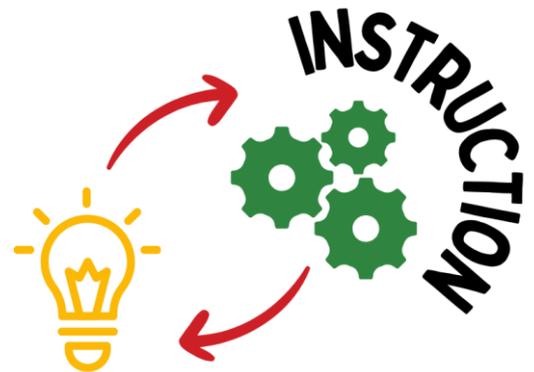


Materials: 1 piece of fabric per pair of participants.



Duration: 40-50 minutes.

1. This exercise requires two people, one guiding the other and dictating the course of the activity without verbal communication.
2. A natural environment away from the hustle and bustle of the city, such as a forest, seaside, or lakeside, and other natural places where the guiding partner can ensure the partner's safety when leading.
3. The exercise involves blindfolding one of the partners, thereby depriving them of one of the sensory perceptions, sight, while heightening the other remaining senses.
4. The exercise is allocated 5-15 minutes per person, depending on the individual participant.
5. Blindfolding the partner's eyes and guiding them in the environment. Leading someone by the hand in a forest, especially someone who is visually impaired, can be a transformative experience for both individuals involved. The guide, by gently allowing the person to touch the rough bark of a tree or guiding their hands to feel the intricate textures of leaves, enriches their sensory perceptions. Changing body positions, such as sitting down to feel the earth beneath their fingertips, further deepens the connection with nature. Encouraging them to explore by touch, smell, or even taste, like feeling the soft petals of a flower or smelling the fragrance of herbs, not only enriches their understanding of the environment but also fosters a profound sense of appreciation. By engaging these senses, the guide empowers the individual to interpret the natural world in a way that is deeply personal, allowing them to experience the beauty of the forest through touch, scent, and taste, creating a truly enriching and memorable encounter with nature.
6. Change partners, now the other person takes the lead.





7. After completing the exercise, partners or the group can share self-reflections on what they felt, heard, smelled, and similar sensations they experienced while doing it.

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MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES AND AHAA'S

6. MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES AND AHAA'S - HORSE ASSISTED ACTIVITIES

The Meaning and Essence of Experiences in Horse-Assisted Activities

In the context of working with young women (at risk), meaningful experiences in Horse Assisted Activities offer a transformative journey imbued with depth and purpose. The essence of these experiences lies in their ability to connect young women with the therapeutic presence of horses and the profound, often non-verbal, communication that unfolds. This interaction fosters a sense of connection and empowerment, transcending verbal boundaries to reach the heart of personal growth and self-discovery.



These experiences are fundamentally rooted in the principle of building trust, not only in the relationship with the horse but also within themselves. Young women at risk often carry a burden of past challenges and may struggle with self-esteem and trust. Through the gentle, intuitive nature of horse interactions, they learn to establish trustful connections and nurture their self-confidence, imparting them with valuable life skills.



The essence of these activities also embraces the notion of empowerment. The young women discover that they can guide, connect, and influence the horses, a realization that extends to their own lives. As they engage with these majestic animals, they encounter powerful metaphors that reflect their strengths, challenges, and resilience. This self-awareness leads to a profound sense of empowerment and self-belief that transcends the equine experience, guiding them toward a path of positive transformation and personal growth.

Key Objectives of Horse-Assisted Activities



Building Trust and Confidence: At its heart, this approach hinges on developing trust and confidence. Participants harness the power of non-verbal communication and body language to create connections, instilling trust in interactions with horses and enhancing self-confidence.

Enhancing Self-Awareness: As young women engage with horses through non-verbal cues, they embark on a journey of heightened self-awareness. This process encourages them to

recognize their non-verbal expressions, fostering personal growth and emotional intelligence.

Effective Communication: The approach promotes effective non-verbal communication, a valuable skill that extends to interactions with horses and peers alike. It encompasses the ability to convey boundaries and intentions through body language and non-verbal signals.

Emotional Regulation: The young women learn emotional regulation through their non-verbal exchanges with horses. Understanding how their non-verbal cues impact the horses' responses is instrumental in managing emotions, a key element of well-being and self-efficacy.

Empowerment: Interactions with horses underscore the power of non-verbal communication and body language in guiding and influencing these majestic animals. This experience imparts a profound sense of empowerment that resonates in their own lives.

Teamwork and Social Skills: Effective non-verbal communication is foundational to teamwork and collaboration. By mastering this skill in their interactions with horses, young women are better equipped for improved social interactions with peers and others.

Resilience: The approach instills resilience by equipping participants to face challenges, adapt, and recognize the importance of personal boundaries. This process enables them to build resilience, persist in the face of setbacks, and navigate life's complexities.

Environmental Awareness: Young women not only gain an appreciation for the natural environment but also learn the significance of respecting the personal boundaries of horses and the environment. This perspective encourages a sense of environmental stewardship.



Personal Growth: The overarching objective is to facilitate personal growth. By focusing on body language, non-verbal communication, boundaries, and self-efficacy, this approach empowers young women to embark on a transformative journey, guiding them to navigate their distinct paths of self-discovery and empowerment through meaningful interactions with horses.

How to build up and implement this exercise?



Location: Equine facility (horse ranch, farm, equestrian center, etc.).



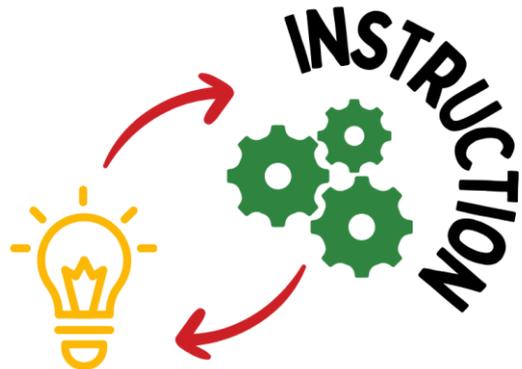
Materials: A lead rope per each participant; a halter per every horse; a brush for the horse per every participant; 2 or more cones.



Duration: ≈1h, it can be adapted according to needs.

Meeting the horse

- Participants should get familiar with the environment around the horses. Under the guidance of a professional they have to be informed in advance of basic safety rules related to the horses and their home - stables and/or pastures.
- Participants are invited to approach the horse at a pace they find comfortable. The horse is a gentle and beautiful animal but it can be intimidating when a human has their first contact with it or has had unpleasant past experiences. If the participant is not comfortable the next steps should be withheld until the participant is fully ready.
- Participants first stand by the horse and touch the animal gently, feeling its warmth and sensing the hair and mane, the horse's breath.
- Next participants can use their hands and tools (brushes) to brush and clean the horse
- In a safe space the participant takes the horse with its leading rope and walk together making a straight line, circle, and take turns





Working in pairs

- Participants divide themselves into pairs, better if the partners are not too familiar with each other.
- The horse has a head collar on and two leading ropes are connected to each cheek side of the head collar.
- About 6-8 cones are set up in the arena/on the field so that the team of 2 persons and the horse can move around them freely, with enough distance left between the cones.
- The pair has to be silent during the whole exercise, they can use only non-verbal communication with each other like they do with the horse.
- During the first circle around the cones, they will make a stop at each cone and then continue, still in complete silence, using only subtle signals for each other and for the horse.
- During the second round around the cones, each participant will make some stops randomly, not anymore at the cones, so they need to tune into each other's non-verbal cues and follow them.
- This exercise helps participants tune into silent communication, into sensing what is going to happen and respond to it as needed. Also, it helps to find a sense of flow in cooperation and, importantly, to be able to stay present and feel the subtle cues in communication between their partner and the horse, enhancing the depth of the experience and the effectiveness of the interaction. This, in turn, facilitates a profound and meaningful experience of non-verbal communication, fostering genuine engagement in the current activity. It enables individuals to be fully present and empowers them to recognize their influence in communication and their ability to read the situation as needed.





IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER

Assessment and Individualized Plans:

- Begin by conducting assessments to understand the specific needs and interests of each young woman.
- Develop individualized plans that take into account their unique circumstances and preferences.

Outdoor activities:

- Plan outdoor activities that are accessible, safe, and enjoyable. Activities might include hiking, camping, nature walks, gardening, team-building exercises in natural settings, animal-assisted interventions, etc.
- Ensure that these activities are age-appropriate and tailored to the physical abilities and interests of the participants.

Professional Guidance:

- Collaborate with different professionals, who have experience in specific fields related to your specific participants (mental health, physical health, social skills, etc) and also in outdoor activities.
- These professionals can counsel you on how to lead or facilitate sessions in natural settings, using nature as a therapeutic tool.

Mindfulness and Meditation:

- Teach mindfulness and meditation techniques that can be practiced in natural settings. These practices can help young women manage stress and anxiety.

Education and Awareness:

- Educate the participants about the mental health benefits of spending time in nature. Understanding the science behind it can motivate engagement.

Supportive Environment:

- Create a supportive and non-judgmental environment where participants feel safe expressing themselves and their emotions.

Safety Precautions:

- Ensure that safety is a top priority. Plan for any potential safety risks associated with outdoor activities and have appropriate measures in place.





Regular Sessions:

- Schedule regular outdoor sessions, allowing the participants to build a routine and experience the benefits over time.

Integration:

- Encourage participants to integrate what they learn and experience in nature into their daily lives. This might include self-soothing techniques, coping strategies, or simply spending more time outdoors.

Evaluation and Adaptation:

- Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the program and adapt it based on feedback from the participants and if needed also the mental health professionals.

Community and Peer Support:

- Encourage participants to support one another and create a sense of community. Peer support can be a valuable aspect of recovery.

Documentation and Progress Tracking:

- Keep records of participants' progress, behaviors, and emotional states before and after engaging in nature-based activities.

Conclusion

The Toolkit “Young Women Go Back to Nature” is intended to offer a thoughtful and impactful approach in working with young women within the realm of nature and outdoor activities involving a well-structured progression. The Toolkit is part of a set of practical materials developed within the project “Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower”/YGBN/ all available for free on the portal www.outdoorportal.eu.

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