

ACT IT OUT – FROM VALUE TO PRACTICE

MATERIAL FOR PARTICIPANTS
OF THE TRAINING MODULE
FOR THE USE OF PROFESSIONAL
PRINCIPLES IN YOUTH WORK



The publication was created within the project
ACT AS PROFESSIONALS - Improvement of the youth work practice
with young people with fewer opportunities





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ACT IT OUT – FROM VALUE TO PRACTICE: Material for participants of the training module for the use of professional principles in youth work

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The publication is intended for participants of a training module based on applied drama “ACT IT OUT – FROM VALUE TO PRACTICE”, that focuses on professional principles of youth work, and is based on the material from the publication “ACT AS PROFESSIONALS: Training module for the use of professional principles in youth work”

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PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

1. NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Non-formal and informal learning are the basic tools through which development is influenced via youth work. The task of those who conduct youth work is to create a multitude of opportunities for non-formal and informal learning.

This principle implies that youth work, no matter in which setting is implemented (so even if implemented in formal educational setting for example) is based on the processes of non-formal and informal learning.

This means that, if we create a program for youth in which they know they are learning something new – such as communication skills program, the program needs to be tailored to the specific needs of our participants, created in a way that raises their motivation to improve their skills and needs to lead to concrete increase in skills, based on individual capacities of each young person involved. A wide range program that comes from a syllabus meant for “everybody” with previously created targets for outcomes is not something we can put under a non-formal learning process through the eyes of the young people participating in the program.

Second, even more valuable for youth work, is the activation of informal learning processes in youth we work with. With informal learning the key for the learning process to happen is in the young person himself/herself. Whether informal learning will happen or not depends on the reflection capacities of a young person – her/his ability to recognize and to internalize the knowledge or skill gained through a concrete situation. For a simple example, informal learning can happen in a situation when a young person is on his/her way to school and realizes that, when he/she is standing on the sun, his/her skin gets warmer. First, he/she observes the change and then has an AHA moment when he/she realizes that the change comes from the increase of the temperature because of the sun. This AHA moment is crucial for the integration of the new knowledge in the existing knowledge base of that person. If the AHA moment doesn't happen, if the young person





just feels the heat and does not think about it/ignores it, the learning opportunity is missed. On a same logical process, informal learning also happens in some much more complex settings. For example, if we fall asleep during a lecture from a teacher, informal learning can happen if we realize that the sleepiness comes from the tone of the teachers' voice and we decide that, when we teach someone, we will not use this tone. Or, even more complex, when we speak up for the first time to our oppressor, and they react in shock, if we have an AHA moment, we will realize that our standing up can make a difference. Informal learning is learning through our own experience, and, therefore is the basis for "learning for life".

The task of youth workers is to create multitude of opportunities for non-formal and informal learning. This means that youth workers will create and implement programs based on non-formal learning (intentional raise of knowledge or skills in any area) but will also implement various activities that provide opportunities for learning through experience and learning by activating the AHA moments in different situations. This is why in youth work practice you don't only have organized, structured non-formal educational programs, but you can find an endless variety of activities – from group painting of public spaces or youth clubs, hanging out with a guitar, creating a theatre play, organizing volunteering activities, helping the elderly, creating a community sports competition... basically "the sky is the limit". But, the important thing here, from the youth workers point of view is to implement these activities with a plan for activating informal learning. So, the role of the youth worker in these activities is to support young people in to reaching their AHA moments. For example, when organizing a sports tournament, if our goal is for our group of youth to learn about responsibility and team work, we can let them do the organization part of the event as well and add some intentional tasks that will "make" them cooperate. Then, after the event, we will discuss with them how everything went, providing with the opportunity for them to reflect, for AHA moments to emerge and for them to integrate that new information in their "system". But, since in the informal learning we can't guarantee that the AHA moments will happen, the task for youth workers remains that we create as many opportunities for informal learning as we can.

Trap for youth workers: Learning is a term usually connected to formal learning settings and can be a trap for youth workers to believe that they have to "teach" young people something concrete and that they are there to be teachers. But learning in the youth work context is happening through the support youth workers provide to young people. If a problem occurs in a

young person's life and the youth worker is just there to listen, he/she could be teaching the young person at that very moment that there are people he/she can confide in and feel better. This is extremely important when working with youth from vulnerable settings, and is very important for youth workers to understand their role in young peoples' lives.

Also, it is relevant for youth workers to have in mind that they are possibly always "teaching" something – just by "being" they are presenting an example young people can identify with, and young people can learn from through informal learning processes. Thus, not understanding this can lead to not "practicing what they preach" and trying to "teach" youth some positive behaviors that the youth workers do not implement themselves, leading to youth learning that people do not implement what they teach others.

2. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Young people voluntarily participate in youth work activities and programs.

Youth workers cannot "make" young people participate. This does not mean that youth workers do not put in efforts to motivate young people to engage in youth work activities – on the contrary. This principle asks of youth workers to understand the motivation of young people and work towards answering that motivation through their activities. The job of youth workers is to make youth work activities attractive to young people and to use the first contacts to motivate them to include in the programs. Even when someone else "brings" a concrete young person to our activity, it is our job for that young person to want to stay and to want to come back. This does not mean we will only have fun on youth work activities. This means that we need to create and "implement" a safe, comfortable environment, where they feel good and welcomed. This often does also include a lot of laughter and relaxing activities, with no judgment. Also, this principle implies that we will create a multitude of opportunities for as many young people as possible to participate in youth work programs, and we will create programs for them and often in locations where they are – thus youth work includes a lot of different outreach and detached youth work activities.

Trap for youth workers: Even though volunteer participation seems like an "easy" principle, there is a lot of room for youth workers to step into different





traps. The first one involves youth workers that are used to working with “typical”, highly motivated young people in youth clubs. This group of youth workers can sometimes get “too comfortable” in the idea that anyone can come to their activities and thus, they do not need to do anything more to “bring in” new young people. Also, this group of youth workers can even become a bit defensive if a new, problematic young person tries to join the group. Also, youth workers that are used to working with highly motivated young people in youth clubs (or anywhere else, but on the basis of young people coming to them on their own), when they encounter young people from some marginalized or vulnerable groups in the field or in some institution, and when they get dismissed by these young people, they feel that the young people are rude and are rejecting what the youth worker is offering “for no reason”. What they forget, or do not understand is that the young person needs to see what she/he gets from the proposed activity, or even from the mere contact with the youth worker in order to want to engage.

Youth workers sometimes step into a trap of demanding attention of young people and organize their activities in not too engaging matter, resulting in young people not being too interested in what the youth worker has to say. For example, a situation when youth workers is presenting a lecture for 50 young people in an outdoor setting for 3 hours while the participants are just sitting and listening, the “worst thing” a youth worker can do is to be angry at young people when their concentration drops, when they start talking, moving around. If a youth worker in this situation tries to demand from them to “behave” a result can be very contra productive and can lead to a drop out in their participation. Youth workers should always think about the motivation of young people and to organise his/her actions in a way that enforces their internal motivation to engage and be present in youth work activities.

3. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH

Youth work does not exist without the full, active participation of young people – they propose, influence the process and are active participants in their development through youth work.

Youth workers are there to follow the young, not to “pull” them – but to know when to be “beside” them, “in front” or “behind” the youth. This means that young people themselves, in youth work, have the final say on their level of involvement

and on the changes that happen. This principle shows that, in youth work, young people have a “big say” in what is being implemented through youth work. Youth work fosters their active participation and fosters their involvement in proposing, organizing and implementing different activities within the youth work program and with support (if needed) from the youth worker. Youth workers task is to foster their active participation through various means, including organizing those kinds of activities that foster and motivate youth for their active participation. This is why interaction is a must in any type of youth work activity.

Trap for youth workers: If a young person is present at a youth work activity, that still does not mean that he/she is actively participating. Following the last example in the previous principle, if a youth worker organizes a lecture and just talks, he/she is leaving zero room for active participation of young people. Also, asking at the end of a 3-hour lecture if they have something to ask, and they don't ask anything – this still does not mean that there is room for their active participation. This is why youth work always implies numerous interaction opportunities.

Other situation where youth workers can walk into a trap is expecting that, just by willingly participating in a youth work activity automatically means that they will be happy to participate in any proposed activity. This can happen for example when the youth worker proposes some activity or exercise at the beginning of the meeting with the youth just so the room for interaction is presented and knows that it is “good” to introduce an engaging activity at the very beginning. In this case, a youth worker can end up proposing an exercise that is not interesting to the youth group present in the activity. In this situation, youth workers are often surprised why young people do not want to take action when they came to a place where action is implied. This is why youth workers should plan their activities having in mind everything they know about their concrete youth group – developmental phase, characteristics, interest, and combine this with the topic of the planned activity. The better all these elements are connected, the higher are the chances of engaging young people and fostering their active participation. Also, when the youth worker notices that his/her proposal is not being accepted in the group, he/she should have an alternative or engage the young people themselves in proposing and realizing some activities that are interesting for them – without the inclusion of negative emotions towards the young people for “rejecting” the youth workers’ proposals.





Also, a trap in understanding the active participation principle is not coming prepared for the activity because you expect the youth to organize the activity themselves – since their active participation implies their action in this matter. Youth workers should always have some plan. It is completely fine to change the plan according to the situation and the needs of young people that are present in the activity. For example, if the plan was that the young people lead the activity and organize something themselves, but that young person did not come prepared for the activity, the youth worker will foster the process by supporting that young person to derive some suggestions or will step in and provide with a suggestion himself/herself as a “last resort” if needed. The main issue here is to engage and motivate young people to want to participate and take action in youth work activities – thus taking action in their own personal growth through youth work.

4. VARIETY OF METHODS

Youth work uses a variety of methods, and their selection depends on the competencies and experiences of those who conduct youth work.

This principle means that a youth worker can use any methodology for the implementation of youth work, as long as he/she respects also all other principles. In order to reach the goals of youth work – to support young people in their positive development and active participation, the youth worker can implement any tool he/she wants, but the condition is that they are good at it. This is important because a youth worker needs to know his/her goal in his/her actions with young people. This means that the youth worker will not implement something he/she does not have an idea how will it influence young people in regards to their personal development. It does not mean that youth worker is necessarily a high-level expert in a concrete field, but that he/she is working with something he/she knows and is aware of her/his competences in the field. This is why youth work practice involves not only social skills and activism actions, but also activities such as yoga programs, applied theatre projects, sports tournaments, art exhibitions, youth clubs, environmental actions, volunteering in the community, peer education programs, etc. There is an endless list of opportunities – anything that provides youth workers with a tool for fostering informal and non-formal learning process with young people is eligible for use in youth work.

Trap for youth workers: This principle can be a tricky one for „fresh“ youth workers with less experience. In this case, they sometimes fall into a trap of using something they do not know because they saw it somewhere or think they


have to use that particular methodology. For example, if a youth worker participated in a forum theatre production one time and he/she decides that he/she will implement a forum theatre creation process with his/her youth group, just based on his/her experience as a participant. This is a risk for any type of activity that the youth worker is not skilled in, but that does not mean that this particular youth worker will never use forum theatre, just that he/she will start with something less demanding. Youth workers have to start somewhere of course, and for this the wide variety of methods offers numerous opportunities. Youth workers here need to be careful not to „go over their head“, because they carry the main part of the responsibility for the activities.

Other issue with the implementation of this principle is using some methodology without a clear goal – without a sense of why they chose what they did and what the methodology will provide youth with – in regards to non-formal and informal learning opportunities. For example, if you just choose to organise a painting job for the youth club and do not think about the goal and learning opportunities, you will probably miss a lot of possibilities for empowering the youth in the process.

Another example implies using any activity as an energizer, just because you „know“ that you should start some activity with an „energizer“. If you connect that starting activity with the rest of the plan for the day – and make of it actually an introduction to the topic, the start of the engagement of your participants or some form of assessment regarding the topic you will work on – you will achieve much more effects of just „energizing“ your group. Other risk with using energizers „just because“ is activating resistance and spite in some participants. This happens for example if you walk into a sleeping group and say: „I am going to energize you now!“ An introductory activity can be a lot more than just an energizer, so we suggest that you think about the beginning of your activity in relation to your whole plan for the day. Sometimes this means following the group and instead of energizing, playing some slow music and lying on the floor with them.

These issues can be seen as minor issues, but they are not. These small things all directly influence the motivation and engagement of youth, as well as your relationship with them – which is a key in their involvement and growth through youth work. These „shades“ make a big difference when working with youth with fewer opportunities, since, not rarely, you need to „prove yourself“





to be worthy of their engagement, or you need to respect their choices and resistances and organize activities in a way that respects this and fosters their involvement even with all the resistances. This awareness is key for connecting with young people with fewer opportunities and creating quality relationships with them.

5. RELATIONSHIP-CENTERED

Youth work is characterized by a specific relationship between youth workers and young people. This relationship is characterized by friendliness and trust and tendency toward imbalance of power. A youth worker is not an authority who has a mandate to direct the development of a young person.

This principle does not diminish the power balance which eminently exists with having the roles of youth worker and young person in place, but focuses around the acknowledgment of the young person's power of their own life and their power in decisions regarding them. Youth workers do not get to decide anything for the young person (which differs from, for example, experts in the education system or social welfare), they do not have any formal measures that will "make" young people modify their attitudes and behavior, they do not have any sanctions they can use or "threaten" with. This means that, if the young person chooses to continue to involve herself/himself in some risky behavior, we can only "forbid" it happening during youth work activities but we can't make any decisions for him/her or be very angry at the young person for making her/his choices. On the other side of this principle, youth workers have to be aware of the imbalance of power which comes from different roles and be accountable for their "part". It's our job to create new opportunities that will allow the young person to challenge his/her choices and experience alternative, positive ways of satisfying needs that are currently satisfied with risky behavior. Also, the youth workers are there to be a positive example, to lead and motivate youth by their personal choices, and provide information and support when needed. This is why this principle asks of youth workers to focus on the relationships with the youth and to build a friendly, trusting relationship, which will foster positive influences of the youth worker towards youth he/she works with.

Trap for youth workers: Because youth work implies friendly, trusting, non-formal relationships with young people, youth workers sometimes have trouble in defining how they should react in some situations when young people become „too“ non-formal and implies that „all is allowed“ in youth

work activities since we are all being non-formal. This can happen for example when a young person implies that he/she should bring alcohol to the next activity or that you can all use marijuana together. The risk lies in not reacting to a issue, because you feel that the young people will then see you as an authority. Here, the youth worker has an obligation and the authority that comes from his/her role to intervene and explain why this is not an option, no matter how all youth feel about this.

Other part of traps in this example lies in transforming the youth worker to a „parent“ in this situation and reacting too strong and in a judging manner. You do not have any formal means to direct the behavior of the young people, thus you should be very careful of not falling into a trap of acting as one. Sometimes, young people (especially those from different marginalized groups) can actually suggest something they know is not ok, just to see how the youth worker will react and to test whether he/she will meet judgment. It is very important to be aware of these processes and to control one's reaction, but still provide one.

Organizing activities that provide young people with opportunities to explore their values, beliefs, attitudes is a crucial part of youth work and reflects also this principle in practice. Challenges in this area are present when the youth workers want to work on some negative attitudes, prejudices or stereotypes, but does that in an untactical way. For example, if a youth worker starts the activity with words: „Today we will work on the prejudices you have regarding refugees“, he/she will very likely activate resistances and spite, and can even lead to young people feel insulted because you presume that they have prejudices or label their opinions as prejudices.. Also, other example for this is if young people express highly negative attitudes towards some group - we'll keep the example with refugees, and you choose for the next activity to take them to refugee camp without consulting them. They can find this measure to be too invasive. This does not mean that you will not take action in providing opportunities where they can explore and create their own positive experiences that will influence their attitudes, but that you will approach these matters with careful planning, thinking and possible reflection with your colleagues if you have any doubts on how to approach a concrete negative value you spotted.





ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

When it comes to ETHICAL PRINCIPLES, the situation is similar: there are many ethical principles that “apply” to the field of youth work. However, there are also certain principles without which, conditionally speaking, there is no youth work, and which form its backbone. Ethical principles in youth work represent the way in which youth workers behave in relation to young people, and by which they represent the values they strive for. They form a certain code of conduct for youth workers which they should follow when in contact with young people – they color the way youth workers treat young people they work with.

1. EQUALITY

A youth worker nurtures equality in relation to a young person. He/she does not place himself/herself in a position of power, respects the young person and equally respects his/her opinions and experiences. A youth worker nurtures healthy boundaries in a relationship with a young person.

For example, when voting for some activity, youth worker has an equal vote as other young people, and his/her opinion is equal to those of others. Having in mind that the youth worker does have a different role, and usually has also different experiences and competences than the rest of the youth group and, preferably, a built authority based on expertise and trust, his/her opinion can result in “more power” and that is all ok – the important thing is that the youth worker does not use any power “against” young persons he/she works with. Regarding boundaries, this principle refers to the part of personal boundaries and building quality relationships with young people with respecting those boundaries – respecting theirs and fostering our boundaries. For example, if the young person is, on our first meeting, asking a lot of quite personal questions about our private life, we can feel free to “stop” her/him – because we do not usually share that info with someone we just met. Same goes vice versa – we won’t ask something that is not “natural” to be shared and expect an answer. On the other hand, we will also participate in sharing information about us if this is the topic in question, for example, if we’re conducting an exercise where we ask of young people to share their regrets, we will also, completely honestly share ours. It’s about the personal relationship more than about the professional role and the position of the youth worker.

Trap for youth workers: When it comes to young people with fewer opportunities, especially those with social obstacles, youth workers often step in to a trap of asking of “new” young people to respect them. This can affect the motivation of newcomers and can result in their dropout from the program. What youth workers forget or do not understand in these situations is that, when working with youth who are, for some of their characteristics, not respected on a daily basis, asking from them to show respect to every person they meet becomes a goal, not a premise we start with. Because then, it is up to us to earn their respect, and then show them, through plenty of informal learning opportunities how good it feels when people are treating each other with respect, we can slowly move to showing respect to be a premise in a contact with new people.

Breaking personal boundaries is a trap here also. For example, if you are not comfortable with physical contact, and a young person you work with continues to touch you by your hair, hands, is hugging you, you can feel “obligated” to allow it, as you feel that you are there for them and not other way around. Youth work implies here equality in connections, and thus should lead to creating those connection based on authentic behavior of the youth worker as well as the young person. Thus, showing personal boundaries and explaining that you are not comfortable with physical contact actually supports this connection and shows the young person that you can still be cared for even when boundaries are in place – it can teach the young person that having boundaries is healthy and good for a relationship.

This also means that, if you do not feel comfortable sharing some personal information because you want to keep a balance between your personal life and your professional role, you are “free” to do so. But you need to be careful not to ask of the young people to share something that you are also not willing to share – if you do this, it will jeopardize this principle in your relationship with your youth group.

2. RESPECTING DIVERSITY

The youth worker considers and respects each young person with all his/her characteristics and respects that each young person has his/her unique set of personalities, experiences and competencies. The youth worker adapts his/her approach





and interventions to each specific young person. In planning and carrying out their interventions, the youth worker follows the needs of the young person and respects their individual pace of development.

Respecting diversity implies lack of discrimination of any sort, implementation of different approaches that allow full participation of all young people included in youth work activities, modifying activities to follow the needs of the concrete young people participating in the program (including slowing down or speeding up), fostering quality atmosphere in which all young people that are on the activity feel welcomed, accepted and safe. It is of high importance that this principle is felt through the actions of the youth worker much more than through his/her words. Youth worker needs to be aware of the diversity of young people, to be aware of his/her prejudice and stereotypes and be open to question them in his/her contact with youth (after all this is something we expect from the young people, so we need to be the “first to lead” and be willing to question our own presumptions through live contact with diversity). Respecting diversity also implies that we implement any inclusive measure needed for full participation of concrete young person we work with. These measures can vary greatly and are recognized the most when talking about disability (thus introducing an assistant, or using sign language, or changing the venue so it is approachable by wheel chair). But diversity means far more than that. It covers all kind of differences, and implies that youth workers are sensitive and are capable of high individualization of their work and connecting to young people from very diverse settings, treating every person as a unique individual. Youth workers should be aware of the need for addressing this principle through their practice all the time. If respected properly in practice, this principle can foster and support all other processes youth worker strives to.

Trap for youth workers: Talking too much – youth workers sometimes, with a big desire to respect everyone in the group, spend too much time talking about it. For example, if a youth worker chooses to devote first 15 minutes of a 60 minute activity talking about how all young people who are present should respect one another, that anyone can state their opinion, introducing rules on how to provide active listening, etc. there is a big possibility that the young people will be bored and feel that there is a formal ask from the youth workers for respecting these things, which can trigger spite in some of the participants, or can trigger resistance with the logic „why are you telling me this, I wasn’t planning on disrupting anybody“. Other option is to „show“

them respecting this principle in practice by choosing for the start some activity that will provide with the opportunity to learn all this through our „magic“ informal learning – providing the young people the opportunity to feel, to experience how you actually obtain mutual respect, listening, support through the activity itself. This requires youth workers' skills, but this is, by our opinion, one of the most important skills a youth worker should master. How to ACT on this principle, not how to TALK on it.

Other trap implies that the youth worker discriminates someone without intention, by acting on his/her presumptions of the characteristics or competences of a young person based on the information we have on his/her former opportunity group. For example, if there is a person with physical disability in the group, and we presume that, because of his/her disability this person cannot actively participate in an activity we planned (for example throwing the ball and our person has a disability with his/her hand) and, preventively, we change the activity, we are maybe fostering the opinion that this particular person cannot do what we planned, even though, in practice maybe he/she could and are not „believing“ in the capacities of our young person. What we should do in this situation is to check with the person whether he/she can participate in what we planned.

The way to do this is also another trap youth workers walk into. And that is the „elephant in the room“ situation, where we are trying to pretend that the diverse characteristic does not exist. We can fall into this trap in a few ways. The first one implies that we do not even ask our person anything, just change the topic, with others noticing that we are doing so. Pretending that something does not exist is the „worst“ thing we can do, because we send a message that this is something not typical, not normal and that it should not be talked about – we're creating a taboo around it. Next thing is if, in our situation, we walk around the topic and we ask the person if he/she can participate like it is a very offensive and a big deal to talk about his/her disability – we are acting as talking about it is something sensitive that should be barred to a minimum. We need to create an atmosphere where it is normal to ask and discuss on diversity, and to normalize different diverse characteristics of young people. In another example, if you have a trans-person in your activity – if you, for example sport that a girl is talking about herself in male gender, it is completely fine to check with her if this is the way she/he would





like the rest of the group to address her/him. This does not mean you will be rude in your contact, but means you will not pretend that this process is not present. Normalize the differences and taboo topics among youth. Youth work should be a safe space where youth can learn about those things that are foreign to them, without of the fear of exploring and connecting.

One more thing that is tricky in respecting diversity is continually adjusting your activities by following the needs and tempo of your particular participants. This means that a youth worker is in trouble if he/she comes to an activity and sticks to his/her plan from A to Z and is not sensitive to the needs of his/her participants (including various factors such as the mood, issues happening in the activity, physical conditions in which the activity is being held, individual level of knowledge, skills and experiences of each participant etc.). Following the needs can be a continuous challenge, as it implies high competences of the youth worker to balance a lot of factors at once. But this is very important, as effects of the activity are very much dependent on these adjustments. Providing additional support for the full participation is also a challenge under adjusting our activities. This means that we need to assess the needs for additional support for each of our participants and organize our work in a way that allows their needs to be satisfied. This includes all kinds of inclusive measures, but also the adjustment of our behavior, attitude, language according to our specific group.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

The youth worker is accountable for his/her practice and treatment of young people.

He/she is aware of the way in which his/her behavior affects young people, takes responsibility for his/her actions and pays attention to the harmony of his/her words and actions. Because the youth workers effects on the young people often derive from the relationship of the youth worker with the youth, being aware of the possible strong effects of how we live our lives, how we see the world and what we say and do on the image of us by the youth and subsequently the influence we can have on them, is very important. Youth workers are there to be positive models and to show in their action how an accomplished person and an active citizen lives, or how one strives towards becoming an accomplished person and reaching out to their potentials. This means that youth workers should not only promote positive

life styles, but should live them. But it is not realistic to expect that all youth workers do not have “skeletons in their closets” or do not involve themselves ever in some risk behaviors. When this is the case, it is important not to promote those actions to young people, but also not to be dishonest about them. There are even options when youth workers can use their personal examples as a study case for the group, so they can explore negative influences of some actions. But it is important that the youth worker approaches these kinds of topics carefully, having always in mind his/her goal and providing opportunities that can lead to a healthy, thriving lifestyle.

This principle also implies that youth workers continuously practice reflective practice, and independently and with supervisory support review and reflect on their actions, activities with young people and learning outcomes. Reflective practice is one of the most important processes of the youth worker regarding his/her work, allowing him/her to have his/her own AHA moments, understand better himself/herself in some situations, understand better the youth he/she works with, understand why some situation happened in the way it did and learns about how to improve. Accountability also means that the youth worker knows and follows his/her professional boundaries well, does not take those actions for which he/she does not have enough competencies and continuously works on their improvement. This also means that youth workers know how to recognize what are the limits of his/her role, and how to support youth in finding the right address for his/her needs – if they overcome the capacities of the youth worker, actively collaborating with other community services.

The last important issue with accountability is being transparent in terms of respect for confidentiality in relation to young people. Young people youth worker works with need to know which information is confidential and which needs to be forwarded, why and how. It is important to know and understand that there is a legal obligation of youth workers (as well as any other person) to break confidentiality in certain cases. Depending of the national legislative, information on this can vary, so it is very important that the youth worker knows the legal norms regarding confidentiality and safety – since safety is the main factor that asks for confidentiality to be breached. Youth workers will assess whether the young persons’ safety is at risk or if the young person is putting someone else at risk, will assess the level of the risk and will act accordingly, often implying that confidentiality cannot “stand”. This does not mean that the youth workers will do anything behind the back of the young person, or that he/she will “turn her/his back” on the young person. Being open about this question actually strengthens the bonds





between youth workers and young people and shows that they are someone you can count on to “do the right thing” even if it’s hard. For this segment to be implemented in the best possible way, youth workers need to know how the systems youth can get involved with work (health care, social welfare, criminal justice), and which is the right address for which problem of the young person.

Trap for youth workers: As the principle goes, this one is the most recognized as the „tricky one“ because it implies all the responsibility coming with our professional role and how we communicate this responsibility to the youth, but also to our co-workers, supervisors and partners in the community. One often made mistake is „saying one, but doing the other“. Sometimes, when youth workers want to „teach“ young people some positive values, he/she can step into a trap of advocating something positive, with not respecting it himself/herself. This is a case for example if we advocate a life without alcohol, but we go out and drink every night – and a young person accidentally bumps into us on our night out – we’re in trouble. This is why youth workers are encouraged to also question their behaviors, attitudes and beliefs so they can work on as many topics as possible with a positive influence and having a complete authenticity in it, avoiding falling into a trap of being hypocritical. This can happen if a young person asks the youth worker: „what do you think about drinking“, and the youth worker, having his positive model role in mind, replies with a strongly negative response.

Lying on past or current experiences in order to preserve the positive image in the eyes of our youth is another trap. For example, if they ask you do you drink (and you do), saying „no“ is not a good choice. This goes for any topic – regarding your experiences or opinions. It can lead to affecting the trust you built between you and them. Also, showing that you are also human and that you can also make poor choices is an important thing you can show to the young people. Acknowledging your bad choices, but also showing how you reflect and grow on them is a very powerful tool for positive influence on youth and motivating them to grow on their experiences and choices. All this does not mean that you will promote some harmful behavior and put on the table your risky experiences if these topics are not in the focus. You have to be careful that your interventions do not lead to an increased interest of youth to engage in some risky behavior. This is why, if you know you have some prejudices that you should not be proud of, when sharing them, it is important to reflect on why do you

feel the prejudices are there and to leave room for a change of your own personal opinion – showing young people that change of opinions, attitudes is all ok with new knowledge and experiences, thus showing them how open mindedness actually looks in practice.

Going in over your head is the next trap regarding accountability. When a young person shares some important personal information with the youth worker that involve, for example the existence of suicidal thoughts, youth workers are in the risk of taking responsibility for this information – by thinking that they need to deal with it on their own since the young person confided in them, giving them their trust by opening up. What can happen here is that the youth workers becomes some sort of emergency contact and that the young person calls the youth worker whenever feeling „down“, feeling at risk. This can be very overwhelming and even dangerous. As a youth worker you should always be aware of the limits of your competences and the limits of your role. In these kind of situations your crucial role will be to listen to the young person and to support her and motivating her to find professional support for her issue in the right address. Sometimes, if your personal competences include knowledge, experience and skills in treatment of psychiatry issues, you can give yourself the privilege of sharing some of them, but only for the goal of motivating the young person to find the right kind of professional issue for the problem in hand – you can share which institutions work better than others, or even recommend a concrete doctor or, if a young person shows interest in this, make a connection with your contacts in order to make it easier for the young person to make the first step in this direction. But, it is also important here not to be too pushy, having in mind that the decision needs to come from the young person herself/himself. Seeking support from your other youth worker colleagues and supervisors is important too – they are there to support you and help you reflect, which is extremely important when we talk about accountable practice of youth workers.

There is a whole set of risks in regards to the question of confidentiality. Youth workers often have dilemmas regarding the limits of their confidentiality „clause“ regarding their relationship with youth. Stepping right into a trap happens when we do not understand the boundaries or the maneuver within the confidentiality between the youth worker and the youth. This is very important when working with youth from different vulnerable or marginalized groups, because they're in higher risk of becoming the victims or perpetrators of behaviors that are relevant for breaching the confidentiality clause. For example, if the young person





in our previous example actually shares that he/she had a suicidal attempt that morning, this is an information you cannot keep to yourself. And if you are aware that this is an information you cannot keep to yourself, what you do with it and how you address this with the young person is the key challenge. If you choose to share this information to the young persons' parents without the knowledge of that young person – you're in breach. If you tell the young person „I am very sorry, but this is not a kind of information or problem I can deal with“ and stop the conversation – you're in breach. If you promise to the young person that you won't share this information with anyone – you're in breach. Each of these choices has potentially a very strong negative consequence for the young person. Thus, acknowledging the trust, listening and supporting the young person, but still talking about the quality of the information, acquiring more information about the issue, about who else is already informed (because sometimes you will find out that the psychiatrist and the parents are already informed), and talking about the next steps that you will take is extremely important.

Cooperation with other systems is another thing that a lot of youth workers forget. But here lies the answer in who can you call for consults when youth work colleagues do not know the answers to your questions, but also who you need to activate as additional support for your young people when you recognize the need for this. This is why knowing how the systems work is extremely important. Often, youth workers fall into a trap of thinking, for example, that the social worker just doesn't care, is not interested and that youth never get their needs fulfilled in the social welfare system. This brings to the lack of motivation of youth workers to make a bridge and connect to the social welfare system and is supporting these negative attitudes of the young people towards the system. Often, youth workers just do not have enough knowledge on the scope of work, procedures and rules that people in the social welfare have to follow, which brings to these misconceptions. It is the same with the health care, education or criminal justice systems. This is why knowing and fostering cooperation with these systems is important, because, if the systems are more closed than open, the youth worker can be the bridge and can open the door to support the inclusion of the young person in the system in question. Cooperating with other systems and knowing where your role ends and someone else's start is one of the foundations of accountability in any profession.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Derived from the rich practice of field work of our street workers from Denmark in working with youth with fewer opportunities, in the following we give you some rich practical examples of challenges that can happen to youth workers in practice. Regarding these examples, we are giving you room to think and reflect on how would you react in this situation. But, since we are talking about real, human situations that are always dependent of various factors, have in mind that there is rarely one single solution that is „always right“. Thus, be free to discuss the examples with your colleagues and supervisors.

All of the situations described bellow are real situations happened to experienced field workers. Challenging situations never stop happening, and they occur even more often when working with youth with social obstacles. But, the way we handle them depends on our knowledge, skills, capacities, expertise – and gets better with time. This is why working on these issues is a part of the lifelong learning process and continuous reflection is always good for assessing where we are and how can we be better – no matter how many years of experience in the field we have.





CASE #1: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FATHER PHYSICALLY ABUSING MOTHER

Actors	A youth worker and a girl.
Case	In connection to activities, set up by a youth worker, the youth worker meets a young girl. The youth worker becomes aware of the young girl displaying distrustful behaviour towards adults. She furthermore, shows signs of discontentment. With support and encouragement, the young girl starts to open up to and trusting the youth worker. She reveals worrying conditions in her home; among other things, that her father beats her mother. She asks the youth worker to keep this between the two of them, and not to discuss it with anyone.
Dilemma /Dilemmas	The youth workers position – including limitations. The relation to the young girl: Should the youth worker act on this disturbing information, and in doing so, risking breaking the young girls trust and thereby confirming the young girls' mistrust towards authorities/adults?
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	

CASE #2: YOUTH DISRUPTING AN ACTIVITY

Actors	A youth worker and eight young people.
Case	A youth worker is engaging eight young people in an activity involving drama exercises. One of the youths is incomprehensible about, what they are expected to do. The youth does not express this verbally, but reacts to the activity by ridiculing and disrupting the activity. This affects the other participants, and creates unease and a lack of focus on the activity at hand.
Dilemma /Dilemmas	<p>It can be difficult to maintain a sense of perspective, when attempting to carry out a specific activity, whilst trying to figure out, why a young person is acting disruptive.</p> <p>How should the youth worker administer/carry out the activity - without further excluding the “disruptive youth”?</p> <p>How can the youth worker include the “disruptive youth” in the activity?</p>
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	





CASE #3: FIFA-TOURNAMENT – VIOLENCE AND THREATS AGAINST THE YOUTH WORKER

Actors	Two young people (Mo and Abdi) and a youth worker.
Case	<p>Mo and Abdi are playing FIFA. Mo suddenly becomes very upset, at starts to throw his PS4 controller. The youth worker tells him, that it is not ok to throw the controller, despite him being angry over losing the game.</p> <p>Mo and Abdi play another match; which Mo also loses. He starts yelling and swearing; he is really angry.</p> <p>They play a third match, during which another young person informs the youth worker, that Mo is not only playing for fun, but also for money, and Mo has lost 200 DKK the last to matches. When learning about this, the youth worker chooses to turn of the PlayStation. The youth worker reminds the two youths of what they already know – that they are not allowed to gamble, whilst being in the youth facilities.</p> <p>Mo becomes very angry. He starts yelling and saying insults towards the youth worker, such as “fuck you, you pig!”. The youth worker calls Mo into an office and tells him, that it is not right to play for money, and it is definitely not right to address others with insults. Mo replies very angrily and uses his father as a threat to the youth worker. Mo starts to shove and intents to strike the youth worker.</p>
Dilemma /Dilemmas	<p>What do you do now?</p> <p>What would you do in a similar situation?</p> <p>Could this conflict have been avoided? If so, how?</p>
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	

CASE #4: LACK OF ACTIVITY WITH 15 FRUSTRATED YOUNG PEOPLE

Actors	15 young people and youth workers
Case	<p>A youth worker is waiting for a group of young people to arrive at an activity. Only about half of the expected group show up. Four girls arrive (group A), who are very upset and are discussing loudly. They approach the youth worker, and all eagerly talk about a conflict, that has taken place the day before, between the three girls (group A) and three other girls (group B). The conflict is concerning one of the girls from group B, who has spoken badly about a sister to one of the girls in group A.</p> <p>While the girls from group A are telling the youth worker about the incident, the three other girls from group B arrive. They see that the girls from group A are talking to the youth worker. They immediately storm over, telling the youth worker, that the girls from group A are lying, and that the group A-girls, has been pursued them all day.</p> <p>The phone rings, and a college, who was supposed to be present, calls in sick.</p> <p>Now the last of the expected young people arrive, making a total of 15 young people gathered for the activity.</p>
Dilemma /Dilemmas	<p>You are on your own with 15 young people, who expect an activity to take place. 7 of the 15 young people are very upset and angry. The atmosphere is very chaotic. The remaining young people are becoming impatient and upset about the commencement of the activity being dragged out. An unease is spreading.</p> <p>What do you do?</p> <p>What should your focus be on?</p> <p>Should you handle the issues, in a certain order?</p>
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	





CASE #5: YOUTH WORKER AND ALCOHOL HABITS AT DEMONSTRATIONS

Actors	Spare time youth worker and vulnerable young people
Case	<p>You are, in your spare time, part of a grassroots movement, that is concerned about environmental preservation. You are taking part in a big demonstration, which is to be held in the main town square. The town square is located next to the place where you volunteer as a youth worker.</p> <p>The demonstration has begun, when you arrive. There are a lot of on-lookers present. Among them, a group of young people, who you affiliate with, when you are working as a volunteer youth worker. These young people come from families, with parents who have an alcohol or marijuana abuse problem.</p>
Dilemma /Dilemmas	<p>You are offered several beers and other alcoholic beverages by your friends, during the demonstration. Marijuana is also passed between your friends. You are known, between friends, to enjoy alcohol during demonstrations, and your friends keep passing you a bottle.</p> <p>You are off work and are used to drinking, whilst at demonstrations.</p> <p>The young people observing you, all have traumas, relating to alcohol and marijuana misuse due to experiences with their parents.</p> <p>What do you do? What are your options to act upon? What do you prioritize?</p>
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	

CASE #6: FOOTBALL ON SUNDAYS – WITH LOCAL YOUNG PEOPLE AS ROLE MODELS

Actors	<p>Based on Football on Sundays – an activity for children and young people, created in corporation with local youth/youth worker between the ages of 17-22.</p> <p>The activity is for all young people between the ages of 11-18.</p> <p>The estimated number of participants: 20 from the local area.</p>
Case	<p>Part 1: 20 young people are gathered for Football on Sundays. The young people are excited for the games to begin, and a positive atmosphere fills the indoor court. After a short period of waiting, the young people are all gathered in the middle of the indoor court. The youth worker takes initiative, and divides the group into smaller teams. The games begin, and the positive atmosphere continues – without any indication of something being on its way.</p> <p>However, during one of the matches, a tackle develops into an argument between the two involved. Shortly after, another two boys take part in the argument. At this point, the argument is turning into a physical fight, making several young people uncomfortable, who then seek outside the indoor court. The youth worker witnesses the argument.</p> <p>Part 2: The situation is very chaotic, and one of the boys now hits the other, who ends up with a bloody nose. The other two boys involved, now become a part of this tense situation and they engage in the physical fight. The youth worker runs to the fight that is taking place, and tries to separate the involved parties. He succeeds, but the involved parties do not want to talk and leave the indoor court through different exits.</p>
Dilemma /Dilemmas	<p>Part 1: How would you feel about the situation? What do you do? Could the situation have been avoided? Who has the responsibility? Could the situation have been stopped?</p> <p>Part 2: What do you do now? Who should be included in the follow-up on the situation: - The young people involved? - Onlookers? - Colleagues? - Parents?</p> <p>What would you imagine would happen, without any follow-up? - The young people involved? - The onlookers? - Colleagues? - Parents? - Future number of participants and future culture in the activity?</p> <p>What challenges has the youth workers experienced? How did we solve the dilemmas?</p>





What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	

CASE #7: PRIVATE, PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL

Actors	A volunteer youth worker and two young people.
Case	<p>A prominent figure within the right-wing affiliation, describing himself as a political activist, regularly announces dates for his political appearances. These appearances are often live streamed and take place in local areas with many of its residents having another ethnic background than Danish. This political activism usually consists of hateful statements and comments about the ethnic groups represented in the local area. During these appearances, the presence of supporting role models for the young people, are often needed.</p> <p>A youth worker is present in the local are on the day, the activist shows up to express hateful opinions on slam. Many of the local young people are present. They are deeply affected by the situation. They shout at the activist and the situation escalates with the young people starting to threat, spit on and throw objects on the activist. The situation is heightened by the presence of the police, and the activists insisting on the right to freely express his opinions.</p> <p>The youth worker, who on a daily basis work with the local young people, feels affected personally, as he himself is a Muslim. After the demonstration, he yells to the activist, to pack up his things and piss off. A local young person comes over to the youth worker, acknowledges him by padding him on the shoulder, and they continue on.</p>

Dilemma /Dilemmas	<p>How are situations handled when private and personal opinions are challenged, and you also have to act on the basis of the set values of your profession?</p> <p>Freedom of religion Freedom of speech Law and order</p>
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	

CASE #8: OPINIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIAS

Actors	A volunteer youth worker, a pedagogue (professional) and a group of young people
Case	<p>A volunteer youth worker (Dan) sits, alongside a pedagogue and a group of young people, in a local youth facility. They are discussing the current societal circumstance concerning COVID-19 and the actualized restrictions in relation to the number of people allowed in the evening gatherings in the youth facilities.</p> <p>One of the young people tells Dan, that he has watched a video Dan has shared on Facebook the day before. The young person tells him, that his video has made an impression on him, as has many of the other videos, Dan often shares. The Pedagogue ask them about the videos. The young person explains, that the video explains how</p>





	<p>the new vaccine is dangerous, as it is part of a bigger plan to create a total surveillance of society, where every citizen fundamentally is viewed as sick, until the opposite is proven. Restrictions are, according to the young person, simply a means for the state, to enforce total control over every citizen. The young person goes on to say, that he actually fears for his own future freedom. He finds the videos, which Dan are sharing, to have been enlightening in to a degree, that he will no longer let himself be tested – and perhaps neither vaccinated.</p> <p>Dan contributes with further facts to the story, and reveals that he will be attending a demonstration, which is to be held in five days' time, as a rebellion against the current restrictions, that he finds to be based on a fabricated pandemic.</p>
Dilemma /Dilemmas	How can you, whilst working with young people, act on social media in such a way, that your personal opinions are not affecting the conscious or subconscious minds of the young people you are working with.
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	

CASE #9: FREE TRIPS AND ACTIVITIES DURING THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS

Actors	<p>Parents affiliated with the local housing association. Youth facility personnel. Children and young people from the local area. Parents to the children and young people from the local area.</p>
Case	<p>The local housing association are working closely together with a group of parents in the local area, in supporting and creating activities for the young people in the local area. The parental group applied for and received funding, in order to create activities for the local youth in the summer holidays.</p> <p>A three-day trip to Copenhagen is arranged in the beginning of the holidays. On the trip are a large group of young people between the ages of 12 to 14. They are all staying at a hotel, eating at restaurants and take a trip to the fun park Tivoli. The young people have an amazing trip. The trip does not cost them anything, as the money from the funding covers all expenses.</p> <p>A few weeks after returning from the trip, the local youth association, advertise other activities that are occurring during the summer holidays. Among other activities, is a trip to an activity and water park. The trip includes one overnight stay, where the young people are going to cook their dinner in their holiday housings. The cost of the trip is 200 Danish Kroner per person. The youth association wonders why no young person has signed up for the trip, as previous trips have been very popular. The young people and their parents argue, that they are not prepared to pay money for arranged trips, when the local housing association are offering more exciting trips for free.</p> <p>The youth workers in the youth association learn why children and young people do not want to go on their trips. The youth workers, are frustrated by the fact that the parents, who are connected to the local housing association, are offering free trips. It is not possible for the youth association to do the same. The youth workers also believe, that valuable lessons can be made, when families contribute with a small payment.</p> <p>During the summer holidays, the children and the young people choose the free activities, offered by the parents who are connected to the local housing association. The youth association also experience less and less children and young people turning up at their youth facilities, despite many of these children may benefit from being around professional pedagogues/youth workers.</p>





<p>Dilemma /Dilemmas</p>	<p>Many families in the area have many children. They do not have the economical means to pay for summer holiday activities for their children.</p> <p>How can the families be supported, if they have to contribute economically to all the trips and activities offered by the youth association?</p> <p>How can the parents have connected to the local housing association and the youth association work together on summer holiday activities?</p> <p>What possible issues surround the local housing associations free trips?</p> <p>How to you select which children and young people, have the greatest need for going on trips, if the amount of people going is limited?</p>
<p>What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?</p>	
<p>What should I do in this situation?</p>	
<p>Which primary principle(s) is at stake?</p>	

CASE #10: IS IT SPLITTING?

Actors	Volunteer youth worker Pedagogue/youth worker 2 girls at the age of 12
Case	A volunteer youth worker (Peter) and two girls at the age of 12, are playing games in a youth facility. A permanent pedagogue employee (Lise) has left the facilities, to go shopping. The two girls tell Peter, that they do not like Lise, as she always seems angry. She does not have a sense of humor, and does not seem interested in doing anything with them. They tell Peter, that they wish for him, to be at the facilities more often, and that they know that other children and young people also like it better in the facilities, when he is around.
Dilemma /Dilemmas	What should Peter tell the girls? Should Peter mention the conversation to Lise? How should Peter handle this situation?
What should I in no circumstances do in this situation?	
What should I do in this situation?	
Which primary principle(s) is at stake?	





As you can notice for sure – the situations are not always “clearly” pointing to a concrete principle. This is because the social interactions are, as a rule, complex, and often intervene more than one issue when a challenge emerges. Also, what is noticeable is that over half of the cases and focus (among others) on accountability, showing that the awareness on ones’ role as a youth worker and everything that goes in line with that particular professional role is a must in each contact with youth. This puts the youth workers in a position that they need to balance a high number of factors when choosing their reaction in a concrete situation. Also, this asks of them to have enough self-control and a clear mind so they are actually capable to choose their reaction. This is important because we step into the youth worker role with different personal experiences.

If we do not train ourselves enough in various challenges and different situations, when a crisis emerges, we will often act instinctively – which will not necessary be according to our training or according to our youth workers’ role. This is why including experience-based training is a very important thing in training youth workers, because this kind of approach provides them with room to practice in crisis situations, but in a safe space, where they can make mistakes and can test different solutions. Our training module tries to answer to this particular need and provide youth work trainers with a tool for organizing this kind of experiential learning opportunities.

MY PLAN

Following the training, you are now in the phase where you mapped the principles that are most challenging for you, and you are asked to create an individual plan for the improvement of your implementation of this principle in practice. Here, you can create your plan.

Mapped principle #1	
My biggest challenge with the principle	
Steps for the improvement	
Timeframe	
When and how will I evaluate my progress	





Mapped principle #2	
My biggest challenge with the principle	
Steps for the improvement	
Timeframe	
When and how will I evaluate my progress	

GOOD LUCK!

