

A Toolkit for Youth Workers Creating Safe and Open Dialogue on Gender



Safe Spaces

Brave Voices



Imprint

Editors



Open Education Centre Foundation



Year of Publication

2026

Authors

Global Education Unit of Progettomondo, Ewa Jeziak, Sonja Jochum, Vanessa Kumer, Anna Miola, Carlo Presotto, Paola Rossi, Javier Saborido, Rumen Valchev

Media Owner and Publisher

Rossella Lomuscio – Responsible for Global Education Office of Progettomondo
educazione@progettomondo.org

Copyright

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license CC BY 4.0 – for the Silent Play®
Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0 – for the rest of the Toolkit

Layout

Theresa Ehrne Grafik

Financing



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the AIG (Italian National Agency). Neither the European Union nor the AIG can be held responsible for them.



Index

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| SECTION A: To Learn | 6 |
| Gender Inclusiveness Guidelines | 7 |
| Resilience Manual – Navigating Gender-related Emotional Challenges: A Guide for Youth Workers | 13 |
| SECTION B: Ready to Use | 25 |
| A Recipe for a Safe and Productive Workshop on Gender Equality | 26 |
| Brief (and not Exhaustive) Tips for Moderating Controversial Issues in Youth Workshops | 31 |
| Workshop 1: A Taste of Equality | 33 |
| Workshop 2: Climbing Dreams – Bridging the Gap | 43 |
| Workshop 3: Dis-cover – Privilege, Power, and the Paths We Take | 49 |
| Guide to Creating a Silent Play® Performance | 56 |
| Annex | 63 |

Introduction

This guidebook is a product of Erasmus+ project “2GATHER Building quality and emotional resilience in youth work on gender equality” a project which has been carried out in Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Spain and Poland, between 2023 and 2026.

2GATHER aims to support 5 youth organizations in developing new high-quality youth work activities on issues related to gender equality that are relevant to young people.

The resources included in this toolkit are the result of a process that lasted over 2 years, built on collaboration, dialogue and continuous exchange between the youth workers of the partnership and the many young people involved in the testing phases.

Each tool was developed during a specific phase of the project – from educational activities to the manual – and reflects the context, needs and questions that emerged at that particular moment. All the materials have been tested, adapted and validated first-hand by the youth workers of the partner organizations together with young people in their local communities. We hope these tools will be useful and inspire new practices within your own working contexts. In this toolkit you will find two sections:

SECTION A: To Learn

- 1 **Guidelines to promote gender inclusiveness in youth work**, that offer youth workers practical strategies and methodologies to create inclusive, participatory and caring environments. They focus on everyday practices that foster gender inclusiveness, encourage active participation and nurture mutual respect, providing concrete suggestions that can be adapted to different youth work contexts.
- 2 **Manual to promote emotional resilience and ensure a safe learning environment when addressing controversial issues**, it invites readers to reflect on their own role, emotions and attitudes, and to better understand how to consciously use the personal and relational resources they already have within themselves. The manual combines reflection, practical insights and self-awareness tools to strengthen facilitation processes and group dynamics.

SECTION B: Ready to Use

- 3 Guide for implementing youth work activities on gender equality** that provides step-by-step practical guidelines to help youth workers create a supportive context for dialogue, reflection and exchange on gender equality. It includes concrete workshop proposals and activity ideas designed to facilitate discussion, critical thinking and collective learning, making it easier to address gender-related topics in an accessible and engaging way.

- 4 Tutorial to perform a Silent Play® on gender equality**, that introduces the Silent Play® as a performative and educational tool, explaining what the Silent Play® is and how it works. It guides youth workers through the facilitation process, offering practical tips to ensure the activity is implemented effectively and that its full potential as a space for reflection, expression and dialogue on gender equality is fully realized.

SECTION A:

To Learn

Section A brings together resources designed to support youth workers in strengthening their awareness, skills and attitudes when working on gender equality and other sensitive or controversial topics.

Before moving to ready-to-use activities, this section invites readers to take a step back and focus on the foundations of youth work: creating inclusive and caring environments, fostering participation, and nurturing emotional resilience – both their own and that of the young people they work with.

The materials included here are meant to be used as learning and reflection tools. They can support individual self-reflection, team discussions and training moments, helping youth workers to better understand their role, recognize existing resources, and consciously shape safer and more inclusive learning spaces.

A Toolkit for Youth Workers
Creating Safe and Open Dialogue
on Gender



Gender Inclusiveness Guidelines

Creating Inclusive and Brave Learning Spaces



Executive summary

These Gender Inclusiveness Guidelines provide youth workers with a framework to create inclusive, safe, and brave spaces in youth and adult education. They combine theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and reflective methods. Key principles include creating caring and participatory environments, using gender-inclusive communication, acknowledging trainer privileges, ensuring accessibility, and addressing resistance to gender equality.

The guidelines integrate workshop experiences and EU policy frameworks, offering concrete tools such as the Brave Space Rules, Glossary Game, and inclusive communication practices. The aim is to strengthen democracy, prevent violence, and empower diverse participants to express themselves freely.

Introduction

Gender inclusiveness is a crucial principle in youth and adult education, ensuring that all individuals – regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, or background – can participate safely, freely, and equally. According to data from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, discrimination and violence against queer people remain widespread, with trans* and intersex people facing the highest levels of discrimination.

The aim of these guidelines is to provide educators, youth workers, and trainers with concrete strategies to create inclusive, safe, and brave learning spaces, while fostering democratic values and preventing violence.

**This little star is called Asterisk.*

It is placed between the root of the word and the ending in order to create space for additional genders. For example, by writing trans – we can refer to transgender, trans men, trans women, and so on.*

Core Attitudes and Principles

Inclusiveness is rooted in caring, empathy, and responsibility towards oneself and others. When it comes to anti-discrimination in education, it is crucial to set clear communication rules in the group in order to create a Safe Space that is as free as possible of discrimination that participants can feel safe and protected. Safe Spaces are ideally characterized by a receptive and attentive atmosphere and shaped by a culture of care. Additionally, it is essential to emphasize to everybody to communicate with respect and sensitivity with each other.

Inclusiveness also requires self-responsibility, and patience. Instead of interrupting people and correcting them in front of everybody for discriminatory behavior, which can be quite shaming (calling out), it is recommended to apply the “calling in” technique. Hereby discriminatory utterings are also pointed out, but in a different manner.

For Example – If a person tells a story about a man or woman, we let the person finish and ask in the end “can we be sure it was a man/woman” instead of interrupting the person and correcting him/her publicly.

Practical Implementation in Workshops

- **Preparation** – Gather participants’ needs before the activity if possible.
- **Opening** – Begin by co-creating ground rules, sharing names and pronouns, and clarifying expectations.
- **Participation** – Apply the principle of “challenge by choice” – which means that everyone decides their own level of engagement.
- **Methods** – Use interactive tools such as the Gallery Walk, the Glossary Game, and reflective rounds to stimulate dialogue.
 - Gallery Walk involves walking through the room, reading the provided information on a certain topic, gathering impressions, taking notes, and then bringing up and discussing what stood out in a plenary session, and if possible, finding examples from everyday life. We did this exercises with the different learning spaces, that you are going to see on page 11.
 - Glossary Game: Elli Scambor, Heidi Gaube, Živa Humer, Rowan Stein, Valentina Pettinger, Jonas Pirerfellner (2024). How to? Designing learning spaces inclusively and illuminating gender diversity: https://vmg-steiermark.at/sites/default/files/2024-08/femqueer_strategy_paper_en_2024_2.pdf (page 26)

Inclusive Communication and Language

Language shapes inclusion. Gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language should be used consistently.

For Example

- Use “Dear colleagues” instead of “Dear Sir or Madam.” Introduce yourself with pronouns and invite others to do the same.
- If mistakes occur, correct them briefly and continue without focusing unwanted attention on the person affected.
- Always prioritize self-definition and confidentiality when it comes to names and pronouns.

Role of Trainers and Youth Workers

Trainers should reflect on their own privileges and acknowledge the social roles they represent. They are responsible for creating structured yet participatory learning environments. This includes combining professional expertise with recognition of the lived experiences of participants. Trainers should act with empathy, openness, and willingness to learn.

Target Groups and Accessibility

Inclusivity also means accessibility: activities should be free or affordable, voluntary, and sensitive to different age and gender groups and naturally inclusive. Spaces should offer both active engagement and calm environments for relaxation. Collaboration with other organizations is encouraged to reach diverse target groups. Challenging traditional gender roles through tools, media, and creative activities helps young people to explore alternatives.

Dealing with Resistance and Antifeminism

Resistance and anti-feminist arguments are common.

Trainers should apply strategies such as:

- **Withdrawal** – Avoid unproductive conflicts.
- **Asking questions** – Invite reflection rather than confrontation.
- **Setting boundaries** – Define limits respectfully.
- **Discussion** – Engage when conditions for a meaningful exchange are present.

Self-care is essential – choose your battles wisely and build alliances.

Brave Spaces and Learning Spaces Framework

Unlike Safe Spaces (you have seen on page 8), which emphasize protection, Brave Spaces explicitly encourage discomfort, reflection, and the courage to confront power, privilege, and inequality. Brave Spaces serve to encourage people to participate in conversation with the aim of changing and learning together.

Key rules for Brave Spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) include:
agree to disagree, owning intentions and impacts, challenge by choice, respect, and no attacks

Brave Spaces acknowledge that mistakes and discomfort can be valuable starting points for collective learning, but must be handled with care, ensuring that marginalized participants are not left alone with discrimination.

Beyond Brave Spaces, critical pedagogy also includes concepts diverse aspects of inclusion and transformation:

- **Space of Power** – Power is always present in learning environments. It must be made visible and addressed, rather than ignored, recognizing structural inequalities such as sexism, racism, classism, and ableism.
- **Space of Differences** – Diversity is not a deficit but the starting point for pedagogy. It requires both recognition and deconstruction of social differences, while being attentive to intersectionality.
- **Space of Experience** – Learning builds on lived experiences, which must be critically analyzed in relation to power structures. Non-discriminatory experiences of acceptance can be transformative.
- **Space of (Self-)Critique** – Education should foster critical thinking not only about society but also about one’s own complicity in unequal structures. Collective critique supports mutual growth.
- **Space of Uncertainty** – Learning is a process of crisis and risk, where uncertainty becomes a quality criterion. Trainers model vulnerability by sharing their own experiences.
- **Space of Conflict** – Conflicts are not disruptions but opportunities for deeper engagement. They can challenge racist, sexist, and other oppressive structures and lead to growth.
- **Space of Unlearning** – Privileges and assumptions that reproduce inequality should be unlearned. For instance: privileges or things should no longer be taken for granted.
- **Space of Appreciation** – A transformative learning space values everyone’s contributions, histories, and presence.
- **Space of Dialogue** – Teachers and learners co-create knowledge through dialogue, countering the “banking” model of education.
- **Space of Questions** – Encouraging questions, even uncomfortable ones, strengthens collective learning and reduces fear.
- **Space of Responsibility** – Teachers and learners share responsibility for shaping inclusive and participatory spaces.
- **Space of Emotions** – Emotions are integral to learning processes. They should be acknowledged as resources for engagement.

Together, these spaces expand the Brave Space concept into a holistic framework for inclusive and critical pedagogy.

Reflection and Evaluation

Each workshop should end with reflection rounds. Reflection and Evaluation activities are useful for participants by providing an opportunity to reflect again on the topic and deepen their expertise on the subject. On the other hand, they are also useful for the facilitators. This way they can gain feedback on what went well and what should be improved for the next workshop.

Possible questions could be: “What surprised me? What did I learn?”

Anonymous feedback should be enabled. Trainers and participants should share responsibility for follow-up actions and commitments.

References – for further information

- Arao, B. & Clemens, K. (2013). From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces. In: The Art of Effective Facilitation.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2024). LGBTIQ Equality at the Crossroads.
- Scambor, E., Gaube, H., Humer, Ž., Stein, R., Pettinger, V., Pirerfellner, J. (2024). How to? Designing learning spaces inclusively and illuminating gender diversity. FemQueer Project: https://vmg-steiermark.at/sites/default/files/2024-08/femqueer_strategy_paper_en_2024_2.pdf
- Ha, J. (2025). The Social Living Room – Creating Gender Inclusive Spaces for Open Youth Work in European Contexts.
- Yogyakarta Principles (2006, 2017), EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025.
- Freie Universität Berlin (2022). Glossar geschlechtliche Vielfalt: https://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/diversity/_media/FU-Glossar-geschlechtliche-Vielfalt-Stand-220623.pdf
- Froebus, Kink-Hampersberger, Mendel, Scheer, Schubatzky (2021). Habitus Macht Bildung: https://static.uni-graz.at/fileadmin/_files/_project_sites/_habitusmachtbildung/Dateien/Lernraum_gestalten_12_2021.pdf
- Zentrum für Lehrkompetenz (2019–2021). Habitus.Macht.Bildung-Transformation durch Reflexion: <https://lehrkompetenz.uni-graz.at/de/forschung/habitus.macht.bildung/>

A Toolkit for Youth Workers
Creating Safe and Open Dialogue
on Gender



Resilience

Manual

**Navigating Gender-related Emotional Challenges:
A Guide for Youth Workers**



Executive summary

This guide aims to support youth workers navigate emotional challenges when they address emotional sensitive topics such as gender inequality with young people.

The guide equips youth workers with theoretical understanding of psychological and social factors such as social pain, chronic stress, emotional triggers, the window of tolerance, and growth mindset to build understanding of how gender-related experiences affect mental health and well-being. Furthermore, it offers practical tools such as effective communication, emotional regulation techniques, coaching conversations and experiential learning to create supportive environments where young people can process emotional challenges related to gender inequality. By applying these strategies thoughtfully and reflectively, youth workers can strengthen emotional resilience, promote self-confidence, and support meaningful, inclusive dialogue.

Introduction

Youth workers need specific tools to help young people feel safe enough to actively engage in activities which may trigger gender-related emotional challenges. Unlike general emotional resilience strategies, which are useful in many contexts, they are often insufficient when supporting young people – particularly young women, and even more so LGBTIQ+ youth – who experience chronic stress due to social stigma, discrimination, micro-aggressions, and exclusion. Unlike temporary stress, which comes and goes, this stress is systemic and ongoing, deeply influencing emotional well-being, self-perception, and social interactions.

Your Best Tool is YOU

Youth workers are not psychologists. Their role is not to provide therapy or process past trauma but to offer emotional support, guidance, and a sense of validation for young people. However, this does not mean they lack the capacity to create meaningful change – on the contrary, the most valuable tool in this work is YOU.

Your expertise, life experience, and unique characteristics – whether it's your ability to listen without judgment, your intuition in reading group dynamics, your creativity in engaging young people, or your deep understanding of the social realities they face – are what make your support truly impactful. There is no single formula for being a great youth worker because each person brings their own personality, background, and approach to connecting with young people.

It is essential to remember that youth workers can only help from the present to the future. You are not here to “fix” young people, but to empower them to build resilience, develop self-awareness, and find their own ways of navigating emotional challenges.

Wellness Begins With YOU

While this manual is designed to equip youth workers with tools to support young people, it is also important to acknowledge that youth workers themselves face significant emotional challenges. Working with vulnerable youth, navigating difficult conversations, and witnessing distress can take an emotional toll.

That's why many of the strategies included in this guide – breathing techniques, mindfulness exercises, and emotional resilience tools – can also be useful for youth workers' own well-being. Taking care of your mental health is not a luxury; it is a necessity. You cannot support others effectively if you are emotionally exhausted. We encourage youth workers to apply some of these exercises to themselves, using them as self-care practices to manage stress and maintain their own emotional balance.

How to Use This Guide

This manual is structured like a cookbook: if you don't put the techniques into practice, they won't be useful. Just as following a recipe without actually cooking won't result in a meal, reading about these strategies without applying them won't create real impact. Furthermore, just as a chef adapts a recipe to their guests' tastes, dietary needs, and available ingredients, youth workers should adapt these tools to their specific group of young people, their context, and their own communication style. There is no one-size-fits-all solution – successful emotional support requires flexibility and responsiveness.

This guide is structured into three key sections:

1 Key Concepts

A foundational overview of psychological and social factors influencing gender-related emotional challenges, including concepts like social pain, chronic stress, emotional triggers, and the growth mindset.

2 Tools and Strategies

A collection of practical approaches, from effective communication techniques and mindfulness practices to coaching conversations and breathing exercises, designed to help youth workers provide meaningful support.

3 For Further Information

Additional resources for those who want to deepen their knowledge of both gender-related issues and emotional resilience strategies.

By engaging with this guide actively and reflectively, youth workers can strengthen their ability to support young people affected by gender inequality dynamics in navigating emotional challenges with confidence and sensitivity.

Key Concepts for Understanding Gender-Related Emotional Challenges

1 Social Pain

Social pain refers to the emotional distress caused by rejection, exclusion, or discrimination. Neuroscientific research by Matthew D. Lieberman has shown that the brain processes social pain in the same way as physical pain, meaning that experiences such as bullying, marginalization, or social exclusion can have deep and lasting emotional effects. This explains why discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation is not just a social issue but also a neurological and psychological challenge that impacts mental health and well-being.

2 Chronic Stress

While anyone can experience chronic stress as a result of discrimination, microaggressions, or social stigma based on how they are perceived by society, many LGBTIQ+ individuals are particularly affected by a specific and chronic form of stress known as minority stress. Unlike temporary stressors, minority stress is persistent and cumulative, increasing the risk of mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. This type of stress is not only a personal experience but a reflection of systemic inequalities that shape daily interactions, institutional policies, and societal norms.

3 Emotional Triggers

David Rock's SCARF Model identifies five social domains that influence our emotional responses, often acting as triggers that can either enhance or threaten a person's sense of security. These triggers are particularly relevant when working with gender-diverse youth:

- **Status** – The perception of where one stands in relation to others. Young people may feel threatened when their identities are invalidated or overlooked.
- **Certainty** – The need for predictability. Constantly facing uncertainty about acceptance or rights can be highly stressful.
- **Autonomy** – A sense of control over one's life. Being denied agency in gender expression or personal choices can trigger distress.
- **Relatedness** – Feeling connected and included. Isolation or rejection from family, peers, or institutions can deeply impact emotional well-being.
- **Fairness** – A sense of justice and equity. Experiencing discrimination, unfair treatment, or double standards can be particularly distressing.

Beyond the SCARF model, other emotional triggers are particularly relevant for young people:

- **Bad experience memories** refer to past traumas, such as bullying, rejection, or discrimination, which can resurface when encountering similar situations. Even if an environment is

now safe, certain words, settings, or behaviors may trigger a defensive response based on previous harm.

- Similarly, a **Negative mindset** – shaped by repeated exposure to prejudice, internalized stigma, or self-doubt – can make individuals more susceptible to interpreting neutral or ambiguous situations as hostile.

4 The Window of Tolerance and Emotional Regulation

Dr. Dan Siegel introduced the concept of the Window of Tolerance, which describes the optimal state in which individuals can process emotions effectively. When exposed to stress or trauma, people may be pushed outside this window, leading to:

- **Hyperarousal (Fight-or-Flight Mode)** – This state is marked by anger, anxiety, panic, or aggression. Gender-diverse youth may enter hyperarousal when they feel attacked or unsafe.
- **Hypoarousal (Freeze Mode)** – A state of numbness, dissociation, or shutdown. When overwhelmed, some youth may disconnect emotionally as a defense mechanism.

For individuals facing discrimination or exclusion, the ability to remain within the window of tolerance is often compromised, making emotional regulation more challenging.

5 Growth Mindset

Psychologist Carol Dweck developed the concept of growth mindset, which refers to the belief that intelligence, abilities, and emotional resilience can be developed over time. In contrast, a fixed mindset assumes that these traits are innate and unchangeable. A growth mindset allows individuals to view challenges as opportunities for learning rather than as signs of failure. This perspective is particularly relevant for those who have faced systemic barriers or internalized negative beliefs about themselves due to societal norms.

6 Gender Glossary

As this handbook is related to gender issues, we believe it is important to provide information on key gender-related concepts. However, including all definitions within this document would make it too long. Therefore, we have decided to include links to gender-specific glossaries, where you can find clear definitions and explanations of relevant terms:

- GLAAD LGBTQ Glossary – <https://www.glaad.org/reference>
- UN Women’s Gender Equality Glossary – <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>

These resources provide comprehensive definitions to help navigate gender-related language and concepts accurately.

Tools and Strategies

Youth workers play a crucial role in shaping how young people navigate emotional challenges. The way they communicate, respond, and create learning experiences can either ease emotional distress or unintentionally reinforce triggers. This is why having the right tools and strategies is essential – not just for providing support when challenges arise, but also for preventing unnecessary distress, fostering trust, and promoting emotional resilience.

At the heart of any effective approach is a safe and supportive environment. Without this foundation, even the most well-intended strategies may fall short. Since this manual does not focus on creating a safe space, we strongly encourage you to refer to “A Recipe for a Safe and Productive Workshop on Gender Equality (page 26).” That resource provides a structured guide on establishing the right conditions for open and respectful discussions on gender-related topics. Once this foundation is in place, the tools and strategies in this section will help youth workers engage with young people in ways that promote emotional well-being, self-awareness, and constructive dialogue.

1 Effective Communication Pattern

Effective communication is essential when supporting young people, particularly those in emotionally charged or vulnerable situations. It goes beyond simply conveying information; it involves understanding, validating, and responding in a way that fosters trust, clarity, and empowerment. The following key elements were compiled by neurolanguage coach Blanca Gallego-Herrerapicazo and presented to the youth workers involved in the 2GATHER project during the transnational project meeting held in Spain in February 2025. These elements help create an effective communication pattern that promotes meaningful dialogue.

The Power of Words

Language shapes perception and experience. The words we choose can either empower or harm, reinforcing inclusivity or perpetuating stigma. Using affirming and gender-inclusive language is critical when addressing young people, especially if they are LGBTQIA+. Avoid assumptions about identity or pronouns, and be mindful of the emotional impact words can have in moments of distress or vulnerability.

Empathy and Action

Empathy involves more than just understanding another person’s feelings – it requires an active response that acknowledges and validates their emotions. It is not enough to say, “I understand how you feel”; effective communication translates that understanding into supportive actions, such as adjusting one’s tone, posture, or approach to create a safe and reassuring space.

Active Listening

Active listening means giving full attention to the speaker, not just hearing their words but also observing nonverbal cues, maintaining eye contact, and responding approp-

riately. It involves avoiding interruptions, providing verbal affirmations, and ensuring the speaker feels genuinely heard and understood.

To enhance active listening, youth workers should also pay attention to nonverbal cues in their participants. Many young people may struggle to verbalize their emotions directly but may express them through body language, facial expressions, or tone shifts. Recognizing these signs allows youth workers to respond with greater sensitivity and insight.

Rephrasing

Rephrasing, or paraphrasing, helps ensure clarity and understanding. It involves restating what the other person has said in different words to confirm comprehension and demonstrate active engagement. For example: If a young person expresses frustration about not being accepted, rephrasing might sound like: “It sounds like you feel exhausted from having to explain your identity to others all the time.”

This technique validates emotions and encourages further dialogue.

Signposting

Signposting is the practice of clearly guiding a conversation, especially when discussing complex or sensitive topics. It involves preparing the listener for what is coming next, providing structure, and reducing uncertainty. For example: “Before we continue, I want to let you know that I’ll ask some questions to better understand your experience, and you can tell me if you’re comfortable answering.”

Another helpful way to set expectations is by stating, “I can only help you from the present to the future,” which clarifies that the conversation is focused on moving forward rather than reliving past traumas. This approach builds trust and transparency in communication.

Calm Presence

A calm presence can help regulate emotions in a conversation, particularly when someone is experiencing distress or frustration. However, youth workers must also be aware of their nonverbal communication, as participants often unconsciously mirror the emotions of those around them.

The way youth workers use body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice influences how participants perceive the interaction. Maintaining an open posture, steady tone, and reassuring demeanor can de-escalate tension and create a sense of safety. Awareness of microexpressions and unconscious gestures is crucial in ensuring that the message being communicated aligns with the emotional support being offered.

Powerful Questions

Asking open-ended, thoughtful questions encourages deeper reflection and helps individuals articulate their emotions and experiences. Instead of asking “Are you okay?”, which may result in a simple yes or no answer, a more powerful question would be: “What’s been weighing on your mind the most lately?” This approach invites meaningful discussion and self-exploration rather than limiting responses.

Positive Feedback: Encouraging or Praising?

Positive feedback should focus on effort, growth, and resilience rather than superficial praise. Instead of saying “You’re so brave,” which may feel patronizing or dismissive, a more meaningful approach would be: “I really admire the way you’re expressing your emotions and advocating for yourself.” Encouragement reinforces positive behaviors and self-worth without placing pressure on unrealistic standards of strength or bravery.

Being Honest

Honesty is key to building trust and authenticity in communication. It is okay to admit when you don’t have all the answers, as long as you are transparent about it. Saying, “I don’t know the answer, but I’m happy to explore this with you,” reassures the speaker that they are valued and that their concerns are taken seriously.

Similarly, avoiding statements like “I’m the expert...” is essential. While youth workers may have knowledge and training, they are not the experts in someone else’s lived experience. Instead of presenting themselves as all-knowing, youth workers should approach conversations with curiosity, humility, and a willingness to learn from the young people they support. Recognizing that “I’m not an expert in you” reinforces the idea that every individual is the best expert in their own life.

Being honest also means avoiding false reassurances – acknowledging challenges while offering realistic and supportive perspectives.

Metacognition

Metacognition, or thinking about thinking, is a crucial element of effective communication. It involves self-awareness in how we communicate, recognizing our biases, emotional reactions, and assumptions. Practicing metacognition allows youth workers to adjust their approach in real-time, ensuring their communication remains effective, inclusive, and empathetic. Additionally, youth workers should engage in reflexivity, continuously assessing how their own biases, assumptions, and interactions shape group dynamics. This allows them to create an environment where participants feel seen and heard without judgment.

2 Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques are essential for emotional regulation and stress reduction, both for the youth worker and the young person. Conscious breathing helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing anxiety and restoring a sense of control. Some key techniques include:

- **Diaphragmatic breathing** (belly breathing) – Inhaling deeply through the nose, expanding the belly, and exhaling slowly through the mouth to promote relaxation.
- **Box breathing** – Inhaling for four seconds, holding for four, exhaling for four, and pausing for four before repeating, helping to regain focus and emotional stability.
- **4-7-8 breathing** – Inhaling for four seconds, holding for seven, and exhaling for eight, which slows the heart rate and reduces stress.

When experiencing emotional distress, breathing exercises provide an immediate, accessible way to self-regulate before engaging in deeper conversations.

3 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of staying present and fully engaged in the current moment without judgment. It enhances emotional resilience by reducing over-identification with distressing thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness can be applied in conversations by:

- Encouraging young people to notice their emotions without immediately reacting.
- Helping them ground themselves through sensory awareness (e.g., noticing sounds, textures, or breathing patterns).
- Practicing non-judgmental awareness, where thoughts and feelings are acknowledged rather than suppressed or exaggerated.

By integrating mindfulness, youth workers can foster a calm, attentive, and non-reactive presence, creating a safe space for reflection and emotional processing.

4 Coaching Conversation

A coaching conversation differs from a typical discussion because it focuses on guiding the young person toward self-discovery and action rather than providing direct advice. Coaching techniques include:

- Asking powerful, open-ended questions that encourage reflection (e.g., “What do you think would help you feel more supported?”).
- Reframing challenges to shift perspectives from obstacles to opportunities for learning.
- Encouraging self-driven solutions, reinforcing autonomy and confidence.

The goal is not to “fix” the situation but to help the young person explore their emotions, identify their needs, and find their own answers with support.

5 Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a method that allows participants to actively engage in experiences that promote self-awareness, emotional resilience, and problem-solving. Instead of simply listening to advice or theoretical concepts, young people learn by doing and reflecting on their experiences.

Experiential learning follows a structured cycle:

- **Experiencing** – Engaging in an activity that presents an emotional or cognitive challenge.
- **Announcing** – Expressing observations and reactions to the experience.
- **Group Processing** – Discussing the dynamics of the activity.
- **Summarizing** – Extracting insights from the experience.
- **Application** – Planning how to integrate these insights into real-life situations.

For Example – using real-life scenarios or simulations allows young people to see the impact of their choices in a safe environment, helping them build resilience and emotional intelligence. Through reflection and guided discussions, participants internalize lessons and develop stronger coping strategies.

6 From Empathy to Compassion

While empathy involves feeling the emotions of others, compassion takes a step further by acknowledging suffering and being moved to take action. This distinction is crucial in emotionally intense interactions. If a young person is deeply sad, pure empathy can cause the listener to absorb that sadness, leading to emotional exhaustion or inaction. Compassion, on the other hand, allows the youth worker to stay emotionally present, understand the pain, and respond with care without being overwhelmed.

For Example – Instead of saying, “I feel so sad hearing this,” which mirrors distress, a compassionate response would be, “I hear how painful this is for you. What can I do to support you?” This approach acknowledges the emotion but focuses on constructive support, maintaining emotional clarity and preventing burnout.

7 Mirror Neurons: How Our Emotional State Impacts Young People

Participants unconsciously mirror the emotions and energy of those around them. Youth workers’ calm, positive, and emotionally regulated demeanor creates a ripple effect, influencing the overall group atmosphere.

If a facilitator remains composed, participants are more likely to feel safe and grounded. However, anxiety or stress from the youth worker can heighten emotional tension in the room. Before engaging in discussions, facilitators can use grounding techniques to ensure they are in a balanced emotional state. Additionally, small adjustments in posture, tone, and facial expressions can significantly impact how young people perceive the space, helping to maintain an atmosphere of trust and stability.

8 Foster Awareness, Responsibility, and Self-Confidence

Creating an environment where young people feel aware of their emotions and actions, responsible for their choices, and confident in their identity is essential in gender-related discussions. Building trust, accountability, and mutual respect allows participants to engage in meaningful self-reflection and take ownership of their experiences. One way to foster awareness is by encouraging young people to recognize and articulate their thoughts, emotions, and reactions. Reflection exercises, open-ended questions, and guided discussions help participants become more conscious of their emotional triggers, biases, and personal growth. Additionally, group work plays a vital role in this process. Working in a group provides a safe space for self-expression, peer support, and shared problem-solving. Groups allow young people to experiment with different behaviors and attitudes in a structured yet flexible environment. Establishing clear group norms and emphasizing cooperation over competition helps create an atmosphere of mutual support.

Responsibility can be nurtured by promoting accountability in discussions and group dynamics. Setting clear expectations for respectful dialogue, encouraging participants to take ownership of their words and actions, and emphasizing the impact they have on others fosters a culture of respect and engagement. Mutual agreements, where participants co-create guidelines for discussions, help reinforce a shared sense of responsibility.

Self-confidence develops when young people feel seen, heard, and valued. Validating their experiences, recognizing their efforts rather than just outcomes, and providing constructive feedback can empower them to trust their abilities and perspectives. Using strength-based approaches – highlighting personal resilience, achievements, and positive qualities – reinforces a growth mindset and self-belief.

For Further Information

Navigating gender-related emotional challenges requires continuous learning and reflection. While this guide provides essential tools and strategies, gender issues and emotional resilience are complex topics that benefit from further exploration. Understanding the broader social, psychological, and structural factors that impact young people can enhance the effectiveness of youth workers in supporting them.

To deepen your knowledge, we have compiled a list of reputable resources that offer further insights into both gender-related issues and emotional resilience strategies. These resources include research organizations, advocacy groups, and psychological frameworks that can help youth workers develop a more comprehensive understanding of these topics.

Recommended Resources

Gender Issues

- United Nations Foundation – Girls and Women – Reports and global initiatives on gender equality and women’s rights.
- Womankind Worldwide – A feminist organization working globally to challenge discrimination and gender norms.

Emotional Resilience

- FRIENDS Resilience Program – An evidence-based program recognized by the WHO that helps individuals develop emotional resilience.

These resources provide in-depth information, research, and tools to help youth workers continue learning and adapting their practices in supporting young people effectively.

References (Bibliography)

- Cialdini, R. B. (2006). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion* (Rev. ed.). Harper Business.
- Damasio, A. R. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain*. Putnam.
- Davidson, R. J., & Begley, S. (2012). *The emotional life of your brain: How its unique patterns affect the way you think, feel, and live – and how you can change them*. Hudson Street Press.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Jensen, E. (2005). *Teaching with the brain in mind* (2nd ed.). ASCD.
- Rock, D. (2008). SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 1(1), 44–52.
- Rosenberg, M. B. (2003). *Nonviolent communication: A language of life* (2nd ed.). PuddleDancer Press.
- Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2012). *The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*. Delacorte Press.
- Tokuhamma-Espinosa, T. (2011). *Mind, brain, and education science: A comprehensive guide to the new brain-based teaching*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Valchev, R. (2009). *Non-formal education*

SECTION B:

Ready to Use

Section B implements the reflections and learning processes introduced in Section A into concrete practice. The resources collected here are designed to directly support youth workers in planning, facilitating and implementing activities on gender equality with young people.

This section offers practical tools that can be easily adapted to different contexts and group dynamics, helping to create spaces for dialogue, expression and collective learning. The materials encourage active participation and experimentation, supporting youth workers in turning ideas, values and intentions into meaningful educational experiences.

A Toolkit for Youth Workers
Creating Safe and Open Dialogue
on Gender



**A Recipe for a
Safe and Productive
Workshop
on Gender Equality**



Dear Youth Worker,

You are about to facilitate a workshop that tackles sensitive and complex topics surrounding gender issues and equality. It can be a controversial, polarizing, and potentially divisive topic even within the group of participants.

It is important to be aware of the dynamics that can emerge, and equally important to have some tools to marginalize the drifts. Facilitation is not just about sticking to the agenda; it's about creating an environment that nurtures trust, openness, and meaningful dialogue.

Here's a recipe to spark your creativity and help you lead an awesome workshop on gender issues, making it a meaningful and inclusive experience for everyone!

Step 1 → Prepare Yourself

Read the Agenda Carefully

Start by setting up a clear plan. Take a moment to read through the schedule of activities. You don't need to memorize every detail, but knowing the overall flow helps you stay on track. Identify which parts can be "tightened" if time is running short or "stretched" if you have extra time. This way, you have a flexible roadmap to navigate the workshop smoothly, adapting to the group's needs and creating seamless transitions between activities.

Step 2 → Double-Check the Ingredients

Organize Materials and Set Your Space

Before you begin, double-check your ingredients. Make sure all materials, like post its, markers, posters, etc., are ready. Arrange a friendly, comfortable space where participants can move freely and feel relaxed, especially for activities that require movement. A well-prepared setup sets the tone for an inclusive and engaging workshop.

Step 3 → Describe What's on the Plate

Set a Clear Goal

Introduce the workshop like a chef presenting the day's special. Ensure that participants understand the main goal and what they can expect to take away. Give a brief overview of the key themes and objectives so everyone knows what's on the plate for today's session. This helps set clear expectations and focuses the group's attention on the goal.

Step 4 → Prepare the Ground

Set the Rules Together

Just like preparing the worktop for baking, start by setting a strong foundation. Work with participants to co-create the ground rules. Establish key guidelines together – for instance, no interruptions, active listening without judgment, and respecting diverse opinions. This shared agreement is your base, ensuring the workshop runs smoothly and inclusively. You can refer back to the agreement at any point during the session if necessary.

Step 5 → Add a Dash of Confidentiality

Encourage Openness

To make your participants feel safe and ready to share, sprinkle in a reminder of confidentiality. Emphasize that what is shared during the workshop stays within the room, and everyone can only share what they feel comfortable with.

In this workshop, you'll be both a sharer and a listener – embrace each role with care, respect, and a commitment to confidentiality. This secret ingredient helps build trust among participants.

Step 6 → Mix in Zero Tolerance for Hate Speech

Create a Safe Space

Add a rule of zero tolerance for aggressive behaviors. Make it clear that any form of hate speech or discriminatory comments about gender identity, gender expression, or other personal traits will not be tolerated. This ingredient ensures a respectful space where everyone can speak without fear of ridicule or harm.



Step 7 → Make Sure Everyone is Involved

Facilitate Inclusive Communication

Make sure every participant gets a chance to share their thoughts and ideas. If needed, suggest methods to guide the conversation – like using dialogue objects or a show of hands. Balance the mix by gently inviting quieter voices to speak up, ensuring everyone is heard. Use encouraging prompts and non-verbal cues, like nodding, to show you're actively listening and value their contributions.

Remind participants to really hear each other out, respecting differing perspectives. This careful attention helps create a dialogue where everyone's input blends harmoniously.

Step 8 → Carefully Handle Complex Ingredients

Introduce Concepts with Care

When working with delicate ingredients like gender stereotypes and intersectionality, take extra care. Simplify difficult concepts and use relatable examples. Add trigger warnings

before diving into sensitive topics, giving participants the option to take a break if needed. This thoughtful preparation helps keep the conversation safe and digestible.

Step 9 → Whisk in Interactive Activities

Keep Participants Engaged

Keep the workshop dynamic and engaging by proposing interactive exercises. These hands-on activities are the yeast that helps your discussions rise, keeping the energy high and participants involved. If necessary, add an icebreaker or energizer.

Step 10 → Fold in Inclusivity and Intersectionality

Promote Diverse Voices

Remember to walk the talk on inclusivity with a gentle hand. Remind everyone that there are different genders, cultural backgrounds, and ways of seeing gender roles, and that identity is multi-layered. Acknowledge that you also see the world through your own cultural lenses – don't assume they're universal.



Step 11 → Release Steam from the Pot

Re-establish Emotional Safety

When running the discussions, be mindful of emotional safety. Encourage the use of “safe words” or signals if participants feel overwhelmed. Be mindful that if you receive worrying confidences from the participants, you might need to refer them to the appropriate support services.

Step 12 → React When it Boils

Manage Group Dynamics

Pay attention to the group dynamics. Keep an eye on power imbalances, making sure no one voice dominates. If conflicts arise, deal with them in a respectful and diplomatic manner, trying to find a solution that meets the needs of all parties involved without favoring one idea over another. The group will decide and find the compromise. If you're struggling with someone's behavior, remind the group of the rules they agreed upon.

Step 13 → Taste and Adjust

Reflect and Debrief

After each activity, take a moment to taste the progress with a debrief session. Invite participants to share their thoughts and any surprising insights they gained. Ask questions like, “What stood out to you?” This reflection helps refine the discussion and brings out deeper flavours of understanding.

Step 14 → Pay Attention to Time

Keep Track of Time

Monitor the time during the session and make sure you devote enough time to each agenda item without prolonging discussions too much.

Step 15 → Don't Hesitate to Involve Others

Ask for Help

If the work of the facilitator becomes tiring or if you cannot find a solution to the impasse or tensions in the group, do not hesitate to ask for help from the teacher (if you are at school) or the group itself, clearly pointing out the things that make it difficult to run the workshop.

Step 16 → Finish with a Sweet Touch

End on a Positive Note

At the end of the activity, the young people might feel a bit overwhelmed – that's a sign they've begun to grasp how gender stereotypes fuel inequalities. Congratulate them on taking this crucial first step – they're now ready to focus on finding solutions and driving change!

Step 17 → Ask for the Review

Get Feedback

Finally, gather feedback through an evaluation questionnaire (or other evaluation method) – preferably online to reduce paper use. Evaluation is crucial, and it enables you to run your workshops even better.

By following this recipe, you'll create a safe, engaging, and thoughtful space to explore gender equality. With the right mix of care and preparation, you'll inspire participants to leave feeling informed, motivated, and ready to make a difference. Enjoy facilitating – you are the secret ingredient in making this experience truly impactful!



A Toolkit for Youth Workers
Creating Safe and Open Dialogue
on Gender



**Brief (and not
Exhaustive) Tips**

**for Moderating Controversial Issues
in Youth Workshops**



The topic of gender can spark heated discussions because it is a controversial issue. If this happens during your workshop and the conversation escalates between participants, do not worry – this is normal. Also, do not worry about the time; here are some tips to better manage the situation.

Let the conversation flow

Allow the conversation to continue for a little while, then intervene to stop it. Propose a two-minute silence, and then ask everyone to answer the following question individually, without sharing their answers: “Why am I so fired up?”

Remind participants of common rules

Remind the participants of the common rules and emphasize that when politeness is lost, the value of the discussion diminishes. Invite them to find another way to express their viewpoints in a calmer manner.

Maintain neutrality as a Youth Worker

As a youth worker, try to distance yourself from the topic. Do not take sides or engage in the discussion. Intervene only to calm the confrontation and keep the environment respectful.

Identify and manage leaders of the confrontation

Identify the leaders in the confrontation. Once they have calmed down, propose discussing the topic again. You can split the group into smaller groups (ensuring the leaders are in different groups) and suggest continuing the discussion in these smaller settings.

Ensure respect for everyone

Emphasize that everyone deserves respect as a person. Make it clear that there is no space for discrimination or offensive behavior during the workshop.

Workshop 1: A Taste of Equality

| | |
|---|---|
| Topic/issues covered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the concept of gender • Gender stereotypes and gender equality |
| Target group | 15–30 years old |
| Time needed | 2–3 hours It's possible to do the activity in one session or in two different sessions |
| Aims of the activity | <p>All the participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are familiar with the idea of gender; • are able to recognize and acknowledge gender stereotypes and how they can affect us; • are aware of the influence of their action in deconstructing gender stereotypes. |
| Brief summary of active and participatory methodologies used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection • Participative discussion/plenary discussion • Group work • Non-formal education |
| Any specific materials and equipment needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blank notes/sticky notes (+ facilitators notes) – Activity 1 • Bowl – Activity 1 • Genderbread with backpack or cotton candies/clouds poster – Activity 1 • “Woman” poster / “2Man” poster – Activity 2 • Post-its in two different colors (one color for man and one for women) – Activity 2 • Stone factor poster – Activity 3 • Duct tape, markers |

Session 1 → Understanding Gender

Duration: 1 hour

This session introduces participants to the topic of gender, helping them explore its complexity in a clear and interactive way. The session encourages participants to share their thoughts, clarify misunderstandings, and build empathy, regardless of their prior familiarity with the topic. By creating a safe and inclusive space for discussion, the workshop aims to deepen understanding, challenge assumptions, and promote awareness of societal expectations and perceptions related to gender.

Introduction (5 minutes)

The facilitators start by introducing themselves, the organization, and the goals of the activity.

As a facilitator, explain to participants that exploring the topic of gender is important because it helps us better understand the complexity of society and develop critical thinking. Even if participants are already familiar with the topic, this workshop will offer a chance to deepen their understanding.

For those less interested, highlight that the discussion can still be valuable as it builds empathy and awareness about the world, we live in.

Tip Before starting, try to find out the group's familiarity with the topic of gender.

If the group has little knowledge, focus on introducing the basic concepts. If the group already knows the basics, you can move to deeper discussions and reflections.

Safe space (10 minutes)

The facilitator and the groups should co-create a safe space to establish shared agreements and guidelines that will help participants feel comfortable, respected, and safe to engage fully in the workshop.

Instructions for facilitators:

- Begin by explaining why creating a safe space is important. For example:
“In this workshop, we want everyone to feel comfortable to share their ideas, ask questions, and express themselves without fear of judgment. To do that, we need to agree on how we treat each other and how we work together. So let's co-create our group agreements for today.”
- Ask the group: “What do we need as a group to feel safe, respected, and supported during this workshop?”
- Invite participants to share their ideas openly.
You can prompt them with questions if needed:
“How do we want to speak and listen to each other?”
“What should we do if we feel uncomfortable or unsure about something?”
“How can we make sure everyone feels included and heard?”

Tip Write participants' suggestions on a flip chart, whiteboard, or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them.

Examples of ground common rules:

- Respect everyone’s opinions and experiences.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Confidentiality: What’s shared in the room stays in the room.
- Listen actively without interrupting.
- Use “I” statements” (speak from your own perspective).
- It’s okay to pass (you don’t have to share if you don’t feel comfortable).
- No judgment or mocking of anyone’s contributions.
- Be open to learning and hearing different perspectives.
- Read through the list and ask participants: “Is there anything you’d like to add or clarify?”, “Does everyone agree to follow these guidelines?”
- Ensure everyone gives a verbal or non-verbal agreement (e.g., thumbs up).
- Acknowledge that everyone’s input is important and that you’ll all work together to uphold the agreements.
- Keep the list of ground rules visible for the duration of the workshop as a reminder for everyone.

First Main Activity: Gender Salad (40 minutes)

Part 1: What’s Gender? (10 minutes)

Start by asking participants to think about the concept of gender.

You can choose one of the following questions depending on their level of awareness:

- “What is gender?” – for young people who may not be very familiar with the topic
 - “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word gender?”
– for participants who already have some knowledge and understanding of the concept
- Participants write their thoughts on 1–2 sticky notes. These can be anonymous or not, depending on their preference. Once everyone has written their notes, they place them in a bowl, and the facilitator mixes them up.

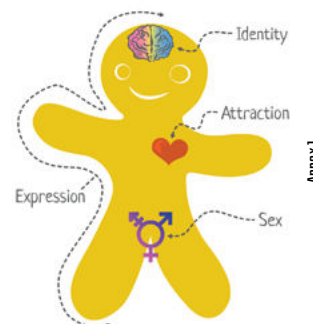


Part 2: Genderbread (20 minutes)

*Alternative models for this part of activity can be found below.

Note This activity works best with two facilitators.

- 1 Facilitator 1 quickly reviews the notes and filters out any offensive, discriminatory, or inappropriate content.
- 2 Facilitator 2 asks participants to take turns reading the notes or key words aloud. After each one is read:
 - Ensure everyone understands the meaning.
 - Ask participants to clarify or share their thoughts if needed.
- 3 Once the meaning is clear, participants place the notes on a visual representation of the Genderbread (see Annex 1) or alternative model of Cotton Candies/Clouds (see below).



Here's how the model works:

- **Head (Identity)** – Words related to who I feel I am (gender identity).
- **Heart (Attraction)** – Phrases about who I'm attracted to (sexual orientation).
- **Gender Symbol (Biological Sex)** – Words linked to biological characteristics.
- **Expression** – Phrases and words connected with how we express ourselves.
- **Backpack (Society)** – Notes related to societal expectations or any other.

Tip If certain themes are missing, facilitators can add pre-prepared notes to ensure important ideas are covered (e.g., biological sex: man, woman, intersex; identity: transgender, cisgender, non-binary, etc.).

At the end, facilitators can summarize the main points on large notes for clarity.

Use simple explanations to define key terms, like the ones you find below (if you prefer, feel free to use other definitions or explanations):

- **Biological Sex** – Physical characteristics that determine if a person is female, male, or intersex.
- **Gender Identity** – A person's internal sense of who they are. It may align with or differ from their biological sex.
- **Sexual Orientation** – Who someone is attracted to or wants relationships with.
- **Gender Expression** – How someone expresses their gender outwardly, like through clothing, behavior, or gestures.

Part 3: Closing Discussion (10 minutes)

Wrap up the activity with a group discussion:

- What stood out to you during this activity?
- How did you feel sharing or hearing these ideas?
- Is there anything you're still curious about or unsure of?

Key Message

Explain that gender is a complex and broad topic. This session wasn't about giving fixed definitions but about exploring our own ideas and experiences to better understand the concept of gender.

For advanced participants: Emphasize that this workshop aimed to create a space for open discussion and reflection to deepen understanding of the concept of gender and the society we live in.

*Alternative Models (for Genderbread)

1 Cotton Candies/Clouds

Use 4 cloud-shaped visuals instead of the genderbread:

- Cloud 1: Identity
- Cloud 2: Attraction
- Cloud 3: Biological Sex
- Cloud 4: Expression and Social Expectations



2 Grouping as We Go

Instead of pre-labeled visuals, read each note aloud and ask participants to help categorize them into themes (like identity, attraction, sex, and expression).

End of Session (5 minutes)

If this workshop is divided into multiple sessions, you can stop here.

Before closing, ask participants:

- How did it go?
- How did you feel during the whole session?
- Do you have any questions or things you'd like to explore further?

Please remind participants that gender is a broad and evolving topic. Creating space for open discussion and reflection is essential to fostering gender equality.

Session 2 → Exploring Gender Stereotypes

Duration: 1-2 hours (depending on group size)

This session is designed to help young people reflect on and discuss gender stereotypes in an interactive way. Through games, discussions, and group activities, participants will uncover how stereotypes impact our perceptions of gender and try to find out ways to challenge these ideas.



Second Main Activity: Shaking Words (30-40 minutes)

This activity aims to start a conversation about how society views gender roles and stereotypes in an engaging and collaborative way.

- **Warm-Up Round (3-4 minutes)**

Everyone stands in a circle. As a facilitator, explain the rules of the game:

 - You will introduce yourselves by shaking hands and exchanging names. You can move freely around the room.
 - The fun part? After meeting someone, you take their name and use it as your own to introduce yourself to the next person. (For example, if Harry meets Emily, Emily then uses Harry's name when introducing herself to Sophia.)
 - We'll do a trial round first to make sure everyone understands the rules!
- **The Real Activity: Exploring Gender (3-4 minutes per round)**

Now, instead of exchanging names, you'll share words or short sentences in response to specific questions.

Round 1 Question → "What do people think of when they think of a WOMAN?"

Round 2 Question → "What do people think of when they think of a MAN?"

After each round of handshaking and exchanging ideas, participants write down the most interesting or memorable words/phrases on post-it notes (one word or phrase per post-it).

Tip You can give each person max 4 post-its before the rounds or place them on a few tables so the participants can freely choose the number of post-its. Everyone should write down at least one word/phrase for “WOMAN” and one for “MAN.”

- **Collecting Words/Phrases**

Explain to the participants:

- You will stick your post-its on two posters: one for “WOMAN” and one for “MAN” (for poster see Annex 2).
- Together, we’ll look at the words and phrases collected.

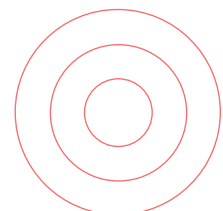
You’ll have a chance to reflect:

Do any of these words surprise you?

Does anything come to mind when reading these phrases/words, and can you identify what topic we are addressing?

And finally can you spot any gender stereotypes?

Some stereotypes will emerge, some will be more obvious, others less, but it will be important to guide the participants towards the identification of the stereotypes.



Annex 2

Tip If necessary, clarify the difference between stereotypes and prejudices to the participants.

Stereotype – A generalized belief about a group of people. Stereotypes can be either positive (e.g., “women are nurturing”) or negative (e.g., “men are aggressive”) or neutral (e.g., “Italian people always eat pasta”) and are often based on oversimplified or exaggerated characteristics.

Example – “All teenagers are rebellious.”

Prejudice – A preconceived opinion or attitude towards a group or individual, usually negative and not based on reason or actual experience. Prejudice often leads to discrimination.

Example – “I don’t trust teenagers because they’re always up to no good.”

Understanding these terms helps facilitate discussions and address any misconceptions participants might have during the activity.

Examples of Gender Stereotypes

- Stereotypes about Men:
 - Men are strong and assertive.
 - Men are less emotional and more rational.
 - Men are natural leaders and decision-makers.
 - Men are better at technical or physical jobs.
- Stereotypes about Women:
 - Women are caring and nurturing.
 - Women are more emotional and less rational.
 - Women are better at multitasking and household tasks.
 - Women are naturally inclined to be teachers or nurses.

Third Main Activity: Stone Factor (30–50 minutes)

The goal of this activity is to dive deeper into the impact of gender stereotypes and explore their consequences. The activity is connected with the previous one.

Divide participants into groups of 4–5 people and explain:



1 Group Challenge

- In small groups (4–5 people), pick one of the stereotypes identified earlier.
- Your group will write this stereotype at the center of a “Stone Factor poster” (see Annex 2).

Tip The Stone Factor poster should be at least A3 size. Therefore, instead of printing Annex 3, it is best to hand-draw the circles radiating outwards on a larger sheet of paper.

2 Consequences – work in groups* (20 minutes)

- Think of the effects this stereotype can have at different levels.
- Remember to write and report the consequences not only related to the gender mentioned in the stereotype but also to other genders.
- Note the consequences of the stereotype in the circles. The inner circle is the personal level, the outer circle – societal level.
- Discuss if there are any connections.

Example – Stereotype: “Older people are bad with technology.”

Consequences:

- Exclusion from opportunities: older individuals may be overlooked for jobs or roles that require technological skills, limiting their career growth and access to new opportunities.
- Missed learning potential: The stereotype may discourage companies or educational institutions from providing the proper training or support to older individuals, limiting their ability to learn new skills and adapt.
- Frustration and self-doubt: older people who encounter this stereotype may feel frustrated or inadequate when trying to engage with new technologies, leading to a lack of confidence.
- Generational divide: This stereotype can contribute to a divide between younger and older generations, fostering misunderstanding and limiting collaboration in both social and professional settings.

3 Sharing and Reflecting

- Each group shares their findings. Give each one of them max 5 min.

Debriefing Questions:

- How did you feel during this activity?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Can you identify similar patterns? (For example, are most stereotypes negative?)
- How can we challenge these stereotypes and their effects? What can we do?

Individual Reflection: Think about whether any of these stereotypes affect you personally – either as someone experiencing them or unintentionally reinforcing them.

If at the end of the activity the young people feel a bit overwhelmed – that’s a sign they’ve begun to grasp how gender stereotypes fuel inequalities. Congratulate them on taking this crucial first step – they’re now ready to focus on finding solutions and driving change!

***Alternative model (for identifying consequences – work in groups)**

If time allows, you can use a fun “World Café” format, where groups rotate and build on each other’s ideas. In this format the number of groups must be min. 2. Set up as many tables as there are groups.

- In the first round, each group will work on a different stereotype, and after 10 minutes, the groups will rotate tables in a clockwise direction.
- Each group arriving in a new table can read the notes of the previous group and either add new consequences or further explore the consequences already written by the previous group.
- Depending on the available time, several rounds can be done.

Wrap-Up and Feedback (5–10 minutes)

We’ll end the workshop with a group discussion to share final thoughts and reflections.

Questions: How did the activities feel (the whole session)? What stood out to you?

Before everyone leaves, ask the participants to fill out a short evaluation form to help us improve the session. They can fill out an online form or, if needed, on paper.

The preference will be to use the online questionnaire to reduce the use of paper.

This workshop is designed to be interactive, thought-provoking, and a safe space to explore how gender stereotypes shape our lives. It’s about listening, learning, and sharing ideas to challenge unfair beliefs and create more equality for everyone.

Additional Activity

Integrating Intersectionality into the Workshop – Identity Onion

What is Intersectionality?

- Intersectionality is the idea that our identities are made up of many interconnected parts that influence how we experience the world. These parts include things like gender, race, age, class, nationality and abilities.
- Intersectionality helps us understand that these identity layers don’t exist separately – they interact and shape each other. For example, a woman who is also from a marginalized racial group may face different challenges than a woman from a majority racial group.
- It is important to note that intersectionality is a complex concept, and not everything connects to it directly. If you are working with younger participants, it’s okay to simplify the topic. The goal is to introduce the idea without expecting to address it fully or exhaustively.

Onion Activity

The Onion Activity is a simple and visual way to explore identity, using an onion as a metaphor. Just like an onion has many layers, our identities are made up of different layers too. This activity helps participants reflect on these layers while focusing on gender as the main theme of the workshop.

You can do the Onion Activity at different points in the workshop depending on your goals:

- At the Beginning to introduce the idea of identity.
- At the End to wrap up the session and reflect on the day's discussion.

Option 1 → Identity Onion Activity at the Beginning

1 Distribute the Onion Template

Provide participants with a visual of an onion that shows multiple layers (see Annex 3).

2 Explain the Task

Ask participants to fill in each layer of the onion with different characteristics that make up a person's identity. For example:

- Gender identity: cisman/ciswoman/transgender
- Sexual orientation: heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual/pansexual
- Socioeconomic status: rich/poor
- Race: white/black
- Nationality
- Migration background/without migration background
- Age: young/old
- Abilities: with/without disabilities

To keep the space safe, participants should use an imaginary identity rather than their own.

3 Connect to the Gender Focus

Once participants complete the onion, explain:

“Our identity is made up of many layers, just like this onion. Today, we are going to focus specifically on gender. However, we all carry other characteristics that influence our experiences in the world and can make our backpack heavier.”

4 Link to the Next Activity

Use the onion layers to transition into the next activity, such as the Gender Salad Activity. Emphasize that while gender is a key part of our identity, it intersects with other layers like race, age, or ability.

5 Optional Note During the Genderbread Activity

Later in the workshop, when discussing stereotypes, refer back to the onion.

Explain how identity layers add to the “backpack” of expectations placed on people because of stereotypes.

Option 2 → Identity Onion Activity at the End**1 Introduce the Onion Template**

Give participants the onion visual and explain that it represents the different layers of a person's identity.

2 Reflect on the Day's Focus

Say something like: "Today, we focused on gender and how it shapes our experiences and stereotypes. But gender is just one part of who we are. Like an onion, our identities have many layers."

3 Ask for Reflection

- Invite participants to think about their own identities and fill in the layers of the onion with characteristics like:
 - Gender identity
 - Sexual orientation
 - Socioeconomic status
 - Race
 - Nationality
 - Migration background/without migration background
 - Age
 - Abilities: with/without disabilities
- Remind participants that this is a personal reflection. They don't have to share what they write.

4 Wrap-Up

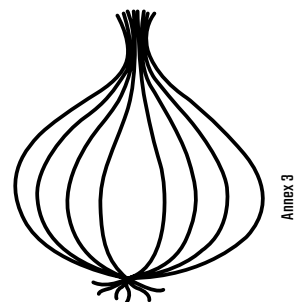
Close the activity by encouraging participants to reflect on how these layers interact. For example: "Our gender is just one layer of who we are. Other parts of our identity, like age, race, or ability, can also shape how we experience the world, our opportunities and how others see us."

Key Points for Facilitators

- Keep the space safe. If necessary, encourage the use of imaginary identities to avoid discomfort.
- Emphasize that while the workshop focuses on gender, intersectionality reminds us that our identities are made up of many interconnected layers.

Why the Onion Activity Matters

The Onion Activity allows participants to reflect on the complexity of identity in an accessible and engaging way. It highlights that while gender is an important layer, other aspects of identity – like race, class, or abilities – can add depth to our experiences. By introducing intersectionality in this way, participants can better understand how different identity layers influence stereotypes, expectations, and opportunities in the world.



Annex 3

Workshop 2: Climbing Dreams – Bridging the Gap

| | |
|---|--|
| Topic/issues covered | Gender inequalities, dream gap |
| Target group | 15–30 years old |
| Time needed | 2 hours |
| Aims of the activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deepen understanding of gender inequalities in life and career paths. • To deepen understanding how small actions that we can do, help to fight against gender inequalities • To recognize the privilege based on gender • To raise awareness of personal privileges and their impact. • To develop empathy and critical thinking about gender inequalities. |
| Brief summary of active and participatory methodologies used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential learning • Group work & Collaboration • Visual & Interactive tools • Guided Discussion & Reflection • Problem-solving & Critical thinking |
| Any specific materials and equipment needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large paper sheets • Markers • Printed Annex 4 (4 copies) • Printed Annex 5 • Colored pencils • Post-it notes |
| Needed before the workshop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This template is designed for groups of 10–20 participants. Adapt your activities according to the size and age of the group. • Collect some basic information about the group before starting. • Check the group’s familiarity with gender and gender inequalities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If knowledge is limited → start with basic concepts. – If the basics are already known → move to deeper discussions and reflections. • Be clear about your role: you are facilitators, not topic experts. You should know the topic and anticipate what may emerge from the group and its discussions, but it’s impossible to prepare for everything– the field is too broad. You don’t always need to have the “right” answer; often, it’s more valuable to guide the discussion and offer inputs for reflection. |

Introduction (5 minutes)

The facilitator starts by introducing themselves, the organization, and the goals of the activity. As a facilitator, explain to participants that exploring the topic of this workshop is important because it helps us better understand the complexity of society and develop critical thinking.

Example – “Today, we’re going to talk about something that affects all of us – privilege, power, and the opportunities we have in life. We might not always notice it, but the way we are treated and the chances we get can depend on things like our gender, background, or where we come from. This workshop is a chance to think about these things, share ideas, and learn from each other. It helps us better understand the complexity of society and develop critical thinking. There are no wrong answers here – it’s all about being open, listening, and understanding different perspectives. Let’s be respectful, keep an open mind, and explore these topics together!”

Explain that in this workshop we are focusing on one part of life, which is job employment, because it is easier and more understandable for everyone, but we do not want to associate the concept of success in life with the concept of job (or career).

Safe space (10 minutes)

The facilitator and the groups should co-create a safe space to establish shared agreements and guidelines that will help participants feel comfortable, respected, and safe to engage fully in the workshop.

Instructions for facilitators:

- Begin by explaining why creating a safe space is important. For example:
“In this workshop, we want everyone to feel comfortable to share their ideas, ask questions, and express themselves without fear of judgment. To do that, we need to agree on how we treat each other and how we work together. So let’s co-create our group agreements for today.”
- Ask the group: “What do we need as a group to feel safe, respected, and supported during this workshop?”
- Invite participants to share their ideas openly.
You can prompt them with questions if needed:
“How do we want to speak and listen to each other?”
“What should we do if we feel uncomfortable or unsure about something?”
“How can we make sure everyone feels included and heard?”



Tip Write participants’ suggestions on a flip chart, whiteboard, or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them.

Examples of common ground rules

- Respect everyone’s opinions and experiences.
 - One person speaks at a time.
 - Confidentiality: What’s shared in the room stays in the room.
 - Listen actively without interrupting.
 - Use “I” statements” (speak from your own perspective).
 - It’s okay to pass (you don’t have to share if you don’t feel comfortable).
 - No judgment or mocking of anyone’s contributions.
 - Be open to learning and hearing different perspectives.
- Read through the list and ask participants: “Is there anything you’d like to add or clarify?”, “Does everyone agree to follow these guidelines?”
 - Ensure everyone gives a verbal or non-verbal agreement (e.g., thumbs up).
 - Acknowledge that everyone’s input is important and that you’ll all work together to uphold the agreements.
 - Keep the list of ground rules visible for the duration of the workshop as a reminder for everyone.



Main Activity: Dream Mountain (40 minutes)

What are we talking about?

The dream gap is the difference between girls and boys in how they imagine their abilities and future opportunities. The dream gap has been studied in relation to how cultural messages, media representation, education, and family expectations shape children’s perceptions of what they can achieve. Research shows that girls as young as five may start believing that certain skills or leadership roles are “not for them,” which can influence their confidence, career aspirations, and participation in different fields as they grow up.



Annex 4

To explore further → <https://shopping.mattel.com/it-it/pages/barbie-dream-gap>

Objective

- To explore the barriers different gender face in achieving their dream jobs and reflect on systemic challenges.
- To show how gender and privileges are interconnected.

Instructions

- 1 Divide participants into four groups and assign different profiles:
 - Group A–B: You are a woman.
 - Group C–D: You are a man.

- 2 Distribute a printed copy of Annex 4 to each group (or display it and ask the groups to draw a mountain on an empty sheet of paper).
 - 3 Explain the activity:
Each group shares the same goal – to climb the mountain and reach their dream job
Choose the same dream job for at least 2 groups with different gender. Here some examples: CEO, Professional Video Game Developer, Daycare Educator for little children
(**Note** If in your country those jobs are not appropriate to reach the aim of the activity, please feel free to change them).
Along the way, they must identify and write down (on post its) the barriers or obstacles their assigned profile might face.

* Alternative proposal: Each group shares the same goal – to climb the mountain and reach their dream. They all can choose either a dream job (becoming an actor/an actress, president, mayor, CEO...) or even a dream like travelling around the world. It is important that the dream is the same for all groups.
 - 4 Tip for participants:
Consider factors such as stereotypes, working conditions, societal expectations, and systemic challenges that could make achieving their dreams more difficult.
Examples of stereotypes – “Girls are too emotional for leadership roles.”; “Men should be the breadwinners.”
Examples of systemic challenges – Unequal access to quality education for marginalized communities; Lack of access to capital and opportunities; Wealth inequality; Mental health stigmatization; Economy instability, where workers lack benefits and job security.
 - 5 Groups will then place their identified barriers on their way to the mountain top.
 - 6 Once finished attach the post-it to the mountain, give to every group a new obstacle/ characteristic of the profile they are playing (one for group) and give them few minutes to reflect about it. If possible, try to find a characteristic that can create conflict with the job (ex: being colorblind for Game Developer).
Here is a list of examples:
dyslexia, single father/mother of 2 children, coming from a rural area, a migrant background, Muslim religion (wearing the hijab for women), being in a wheelchair.
- This last part has the aim to introduce a bit the concept of intersectionality.
- 7 Once the group work is complete, participants will present their dream mountains to the rest of the group.

Reflection for the group work

- What do people say?
- What happens at school?
- What do you see in media?
- What rules or systems might get in the way?

Discussion questions

- What do you notice about the barriers? Are they different depending on gender?
- Do these barriers feel fair? Why or why not?
- How do you think, hearing “you can’t”, affects someone’s confidence, motivation or dreams?
- Which are the barriers that can influence my possibility of dreaming that dream?
- Are there certain careers or activities people think are “for boys“ or “for girls“?
- Have you ever noticed differences in how people talk about boys’ and girls’ dreams?
- Are there certain dreams people think are only for boys or only for girls? Why?
- What things do boys/girls hear about what they should or shouldn’t do?
- Who or what might make it harder for someone to follow their dream?

Additional discussion points

- Do your personal career goals depend on your gender? Reflect about it.
- Which barriers influence your ability to dream about a certain career?
- Did anyone in your life support or challenge your dream? How did that shape you?

These barriers are part of what’s called the dream gap – the differences in how society supports boys’ and girls’ dreams and their chances to dream big. But we can change that!

Closing Activity: World café (15–20 minutes)

Create three tables (table A = for transforming myself
– table B = for supporting people I care
– table C = for changing the society – Annex 5)
and create three groups.

Ask the participants to write the answers on the tables.

Word Café methodology (work in groups; spend 5 to 7 minutes
at each table; Once you have finished at one table, you may move
to the next. You do not need to stay in a fixed group or change tables at a specific time)



Suggestion for multiple reflection

- Individual = self-reflection (What expectations are placed on me because of my gender? Which prejudices or stereotypes do I personally hold? How do these influence the way I see myself and others? What small steps can I take to challenge these within myself?)

- How can I support someone else in breaking the rules (How can I encourage friends or peers to question stereotypes? What can I do to support someone who wants to break the rules or go beyond traditional roles? How can I be an ally in everyday situations?)
- What needs to change in society to be able to be free (What needs to change in society so that everyone can feel free to be themselves? How can awareness-raising, education, or political action contribute? What role can young people play in this transformation?)

To help the group work

Ask what strategies could be useful to overcome the barriers we placed on our mountains. Encourage participants to reflect on strategies that can be implemented both on a personal level (in daily life) and on a societal level (for example, if a specific regulation is mentioned).

- What can we do as individuals or a community to ensure everyone can dream freely?
- How could we help someone climb over these obstacles? What could you say or do to challenge these barriers?

Ways to Challenge Barriers:

Use positive language: instead of “That’s not for you” try “If that’s your dream, go for it!”

Share success stories: Who’s already doing what you dream of?

Their story = your inspiration!

Question stereotypes: When you hear “girls/boys can’t...” ask “Says who?”

Once the time for the world café is over, and after all groups have rotated through all three tables, read out some of the contributions in plenary and especially highlight the ‘simple actions’ that can make a difference. Conclude the activity by showing the Cholitas video:
→ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1H47Uq4X0c>

If there is still some time left, you can do a short evaluation. Hand out post-its to the participants (if possible, without mentioning it, give one color to female participants and another to male participants) and ask them to write down what they are taking away from this workshop.

Workshop 3: Dis-cover – Privilege, Power, and the Paths We Take

| | |
|---|---|
| Topic/issues covered | Intersectionality, privilege, and systemic inequalities |
| Target group | 15–30 years old |
| Time needed | 2,5 hours |
| Aims of the activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deepen understanding of intersectionality and gender inequalities in life and career paths. • To deepen understanding how multiple identities shape experiences. • To recognize the structural barriers different groups face and their cumulative impact. • To raise awareness of personal privileges and their impact. • To develop empathy and critical thinking about social inequalities. |
| Brief summary of active and participatory methodologies used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential learning • Group work & Collaboration • Role-Playing & Simulation • Visual & Interactive tools • Guided discussion & Reflection • Problem-solving & Critical thinking |
| Any specific materials and equipment needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balloons • Large paper sheets • Markers • Printed Annex 4 (4 copies) • Printed Annex 6 (for each participant) • Colored pencils • Post-it notes |
| Needed before the workshop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This template is designed for groups of 10–20 participants. Adapt your activities according to the size and age of the group. • Collect some basic information about the group before starting. • Check the group’s familiarity with gender and gender inequalities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If knowledge is limited → start with basic concepts. – If the basics are already known → move to deeper discussions and reflections. • Be clear about your role: you are facilitators, not topic experts. You should know the topic and anticipate what may emerge from the group and its discussions, but it’s impossible to prepare for everything – the field is too broad. You don’t always need to have the “right” answer; often, it’s more valuable to guide the discussion and offer inputs for reflection. |

What are we talking about?

Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how different aspects of a person's identity – such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and more – overlap and interact to shape their experiences of privilege and oppression. The concept, introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, highlights that systems of discrimination (like racism, sexism, and classism) do not act independently but are interconnected, creating unique and compounded experiences for individuals.

For example, a Black woman may face discrimination differently than a white woman or a Black man because of the combined effects of racism and sexism. Intersectionality helps recognize these complexities and encourages more inclusive social policies and activism.

Introduction (5 minutes)

The facilitator starts by introducing themselves, the organization, and the goals of the activity. As a facilitator, explain to participants that exploring the topic of this workshop is important because it helps us better understand the complexity of society and develop critical thinking.

Example – “Today, we’re going to talk about something that affects all of us – privilege, power, and the opportunities we have in life. We might not always notice it, but the way we are treated and the chances we get can depend on things like our gender, background, or where we come from. This workshop is a chance to think about these things, share ideas, and learn from each other. It helps us better understand the complexity of society and develop critical thinking. There are no wrong answers here – it’s all about being open, listening, and understanding different perspectives. Let’s be respectful, keep an open mind, and explore these topics together!”

Safe space (10 minutes)

The facilitator and the groups should co-create a safe space to establish shared agreements and guidelines that will help participants feel comfortable, respected, and safe to engage fully in the workshop.

Instructions for facilitators

- Begin by explaining why creating a safe space is important. For example:
“In this workshop, we want everyone to feel comfortable to share their ideas, ask questions, and express themselves without fear of judgment. To do that, we need to agree on how we treat each other and how we work together. So let’s co-create our group agreements for today.”
- Ask the group: “What do we need as a group to feel safe, respected, and supported during this workshop?”

- Invite participants to share their ideas openly.
You can prompt them with questions if needed:
How do we want to speak and listen to each other?
What should we do if we feel uncomfortable or unsure about something?
How can we make sure everyone feels included and heard?

Tip Write participants' suggestions on a flip chart, whiteboard, or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them.

Examples of common ground rules

- Respect everyone's opinions and experiences.
 - One person speaks at a time.
 - Confidentiality: What's shared in the room stays in the room.
 - Listen actively without interrupting.
 - Use "I" statements (speak from your own perspective).
 - It's okay to pass (you don't have to share if you don't feel comfortable).
 - No judgment or mocking of anyone's contributions.
 - Be open to learning and hearing different perspectives.
-
- Read through the list and ask participants: "Is there anything you'd like to add or clarify?", "Does everyone agree to follow these guidelines?"
 - Ensure everyone gives a verbal or non-verbal agreement (e.g., thumbs up).
 - Acknowledge that everyone's input is important and that you'll all work together to uphold the agreements.
 - Keep the list of ground rules visible for the duration of the workshop as a reminder for everyone.



Energizer: Privileged Balloons (15–20 minutes)

Objective: To help participants experience how privilege influences success and ease of participation.

Instructions

- 1 Distribute one balloon per participant (or small group of participants).
- 2 Assign random limitations to each participant (or small group of participants), such as:
 - You can use both hands.
 - You can use only one hand.
 - You can use only your legs and must keep your hands behind your back.
 - You cannot move from your spot (but you can use hands and legs).

Do not tell the other groups what limitations the remaining participants have. Communicate these limitations individually to participants or to each small group that will take part in the game. They will discover it later by answering debriefing questions.



Activity

Participants (or small groups of participants) attempt to keep their balloon in the air while following their assigned limitations (2–4 minutes).

Debriefing Questions

- 1 How did you feel during the activity?
- 2 Was anything difficult?
- 3 Have you noticed any differences between you and other players?
- 4 Did you experience any limitations?
- 5 Did having more abilities make the task easier?
Did some people have a better chance to succeed? Why?
- 6 Was it a privilege to be able to use both hands?
- 7 What do you think privilege is (in general)? Can you give examples?
- 8 Do we all have the same privileges in life?
- 9 Do privileges create power? Do they create responsibility?

Key Takeaways

- Privilege provides advantages that others may not have.
- Some limitations are visible, while others are hidden.
- Awareness of privilege fosters empathy and inclusion.

Main Activity: Dream Mountain (40 minutes)

What are we talking about?

The dream gap is the difference between girls and boys in how they imagine their abilities and future opportunities. The dream gap has been studied in relation to how cultural messages, media representation, education, and family expectations shape children's perceptions of what they can achieve. Research shows that girls as young as five may start believing that certain skills or leadership roles are "not for them," which can influence their confidence, career aspirations, and participation in different fields as they grow up.



Annex 4

To explore further → <https://shopping.mattel.com/it-it/pages/barbie-dream-gap>

Objective

- To explore the barriers different groups face in achieving their dream jobs and reflect on systemic challenges.
- To show how different privileges are interconnected.
- To illustrate how power depends on multiple factors and how it can shift with slight changes in circumstances.

Instructions

- 1 Divide participants into four groups and assign different profiles:
 - Group A: You are a woman.
 - Group B: You are a man.
 - Group C: You are a woman and additionally choose two more characteristics (preferably familiar to you).
 - Group D: You are a man and additionally choose two more characteristics (preferably familiar to you).
 - Characteristics Selection (Identity):

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Migrant background / No migrant background | Black / White |
| High / Middle / Low SES (Socioeconomic status) | Rural / Urban |
| Homosexual / Heterosexual / Queer | Transgender / Cisgender |
| Elementary / Secondary / Postsecondary Education | Native speaker / Non-native speaker |

- 2 Distribute a printed copy of Annex 4 to each group (or display it and ask the groups to draw a mountain on an empty sheet of paper).

- 3 Explain the activity:

Each group shares the same goal – to climb the mountain and reach their dream job (choose the same dream job for all groups: becoming an actor/an actress, president, mayor, CEO, ...). However, along the way, they must identify and write down (on post its) the barriers or obstacles their assigned profile might face.

*Alternative proposal: Each group shares the same goal – to climb the mountain and reach their dream. They all can choose either a dream job (becoming an actor/an actress, president, mayor, CEO, ...) or even a dream like travelling around the world. It is important that the dream is the same for all groups.

- 4 Tip for participants: Consider factors such as stereotypes, working conditions, societal expectations, and systemic challenges that could make achieving their dreams more difficult.

Examples of stereotypes – “Girls are too emotional for leadership roles.”; “Men should be the breadwinners.”

Examples of systemic challenges – Unequal access to quality education for marginalized communities; Lack of access to capital and opportunities; Wealth inequality; Mental health stigmatization; Economy instability, where workers lack benefits and job security.

- 5 Groups will then place their identified barriers on their way to the mountain top.

- 6 Once the group work is complete, participants will present their dream mountains to the rest of the group.

Reflection – discussion questions

- What do you notice about the barriers? Are they different depending on gender?
- Are they different depending on other characteristics (identities) you chose (migrant background/race/sexual orientation etc.)?
- Do these barriers feel fair? Why or why not?
- How do you think hearing “you can’t” affects someone’s confidence, motivation or dreams?
- What can we do to overcome these barriers (individually and as a society)?

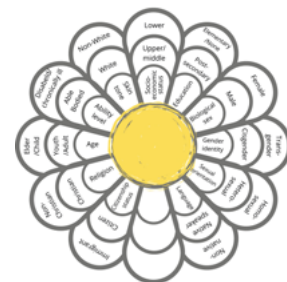
Additional discussion points

- Do your personal career goals depend on your gender? Reflect about it.
- Which barriers influence your ability to dream about a certain career?
- Did anyone in your life support or challenge your dream? How did that shape you?

Closing Activity: Power Flower (15–20 minutes)

Objective

- To show power relations in society.
- To show how different privileges are interconnected.
- To illustrate how power depends on multiple factors and how it can shift with slight changes in circumstances.



Annex 6

Explanation of the Power Flower

- The Power Flower represents privilege and discrimination in European society.
- The inner petals represent structurally privileged groups.
- The outer petals represent structurally discriminated groups.

This is not about personal feelings of privilege, but about access to resources, power, and societal recognition. The Power Flower represents general positions of privilege and disadvantage within society, but does not define one’s individual abilities, strengths, or prospects for growth. It is worth highlighting that even people in less privileged positions can draw strength from their experiences and achieve success.

Additionally, those in more privileged positions carry a responsibility towards others in society – particularly those in more difficult situations – and that mutual support and solidarity are essential.

Instructions

- 1 Give each participant one printed copy of annex 6 and explain that this is an individual exercise. Explain that participants can, but do not have to show their Power Flower to others. After the activity, participants keep their Power Flowers as a reminder of their unique position in society.

- 2 Ask participants to mark each petal with a color:
 - a Inner petal = If you belong to a privileged group.
 - b Outer petal = If you belong to a non-privileged or discriminated group.
 - c Additional petals = If your identity does not fit neatly into these categories, feel free to add your own.

Reflection

Under the Power Flower each participant completes the sentence:
“The Power Flower gives me the power to...”

If there is enough time for discussion, you can foster it by asking questions like

- How do I feel about the result?
- How does it feel to be in the inner / outer group?
- What impact does my position have on my career choices/career position/dream job?
- Does it give me a special power or responsibility?
- What additional categories did I fill in?
- What questions have arisen?

Reference

The Power Flower is a method inspired by anti-racist education tools and was further developed within the 2GATHER project.

See for example:

Europahaus Aurich und Anti-Bias-Werkstatt (Hrsg.) 2007.

Methodenbox “Demokratie lernen und Anti-Bias-Arbeit“.

or:

Anti-Bias Werkstatt (2007). Power Flower

→ <https://www.mangoes-and-bullets.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/8i-Power-Flower.pdf>.

Final note

This workshop provides youth workers with a structured, interactive session to explore privilege and intersectionality, encouraging critical reflection and meaningful discussion.

A Toolkit for Youth Workers
Creating Safe and Open Dialogue
on Gender



Guide to Creating a Silent Play[®] Performance



This guide offers practical advice on preparing and conducting a Silent Play® performance, from technical set-up to managing the group in the final phase.

Silent Play® is part of 2GATHER as a methodology to introduce discussions with young people on gender equality, and to initiate further educational, artistic and participatory activities on the topic. Its immersive and interactive format actively engages participants on a physical, emotional and relational level, creating a safe space where inhibitory barriers are lowered and complex social issues can be explored through experience.

Silent Play® Echoes of Choices was created through a collective process involving facilitators and youth workers and realized by the two artists Carlo Presotto and Paola Rossi (La Piccionaia). The thematic focus is Gender Equality. The experience unfolds in five stages and revolves around seven key words: Choices, Privilege, Stereotypes, Power, Shared Responsibility, Intersectionality and Change. These concepts are not presented as definitions or theoretical content, but as experiential triggers designed to resonate with participants' personal stories and lived experiences, stimulating reflection and dialogue. Silent Play® is a registered trademark owned by La Piccionaia Centre of Theatre Production.

Want to perform “Echoes of Choices“ Silent Play®?

Do you need equipment?

- If you live in Austria, contact Südwind Vorarlberg at vbg@suedwind.at
- If you live in Bulgaria, contact Open Education Centre at openedcen@gmail.com
- If you live in Italy, contact Progettomondo at educazione@progettomondo.org or La Piccionaia at progetti@piccionaia.org
- If you live in Poland, contact Czart at czart@czart.org
- If you live in Spain, contact Madre Coraje at educacion@madrecoraje.org

What is a Silent Play® performance?

A Silent Play® performance is an immersive theatrical and narrative experience in which the audience wears wireless headphones through which they receive voices, sounds, music and instructions.

Participants thus become protagonists of a journey that takes place in real space – a hall, an urban space, a park, a natural space – transformed by sound into an invisible stage. Through a combination of audio narration, musical suggestions and movement in space, participants experience the dual perception of being in everyday reality and, at the same time, in a poetic and imaginary dimension.

Silent Play® naturally opens up space for discussion, debriefing and follow-up actions. At the end of the performance, dedicated time is provided to share thoughts, emotions and reflections, supporting group dialogue and helping participants connect the experience to their everyday lives and to wider social dynamics related to gender equality.

Origins and invention

The Silent Play® technique was conceived in 2010 by Carlo Presotto, actor, director and theatre trainer. The idea arose from the encounter between theatre, radio and new technologies: the possibility of transmitting a recorded text through headphones opens up a new way of doing theatre, in which there is no traditional stage or audience, but a shared space in which the spectators themselves become performers. Silent Play® is inspired by the experiences of guided storytelling and urban walkabouts, but renews them with a theatrical dramaturgical structure and creative use of the soundscape.

Silent Play® performances are staged in a wide variety of contexts, including:

- Theatre and performing arts: as an innovative form of site-specific performance, which leads the audience to experience cities and landscapes as narrative places.
- Education: in schools, with children and young people, as a tool for creative exploration, listening and relating to space.
- Museums and cultural heritage: to enhance historical or naturalistic sites with immersive narratives that combine information and suggestion.
- Social and community events: to create collective experiences of memory, participation and reflection in public spaces.
- Festivals and urban projects: as practices of active citizenship and symbolic reappropriation of the territory.

Audio standards

Silent Play® audio files are in 128kbs mp3 format. They are recorded with a sampling frequency of 48000hz. The title of each track contains a sequential number and a text indicating the content (01 Staircase Arch).

How to conduct a session

Step 1 → Preparing the equipment

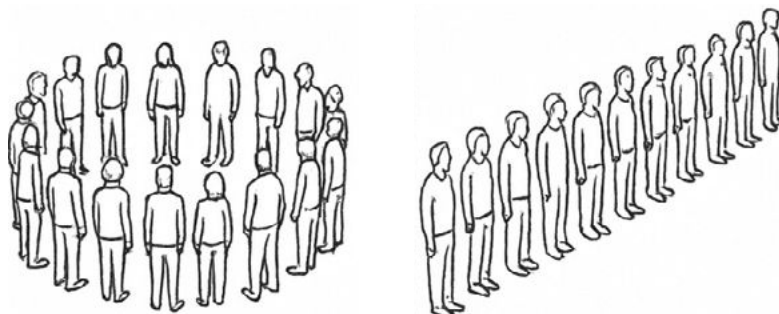
Before you begin, make sure that the equipment is ready and working:

- Headphones: check that they are all charged. Test them to check the volume and sound quality. Refer to the instruction manual.
- Transmitter: make sure it is charged. Check that the channel is set correctly and that the signal is stable. Refer to the instruction manual.
- Recorder or audio player: You can use an audio recorder similar to the Tascam DR-05, or an MP3 player or smartphone. To load the audio files and configure them in a playlist, refer to the specific instructions for the recorder or audio player. Load the correct files (pay attention to language, version and format). Connect the player to the transmitter with the 3.5 mm dual jack cable. If you are using a smartphone, you may need an adapter.

The output of the audio recorder or player is the headphone output.
The input of the transmitter is marked “audio”.
Adjust the volume of the audio recorder or player.
Always test with headphones to check synchronization and volume balance.
We recommend setting playback to continuous mode so that it does not stop at each track.

Step 2 → Preparing the space and setting

The quality of the experience also depends on the context:
Choose a space that is suitable for listening and movement, safe and easily accessible.
The size of the space must allow the group to form a large circle and line up along one side.
(For 15 people, a square space of about 8/10m per side.
For 25 people, about 13/18m per side).



Reduce external noise or interference as much as possible.
Clearly define the group’s meeting points: one at the start and one at the end for discussion.
If the activity is outdoors, consider the weather and have an alternative plan in case of rain or wind.

Step 3 → Number of participants and type of group

The size of the group greatly affects the performance:
The ideal number ranges from 10 to 25 people: enough to create a collective experience, but not too many to make it difficult to manage.
Adapt your instructions to the type of participants.

Step 4 → Warnings before the performance

Now that everything is ready, the group arrives. How to prepare for the performance?
What should the leader say? They will need to present the content and then provide some technical instructions on how the performance will take place.

Content

- Every group has its own unique story, and no two performances are the same. A group addressing the issue for the first time will react differently from a group that has already discussed it. Age, gender composition and cultural background can greatly affect reactions.
It is important to give clear and complete instructions without overloading the introduction.
- Point out in advance that this is a game, a context in which there is no “right” or “wrong” way of doing things, but that each person should feel free to respond as they wish to the voice’s instructions, or even not to respond at all.
- The performance was created through a collective process, which was then handed over to the two artists Paola Rossi and Carlo Presotto.
- The theme is Gender Equality.
- It takes place in five stages, covering seven words: Choices, Privilege, Stereotypes, Power, Shared Responsibility, Intersectionality, Change.
- Seven important words rich in meaning. The performance does not seek to explain them, but rather to make them resonate in the experiences of each participant, stimulating reflection and an exchange of opinions.
- At the end, there will be time dedicated to sharing thoughts, emotions and reflections on the theme.

Technical instructions

The person in charge explains:

- How to turn the headphones on and off.
- How to adjust the volume without risk to hearing.
- What to do in case of interruptions or technical problems.

They carry out an initial transmission test, inviting people to put on their headphones and hold a finger on the volume control to adjust it. They speak into the microphone to check that everyone can hear correctly and at a suitable volume. Usually, the person leading asks, “Who can hear my voice, raise your hand,” and checks that everyone is connected.

Step 5 → Role of the guide during Silent Play®

We are ready, we have presented the performance, let’s begin. What should the leader do?

The guide is not the protagonist, but the guarantor of the experience.

Welcome the group calmly, creating an atmosphere of attention and curiosity.

Help participants put on their headphones and start the audio track in sync.

During the performance, observe: make sure everyone is following along, and only intervene in case of problems or risks. Stand in the center to indicate the four cardinal points, using the gestures of flight attendants on airplanes, using both hands if you wish.

If necessary, you can invite participants to move around the space and form a circle when requested by the voice, supporting the instructions with your non-verbal language. Maintain eye contact with people who seem uncomfortable, but do not force them. For some participants, it may make sense to sit and listen. Maintain a discreet presence: it is the audio that guides the participants.

Step 6 → Conclusion of the performance

We are at the end of the last track. Applause.

The final moment needs a clear and shared signal.

Indicate unambiguously the end of the performance of the game, and invite participants to remove or turn off their headphones. Lead a brief transition: a moment of silence, a gesture, a phrase that marks the end of the experience.

Step 7 → Conversation after the performance

Silent Play® does not end with the performance: the final conversation is an integral part of the experience. Gather the group in a circle or in a welcoming space. Encourage them to share their impressions, emotions and questions.

Use open-ended questions to stimulate dialogue:

- Which moment struck you the most?
- Did a phrase, a gesture, or a moment evoke a particular thought, emotion, or physical sensation?
- Did you notice anything new in the space?
- How did listening to the music and sounds affect you?
- Repeat the words from the text, asking if any of the participants would like to say something about any of them.

Then, repeat the key words from the chapters of the performance – Choices, Privilege, Stereotypes, Power, Shared Responsibility, Intersectionality, Change – and invite participants to choose one they feel connected to. Let them decide which words they would like to expand on and use these choices to guide the collective reflection, paying attention to emotional safety, active listening and inclusiveness, as explored in the manual and guidelines. Value all contributions without judgment, allowing silence and different perspectives to coexist.

To close the experience, invite participants to write on a post-it a small personal commitment – to themselves or to a community they feel part of – that can help them walk together toward gender justice. Thank the group and conclude with a brief summary or a sentence that captures the shared meaning of the experience.

How to Use and Share This Work

We are excited to share Echoes of Choices with the global community! To ensure this resource reaches as many people as possible, Paola Rossi, La Piccionaia S.C.S., and our project partners have released the original script, audio tracks, and translations under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license.

This means you are free to:

- Share, reproduce, and perform the Silent Play® publicly.
- Adapt and translate the content to fit your local context.
- Use it for commercial purposes, if needed.

Your only obligation: attribution.

The only “cost” of using this work is giving credit to the creators. To comply with the license, please include the following exact wording in your materials, programs, or digital platforms:

- Echoes of Choices
- Silent Play® by Paola Rossi
- Production: La Piccionaia S.C.S. – Centro di Produzione Teatrale

Developed with the support of the Italian Youth Agency under the Erasmus+ Programme, within the framework of the project 2GATHER – Building Quality and Emotional Resilience in Youth Work on Gender Equality, promoted by Progettomondo ETS, in collaboration with Stowarzyszenie Wspierania Działań Młodzieży Cz-ART, Asociación Madre Coraje, Open Education Centre Foundation, Südwind – Verein für Entwicklungspolitik und Globale Gerechtigkeit, and La Piccionaia S.C.S.

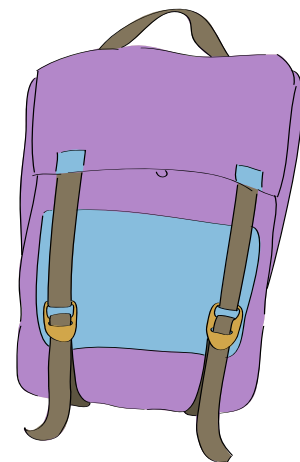
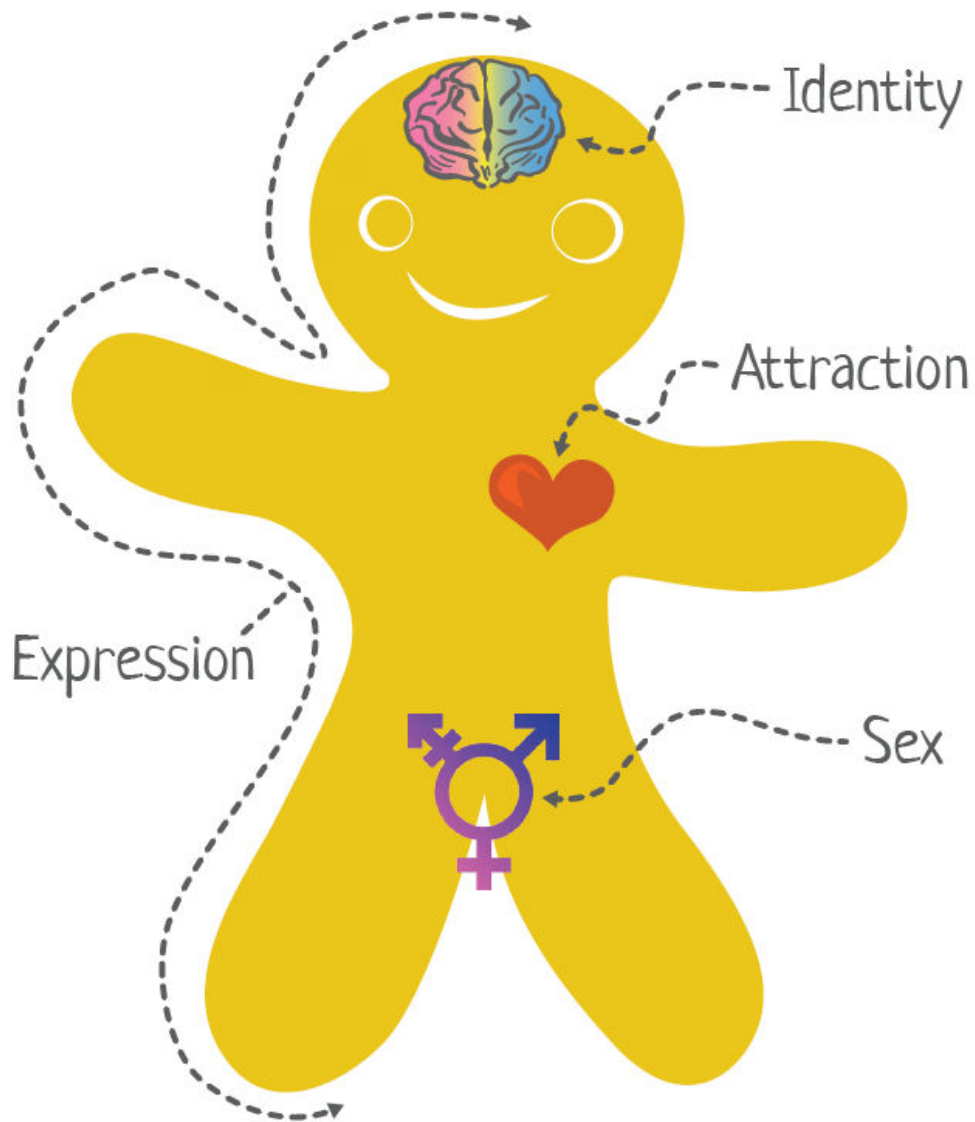
For a full explanation of your rights under this license, you can visit [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

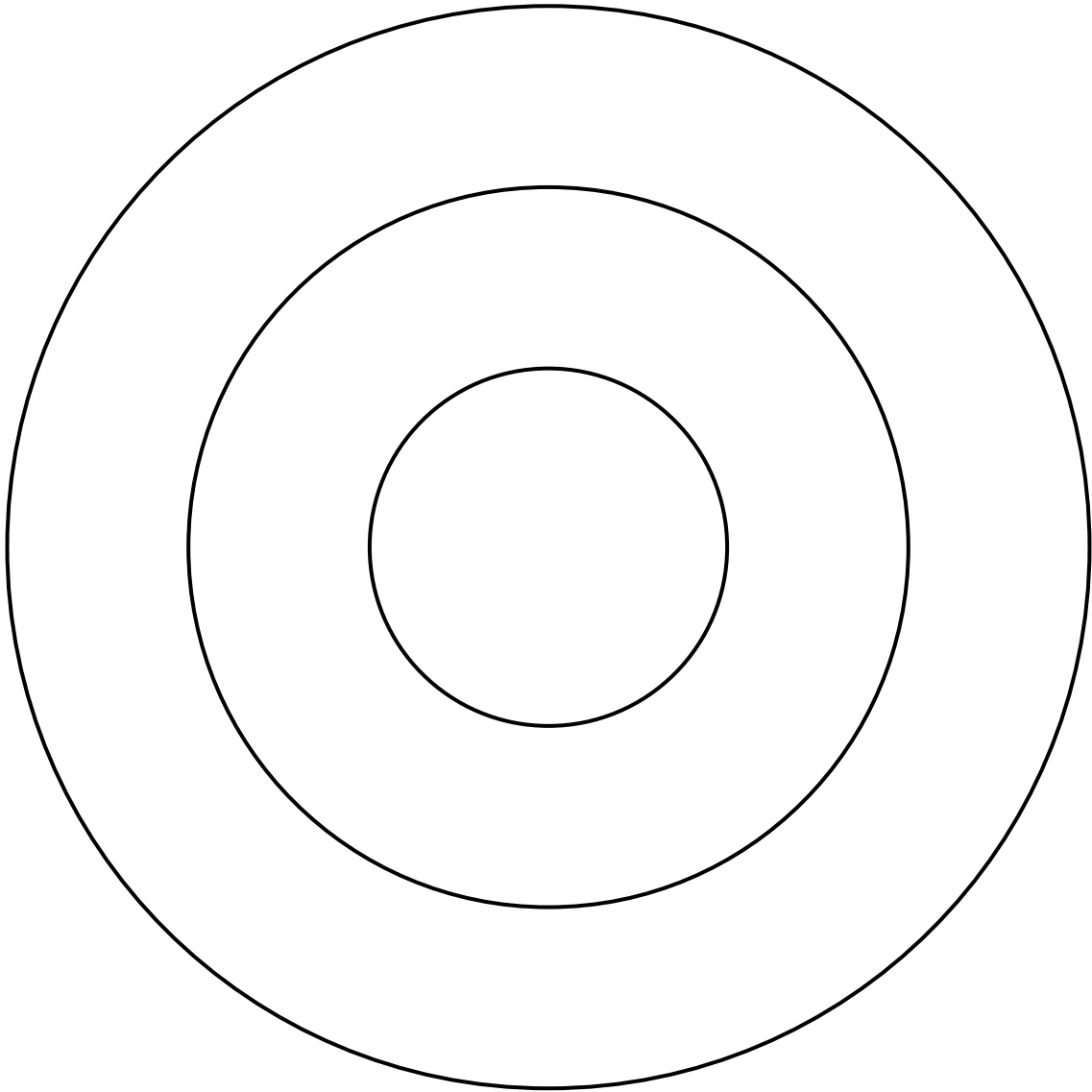
A Toolkit for Youth Workers
Creating Safe and Open Dialogue
on Gender

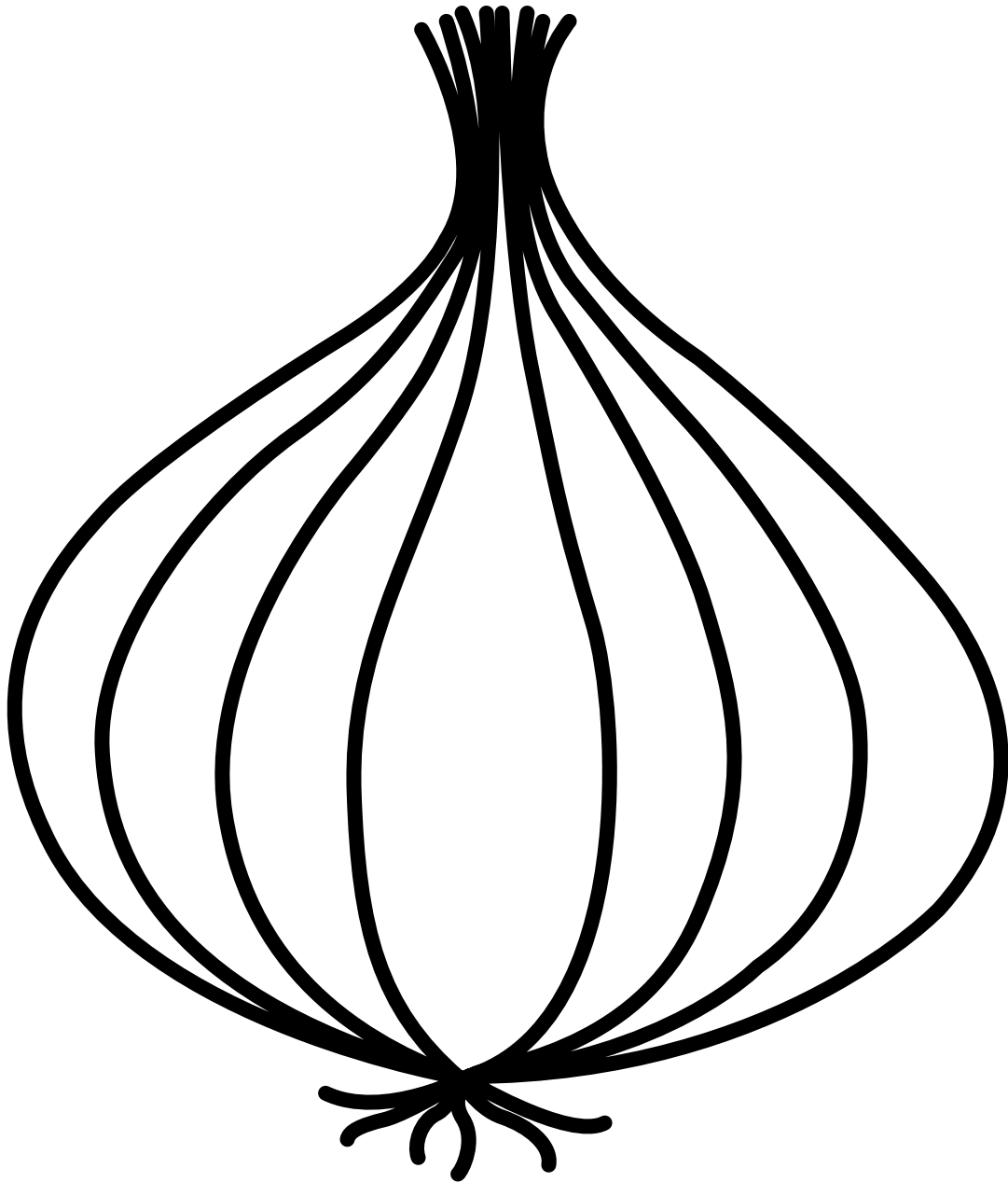


Annex

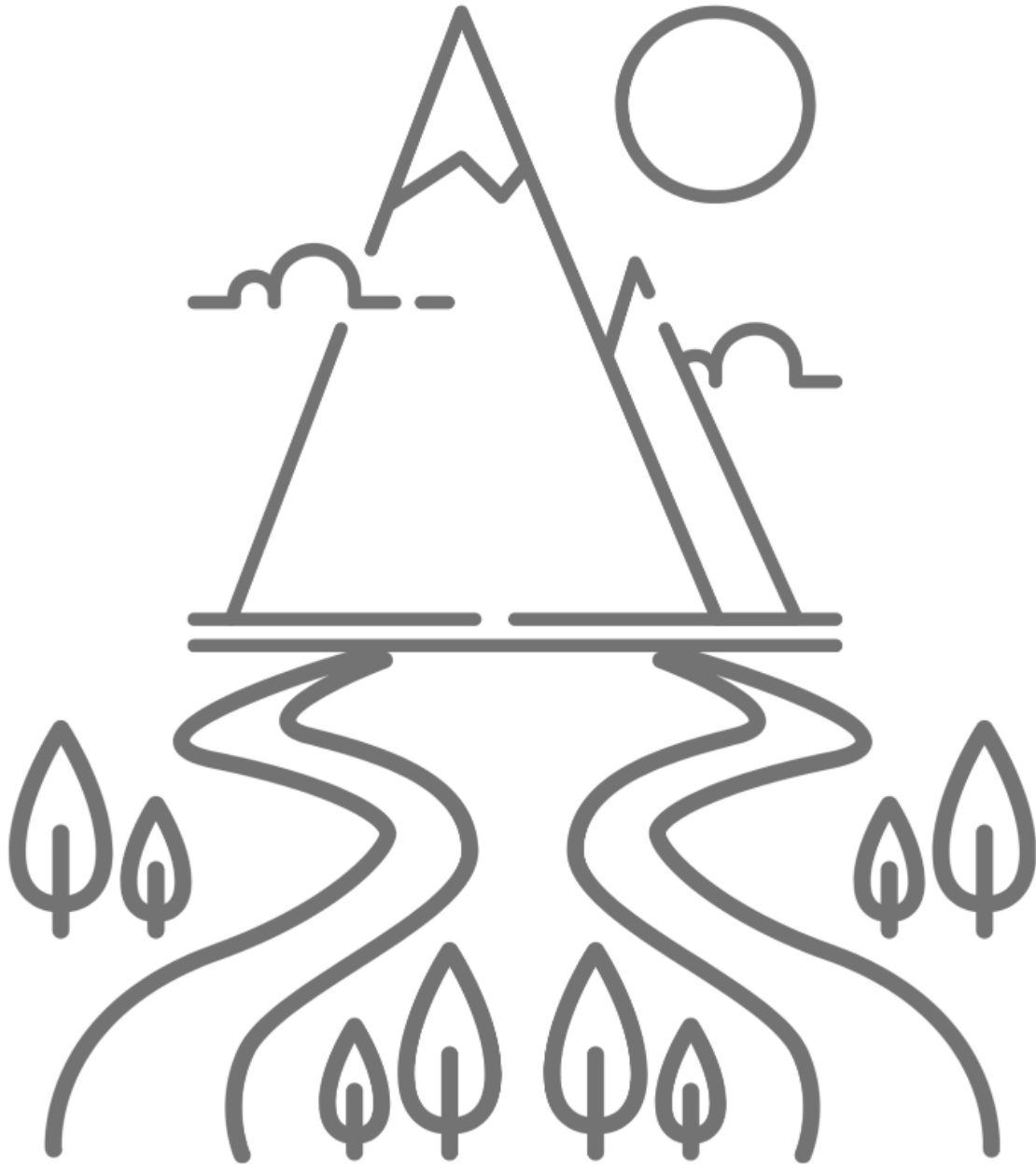








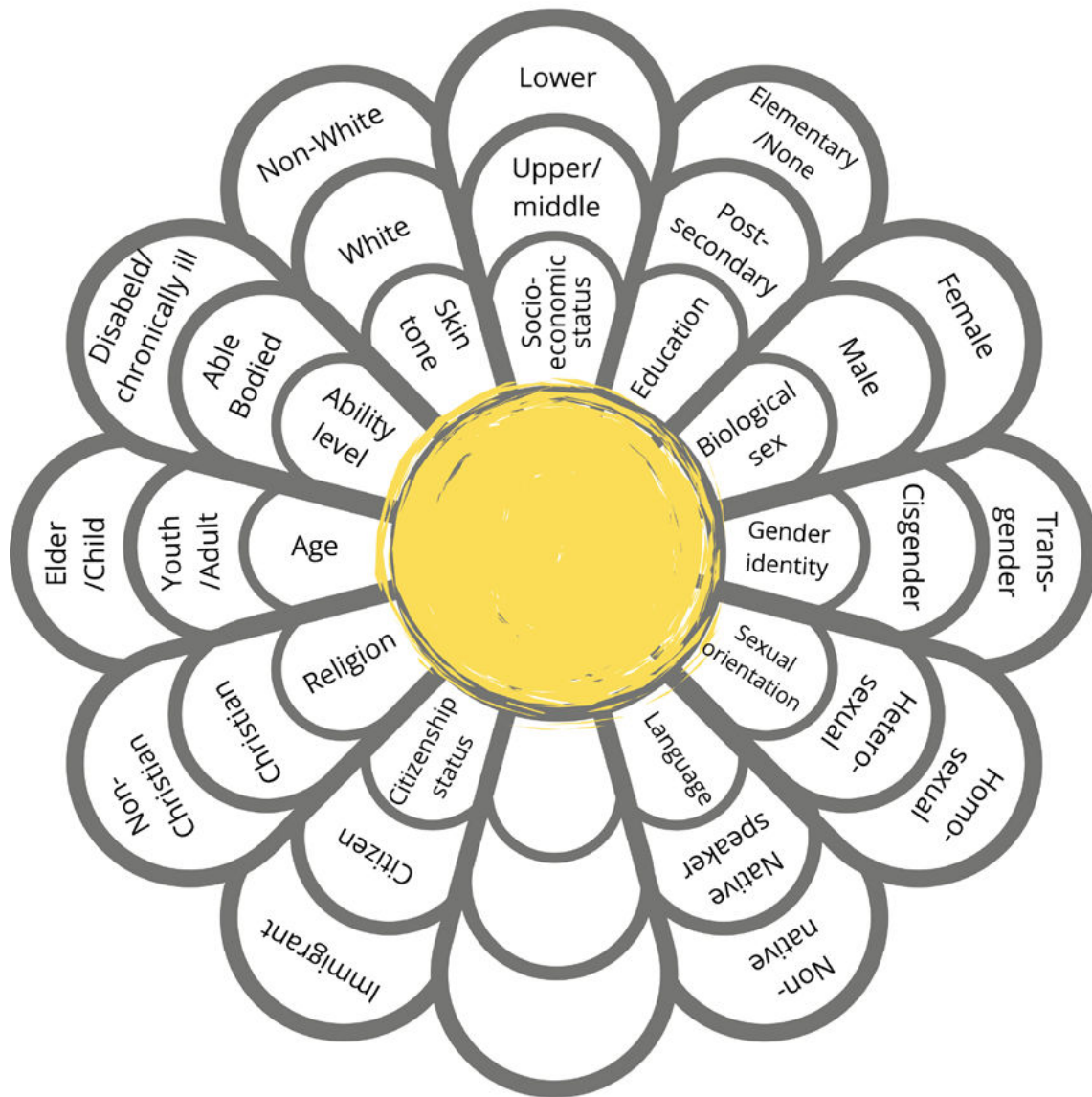
MY DREAM IS TO BECOME



**For transforming
myself**

**For supporting the
people I care about**

**For changing
society**



The Power Flower gives me the power to...

