

INTRODUCTION



Enhanced social emotional skills are necessary for youth workers – they need it to be able to work with young people, to connect with them, to understand them, help them manage their relationships with others. The Skills to Connect Toolkit provides tools for youth workers to develop such basic social emotional skills as self-awareness and self-management skills, the ability to listen to and to empathise with others and to engage with them in an assertive and efficient way. Naturally, these skills are also essential for the young people they work with and the same activities we offer to youth workers in this toolkit can also be used/adapted to the needs of young people.

The activities described in the toolkit use techniques from cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), non-formal pedagogy, process work and theatre. CBT is efficient in identifying and modifying negative thoughts and interpretations and exploring how they affect emotions and behaviour. Forum theatre gives us tools to test new behaviours in challenging situations. The activities proposed are in line with the principles of non-formal pedagogy, offering low-barrier, easy access techniques that invite participants to mobilise their own life experiences, valorise their competences and engage in an active way in the learning process.

In Chapter 1, we provide a short introduction to our theoretical and methodological pillars. We start by detailing social emotional learning (SEL) and its major competence areas and these are the skills that help connect. We also introduce the basic ideas behind CBT, process work and the theatre techniques we used, and explain how they could be used to develop SEL skills.

In Chapter 2, we describe in detail a series of activities that we created for youth workers using the above mentioned techniques.

The collection of activities presented here in is not a linear sequence. Instead, our aim was to provide various strategies or ideas that youth workers could choose from, according to their needs, their preferences and the needs of the young people they work with. Our focus was on providing tools to target key elements of “skills to connect”. Also, we wished to take into account the sensitive zones we had identified in the previous phase of the project (relationship to authority, relationship to each other, relationship to groups) and which underlie the main challenges that young people experience in their communication adventures. Integrating these two reflections, we propose four groups of activities. We start with “first contact” activities that help participants get in touch with each other and the subject matter while establishing a culture of collaboration. The second group covers activities that develop verbal/nonverbal communication skills while bringing in some of the challenging issues (e.g. leading / following, relating to groups etc.). The third group of activities aims at helping participants to reflect on their relationships, and the final group addresses to conflicts.

The activity templates share all information needed to replicate the exercises (including their goal, needed materials, suggested duration, step-by-step instructions, tips for debriefing). Readers of this Toolkit can freely combine the activities from this compendium and complete them with other exercises, according to their motivations, needs, and experiences.

To illustrate how these activities can be combined and completed in a specific context to develop the SEL skills of youth workers and of young people they work with, we offer a sample 20-hour long learning path in Chapter 3. This learning path was actually tested in Hungary.

To illustrate how this learning process can be adapted to working with migrant people who has difficulties with speaking the local language, please check out our "Case study from Amsterdam" on the IRIS project website: intimacy-acrosscultures.eu

The main target group of this Toolkit is youth workers, but it could provide new ideas and inspiration for any educator and professional working in the field of developing SEL skills.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND



QUICK OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Social emotional learning (SEL) is a learning process through which children and adults learn social and emotional skills that are fundamental for life effectiveness. We may read about “soft skills” or “life skills” – these are similar concepts to SEL skills.

According to the Collaborative Association of Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), a Chicago based nonprofit organisation that is among the pioneers in research of social emotional learning, SEL can be defined as the development of 5 major competences, which can be further broken down into more basic social/emotional skills:

- self-awareness,
- self-management,
- social awareness,
- relationship skills,
- responsible decision making.

Self-awareness means that we can recognise our emotions, beliefs, needs and motivations, as well as find out about our strengths and limitations.

Self-management means that not only do we know ourselves but we can also manage/regulate our emotions, thoughts and behaviours: we can work towards the goals that we set for ourselves, we persevere in case we face challenges, and we can learn from our mistakes.

Social awareness (or the awareness of others) means that we have empathy towards others, we recognise their feelings, their needs and concerns, we can understand their situations, and we are able to take on their perspective. Having social awareness requires self-awareness as well, as it is unlikely that we will be able to spot the emotions, needs and motivations of others if we can not recognise them in ourselves.

Relationship skills refer to our abilities to initiate and maintain rewarding interpersonal relationships, which implies that we can communicate efficiently and assertively, present ourselves towards others in a way that is in line with our intentions, cooperate with others, tackle conflicts, help others, and seek help from them when needed. We need to be equipped with skills from all previously mentioned competence areas to be able to manage relationships successfully.

Lastly, responsible decision making means that while working towards our goals and interacting with others we take into account our own and other people's well-being, we adhere to the social norms, and we behave ethically. When making decisions, we foresee and take into account their consequences, both for us and for others.

The Skills to Connect Toolkit touches on all of these competence areas, yet more emphasis is given to the self-awareness and self-management skills as they can serve as building blocks to the development of more complex skills (such as understanding the other's situation/point of view, and engaging with others in an assertive and efficient way).