



Reinforced and upgraded youth group methodology on building healthy relationships (Re-GROUP)

Adapted Youth Group methodologies

This material is created with the intention of serving as an informative resource about Youth Group Methodology as central part of the strategic partnership project – its adaptation in project partner countries with the aim to reduce violence among and towards youth. Project was funded by the Erasmus+ programme and its partnership consisted of Centrs MARTA (Latvia), Asociacion Mundus (Spain), The Future Now Association (Bulgaria) and CRIDL (Romania).

This material does not pretend to represent the full Youth Group methodology guidebook, but rather should be considered as an informative resource for individuals and organizations working in the field of violence prevention and youth.

The main elements of this material are:

- Description of the project, project partners, goals, and previous iterations of the Youth Group Methodology.
- Tips in the field of non-formal education and communication with youth.
- Reflections and conclusions on the Youth Group methodology implementation process in project partner countries.

Disclaimer

This material represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for the use that may be made of the information contained in this material.

Introduction about the project

When children move into early adolescence, they begin to take on new gender roles, often reinforcing socially and culturally conventional gender norms related to being women or men. These roles have an impact on the decisions that people in early adolescence make in relation to sexual and interpersonal relationships, which can affect their health and wellbeing throughout the rest of their lives. Gender norms and beliefs have significant implications for both girls and boys in terms of child marriage, early school leaving, pregnancy, HIV and sexually transmitted infection risk, violence exposure, depression, physical violence, substance abuse and suicide. Such differences are socially, not biologically determined.

Mental health issues need to be addressed as part of adolescent well-being and in order to ensure health throughout people's lives, it is crucial that countries address gender inequality, violence and healthy relationships in early adolescence.

To answer these identified needs, through the adaptation and piloting of the Youth Group Methodology (YGM), developed by MARTA Center, as well as through qualitative and quantitative research in the field of youth well-being and violence, the project Re-GROUP set objectives to:

- reduce risk factors for youth (ages 12-18) to become a victim or a perpetrator of violence;
- build capacities in the field of youth work by adding to relevant research and adapting a culturally specific methodology thus prevent violence toward and among youth;
- expand the size and impact of youth violence-preventing actors through training, popularization and multiplication of the methodology.
- through broad consultation and cooperation with many local actors, create data-backed policy recommendations for each reality.
- through further local activities and international cooperation within and after this project, take part in achieving Sustainable Development Goals #4, #5 and #16.

The project was comprised of four project partners from EU countries

Latvia - [MARTA Center](#)

Bulgaria - [The Future Now Association](#)

Romania - [The Romanian Center for Innovation in Local Development \(CRIDL\)](#)

Spain - [Asociación Mundus](#)

Project activities:

- The Youth group methodology was piloted and adapted in several communities in each partner country:
In Latvia youth groups were organized in Riga, Liepaja, Aluksne and Gulbene. In Bulgaria - in Pernik, Sofia and mixed Pleven and online. In Romania in 20 different locations all across the country. And in Spain - Barcelona and Aviles.
- One online (January 2021) and one in-person (January 2022, Zaragoza, Spain) international youth worker trainings were conducted which improved competences and support research efforts for the project;
- National workshops on violence prevention and YGM took place in every partner country, engaging more than 160 youth workers and educators;
- An extensive qualitative and quantitative research was conducted on the well-being and violence in youth in the partner countries. [Available here.](#)
- Policy Recommendations were created together with a wide network of actors in the field of youth, with which to address the policy framework, as it relates to youth and their well-being. [Available here.](#)
- Project closing conference took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, November 2022, involving more than 45 people in person and online. Aim of the conference was to discuss the Youth Group methodology, share insights from the conducted research, and discuss policy recommendations aimed at improving the well-being of young people in the EU.

During its 22 months of implementation, the project directly engaged more than 160 youth workers and educators and more than 1500 young people (aged 12 to 25) into national Youth group activities.

Origins of youth groups

In the early 1990s, youth outreach leaders in Sweden noticed that the activities on offer in youth centers fail to attract girls as much as they attract boys. One of the potential reasons was the fact that most of the activities financed were traditionally boy-dominated. This led to the introduction of separate activities just for girls, with corresponding methods being developed over the following years. To promote self-reliance and independence among girls, most methods included a gender equality approach based on the view that girls claim for themselves less space than boys – in the classroom, in youth centers and in life in general. Due to gender norms and societal expectations, girls have a narrower space for action than boys, which is why they take a less active role in social life than boys. The prevailing view was that a safe environment could be created in activities separated by gender, e.g. a girls' group where girls could discuss issues that mattered to them and carry out various activities, and that would not be dominated by gender based expectations and behavior.¹

Eventually, practitioners realized that the work to reduce gender norms and promote equality impacts boys, too. To promote gender equality in various aspects of society, this work must also involve men. Furthermore, men are also subject to gender norms and associated societal expectations, which can sometimes be highly restrictive and have an impact just as negative as those applied to girls.

MARTA Centre first decided to introduce this method in Latvia at the end of 2007, after participating in a seminar in Sweden and learning about the success of the girls' group method in Lithuania. In early 2009, a project was drafted in cooperation with the Åland Islands Peace Institute. The project ran until 2012. In 2013, MARTA Center partnered with CARE Balkan², adopting their boys' group method "Young Men Initiative"³. Through the implementation and evaluation of both of these approaches, MARTA Center decided that a methodology better suited to the specific cultural conditions of Latvia was required. Thus, 2015 saw the creation of the project "Drosme rūpēties! Vardarbības prevencija jauniešu vidē" ("Youth – Dare to care. Violence prevention among and towards youth")⁴, which continued until 2020 with the support of the Oak Foundation⁵

Evaluation of the Youth group methodology⁶ approach showed that by participating in youth groups, young people have raised their self-confidence, increased the ability to critically analyze and reflect on the world, act in an informed way towards bullying and violence, make responsible and informed decisions about their emotional, mental and physical health and interactions, create and maintain healthy, respectful relationships with their peers, teachers, parents and themselves.

¹ [G. Bahara, E. Gritane, J. Jonstojj \(2011\) Effects of the girl and boy group method – A gender and social psychology perspective on gender equality youth work on Åland and in Latvia.](#)

² <https://care-balkan.org/>

³ <https://youngmeninitiative.net/en/>

⁴ [MARTA Center Youth programs](#)

⁵ [Oak Foundation](#)

⁶ [Research report on the impact of the Group methodology. Egita Plaviņa 2020.11.01.](#)

Methodology has proved itself to be a meaningful educational tool in the context of Latvia, and its objectives, structure and activities have been shared in international context.

Based on feedback gained from Re-GROUP project partners, lack of actions taken to constructively and sustainably address the issue of psychological, physical and sexual abuse towards and among young people (especially teenage group 12-18 years old) was identified. Therefore, the consortium saw the strong need and relevance of bigger and broader research on the topic, as well as testing and evaluating this methodology internationally.

During the project Re-GROUP, project partners worked to research, pilot and adapt the Youth Group methodology based on the needs and cultural context in their respective communities.

So - what is the Youth group methodology?

The Youth Group methodology consists of a cycle of 17 workshops (90 – 180 min long), with a meeting once a week. During the cycle, the group members, accompanied by a specially trained group leader, theoretically and practically acquire various healthy life skills and competencies that will help them understand and manage themselves, build healthy and mutually supportive relationships with peers and face injustice safely, without violence.

During the workshops, various non-formal education methods are used (discussions; group work; self-reflection tasks; analysis of situations, attitudes, actions, etc.), looking at the following topics:

- Who and what are we? Understanding oneself and others. Belonging to the group and community.
- Understanding and managing my behaviors and emotions.
- What is gender equality and why is it important to talk about it?
- Adolescent reproductive health and sexuality.
- HIV / AIDS and STDs - what is it and how to protect myself and others.
- Decision making, physical and emotional boundaries, consent.
- Addictive substances and their effects on my body and well-being.
- Caring for myself and others.
- How to say "no" and stay "stylish"?
- Relationships at school, family and other environments.
- What is violence? What are its types? Why does it occur and how can it be recognized and prevented?
- Bystander effect - how to stop violence?
- Conflicts and ways to resolve them.

Fundamental values, “laws” and other aspects of group sessions

What is a girls’/boys’ group?⁷ Work in a girls’/boys’ group is a special way to work with young people, implementing specific goals and methods. The girls’/boys’ group typically consists of 6-10 participants aged 12 to 18 and one or two specially trained group leaders. Groups may be split by gender or can be mixed based on the context and the need of participants, group leader and the

⁷ G. Bahara, E. Gritane, J. Jonstoj (2011) Effects of the girl and boy group method – A gender and social psychology perspective on gender equality youth work on Åland and in Latvia

local community. Whether the group will be boy/girl or mixed can be decided through discussion with participants.

→ The gender of group participants also determines a slightly different approach to promoting self-reliance and independence within the framework of the method. For girls, this involves encouraging them to voice and formulate their personal opinion, and to expand their space for action. Promoting independence in boys, however, requires different elements to be considered. Boys must be given the opportunity to listen to others, talk about their emotions and feelings, and to learn non-violent approaches to solving conflict situations. Since the differing gender norms restrict the action space of men and women in different ways, the self-reinforcement and promotion of self-reliance in boys and girls must also be carried out in different ways.

Important aspects:

- The presence principle
- The confidentiality principle
- Mutual respect

Session format⁸

The meetings of group members are based on a conversation over a *cup of tea*, i.e. meeting, sipping on a warm beverage, discussing various issues important to group members and engaging in activities. The group can also provide space for many other things, e.g. trying out various practical pastimes or handcrafts, accepting challenges, doing sports, going on study trips or organizing activities for community members. It is important to maintain continuity – sessions should be held at a fixed time and place. One way to open a session is a review of the previous week, where everyone shares a fun or sad experience they have had since the previous meeting.

Sessions should be held once per week, as this allows for continuity, but group participants may decide on a different schedule. The duration of each session depends on the group and the topic at hand. The average session takes an hour and a half up to three hours.

Group members work with group leader based on the methodology. Apart from that, the group can decide and agree on specific activities, additional or expanding on certain topics, taking into consideration the needs of group members as well as the group leader's thoughts on what the members should discuss. It is important to facilitate the engagement of group members and to encourage them to take increasing responsibility for the organization of the sessions.

The group leader should think about the arrangement of the meeting location and make sure sessions can proceed undisturbed. Conversation will flow more freely if there is a comfortable seating area or for example a kitchen with a large table for everyone to gather around.

What is non-formal education?

Non-formal education (NFE) refers to learning that takes place outside formal education programs and is a central part of the Youth Group methodology approach.

Features of nonformal education:

- a planned, structured, conscious learning process and procedure with set aims, tasks,

⁸ G. Bahara, E. Gritane, J. Jonstoj (2011) Effects of the girl and boy group method – A gender and social psychology perspective on gender equality youth work on Åland and in Latvia

- and a target group
- voluntary participation
- no formal assessment
- no single correct answer
- active involvement
- learning from experience
- learning process based on participant needs, expectations and interests
- flexible learning process where methods, content, and tasks can be changed and adapted
- no strict hierarchy/demagogy among participants and leaders/trainers
- balance between individual and group learning
- important not only what is being done, but how it is done – the process is often more important than the result.

People engage in non-formal education activities voluntarily; such activities are carefully planned and designed around the immediate needs of specific target groups, promoting the development of participants' skills and attitudes. The NFE process is usually structured, with its own learning goals, methodology, timeframe and support system. The learning process can be organized by trained specialists, trainers or anyone who takes the initiative to do so. There is usually no strict hierarchy among trainers and learners, and the learning environment is of great importance. The learning process is based on individual needs, and interaction with other members of the group plays a significant role. The NFE process and results are typically evaluated by participants themselves, based on their learning needs.⁹

Basic principles of non-formal education¹⁰:

- **learning to be:** learning to become conscious of oneself and one's place in the world; understanding one's inner world and developing the ability to self-actualize and build a life in line with the self and own beliefs.
- **learning by doing:** acquiring various skills and abilities through practical activity and emotional involvement in the process; seeing the results come to life.
- **learning to be with others:** acquiring and developing an understanding of differences, working in a team and learning to accept others and cooperate with them.
- **learning to learn:** acquiring skills to analyze one's own experience, acquiring new knowledge, finding information and being able to use all the above when facing novel life situations.

Important part of non-formal education experience is **reflection¹¹**. Reflection is a process of exploring and examining ourselves, our perspectives, attributes, experiences and actions / interactions. It helps us gain insight and see how to move forward.

Reflection attempts to move beyond simply describing events. It aims to:

- be considered, thoughtful, analytical
- be honest – even when this is difficult or uncomfortable
- be rational and distanced (Although it often deals with feelings and emotions, we try to look at them dispassionately)
- relate experiences to wider contexts, other perspectives and theoretical frameworks.

⁹ [Manual for facilitators in non-formal education \(2021\)](#)

¹⁰ [Non-formal education. The Council of Europe.](#)

¹¹ [Insitute for Academic Development. Reflection: What is it and why is it useful?](#)

Reflection is an important part of the Youth group methodology approach, as it allows participants to evaluate their thought process, get connected with their feelings and emotions and provide vocabulary for sharing these inner processes with the rest of the group. At the end of each session or activity, there are several reflection questions provided to stimulate discussion on the recently gained experience.

Group formation

When thinking about creating youth group and using Youth Group methodology as a central element of the group sessions, group creator and leader needs to consider the following:

- A certain kind of competency is required to cooperate with other group participants. This cannot be learned, but it can be trained. For a group of people to cooperate and develop in a positive way, everyone needs to feel safe, noticed and appreciated, everyone needs to feel trust and receive encouragement, and everyone must have a sufficient level of responsibility and influence on the progress of the group.
- Different groups (and different members of the same group) have varying levels of group competency. One group might consist of members with a lot of experience in contributing to group cooperation, and another might consist of members with very little experience. This is a challenge for group leaders. The more untrained individuals there are in a group, and the less time they have spent together, the clearer and more definite must the leader's actions be.
- The group leader must be able to create a pleasant atmosphere in the group and praise individuals and the group when cooperation of some form has taken place.
- Group leaders can develop themselves by observing and reflecting on what happens in the groups they participate in and the groups they lead. Although the group leader takes responsibility for the group, all participants are collectively responsible for the way group sessions proceed.
- Every participant is special, and every group is unique. The level of responsibility group participants can take depends on their prior experience and knowledge gained.
- Group leader needs to be aware that there are several stages group will go through (Tuckman's 5 stages of group development¹²), affecting the processes within the group.

Belonging/identity

A sense of belonging is most strongly and clearly characterized by:¹³

- a common aim to strive for or try to achieve
- internal values, rituals, traditions – “culture” (e.g., tea-drinking)
- identifying marks or symbols (T-shirts with symbols, a team slogan, a name)
- publicly taking pride in belonging to the group
- internal codes of conduct that are difficult to identify from the outside (e.g., never judging others for their failures)

→ Belonging is not a result or a visible event. It is a feeling that people notice at a certain point, or that is most clearly recognizable when it is lacking. A sense of belonging to a group is best

¹² Tuckman, Bruce W (1965). "Developmental sequence in small groups". Psychological Bulletin. 63 (6): 384–399

¹³ [JSPA Jauniešu grupu un komandas veidošana un vadība jaunatnes darbā. M.Resnis](#)

maintained through common adventures, overcoming difficulty, active learning experiences and moments of togetherness rich in emotion and feeling.

→ The formation of a group identity is a key part of the successful functioning of a girls'/boys' group. This can be helped by giving the group a name or a symbol, or by creating internal rituals. Sessions might require repeated reminders that all participants matter; everyone must get a chance to speak their mind.

Adolescence and its characteristics

Sarah-Jayne Blakemore in her book “Inventing ourselves. The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain” (New York, 2018)¹⁴ describes adolescence as a unique period in our lives. “There are three main reasons why we can confidently say that adolescence is an important, distinct biological period of development, in all cultures,” she claims. “First, you can see behaviors that we typically associate with adolescence, such as risk-taking, self-consciousness and peer influence, in many different human cultures, not just those in the West. The second reason why we can consider adolescence a unique period of biological development is that there is also evidence of adolescence typical behavior in non-human animals. And, third, such behavior is also typical across history.

Based on the book¹⁵ mentioned above, here are some important aspects youth group leaders need to remember about adolescence:

- **PEER INFLUENCE.** Often, adolescence decisions are driven by their friends, rather than by a dispassionate consideration of the consequences. E.g. in the heat of the moment when they're offered a cigarette or an Ecstasy tablet, many adolescents care far more about what their peer group thinks of them than about the potential risks of their choice.
- **SENSE OF SELF.** Adolescence is a formative period of life, when neural pathways are malleable, and passion and creativity run high. We start to develop a more complex sense of morality and to become aware of the political realities of society around us. Its often the first time when we give much thought to how our identity affects our lives and the ways in which other people see us.
- **COMPARISON.** Adolescents are more likely than younger children to compare themselves with others and to understand that others are making comparisons and judgements about them; they also begin to place higher value on these judgments.
- **SELF – CONSCIOUSNESS.** Beginning of questioning – “who am I?” and “how do I fit in with other people?”. Development of “social brain” – the network of brain regions involved in understanding other people’s intentions and emotions.
- **“IMAGINARY AUDIENCE”.** Phenomena, described by psychologist David Elkind in the 1960s: adolescents imagine that other people are constantly observing and evaluating them,

¹⁴ Sarah-Jayne Blakemore “Inventing ourselves. The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain”. New York, 2018

¹⁵ Sarah-Jayne Blakemore “Inventing ourselves. The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain”. New York, 2018

even if this is not actually the case (e.g. Even though no one of their friends is watching or would be likely to find out, 14-year-old stops playing board games with their family, because their friends think its uncool).

- PEER ACCEPTANCE. Adolescents are becoming more independent from their parents and more thriving to be integrated into their peer group. Hypersensitivity to social exclusion: decision making is more driven by the need of peer acceptance and the desire to avoid being socially excluded.
- RISK TAKING depends on the presence and influence of peers. Studies show 14 that when in the presence of their friends, adolescents take almost 3 times as many risks as when they are alone.

Adolescent environments – culture, education, home and social life, hobbies, nutrition and exercise – all contribute not only to the emotional and physical well-being, but also shaping their brains, therefore leaving a long lasting impact on their neurological and physiological development. It's important to keep in mind that the parts of the brain that are responsible for understanding cause-effect relationships and regulating emotional impulses develop till the age of 25.¹⁶

During adolescence, children develop the ability to¹⁷:

- Understand abstract ideas. These include grasping higher math concepts, and developing moral philosophies, including rights and privileges.
- Establish and maintain satisfying relationships. Adolescents will learn to share intimacy without feeling worried or inhibited.
- Move toward a more mature sense of themselves and their purpose.
- Question old values without losing their identity.

Adolescence is not just the time of puberty, but also a transitional period between childhood and embracing the role of an adult. This is a time of approaching sexual maturity, driven by endocrine changes in the organism. Teenagers' appearance lacks harmonic proportion, and they may occasionally become clumsy, leading to shyness and awkwardness in communication. The changes are characterized by two main parameters: intensity and uneven development. Teenagers struggle with changes in their physical appearance; evaluating their appearance becomes relevant. This age is characterized by a belief that body proportions should match certain standards set by their group

Although ages 11-12 are characterized by heightened activity, this is accompanied by a drop in work capacity, while ages 13-14 are characterized by a general drop in activity. This manifests as an inability to perform prolonged, repetitive tasks and reduced physical endurance. Boys in this age often exhibit more active, even frantic, movements. The behavior of girls, on the other hand, can be significantly influenced by the hormonal changes caused by the onset of menstruation and the so-called premenstrual syndrome. Hormonal changes influence emotional states, with the most

¹⁶ Dynamic mapping of human cortical development during childhood through early adulthood» Nitin Gogtay, Jay N. Giedd, Leslie Lusk, Kiralee M. Hayashi, Deanna Greenstein, A. Catherine Vaituzis, Tom F. Nugent III, David H. Herman, Liv S. Clasen, Arthur W. Toga, Judith L. Rapoport, and Paul M. Thompson, 2004

¹⁷ [Adolescent development](#)

common changes including crying for no reason and unprovoked resentment. Teenagers suffer from fewer acute illnesses than children, but they are more likely to die in accidents or commit suicide than before and can suffer from two types of eating disorders – bulimia and anorexia. Bulimia and anorexia may be a reaction to cultural demands for slenderness and may arise from the incongruity between one's actual and ideal body.

On the basis of abstract thinking, teenagers also develop a desire to understand the meaning of life. At this age, teenagers develop the ability to consciously focus attention, even as the abundance of impressions and feelings may cause attention disruptions; the amount of attention is increased along with teenager's ability to shift attention between objects and activities.

Adolescent years are dominated by a desire to be an adult and to be recognized as such. Claims to adulthood can be manifested in various areas of life, most commonly when it comes to appearance, mannerisms, and clothing. Teenagers can loosely be divided into two groups according to their expression of a "sense of adulthood" – those who have a pronounced tendency to strive for adulthood, and those in whom this tendency is less pronounced.

Teenagers require creative activity and desire to do things their own way – to explore and express themselves. They can attempt to express themselves through music or literature. This can also manifest through destructive actions, however – this is how teenagers test their strength. Other key characteristics of this period include uncritical juxtaposition between the self and others, a heightened desire to express one's personality, beliefs, drive for emancipation – the need to remove oneself from the custody of adults. Interaction with peers of the same age helps teenagers develop.

Teenagers respect their parents' actions over their words. Much is determined by their previous relationships, family traditions and the parents' level of education. A teenager who feels respect, love and a positive attitude from their parents is more likely to integrate these values in their own value system.

There is nothing fixed or stable in a teenager's personality structure; this causes personality swings, contradictory desires, and contradictory actions. A teenager's instability may be expressed as:

- negativity, protest, dismissal of values;
- dependence crisis – i.e., escaping back into childhood, with pronounced dependence on those older or stronger;
- regress towards old interests – even toys, games – and obedience.

Teenagers seek out new sources of authority as adults cease to serve as role models to follow and imitate. Teenagers find sources of authority and expertise in their peers; they rely on their peers in areas of behavior, morality, ethics, taste, interests, and hobbies. The more conflict there is in a teenager's relationships with their parents and teachers, the more authority they are likely to find in their peers.

One of a teenager's most fundamental needs is the need for self-actualization, and the teenager will seek out an environment to realize this in. If the environment of adults is welcoming and provides the teenager with these opportunities, the teenager will operate there; if not, they will seek this environment out on their own among peers. Teenagers often require communication with their parents when they are scared, stressed or confused. Parents have considerable influence on such areas of a teenager's life as their value orientation, understanding of social issues and morality.

Teacher-teenager relationships

Teenagers are characterized simultaneously by activity, aggressiveness, and laziness. Due to this inconsistency, teachers require a great deal of tolerance and empathy when interacting with teenagers.

Teenagers are bound to reject an authoritarian style of leadership; instead, their cooperation can be ensured by:

- involving them in the decisions affecting them;
- showing them respect;
- treating them as equal members of the school or society.

Democracy is the optimal style for working with teenagers – for a teacher, this means setting a general course of action and then letting teenagers decide on how to perform specific tasks without supervising each incremental step.

Teenagers' relationships with their peers

As a teenager searches for their own identity, the way others perceive them is of great significance – this serves as a mirror that the teenager can use to compare and evaluate themselves in relation to others. The need to be involved in a group is one of the characteristics of this development period, but this manifests very differently in every individual – there may be great differences in both the number of friends and the depth of psychological engagement. On the other hand, lack of involvement in a group and keeping to oneself at this age can potentially signal psychological issues.

Adolescence is characterized by poor ability to verbalize one's feelings, which is one of the reasons why teenagers are so agitated, even tense – this is because they lack the ability to recognize and verbalize their feelings, making it difficult to find an outlet for emotional conflict. Teenagers are subject to internal tension and often intuitively seek out action as if justifying their behavior which satisfies neither themselves nor adults; a teenager may not express (or be able to express) this in words, which is why such teenagers are characterized by affective outbursts, unsociability, retreating into oneself and lying (due to both fear of punishment and a desire to look better in one's own eyes).

Music is one of the most important phenomena in a teenager's life, helping to integrate their feelings. A teenager's feelings can often be diametrically opposed and incongruous. Music creates a sense (if temporary) of wholeness of one's own personality, as it is rhythmically organized, i.e., clear and perceptible. Music reduces internal dissonance.

A teenager can simultaneously feel a tendency for self-actualization, independence and lack of belief in themselves; a desire for similar peers and a need for aloneness; harshness, rudeness, and high vulnerability, shyness which often causes certain forms of self-actualization: bravado, laxity, discipline violations, conflicts with adults, spitefulness, and negativity. This can all be based on a subconscious or unrecognized disbelief in one's own ability and the consequent desire to prove oneself and others wrong; a teenager's self-image can be so incongruous that it can be summed up as "genius + nobody".

Most common causes of delinquent (antisocial) behavior during adolescence:

- A broken family. Divorced or deceased parents; a single-parent family. These stressful events can negatively impact both the current moment and the child’s entire future social development.
- Being treated inconsiderately by parents. Delinquency is rare in families with warm parent-child relationships. If, however, parents constantly argue or show little emotional warmth or attachment to a child, the child’s behavior has a high probability of turning into delinquency. In this way, the psychological unavailability of parents promotes delinquency. The extent of psychological absence determines the extent to which delinquency is increased or reduced.
- Poor treatment. Delinquency is more common when parents discipline children in abusive or hostile ways. Teenage rebelliousness and delinquency are possible where spanking, beating and other types of corporal punishment are used as methods of control. A teenager’s hostile behavior can carry over into their adult life.
- Economic deprivation (poverty).

→ One of the most common errors in dealing with teenagers is that parents, teachers, and others mistakenly believe them to be adults. Adolescence is believed to involve the greatest changes in self-consciousness and personality structure, along with an early understanding of what the individual should be like and whether they are happy with themselves. This is when a teenager’s self-image is internally formed and integrated into their idea of self. Teenagers are highly suggestible during this time.

Regardless of their edginess, spitefulness, reservedness, and protests, they are actively searching for a personification in life (a “life teacher”) – someone to serve as a role model. Teenagers may behave and act in ways that are difficult to understand; their self-esteem is unsteady and contradictory. Manifestations of identity crisis can resemble signs of mental disorders. Self-esteem contradictions often lead to an inability to engage in any activities or actions. If a teenager finds themselves unable to identify their place in society, they may try to become an “antihero” and choose “roles” like thief, racketeer or alcoholic. Teenagers are highly emotionally excitable and prone to disorders that may manifest as mental illnesses. Certain emotions are experienced most deeply during teenage years as opposed to early youth or adult life, which is why many teenagers develop emotional disorders. The main psychological characteristics of this age include: maximalism – here and now, now or never (the teenager wants all of their needs to be met immediately); search for ideals (a person or character from a book/film); shutting oneself off from others; creating one’s own subculture. Teenagers are driven by a desire to attract attention, to stand out, to be leaders, even as they find themselves in countless conflicts with surrounding people, family members, schoolmates, and themselves.

Structure of the group session

Each group session, as described in the YGM manual, starts with the aim of the session, accompanied with a theoretical part, which helps for the youth group leader to prepare for the session’s topic. *Let’s take session #14 **Recognize violence** as an example.*

The aim: to provide young people with the understanding and knowledge necessary to recognize different types of violence.

Theoretical part describes violence as a learned behavior, building understanding on its causes and consequences. It also provided vocabulary, describing and explaining types of violence. Larger emphasis is put on bullying as a main type of violence in school settings and other environments where young people are in contact with each other. Theoretical part helps to understand what bullying is and what it is not; distinguish differences between hassling/teasing, fighting/aggression and bullying as well as to understand differences between conflict and bullying, building competencies to respond and intervene accordingly.

After the theoretical part in the manual there are several non-formal education activities offered in relation to the topic. Group leader is invited to choose from the activities listed depending on the needs of the group (level of knowledge, burning questions, experience on the topic, skills which need to be developed etc.).

Below is an example – how an activity is described in the Youth group methodology manual. Each session covers a specific topic and there are 3 - 5 different non-formal education activities offered to be chosen from, based on the needs of the group.

Activity #2: Agree or disagree?

The aim: To enable participants to examine how they view bullying, challenge their thinking, and encourage discussion.

Necessary: Draw a line on the floor, real or virtual, and place the words AGREE at one end and DISAGREE at the other end. Prepare the statements.

Procedure:

1. Read a set of statements out to the class and ask the participants to position themselves on the line depending on whether they agree or disagree with the statement.
2. Ask participants to volunteer their reasons for their choice; they are allowed to move along the line if they are persuaded by other people's opinions.
3. Remind your participants that there are no wrong answers and that respecting the opinions of others is important.
4. Below are some suggested statements, or you can develop your own to suit your setting or to address particular issues:
 - Spreading rumors about someone is bullying.
 - Getting bullied is a natural part of growing up; it's character building.
 - Bullying doesn't happen in my class / school.
 - Forwarding pictures or texts that upset people is bullying.
 - Always making fun of someone's hair is just banter.
 - It's their fault for not standing up for themselves.
 - A diverse student group is more interesting and better for learning about life than a group where everyone is the same.
 - There's no point in students challenging other students who frequently use name-calling, racist or sexist slurs and/or personal insults.
 - Most people who bullied are asking for it.
 - Sometimes people who think they are being bullied just can't take a joke.
 - Taking the mickey out of the way someone speaks, how they look, walk or dress is only bullying if they get upset about it.

Reflection questions:

- How easy/ hard it was for you to decide – where to stand?
- What affected your decision (previous knowledge, experience, peer pressure etc.)?
- Which of the statements were the most challenging and why?
- Which other statements would you add?
- How prevalent is bullying in your local reality?
- How are you/ the school system/ adults addressing it?
- What else should be done in order to prevent bullying from happening?

Some of the activities require resource sheets which need to be printed and shared among the participants. If so – resource sheets can be found at the end of each session, in the manual of YGM. As well as closing comments and lists with additional resources (books, videos, web pages etc.) are provided at the end of each session’s description.

Youth groups in Latvia

During the project 4 youth groups were organized in different parts of Latvia:

- Riga ([Rigas Jauniesu atbalsta centrs](#))
- Aluksne ([Aluksnes Youth center](#))
- Liepaja ([J.Cakstes Liepajas pilsetas 10.vidusskola](#))
- Gulbene ([Youth center “Baze”](#))

Youth group activities engaged more than 60 young people aged 12 to 18 in a long-term group session. Group leaders covered all 17 sessions both – in person and online settings, using variety of activities offered by the Youth group methodology guidebook. Participants of the youth groups also engaged in other local activities such as board game nights, bicycle tournaments, community service, movie screening and creating different events for other young people in their communities.

Reflections and conclusions

- All the youth groups in Latvia were organized in local youth centers. It appeared to be the most convenient place, as the youth center already provides space, equipment and young people are familiar with its structure and activities offered. Moreover – young people who attended groups were either the ones who have already been attending the youth center on daily bases or their friends and schoolmates. Therefore young people were conditioned to attend the youth center even after the group ended.
- All youth group leaders used the methodology as it was provided, keeping the sequence of the workshops, its structure, and activities. Only things that differed from place to place, were extra activities offered by youth group leaders or by group members themselves.
- “Getting to know each other” activities were a crucial part of establishing the group and creating a sense of belonging and safety among participants. Most of the group leaders mentioned that they devoted more time for team building activities than it was mentioned in the Methodology guidebook.
- Most interesting and most engaging topics young people explicitly mentioned were #3 *My emotions and the behaviors associated with them*, #7 *Puberty*, #8 *Sexuality and intimate relationships*, #9 *Decisions*, #10 *Contraception and avoiding risks (STDs/HIV) Questions*,

experiences, thoughts and feelings related to these topics were rarely addressed elsewhere and group participants were grateful for the safe, open and encouraging environment group settings provided, to address different concerns etc.

- Sessions #13 *Power and relationships* and #14 *Recognize violence* were the moments when participants started to share their personal experiences in the family, as bystanders of violent relationships among parents or other family members. When preparing for these activities, group leaders should gather information about local and national help services and support mechanisms in case of disclosure, to be able to provide the best needed support for the young person.
- Youth group participants and group leaders noted that there is a lack of competencies needed to respond to everyday sexism in person (school, workplace, on the street etc.) and in online settings. Group sessions definitely raise awareness on recognizing sexism and gender-based harassment, but there is a need for more workshops on building the skills to respond and intervene as active bystanders. Young people mentioned that it is even harder to stand up against someone who is higher in the stairs of hierarchy (a teacher, principle, parent etc.)
- During group sessions the situation of bullying in schools was highlighted as one of the major issues across the country. According to a PISA report in Latvia, 35% of students reported being bullied at least a few times a month, compared to 23% on average across OECD countries. Which ranks Latvia in the 1st place of the prevalence of bullying in schools. Group members also noted that constructive actions towards cases of bullying are non-existing or met rarely. This feedback indicates a strong need for sustainable violence prevention programs in schools of Latvia.
- Majority of participants mentioned that taking part in the YGM sessions was a meeting with like-minded people. In the end of the groups, the young people emphasized once again that they were happy that something like this happened and that there was an opportunity to talk about such different topics (which one doesn't always want to talk about with parents, best friends, etc.), and they were also happy to learn that friends and other people also wanted to talk about something like that (somehow it had always seemed that only each individual was interested in it), because they usually did not reveal it among their friends.
- Majority of group participants expressed interest and needed to continue the meetings occasionally. Participants noted that thanks to the YGM sessions their feeling of belonging to the community as well as the ability to impact local actions and making decisions related to young people have increased.

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Youth groups in Romania

During the project 20 youth groups were organized in different parts of Romania:

No.	Name of organizations	Community	Age group of participants
1	The library of 'Nicolae Ciorănescu' Highschool Târgoviște and The County Library Dâmbovița	Târgoviște	17-18
2	The Public Library Raci	Raci	14 -18
3	The Public Library Conțești	Conțești	13-15
4	The Public Library Valea Mare	Valea Mare	13-15
5	The Public Library Pietrari	Pietrari	13-17
6	The Public Library Bălcești	Bălcești	16-18
7	The Public Library 'George Missai'	Trifesti	13-16
8	The Public Library Ovidiu	Ovidiu	16 -18
9	The Public Library 'Neculai Paduraru'	Sagna	12-14
10	The Public Library Albești	Albești	12-15
11	The Public Library Braniștea	Braniștea	12-17
12	The Public Library Perșinari	Perșinari	12-14
13	The Public Library Râșnov	Râșnov	13-16
14	The Public Library Cheile Bicazului	Cheile Bicazului	12-14
15	The Public Library Bâra	Bâra	13-17
16	The Public Library 'I.I. Mironescu'	Tazlău	12-14
17	The Public Library 'P.S. Petru Gherghel - Episcop'	Gherăești	15-18
18	The Public Library "Mihai Eminescu"	Ighiu	13-15
19	The Public Library 'Prof. Ion Buzea'	Măcin	13-17
20	The Public Library Tămășeni	Tămășeni	12-15

Reflections and conclusions

- All youth groups in Romania were organized in public libraries in small communities (in villages and towns with less than 30,000 inhabitants, with the exception of Târgoviște where a youth group was hosted by the county library);
- Organizing the youth groups having librarians as facilitators, and the public library as venue, is one of the key innovations of the project, i.e. testing new anchor organizations

and professionals for such methodology to be implemented. The methodology became a new library service that the libraries are offering to the community;

- Over 40 public librarians were trained in how to use the methodology and 20 of them started youth groups, with over 200 adolescents being involved in the program;
- A support group using social media, was started, where recurrent meetings are still being held to share good practices, talk various difficulties in facilitating the youth groups, discuss new ideas and helping the community to become stronger;
- The librarians along with the CRIDL team, through the EduCaB program, will be involved in additional training sessions for other public librarians in Romania that are interested in implementing the methodology;
- First, the librarians were nervous to facilitate such youth groups but after a few meetings they realized it's something they like and are good at, addressing very pressing issues the adolescents are facing; they all got very good feedback from both the adolescents and parents, with stories where the librarians are stopped on the street by parents and being thanked for creating such a space for their teenagers to talk about their problems;
- We had some cases in rural areas (very few, 2-3), where the priests heard about the program and tried to blame the librarians that they are talking with the adolescents about topics that are against the Christian values; the community of parents backed the librarians up, though, saying that they know how important such topics (like sexuality, gender etc.) are for their youth, and since they are not feeling comfortable to talk about such issues at home, the library is the best place to be addressed;
- The librarians as youth workers, and facilitators of the youth groups, invited various professionals from the community or outside it, such as, a therapist, a police officer etc., to give also their feedback on various topics discussed;
- There were two librarians that did not feel comfortable facilitating discussions on some topics (such as sexuality and gender), and one case where adolescents did not feel comfortable to talk about it (again, about sexuality); the rest of librarians found it very useful and just switched sometimes the place of the subjects, leaving the more tabu ones to the final, in order to give the group more time to calibrate, gain trust and feel comfortable to open themselves;
- There were 3-4 librarians that found some of the exercises from the methodology not gaining the attention of the adolescents and had to come with other activities;
- There was no real perceived difference in between girls and boys in the engagement during the youth groups, and the openness in discussing certain subjects;
- One of the key outcomes of the youth groups was about the willingness and need of the adolescents to go even further in detail on certain subjects, the 17 subjects discussed, being for them so interesting that they want to find out more, to connect with organizations that are focusing on such areas. This can push the program into new directions, connecting the adolescents with existing national and international providers of services on the topics covered by the methodology;
- Since CRIDL has ongoing projects in many countries around the world, through the EduCaB program, working with public and/or community libraries, one of the aims is to scale-up the methodology in other places, starting with Nepal, Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Indonesia.
- One of the needs for the community of youth workers / librarians in Romania, along with CRIDL team, is to remain connected with MARTA team / namely, the team that build and

is managing the program, those that put together the methodology, in order to upgrade it with new topics, to test new ideas and to continue to scale-up the program not only on national basis realities but connected to an European and International ecosystem of support for adolescents.

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Youth groups in Spain

During the project, 2 youth groups were organized in different parts of Spain:

- Barcelona
- Aviles

Two youth groups were organized in Spain, one in Barcelona and one in Aviles. In total, 22 sessions took place between the two locations, engaging 119 young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Group leaders carried out the sessions in a face-to-face mode, with the challenges that Covid-19 restrictions presented at the time. The methodology of the activities that were shared with the participants followed the Youth Group Guidebook.

Reflections and conclusions

- The youth groups in Spain were organized in a face-to-face mode. The ones in Barcelona took place in a youth centre, while the ones in Aviles were carried out in outdoor spaces due to the Covid-19 restrictions that applied in the region at the time.
- The youth workers in Aviles reported that this fact made it difficult for them to do some of the activities in the Youth Group Methodology as some of them required a specific room layout and/or materials that the outdoors could not provide. This fact, nonetheless, did not prevent them from transmitting the main ideas and concepts from this methodology.
- Most of the youngsters from both groups knew each other from class, from their local youth centre or from their neighborhood. The youth workers knew some of them previously as they had been working with them for some time before, so this facilitated the communication and participation. For the sessions carried out with the participants that the youth workers knew the most, the sessions started on session 6 of the manual, as they considered that it was not necessary to start with “getting to know each other”.
- Youth workers also tried to group the participants by age range, as they considered that some of the activities suited the younger ones more, while others were better received by the older ones.
- In general, youth workers perceived that girls showed a better understanding of basic concepts of gender and gender stereotypes. They reported that girls showed that they are much better informed and aware about these issues, while their male classmates found it more difficult to follow some of the discussions. They note that the male participants,

however, proved to be open to learning these new concepts and to incorporate them into their every-day life.

- In many of the sessions, when discussing gender representation in mainstream media, participants demanded more information and visibility about the diversity of gender in the schools and in the audiovisual sector. Also, they stated that it was important for them to understand if the cinema is a reflection of society or is society a reflection of film content and production. Many interesting discussions came from this topic.
- Overall, participants engaged the most when they could feel represented in the topics discussed and could speak about their own realities. Youth workers noticed this and tried to tie the concepts discussed with examples that the participants could relate to and therefore understand better.
- The majority of the participants reported high levels of satisfaction and willingness to keep learning more about the topic and keep participating in activities that promote these types of initiatives.

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Youth groups in Bulgaria

During the project, 4 youth groups were organized in different parts of Bulgaria:

- 2 in Pernik;
- 1 in Sofia;
- 1 online / in Pleven.

Youth group activities engaged more than 30 young people aged 13 to 18 in long-term group sessions.

Group leaders covered all 17 sessions both – in person and online settings, using a variety of activities offered by the Youth group methodology guidebook, as well as adding some extra topics (such as Media literacy) and extra activities from their youth work experience. Participants of the youth groups also engaged in other local activities such as long-term role-playing games, community work and others. Many of the young people in Bulgaria showed great enthusiasm in becoming Youth Group leaders themselves and some assisted in the second youth group led in Pernik.

Reflections and conclusions

- The youth groups led in Pernik were part of the activities of a well-established organization in the town - PULSE Foundation. The youth workers there have a lot of experience in the same field - prevention of violence and leading a club - Let's be friends club, and they were very enthusiastic about implementing the YGM. Mostly, the Pernik groups were held in person, with some online sessions when full COVID lockdowns were in place. In Sofia,

the group was held in an English language school; because of COVID restrictions and changes, most activities were held online. Finally, the group in Pleven was mostly held online because one of the two group leaders was remote. Still, the group met and continued to be close after the end of the 17 sessions.

- All youth group leaders used the methodology as it was provided, keeping the sequence of the workshops, its structure, and activities. Only things that differed, were extra activities offered by youth group leaders or by group members themselves. The groups in Pernik engaged in more local volunteer activities. The group in Pleven continued to be close in a more informal way.
- Even though youth group leaders followed the order of the Methodology, they believe that it could be slightly rearranged based on each group and its needs.
- Participants share that they have rarely or never found another space in which to safely ask and share about the topics of the Methodology. Overwhelmingly, the participants expressed their feeling of being connected to the group, feeling safe, sharing freely and understanding themselves better.
- The first and last meetings were pointed as particularly affecting the participants but also the group leaders. While every meeting should be treated with a high level of attention and respect, the first and last had the biggest personal impact for the participants and for the group leaders.
- Youth group leaders in Bulgaria shared the importance of boundaries - as a youth group leader, but also as a youth worker overall. Because of the closeness created within the groups, it is easy for youngsters to imagine the leaders as friends and overstep some boundaries. This is why the youth group leader should be aware of this and vigilant about their personal needs, healthy boundaries and the nature of the relationship with the youngsters.
- Many participants in the youth groups showed enthusiasm about being a youth group leader as well. Actually, one of the group leaders in Pernik was a participant in a previous youth group, organized by the same methodology, in the KA1 project Dare to Care. Two of the participants from the first youth group in Pernik showed a huge desire for using this as an opportunity to develop as a facilitator and a leader, and supported the formation and leading of the second youth group in Pernik. This continuity was also shown in the second group there, and the organization managed to find municipal funding in order to continue the youth group - and this is how a third youth group was formed in Pernik, even after the end of the piloting within Re-GROUP.
- Most of the participants in youth groups continued in one way or another their groups even after the end of the official meetings.

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Concluding comments

Although the work with the group will come to an end and will not continue in this format, group members can agree on different ways they could spend time together. These can be local events that they meet at or co-organize. A “group gathering” that can be organized once every six months or once a year. And it may be the case that some participants are more eager to meet than others and decide to do so, meeting every month in a smaller group. In this case the group leader can give the group full responsibility for the future meeting process. Or a group may even decide that they will no longer invest resources to get everyone together. Any of these (and other) options are valuable, as long as they are a group decision, and everyone is aware of it. Despite the ways and scenarios of future group activities, group sessions experienced have already left a meaningful, long lasting impact on group members, their emotional, mental and social growth.

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