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Handbook
**Non-Violent
Communication**
From Conflict to Resolution

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Introduction

This handbook was created as part of the training course “**From Conflict to Connection: Non-Violent Communication for Youth Workers**,” 2025-3-HR01-KA153-YOU-000369418 held in Nova Gradiška, Croatia from 19 to 27 of April 2026.

It gathers practical tools, creative methods, and reflection activities that support youth workers in transforming conflict into dialogue, empathy, and cooperation.

The training explores conflict not as something to avoid, but as a natural part of group life, youth work, and community building. Through non-formal education, participants are invited to experience communication with the whole self: by listening, expressing, moving, reflecting, trusting, and understanding emotions.



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The handbook focuses on six key learning areas.

Conflict resolution methods which are important to recognise in everyday communication.

Active Listening which strengthens the ability to be fully present, hear beyond words, and respond with empathy.

Negotiation Techniques which help understand positions, identify needs, and move toward constructive agreements.

Assertive Communication supports honest self-expression while respecting others' boundaries and dignity.

Emotional Intelligence which means having awareness of feelings, self-regulation, empathy, and more conscious responses in challenging situations.

This handbook is intended for youth workers, facilitators, educators, and young leaders who want to create safer and more connected spaces for learning. The activities can be adapted to different groups and contexts, encouraging participants to move from conflict to understanding, from reaction to reflection, and from communication to real connection.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is the process of dealing with disagreements in a respectful and constructive way. It helps people understand each other's perspectives, express their feelings and needs, and find solutions without blaming or attacking. It is important because conflict is a natural part of group work, youth work, and daily life, but if it is ignored, it can create tension, misunderstanding, and distance between people.

A simple conflict resolution model includes identifying the conflict, listening to all sides, recognizing the emotions and needs behind the problem, exploring possible solutions, and agreeing on a constructive action. This helps people move from reaction to reflection and from disagreement to better communication.

Thomas Kilmann Conflict Resolution Model

Thomas Kilmann conflict Resolution Model explains conflict behavior through two main dimensions: **assertiveness**, which is how much a person tries to satisfy their own needs, and **cooperativeness**, which is how much they try to satisfy the needs of others.

From these dimensions come five conflict-handling styles.

Competing means a person pushes for their own outcome, often at the expense of others, which can be useful in urgent situations but may harm relationships.

Collaborating is high in both assertiveness and cooperativeness, where people work together to find a solution that fully satisfies everyone involved, making it the most constructive but also the most time-consuming approach.

Compromising sits in the middle, where each side gives up something to reach a quick, acceptable solution, though it may not be ideal for either party.

Avoiding means the person chooses not to address the conflict at all and it often leaves the problem unresolved.

Accommodating is where a person prioritizes the other party's needs over their own, which can maintain harmony but may lead to their own interests being neglected.



Conflict Resolution through Forum Theatre



What is Forum Theatre?

Forum Theatre is a method that transforms a theoretical conflict into a living, breathing scene. It allows us to stop focusing only on our own viewpoint of the problems and instead engage with the complex and difficult reality of situations. It is not just about putting on a performance for an audience, but also about creating a space to test different versions of ourselves.

During Forum Theatre, a short scene is performed that shows a situation of conflict without resolving it. After the first performance, the audience is invited to step in, replace the main character, and try out different actions to change the outcome. Instead of being passive spectators, they become “spect-actors,” actively exploring possible solutions.

The goal is not to find one correct answer, but to rehearse real-life situations, test different responses, and better understand power dynamics and social issues. It is often used in education, social activism, and community work to encourage critical thinking, empathy, and problem-solving.

How is it connected to the project topic?

People often feel helpless in the face of conflict, believing the outcome is written in stone and that a fight is unavoidable. **By stepping onto the stage, they break that cycle. It is about uncovering the power dynamics, the hidden motivations, and the emotional weight of a situation.** When they test different solutions in practice, they stop guessing what might work and start experiencing the immediate impact of their choices.



WORKSHOP 1

Forum Theatre: A Rehearsal for Reality

Aim:

To explore conflict situations through role-play and collective reflection. To implement different conflict resolution strategies through role-play. This activity helps participants understand different perspectives, power dynamics, and possible ways to transform conflict.

Duration:

60-90 minutes

How to do it:

Participants receive a prompt presenting a realistic conflict situation related to youth work, communication, or everyday life.

A small group (3-6 people) then performs the scene in front of the others, clearly portraying the conflict, the roles involved, and the underlying tension. After the initial performance, the audience reflects on what they observed.

The scene is then repeated, and participants can intervene by clapping to pause the action. At that moment, they may step in, replace a character, or introduce a new one, exploring alternative ways to respond. Through these interventions, they test different conflict resolution strategies with the aim of improving the situation. The process can be repeated multiple times, allowing for new ideas, perspectives, and responses to emerge.

Reflection:

This activity shows that conflict can be explored safely through theatre. It helps participants test new behaviours, understand others' perspectives, and discover alternative ways of responding before applying them in real life.

During reflection, questions can be asked, such as: "How did you feel in different roles?", "How was it to intervene and implement new conflict resolution strategies?"



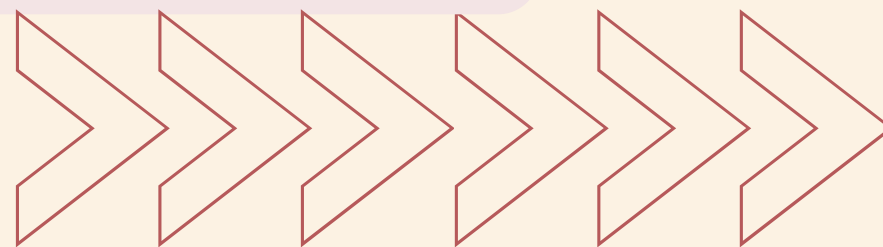
What is Negotiation?

Negotiation is a process in which two or more parties communicate and try to reach an agreement on an issue where they have different interests, needs, or perspectives.

COMPONENTS OF NEGOTIATION

We differentiate 4 main components of negotiation:

1. POSITION
2. NEEDS OR INTERESTS
3. EMOTIONS
4. PERCEPTIONS



NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

STRATEGY:

COMPETING

COLLABORATING

COMPROMISING

AVOIDING

ACCOMMODATING



OUTCOME:

WIN - LOSE

WIN - WIN

MIDDLE
GROUND

LOSE - LOSE

LOSE - WIN

Position is what a person says they want or demand in a situation.

It is often the most visible part of the conflict, but not always the most important. Positions matter because they define the starting points of each side, but focusing only on positions can limit solutions and create deadlock, since they may hide deeper reasons behind them.

Needs or interests refer to the underlying reasons why a person takes a certain position.

These can include practical needs, values, goals, or concerns. They are important because they reveal what truly motivates each side, and understanding them allows negotiators to move beyond fixed demands and find solutions that satisfy both parties more effectively.

Emotions are the feelings that people experience during negotiation, such as frustration, fear, anger, or trust.

They are important because they strongly influence communication, decision-making, and behaviour. If emotions are not acknowledged, they can escalate conflict, but when managed properly, they can help build empathy and cooperation.

Perceptions are how each party interprets the situation and the other side's behaviour.

They are important because misunderstandings or biased views can create unnecessary conflict even when interests are compatible. Recognising and clarifying perceptions helps reduce miscommunication and builds a more accurate understanding between parties.

WORKSHOP 2

Negotiation in Action

How can one approach negotiation effectively?

This is where strategies come in.

Competing is win-lose, useful but potentially damaging. Collaborating is win-win and aims for mutual benefit. Compromising finds a middle ground, while avoiding leaves conflict unresolved.

Finally, accommodating means giving in to maintain harmony, but it can create imbalance if overused.

Aim:

To develop participants' ability to analyze conflict situations and apply effective negotiation strategies. The activity helps participants understand different perspectives and improve communication and problem-solving skills in challenging interactions.

Duration:

90 minutes

Group size:

In pairs, while the rest of the group acts as observers.



How to do it:

Participants are divided into pairs. Each pair receives two different role cards. Each card contains specific information about the participant's role, objectives, background context, and a suggested negotiation strategy. Participants must not share their role cards with each other.

Each participant reads their role card individually and prepares for the negotiation, stepping fully into their role and perspective.

The role-play begins, and participants engage in a negotiation. Their goal is to achieve their objectives while managing communication, emotions, and possible conflict.

Reflection:

After each role-play, participants share their experience as the given character. Questions can be asked:

“Which negotiation strategy did you use and why?”

“How could have a differentiated negotiation strategy impacted on the situation?”

“What was the main obstacle for you in overcoming the common problem in the role-play situation?”



Active Listening

Active listening means fully focusing on the speaker to understand both their message and meaning, not just hearing words. Here are seven ways to improve your active listening skills.

BE FULLY PRESENT

Being present means giving your full mental attention to the conversation without distractions or thinking about your response while the other person is speaking.

ASK OPEN- ENDED QUESTIONS

Asking open-ended questions encourages the speaker to elaborate and explain more deeply, which leads to better understanding and clearer communication.

PAY ATTENTION TO NON-VERBAL QUES

Paying attention to non-verbal cues involves noticing body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture, since these often reveal emotions or meanings that words alone do not. It also means paying attention to your non-verbal communication, such as nodding as a form of confirmation.

WITHHOLD JUDGEMENT

Withholding judgment means listening without immediately evaluating, criticising, or forming conclusions, which creates a safe space for honest and open communication.

KEEP EYE-CONTACT


Keeping eye contact helps show interest and engagement, and signals to the speaker that they are being heard and taken seriously.

REFLECT WHAT YOU HEAR

Reflecting what you hear means summarizing or repeating key points in your own words to confirm understanding and show the speaker you are following them accurately.

BE PATIENT

Being patient involves allowing the speaker to express themselves fully without interrupting or rushing them, even if pauses occur.



WORKSHOP 3

Talker, Listener, Observer

This workshop introduces participants to the technique of active listening, its core components, and how it improves interpersonal connection through focused attention and aims to guide trainees in practicing these skills via structured group interaction and immediate peer feedback.

Aim:

To practice active listening meaning listening with attention, empathy, and respect. To practice asking open questions, paying attention to non-verbal cues and confidence in interactions. To practice giving constructive feedback and individual introspection into the learning process.

Duration:

60 minutes

Group size:

Groups of 3 participants



How to do it

Participants form groups of three: one talker, one listener, and one observer. Each participant chooses an associative card (i.e. *Dixit cards*) and explains why they selected it and what meaning it has for them.

The talker shares their story or thoughts about the card.

The listener listens carefully without interrupting, judging, or giving advice. The observer takes notes on the listener's positive behaviours and possible areas for improvement.

After each round, the observer gives short feedback to the listener and they discuss what was positive and what could be improved. Then, participants change roles so everyone can experience each position.

Reflection

This activity helps participants understand that active listening is more than hearing words. It also includes eye contact, body language, patience, open questions, silence, and creating a safe space for meaningful communication.

At the end of the workshops the facilitator should ask the participants reflection questions, such as:

1. How did you feel in different roles (talker, listener, observer)?
2. Was it challenging?
3. Did you learn something about yourself?

Assertive Communication

What is Assertive Communication?

Assertive communication is a way of expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly and respectfully, without ignoring your own rights or the rights of others. It means standing up for yourself in a calm, honest, and direct way while still considering the other person's perspective.

The Connection between Conflict Management and Assertive Communication

Assertive communication is important in conflict resolution because it allows people to express what is wrong without blaming or escalating tension, which makes it easier to find solutions. In negotiation, it helps you clearly communicate your needs and boundaries while still being open to compromise and cooperation. In relationships, it builds trust and respect, because people feel heard without feeling attacked or controlled.

Assertive is Not Aggressive

Assertive communication is often in practice mistaken as aggressive. However it means more than taking a stance and getting it your way. **The key difference between assertive and aggressive communication is respect and intent.** Assertive communication respects both yourself and the other person, focusing on clarity and fairness. Aggressive communication, on the other hand, prioritizes winning or controlling the situation, often at the expense of the other person's feelings or rights, and can include blaming, shouting, or intimidation.

ASSERTIVE

"I MATTER, AND YOU MATTER."

AGGRESSIVE

"I MATTER MORE THAN YOU."

WORKSHOP 4

Speak Up: Assertive Communication

Aim:

Increase their awareness of how different levels of assertiveness influences communication and interactions.

Duration:

20 minutes

Group size:

20 participants



How to do it:

Each participant is assigned a number from 1 to 10 to represent their assertiveness level, from very passive to highly assertive. They interact in small groups, discussing simple topics while staying in character. After a quick reflection on how these roles felt, participants swap levels, high to low and vice versa, to repeat the exercise. The session ends with a group debrief where everyone connects these shifts to real-life situations, followed by a final summary on practicing conscious communication.

Reflection:

This activity helps participants understand how different levels of assertiveness affect communication, emotions, and interactions with others. It highlights the importance of balance between passivity and aggressiveness.

Participants are encouraged to reflect on their own communication style and how they can adapt it depending on the situation.

At the end, the facilitator can ask questions such as:

1. How did you feel at different levels of assertiveness?
2. Which level felt most natural to you?
3. Was it difficult to change your communication style?
4. What did you learn about yourself?

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (often abbreviated as EI or EQ) is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and use emotions—both your own and those of other people—in a constructive way.

Five core components of EI include:

SELF-AWARENESS

Noticing your own emotions as they happen and understanding what triggers them.

SELF-REGULATION

Managing emotional reactions instead of being controlled by them (e.g., not snapping when angry, not shutting down under stress).

MOTIVATION

Staying focused on goals even when emotions fluctuate—especially frustration, boredom, or doubt.

EMPATHY

Understanding how other people feel and seeing situations from their perspective.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Communicating effectively, building relationships, resolving tension, and cooperating with others.



Why emotional intelligence matters in conflict resolution?

Conflict is rarely just about the surface issue. It's usually driven by emotions like feeling disrespected, unheard, misunderstood, or threatened. Without EI, conflicts tend to escalate quickly because people react defensively rather than reflectively.

Emotional intelligence helps because it allows you to:

- **Pause instead of react impulsively (self-regulation)**
- **Understand what the other person is actually feeling beneath their words (empathy)**
- **Separate facts from emotional interpretations**
- **Stay grounded instead of escalating the conflict**
- **Shift from “winning” the argument to solving the problem**

WORKSHOP 5

The Trust Walk

Trust Walk is a non-formal education activity that focuses on trust, responsibility, vulnerability, and non-verbal communication. The workshop is a direct and practical exercise in developing **emotional intelligence**, because it places participants in situations where they must notice, understand, and manage emotions—both their own and their partner’s—without relying on verbal communication.

Aim

To strengthen the components of emotional intelligence, explore trust, responsibility, vulnerability, and non-verbal communication.

Duration

30–45 minutes

Group size

Pairs of 2 participants

How to do it

Create a safe obstacle path made of chairs, sticks, broom, tables, etc. Divide participants into pairs. One person is blindfolded, and the other guides them without speaking. The guide uses gentle touch, body positioning, and careful movement to lead their partner safely. If time allows, switch roles.



Reflection:

How did you feel while being blindfolded?
How did you feel while guiding someone?
•What helped you trust your partner?
What was difficult or uncomfortable?

Quotes on non-violent communication...

"If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."

— Nelson Mandela

"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it. It is not a static condition, but an active, daily effort to bridge divides, dismantle prejudices, and construct a framework where mutual respect can flourish."

— Eleanor Roosevelt

"Understanding is the basis of love. If you do not understand, you cannot love. You cannot offer peace. When you listen to the other person, when you understand the suffering of the other person, when you see their difficulty, you cannot help but have compassion for them."

— Thich Nhat Hanh

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