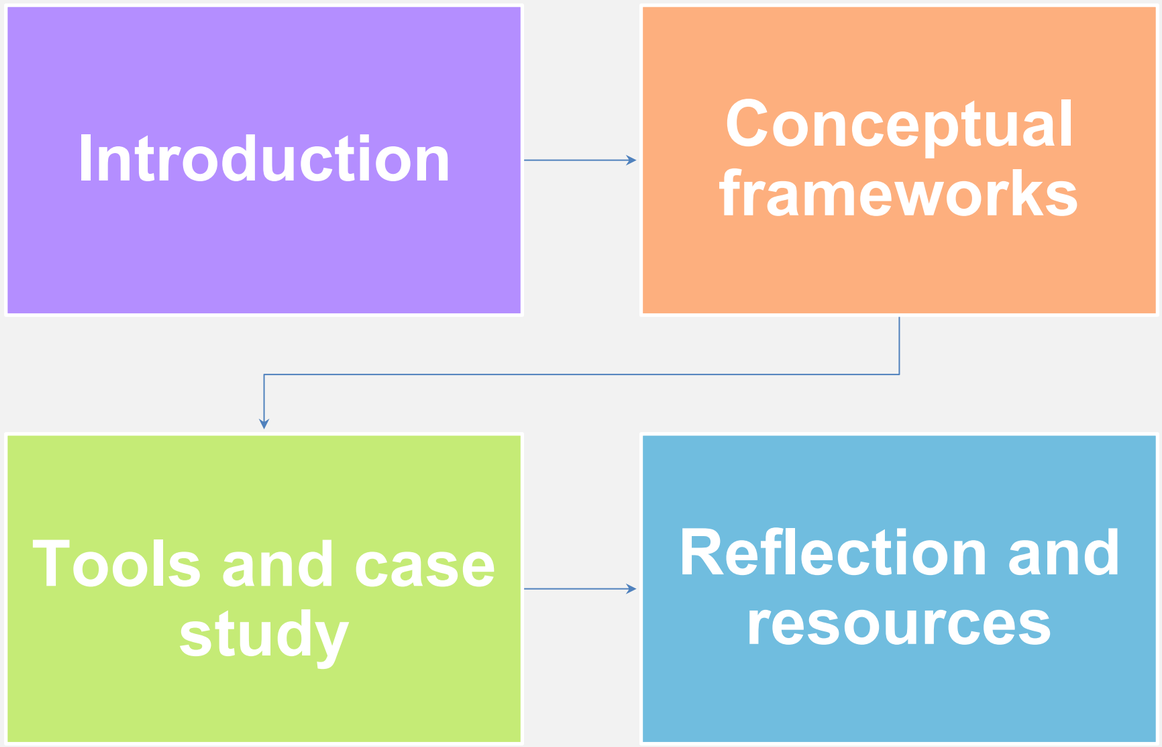
YOUTH in ROUTE

Routes for fostering sense of initiative and active citizenship among disaffiliated youth

Level 2/Session 3 – Trauma-Informed Youth Work

Co-funded by the European Union 2024-2-BE04-KA220-YOU-00276965

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Trauma-Informed Youth Work

Level 2 – Application | Module 3

Understanding Trauma, Secondary Stress & Protective Practices

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About the Youth in Route Training Programme

Youth in Route is an Erasmus+ project equipping youth workers to understand and address youth disaffiliation across Belgium, France, Portugal and Serbia. The training has 3 progressive levels :

- L1 Foundation – Theory & concepts of disaffiliation
- L2 Application – Practical tools & field strategies → **YOU ARE HERE**

Position of Module 3 within Level 2

Module 3 deepens the relational skills from M1 & M2 by introducing a trauma lens. Workers who understand trauma can engage more safely and effectively — and protect their own wellbeing.

- Follows L2 Module 2 (Creative and Non-Formal Education Methodologies)
- Leads into L2 Module 4 (Digital Tools for Engagement)

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- **Knowledge**: Explain the neurological and psychological effects of trauma and identify how they manifest in disaffiliated young people's behaviour
- **Skills**: Apply trauma-informed principles (safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment) in daily youth work practice
- **Attitudes**: Read behaviour as communication, not provocation — and never re-traumatise



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Key concept



Suggested: Two people in calm dialogue, or a hand holding a plant (growth metaphor)

5 key concepts for this module:

1. **Trauma**: An overwhelming experience that exceeds a person's capacity to cope, leaving lasting effects on safety, trust, and self-regulation
2. **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**: Traumatic events in childhood (abuse, neglect, household dysfunction) linked to lifelong health and social outcomes
3. **Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA)**: A framework that integrates knowledge of trauma into all practices — asking "what happened to you?" rather than "what is wrong with you?"
4. **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)**: The emotional and psychological cost of working closely with traumatised individuals; often confused with burnout
5. **Regulation**: The capacity to manage one's emotional and physiological state; co-regulation is when a calm adult helps a distressed young person return to a regulated state.

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Interactive questions



Discuss in pairs after reading each scenario:

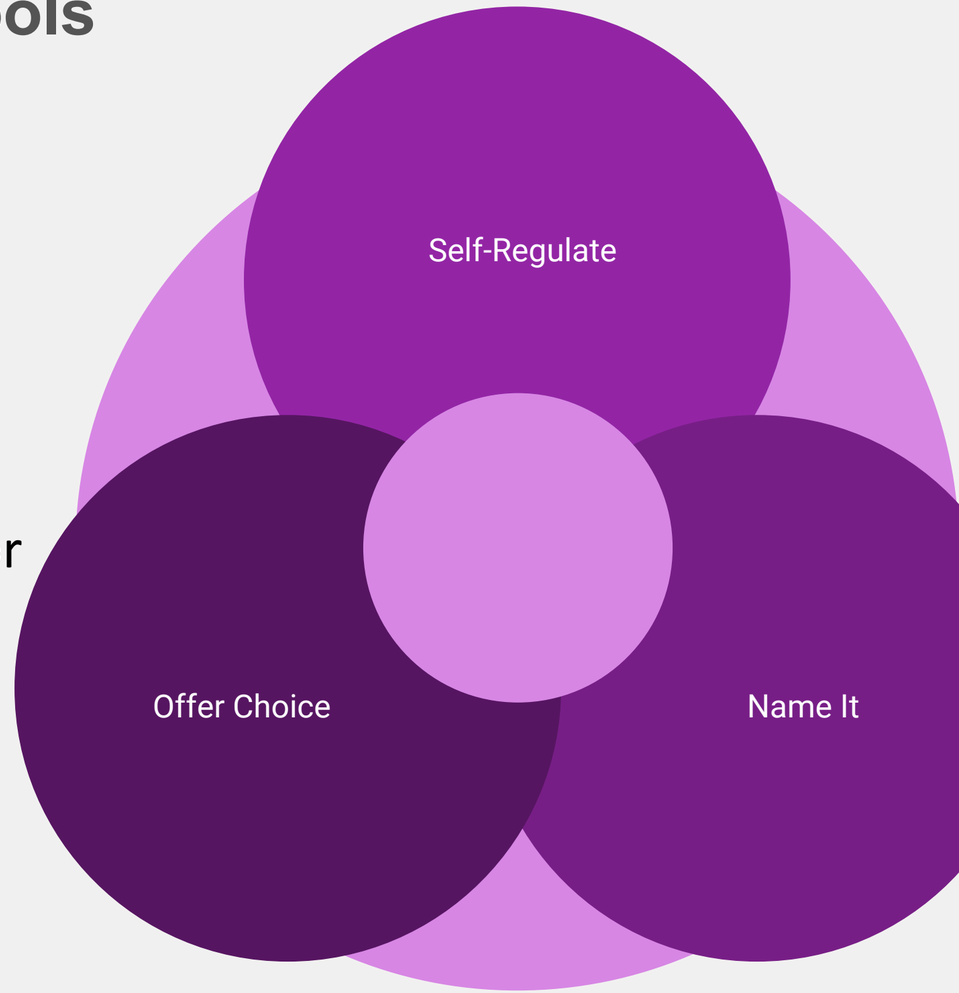
Scenario 1 – Brussels: Karim (18) shouts and leaves every time you raise the topic of his family. He later apologises but says he “can’t control it.”
→ What trauma response might explain this? How do you adapt your approach?

Scenario 2 – Charleroi: After 3 months of intense work with a highly traumatised group, you notice you’re dreading sessions, sleeping badly, and becoming cynical.
→ What is happening to you? What support do you need?

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Regulate Yourself First

Draws directly from co-regulation theory: a dysregulated nervous system cannot calm another dysregulated nervous system. When a youth worker enters a tense interaction already stressed, rushed, or emotionally activated, their body communicates that state involuntarily — through tone, pace, muscle tension, micro-expressions — before a single word is spoken. The young person's nervous system reads this and responds in kind. The worker's internal state is, quite literally, the first intervention.



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Study: Trauma-Informed Shift in a Brussels Youth Centre

els youth centre serving highly vulnerable youth (15–25) undertook a 6-month shift to trauma-d practice, triggered by a critical incident where a well-intentioned worker confrontation caused a risis in a young person with unidentified trauma.

case study: “CS-L2-M3-TraumaInformed-Brussels-BE” | Key result: 70% reduction in crisis incidents; nt improvement in worker wellbeing scores after 6 months.



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Reflection



1. Think of a young person whose behaviour you found difficult. What trauma responses might have been at play?

2. How do you currently notice your own secondary traumatic stress? What is missing from your support system?

3. What one change in how your team debriefs could make your practice more trauma-informed?

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Additional resources

1. VIDEO: “How Childhood Trauma Affects Health” – Nadine Burke Harris TED Talk (16 min)
2. ARTICLE: SAMHSA – “Trauma-Informed Approach: Key Assumptions” (5 min)
3. REPORT: WHO Europe – ACEs and Youth Social Exclusion (advanced)
4. QUIZ: Trauma Responses Scenario Quiz (Kahoot, 8 questions)
5. TOOLKIT: Scottish Trauma Informed Schools – Adapted Guide for Youth Workers (free PDF)

See facilitator notes for platform links and access instructions

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mindshift

CEPORA
CENTER FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Louis Lumière Chelles
Lycée des métiers du Commerce et des Environnements Connectés

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