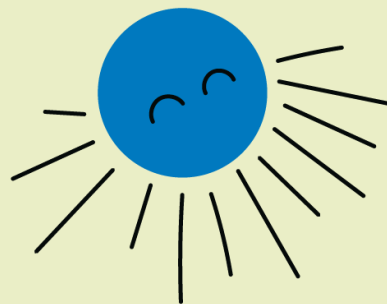


MENTAL WELL-BEING

IN YOUTH WORK

vision | playfield | roadmap



VISION - PLAYFIELD - ROADMAP

Mental well-being in youth work

Date: 1 June 2023

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1 Introduction

The issue of mental well-being has risen to the top of the agenda in recent years, including for De Ambrassade and youth work. Saying that the mental well-being of children and young people is under pressure and that mental health problems are more visible in places where children and young people meet, such as youth work, is stating the obvious. So what can youth work do? How do we tackle the issue, and is this really the role of youth work?

We wrote a [vision statement](#) on mental well-being and defined several transition paths to get started. One of these pathways is developing a mental well-being framework in youth work. This has several aims:

- to give youth work an anchor and a language to formulate its own mental well-being policy tailored to your organisation;
- to define the role and responsibility of youth work in the mental well-being of children and young people;
- Build bridges to other sectors (especially well-being);
- Provide examples, concrete tools and support.

Youth work has an important role to play in this domain. As we wrote in our #youthworkworks story, [youth work is active at intersections](#). Youth workers are safe figures in a society that mainly confronts people with obligations, leaves little room to figure things out on the fly, and rarely allows failure. For this reason, children and young people entrust youth workers with many questions related to things other than leisure and recreation: problems with parents, at school, with themselves, and in society. Youth work, which takes place in children's and young people's leisure time, also has an advantage here: nothing is a must, everything is possible. Youth work can provide a safe environment where children and young people can talk about their problems, but it can also positively promote mental health.

Youth work is already taking many initiatives to strengthen the mental well-being of children and young people. Every step taken counts enormously for children and young people, and we should continue to monitor these efforts. But what if we genuinely harnessed the power of youth work and worked towards a future where mental well-being is a given for every child and young person? This Playfield is designed to help you do just that. It is a framework you can use in conjunction with your organisation's integrity policy.

The 'Playfield of mental well-being' is not a rigid tool to be followed from A to Z, but rather a 'playfield of possibilities' (hence the name) to start the thinking exercise within your youth work organisation. The 'Playfield of mental well-being' was designed in a generalist way and is aimed at all youth work organisations, whether they work with volunteers or professionals. All this is linked to the integrity policy at the organisational level, because here too you are working on a policy of promotion (quality) and prevention. It is up to you to translate this Playfield into your organisation.

In this document, you will find theory on mental well-being (what is it), and we will create a shared language. We define what the 'playfield' is, the role and responsibility of the youth worker, and provide tools and support to get started.

2 Background

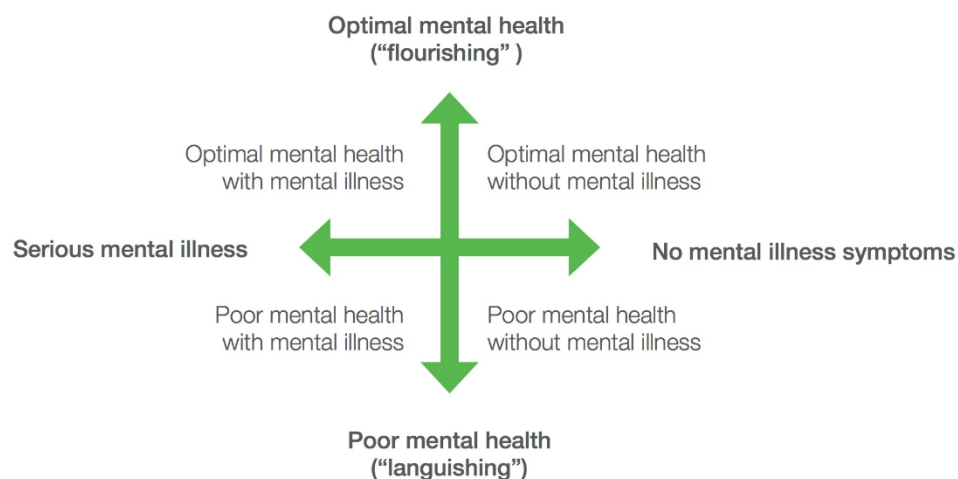
2.1 Mental well-being, a shared language

Mental or psychological health, mental well-being or mental fitness, mental problems, psychological problems... these different terms are all used interchangeably. They are of course related, but it is important to be aware that mental health is more than the absence of illness or disorders. **Mental health is not just about whether you have depression, anxiety or ADHD.** It is also about positive mental health or 'well-being': how comfortable you are in your skin, how you feel - emotionally and in relation to other people, how energetic you are... We prefer to use a broad definition and talk about mental well-being, as this is the term most often used in youth work.

How 'positive mental health' and 'mental illness' interact is illustrated in **Corey Keyes' (2005) dual continuum model.** The first continuum (the horizontal axis) represents mental illness, ranging from maximum to minimum presence of psychological symptoms and complaints. The second continuum (the vertical axis) is positive mental health, ranging from poor to optimal mental well-being or feeling comfortable in one's skin.

The two axes do not overlap completely, but they can influence each other. This interaction means that working on one axis can lead to shifts in the other. It also means that **if psychopathology (higher levels of mental illness) is in play, someone may benefit from strengthening mental well-being.**

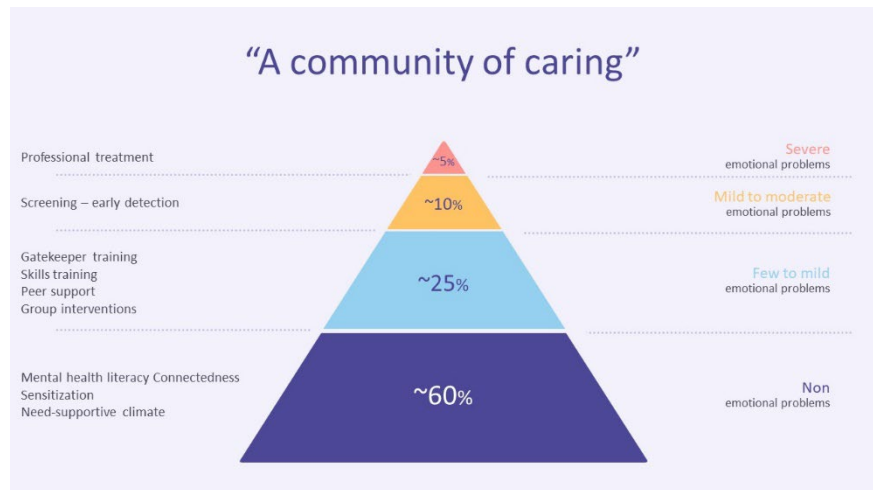
Figure 1: Dual Continuum Model of Mental Health and Mental Illness



MacKean, 2011. Adapted from: The Health Communication Unit at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto and Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario; based on the conceptual work of Corey Keyes

In this way, the dual continuum model has important implications for mental health care. **While the focus has been on treating disorders, it turns out that investing in well-being can help prevent mental disorders** (From Handboek positieve psychologie by Bohlmeijer, Bolier, Westenhof and Walburg, 2013). The power of youth work in this regard is **investing in the well-being of children and young people.**

In this context, Professor Ronny Bruffaerts refers to the concept of a **community of caring**. A community of people that care for each other as early as possible, not only when mental health problems have developed. If we want to build such a community, we need to initiate specific interventions at each level of the pyramid below (You can also find the full explanation in [the video at Moodspace](#)).



We need a social system switch in which we strengthen mental well-being to prevent and/or treat mental health problems. From a public health perspective, we believe that a lot can be achieved in the early stages: before children and young people start to feel bad, but also as soon as the writing is on the wall. The more we can focus on this and tackle issues early, the more we can reduce the burden on specialist services and ensure that more children and young people feel good about themselves. **Let's use the power of youth work to make that happen!**

Want to read more about the (scientific) background and definition of mental well-being?

Check out our [vision statement](#) on the De Ambrassade website.

2.2 The power of youth work

Scientific research into the key predictors of well-being offers hope. Strong connections with others were found to be the main predictor of happiness later in life. The Flemish SIGMA study shows that **mainly qualitative daily social interactions are strongly related to young people's mental health**. These findings are hopeful because they show what we can actually do to promote well-being. Helping children and young people to make meaningful connections with others will lead to tremendous resilience in future generations.

All children and young people have a right to youth work. It can be an enormously powerful safeguard against the development of psychopathology. Research shows that this is linked to the central role of connection with others. Youth work is an expert in connecting!

From our #youthworkworks story:

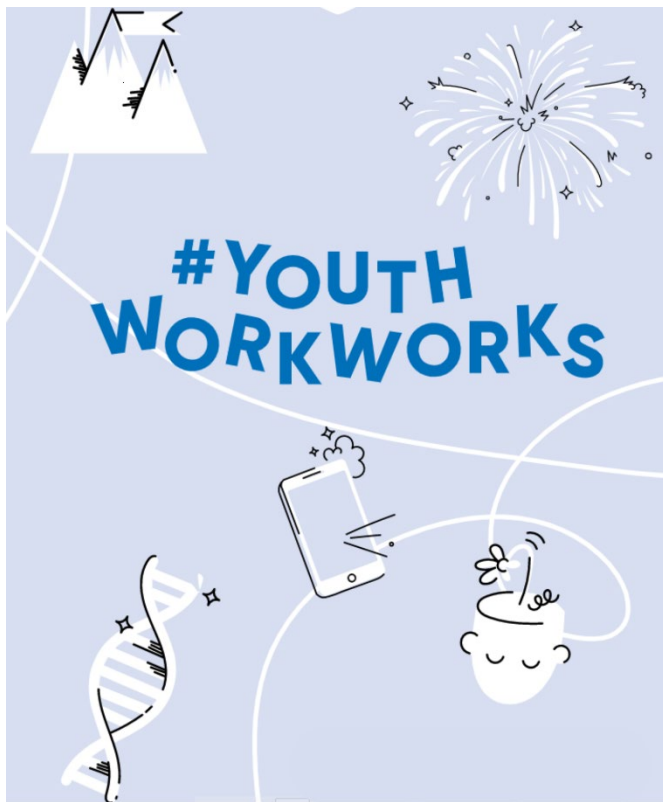
DNA of a youth worker: everyone a youth worker! Youth work as a way of living, thinking, looking...

Whether a youth worker is a paid member of staff or a volunteer, [every youth worker has a specific DNA](#) that can only be lived, learned and experienced in youth work. Indeed, youth work is playful, fun, creative, dirty, rebellious, vibrant, passionate, wacky... But youth work is above all an attitude: it is how youth workers relate to the world and look at society. Not because they have to, but because they want to.

If everybody in contact with children and young people lets their inner youth worker out, we will move towards a society that empowers children and young people. Not top-down, but rather bottom-up. Not starting from unequal power positions, but from active ownership and critical citizenship.

#Youthworkworks because youth workers ...

- **consistently put children and young people at the centre of their actions** - Youth workers always start from the situation of children and young people. Youth workers offer children and young people their own social space, with room for what they are able and willing to do, based on their interests.
- **give children and young people ownership** - Activities, group building, daily operations, processes, experiments: children and young people can manage these themselves. They find themselves on equal footing with their youth leaders and youth work professionals.
- **give equal importance to process and product** - Together with children and young people, youth workers work towards a product. But the road to reaching the result is at least as valuable. Cycles of reflection and action alternate. In dialogue, from experience and in group, young people learn and take steps forward.
- **use the power of the group in a positive way** - Youth work connects children and young people by cooperating, linking to shared interests, meeting each other, networking and community building. That way, youth work provides a sense of belonging and creates openness towards different opinions or habits.
- **help shape society** - Youth workers support children and young people to grow up as active and committed citizens. Together with the children and young people, they think about their neighbourhood or (local) policies and set up initiatives that bring people closer together...



The positive effects of youth work

Youth work's mission is to actively create space for children and young people so that they have opportunities to experiment, participate and enjoy (meaningful) leisure activities. That way, youth work creates a place where children and young people can be young, develop and grow together. Moreover, youth workers do this based on their common DNA (see above).

#Youthworkworks because youth work empowers children and young people, connects them and makes them grow

Youth work first of all has a direct effect on children and young people. Youth work empowers children and young people and develops their competencies, values, skills and attitudes. Youth work creates a safe place for children and young people. It uses informal and non-formal learning and allows them to have new experiences. That influences who

they want to become later in life. Youth work connects children and young people to develop and grow up together.

Youth work contributes to the (general) development of children and young people.

👑 Youth work empowers children and young people:

- ▶ Youth work enhances the self-confidence and resilience of children and young people.
- ▶ Youth work contributes to the independence and autonomy of children and young people.
- ▶ Youth work increases children's and young people's ability to learn.

👑 Youth work makes children and young people grow:

- ▶ Youth work increases self-understanding and impacts young people's identity development. Youth work reinforces reflection on who you are and want to be.

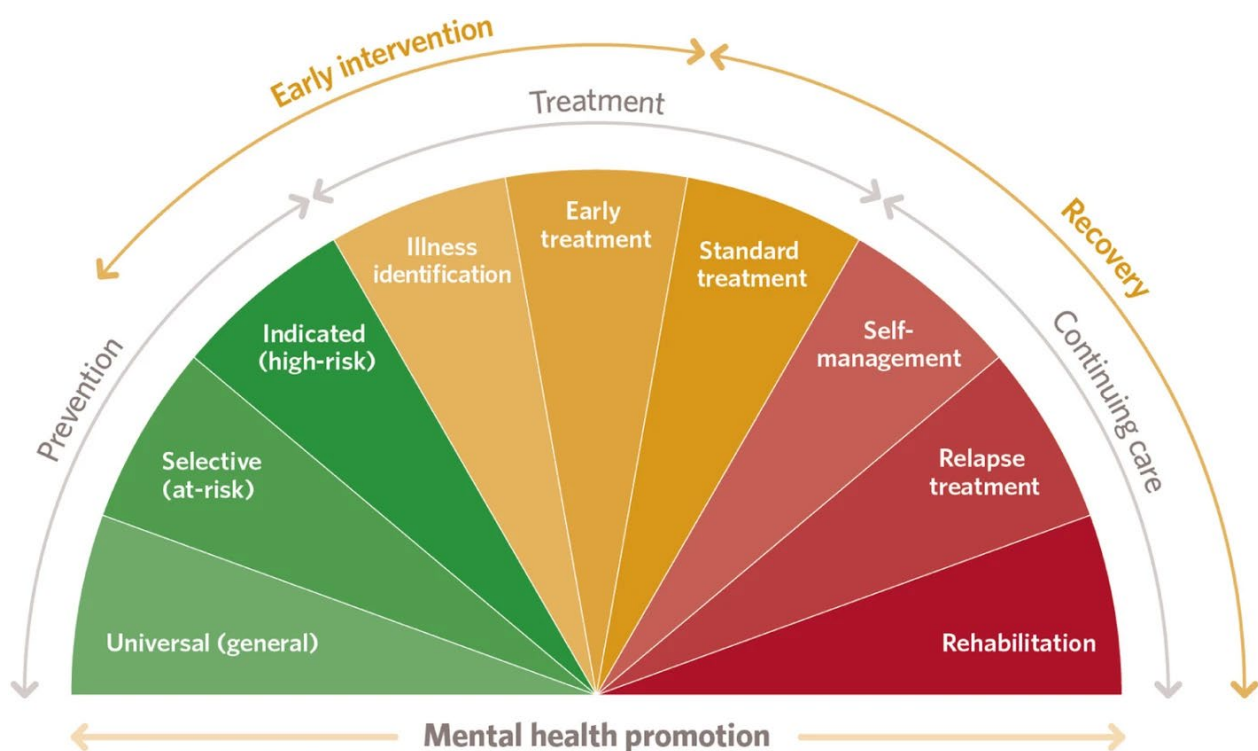
👑 Youth work connects children and young people:

- ▶ Children and young people perceive youth work as a safe and trusted environment. Youth work offers children and young people a sense of belonging and a place to be themselves.
- ▶ Children and young people confirm the shared values they experience in youth work: fun, freedom, competence, recognition, safety, self-development, respect and connectedness.

2.3 Towards a framework for mental well-being in youth work

To establish a clear framework for youth work, we have chosen to draw on the **spectrum of mental health interventions** (interventiespectrum geestelijke gezondheidszorg) of the Institute for Healthy Living (Instituut Gezond Leven). Based on the dual definition of mental health (i.e. optimal mental health is an interaction between mental illness and positive mental health/mental well-being), there is a broad spectrum of actions and interventions that we as a society should take to work on mental health:

1. actions and interventions to **promote** positive mental health;
2. actions and interventions to **prevent** the development of mental health problems or disorders (psychopathology) or maintain good mental health;
3. actions and interventions to **treat** mental health problems or disorders;
4. actions and interventions to **maintain** effective elements of treatment of mental health problems or disorders.



© Image: <https://sportsmedicine-open.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40798-019-0220-1/figures/2>

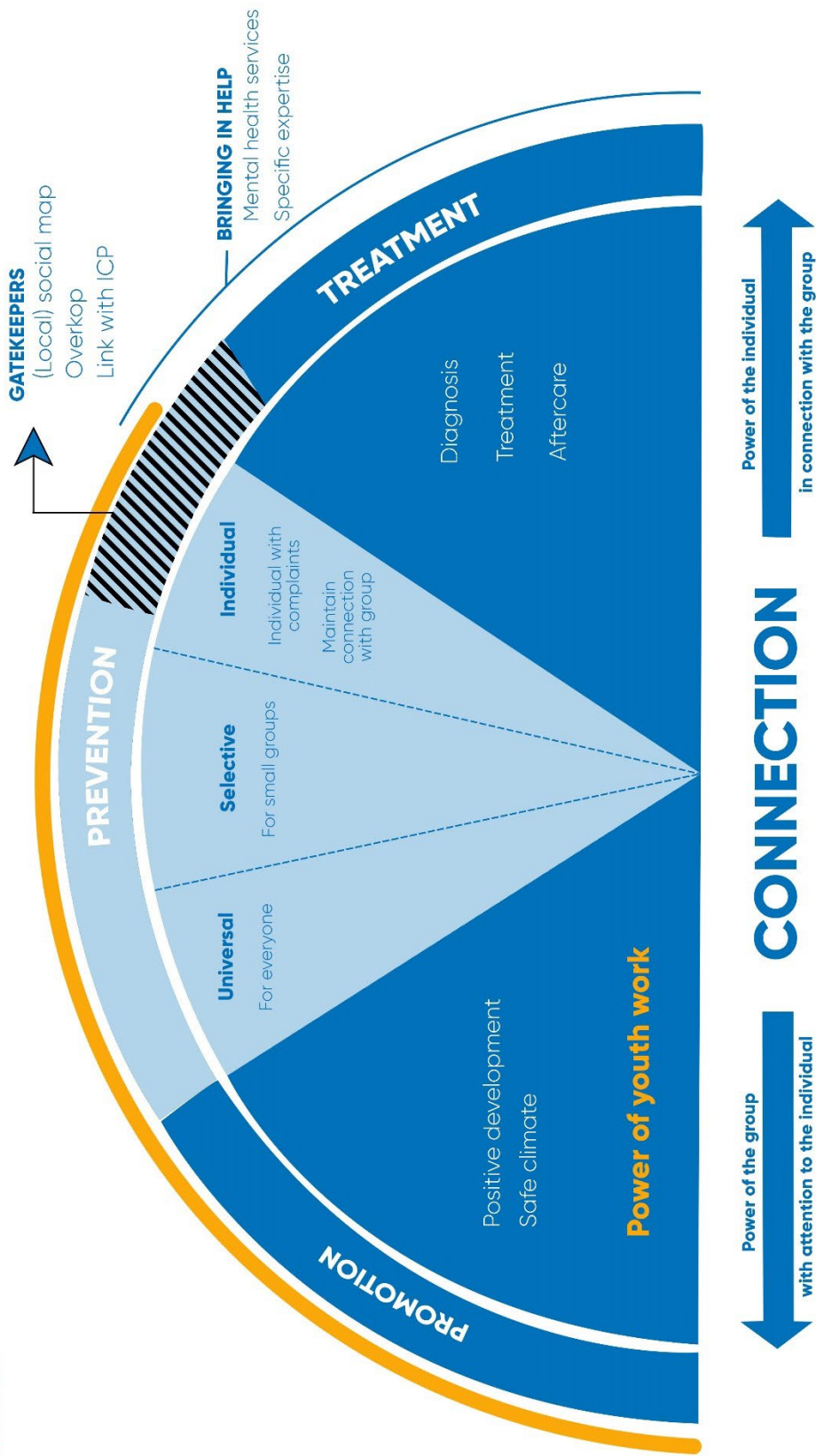
The role of youth work(ers) in these different interventions (promotion, prevention, treatment, maintenance) can be defined using the above spectrum. It also offers an opportunity to reflect on the issue as a group, to talk to professional services in the neighbourhood, etc.

However, after consultation with a youth work sounding board group, we have decided not to adopt this spectrum entirely but to adapt it and turn it into a 'playfield'. Why?

- ✦ The spectrum gives a rather linear impression, whereas we naturally want children and young people to feel adequately supported in the left half of the spectrum and thus avoid crossing over to the right.
- ✦ The commitment to promotion and prevention also does not end when a young person is in therapy in the right half of the spectrum, for example. Research shows that investing in the group and connection should not stop and is always important.

This is why we have chosen to use the term playfield alongside the accompanying image below. As a youth work group, your actions are situated in a particular area, but the transitions are fluid. Youth work is mainly situated in the area of promotion and prevention, but it can also play a role in treatment and maintenance in some cases.

Playfield of mental well-being youth work



Based on the framework (c) Vlaams instituut Gezond leven, 2020

3 Playfield of mental well-being

Youth work is situated mainly on the left side of this spectrum (promotion and prevention). Youth work uses its strengths and the power of the group to empower children and young people and to prevent mental health problems. As soon as the middle line is crossed, especially in the treatment area, we move towards an additional individual scenario where mental health services come into view. This is when we speak of bringing in professional help. Of course, we can also use youth work methods in this process. It remains important to continue working on promotion and prevention and not lose contact with the group at this stage as well.

In the following, we will take a closer look at the different areas of the Playfield and how you can focus on them. As you can see, there is a wide range of possibilities between promotion and treatment, namely the area of prevention. In other words, you don't have to rush to a psychologist at every sign of mental distress among participants. You can do many things without needing to be a mental health professional.

3.1 Promotion

Promotion means working on the mental well-being of children and young people in the group before and independently of the development of mental health problems. **It is important that children and young people feel comfortable in the group to which they belong** by providing a **safe climate where they can be themselves** and where **dealing with emotions is considered normal**. Creating a safe climate is part of your quality policy and reduces the risk of mental health problems. You set up actions to achieve this safe climate. These can be intentional or unintentional, such as introductory games or group-building activities. These protective factors have a dual role: they help children and young people be more confident and provide a buffer against what might go wrong.

Research by Pimento (2023), the centre of expertise within the network of Chirojeugd Vlaanderen, shows that youth work is already very good at using the protective factor of connection. The next step is to start naming and making these existing efforts visible. For example: "We do 'energisers' at the beginning of an activity to create a positive atmosphere where everyone feels welcome. In this way, you are helping youth workers, children and young people to put mental well-being into words. You don't have to spell it out every time you plan an energiser, but it is important to name these things when working on your integrity policy.

It is also important to create a safe climate for youth workers themselves. Young adults working with children and young people don't always have enough mental space either, or certain things can be triggering for them too. So it is important to feel safe to talk about this and to create a gentle environment as a group, without expecting every youth worker to engage.

This is where the power of youth work really lies. We put children and young people at the centre, use the group's power, value both process and product, and actively shape society by giving young people ownership. By definition, these things promote mental well-being, but we do not currently value and name them enough. We can make a real difference to children and young people by giving them a place where they can be themselves, where fun and enjoyment come first, and where they can develop through trial and error. **And that is something to be proud of!**

Some questions to think about when focusing on promotion: What can you do in any activity, such as checking in and out? How do you activate silent bystanders in a conflict or bullying situation? How can you promote social skills? How do you create an environment with few rules that still ensures mutual

respect? Is there room for talking and listening? How do you create 'flat thresholds' (affordable, physically and mentally attainable, accessible, culturally sensitive)?

Inspiring examples from youth work organisations:

The **Flemish Playground Service (VDS)** supports playground and holiday work: “In our playgrounds, we focus on getting to know each other, our supervisors have an empowering attitude (involved, open and authentic), we work with co-animators ... Different children come to our activities each week, so we have to work continuously on creating a safe climate. One example is showing the preschoolers where the toilets are every day. That way, they don't have to worry if they suddenly need to go to the toilet.”

Jonge Helden organises camps and play weeks for children and young people during school holidays: “Children and young people express themselves in different ways. We give them another 'language' to express their feelings by focusing on musical expression.”

Speelplein Stad Brussel is the City of Brussels' playground work organisation: “To properly guide new animators and put them at ease, we have a buddy system where we pair each trainee with a lead animator. We create a good atmosphere between animators by starting the summer with a start-up day and ending with a celebration.”

Citizen Service Belgium brings together more than 600 organisations around the common goal of implementing a citizen service for young people aged 18 to 25: “We find it important to define what is okay within a group. For example, it's okay to have boundaries and to guard them. It's okay to share something with the group, but it's also okay not to. Everything that is shared stays within the group.”

Formaat stimulates, connects and develops open youth work in Flanders: “We think it is important to have clear points of contact at our training events. That is why colleagues wear a Formaat jersey, which signals: Talk to me!”

Scouts en Gidsen Vlaanderen is the second largest youth movement in Flanders and organises weekly activities, weekends and camps for young people aged 6 to 30: “With the [NESTkreten](#) method, you work on creating a safe basic climate in your group.”

Pimento is the centre of expertise within the network of Chirojeugd Vlaanderen. They have developed a publication to work on a positive group atmosphere called [In de pocket](#), a pocket-sized booklet with many methods to work on bullying prevention, team building, talents and resilience.

Quote from a young person in Pimento's study:



“Recently, a boy was struggling with something and he told the leaders, and they were very understanding. We supported him in his decision. It's really nice to be able to open up to the leaders, to have a confidant. And when we act stupid, they just act stupid with us. They are not really leaders, they are more like 'older mates'. They are also only two or three years older than us.”

"It's not children and a youth movement, we are a family. So I try to ensure that everyone feels complete and at home as much as possible."



3.2 Prevention

Preventing mental health problems or disorders means focusing on factors that can cause or trigger mental health issues. You raise awareness of these factors or try to reduce their impact. We distinguish three types of prevention that you can use depending on the risk in your target group. Note that the boundaries between them are not always clear. This is not a bad thing, as long as you think about the different forms within your organisation.

Universal

These are preventive actions that you introduce for everyone. One example is a game about the dangers of alcohol and drug use ([Zot op kamp](#)). Or you can actively use the methods of the Vlaams Netwerk Kies Kleur tegen Pesten, such as the [WAT WAT seven-day Detox Challenge](#) or the [STIP IT campaign](#). During 2023 you can get started with the [Wij Pestvrij toolkit](#).

Selective

These are preventative actions that you set up for (groups of) people at increased risk of developing mental health problems. Intersectionality is a key concept here. Social inequality and exclusion occur along different axes that intersect. Increased risk of mental health problems is also related to background factors such as home environment, socio-economic status, gender identity, ethnic-cultural background, disability, having someone in the family with mental health problems...

Youth work is already doing a lot of selective prevention, for example through safe(r) spaces, inclusion policies...

Individual

These are preventative actions that you set up for people with developing problems. For example, you notice that a young person is having a hard time and take them aside to talk about it. It is important that you always link the individual discussions to the group situation (which youth work is, by definition). How can we ensure that the group remains a warm environment for the person without losing the safety of the group? As a youth worker, this is where you take on some mental health care tasks without engaging in professional mental health care. Examples include offering a sympathetic ear, making time available, or giving a young person at risk of dropping out a specific task to ensure they can still function in the group...

Inspiring examples from youth work organisations:

Jonge Helden: “We pay attention to everyone in the group. We also welcome young people with special needs on our holidays. We also organise activities in prisons for children and their parents. In this way, we work with a specific group exposed to risk factors.”

FOS Open Scouting is a youth movement in Flanders that organises weekly activities, weekends and camps for young people aged 6 to 30: “We have a project with LEJO where we go on camps with young people who have a history in youth welfare.”

Arktos is a Flemish centre of expertise that empowers children and young people in vulnerable situations and people with disabilities when needed, and supports parents, schools, partners, authorities and the wider society to do the same: “As an organisation, we focus on children and young people in vulnerable situations. We use methods such as active reviewing, proactive circles and check-ins to reflect on their mental well-being continuously.”

Tumult teaches conversation techniques through its ‘[Pesten aanpakken met No Blame - basis/gevorderden](#)’ training and free [No Blame](#) booklet.

KSA Nationaal and **Chirojeugd Vlaanderen** have set up [Project XX](#) in cooperation with vzw Lionshulp. Project XX aims to bring together young people from youth welfare and youth work by starting two parallel tracks with a focus on strengthening, increasing and broadening networks and social skills.

Formaat: “In our animator and head animator courses, we do a privilege walk, an educational game to (learn to) recognise privilege.”

Quote from a young person in Pimento's study:



“They know how to deal with it. If you have problems at home and you go to Kras, they know that you don't need more problems but that they should ensure you forget your problems.”

3.3 Bringing in help

When promotion and prevention are insufficient and the youth worker's role is 'played out', external help must be brought in. Even in this case, it is best if the youth worker does not lose contact with the young person.

Sometimes it is not enough to work on a child or young person's mental well-being through the power of the group. You notice that things are not going well despite (individual) prevention and promotion actions. The child or young person struggles with dark thoughts for some time, does not seem to be themselves, asks for help, does not function well in the group... This is when it is important to bring in external help. Where we used to speak of 'referring', we now use the words 'bringing in'. A professional caregiver is sought, and a diagnosis and/or treatment process is initiated. This is the task of (individual) mental health care services, but certain specialised youth work or welfare services may also play a role.

In addition to treatment, staying committed to promotion and prevention is essential. In other words, the youth worker and the professional caregiver can work together to ensure the young person can continue to belong to the group. How can you be close and stay close? This is the difference between bringing in help and referring.

Bringing in help requires consultation and cooperation between youth work, mental health services and local government. This is a new approach in which each organisation or sector has a role. Youth work can play its part by engaging and/or collaborating with the following intermediaries or agencies:

3.4 The gatekeeper

Building a bridge to mental health care is not easy for every youth worker, many of whom are young volunteers. They have to make an assessment, too often there is a hesitation to act, you have to know the social map of the neighbourhood...

Some youth workers, whether volunteers or paid staff, tend to quickly become the confidants of the whole group because of their presence and talent. They are unconditionally present, see and value the child or young person, care... There is a lot of beauty in this, but it is also a pitfall for the person concerned. That is why we believe in the role of the gatekeeper, which the youth work organisation and umbrella organisations should adequately support. The role of the gatekeeper is to **bridge the gap between prevention and mental health care.**

Gatekeepers are (volunteer) youth workers and approachable, trusted people in the (local) group. They are not your organisation's integrity contact persons (ICPs). They are given an additional role out of their voluntary interest and talent to look after mental well-being and, if necessary, to keep an eye on which young people are at risk of dropping out. They are advocates of mental well-being and how to work on it at different levels (promotion, prevention, bringing in help). These youth workers' role is not to act as mental health professionals, but rather to support other youth workers when needed and/or to be a sympathetic ear for children and young people. This person will help involve professional support organisations or the ICP if necessary.

Youth work organisations are free to decide whether they want to **formalise this role or not**. Usually, each (local) group already has someone who acts as a gatekeeper, automatically taking on this role without being appointed. An organisation can explicitly assign an additional role to one (or more) of the group's youth worker(s), e.g., a volunteer studying social studies and taking an interest or an experienced lead animator.

Whether they have a formal role or not, **it is essential to support gatekeepers** by valuing their work and helping them to take the extra step to involve mental health services. In this way, we ensure gatekeepers' resilience and avoid placing all the responsibility on them.

KIMIWA is a method developed by the Flemish Child Abuse Expertise Centre (Vlaams Expertisecentrum Kindermishandeling or VECK) that uses the strengths of the youth worker to take action in cases of child abuse. The 'superpowers' described can also be used concerning other welfare issues and describe very well what a gatekeeper can do.

The (local) social map

We have found that local volunteers and youth workers often turn to mental health professionals they know, for example to get their opinion on a situation. To avoid too arbitrary a process, it is a good idea for an organisation to **have agreements with one or more local mental health services**. Knowing which local first-line services to contact for **specific questions** is also important. The local authority, the JAC (youth department of the Flemish Centre for General Well-being) and/or OverKop (see below) can play a role here. Umbrella organisations can help to facilitate this for their local groups. The 'Playfield for mental well-being' can help build bridges with mental health services and clarify everyone's role.

Your organisation's integrity contact person (ICP) can also help, as they often have a good overview of where to go with specific issues.

Visit [watwat.be/praat-erover](https://www.watwat.be/praat-erover) for a list of all organisations.

Visit the [SAM website](#) for more information on first-line support.



OverKop houses nearby

In an OverKop house, young people up to 25 can just walk in and out and do all sorts of fun activities. It is [a safe place](#) where you can also find a sympathetic ear and professional therapeutic help without being labelled. You can find a map showing where to find OverKop houses and how to contact them at www.overkop.be. The government wants to ensure that there is always an OverKop house nearby in Flanders and Brussels. The OverKop houses have also recently been given a specific role in supporting youth work.

What are the tasks of OverKop in the psycho-education of youth work?

OverKop is developing an advisory function for youth work within its network. This means that youth work partners within the working area can turn to the OverKop network for questions and advice on dealing with mental well-being issues within their organisation.

- OverKop network offers training and intervision on mental well-being, tailored to and requested by the youth work organisations in their working area. The OverKop network looks for the right person or organisation to conduct the training or intervision.
- The OverKop network is the hub between youth work partners, local authorities, welfare partners and mental health partners. This means they promote supralocal connection and cooperation between youth work, welfare and mental health services. They also visit youth work organisations to see what the needs opportunities for collaboration are.

Are you interested in the efforts of the OverKop houses in your neighbourhood? Have a look at the [website of De Ambrassade](#). [PONT-ON in OverKop Gent](#) is an inspiring example of how support for youth work can take shape.

Integrity Contact Person (ICP)

The integrity contact person, or ICP for short, is the person in your organisation to contact in the event of an integrity breach. Integrity breaches include any physical, sexual, moral or psychological behaviour that someone feels has crossed their or someone else's boundaries. The ICP will act on the report and will take every report seriously.

The role of the ICP in the event of an integrity breach:

- First contact: The ICP is the first point of contact for reports. They listen to the story and try to assess the situation.
- Coordination + referral: The ICP will work with the reporter to determine how best to handle the situation and, if necessary, assist by referring to other organisations. The ICP will try to gain

a better understanding of the situation and may contact other people or organisations who are involved, always in consultation with the reporter.

- ✦ Follow-up: The ICP will follow up with the reporter until the situation resolved. Together they will consider how best to manage aftercare.

As a gatekeeper, you can also turn to the ICP to find the right mental health services.

Inspiring examples from youth work organisations:

FOS Open Scouting: “As a Flemish umbrella organisation, we have developed tools for the local ‘everyone a gatekeeper’ groups.”

JES: “We have employed someone in Antwerp specifically to act as a bridge between youth work and well-being. We also do education and job coaching, outreach work in Antwerp and Brussels, we have activities for newcomers, a collaboration within OverKop Gent... So we are always at the intersection of youth work and well-being. We always focus on the young person and do not think in terms of policy areas. All this also means that we have to adapt our certified training courses for volunteers accordingly, resulting in nice projects like ‘Pleinpatrons’, where we train young people to be contact persons in their city squares.”

Arktos: A youth worker pauses to reflect on her actions. “How am I already working on mental well-being?”

- ✦ I ask “How are you?” instead of “Everything alright/ça va”? With the latter, you almost expect the answer to be that everything is fine; by asking “How are you?” you leave room for the young person to tell you how things are really going. This leads to more openness and, more often, an honest answer.
- ✦ Young people are free to drop in for a chat. There is no need to make an appointment, and the conversation lasts as long as it takes (sometimes 1 hour, sometimes just 20 minutes). During the talks, I use methods such as Duplo dolls, a perspective-oriented conversation method ...
- ✦ I link to mental well-being with the ‘explorer’ of the Missing Link method. Young people often already mention a thing or two about the state of their mental well-being. With an explorer, I create extra space to explore how they feel about these things and what I can take into account. Sometimes this is a separate issue, and sometimes it fits into a broader issue, such as their context, health, life situation...
- ✦ Together with the young person, I put their feelings and uncertainties into words. If a young person cannot put something into words, I try to summarise it myself and check that I have understood it correctly.
- ✦ I give young people space to not have to talk too much either. If it is too much for a young person, I ask what is still possible. Can we do small practical things together? For example, I check how the personal action plan is coming along, we work out a daily schedule, we make an appointment with the psychologist or doctor together, etc.”

Formaat: “We refer colleagues to The Human Link.”

4 Getting started with the Playfield

We invite you to get started with this Playfield. As an annex to this playfield, you will find [a step-by-step plan](#) on the website that your organisation can use to start the exercise. It will help you to reflect on the following questions: How are you currently doing in your organisation? What actions are you taking, and where are they located on the Playfield? Where can you go one step further? Do you already name these actions specifically in terms of mental well-being? Suppose there is a need for professional help, do you know where to turn (in your neighbourhood)? Etc.

So, instead of a ready-made guideline, we offer pointers. Youth work organisations can create their own well-being policy based on this Playfield, clarifying the role and limits of different youth workers. Because every youth work organisation is different, has a different target group, works with volunteers or professional youth workers, etc.

Some points to consider:

- 👑 Think about who in your organisation will start this exercise and give them a mandate to take action..
- 👑 Think about the aspects of your organisation's management in which this mental well-being policy should be integrated (organisational culture, volunteering policy, recruitment policy...).
- 👑 Each (local) group must be given a mandate regarding its carrying capacity. How far can it go? When does it stop? Emotional safety means safety for children and young people, but also for youth workers, who are often young people themselves.
- 👑 We recommend working with a strong (local) network so that youth workers can maintain their own role.
- 👑 Link your mental well-being policy to your organisation's integrity policy. In your integrity policy, you also pay attention to a general quality policy (-promotion) and prevention.
- 👑 Using a [deontological code](#) is essential.

5 Methods, tools and opportunities for training and support

Youth organisations and workers are concerned about the mental well-being of children and young people and are motivated to address this issue in their work. However, it is not always easy to address mental well-being in an accessible and enjoyable way. That is why we've collected a range of helpful methods, websites and tips. You can find them on our website, which we will continue to update. Do you know of a fun tool or method? Let us know.



[Good practices mental well-being children en young people](#)

The 'Playfield of mental well-being' and the 'Getting started with the Playfield' step-by-step plan offer a good starting point for organisations to develop a mental well-being policy. Would you like more support in setting up a mental well-being policy, training for local groups, or more specific knowledge on the topic? There are several organisations inside and outside youth work that can provide these things. They all know the 'Playfield of mental well-being' and can help you put it into practice.

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