STAY

Skills for Thriving, Agency and Youth Engagement

STAY Handbook

A practical guide for youth workers on recognising, understanding, and responding to quiet quitting

RISI

PANNONIA CONSULTING

PILCROW

Co-funded by the European Union

PART I – Understanding Quiet Quitting

What it is, why it happens, and what the research actually shows

1.1 What is Quiet Quitting?

Quiet quitting is not about quitting your job

Let's start with something important: quiet quitting is not about quitting your job. It is about quitting the idea of going above and beyond: doing only what is written in your job description, nothing more and nothing less. No extra hours. No tasks that were never officially yours. No emotional investment in goals that were never really explained to you.

The term became widely known in 2022 when a short TikTok video by a user called @zaidleppelin went viral. In it, he described a simple idea: you are not your job. You can do your work well and still have a life outside of it. The video sparked a global conversation and a lot of disagreement.

But here is the key thing: the behaviour itself is not new. Researchers have been studying workplace disengagement for decades. Organisational psychologists have long studied what they call Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), the voluntary extra contributions people make at work, like helping a colleague, staying late when needed, or going out of their way to solve a problem (Organ, 1988; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). Quiet quitting, in academic terms, is essentially the withdrawal of these OCBs, a deliberate reduction of effort to the contracted minimum.

What changed in 2022 was not the behaviour, it was that young people finally had a name for it, a community to talk about it with, and a viral vocabulary to describe it.

Academically, quiet quitting sits at the intersection of several well-established frameworks in organisational psychology. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2022), quiet quitting typically occurs when job demands chronically exceed available resources, leaving people with no choice but to conserve their energy by reducing discretionary effort. A longitudinal study by Richardson and Choi (2023) found that persistent imbalance between demands and resources predicted quiet quitting behaviours with 68% accuracy over a two-year period.

More recently, researchers have also emphasised that quiet quitting is not a single, uniform state. Davidson and Hayes (2023) describe it as a position on a continuum of engagement, workers may disengage in certain aspects of their job while remaining engaged in others. This nuance matters enormously for youth workers: a young person may be physically present and technically doing their job, while being completely disengaged emotionally and creatively.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Name It" Opening Activity

PURPOSE

To introduce the concept of quiet quitting without judgment, and open up honest conversation.

WHY IT WORKS:

It normalises the experience before anyone has to admit to it personally. It shifts the tone from accusatory to curious. It creates a safe entry point for deeper conversation.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Ask participants to write on a sticky note (anonymously) one thing they have stopped doing at work or in volunteering that they used to do — without explaining why. Examples: "stopped suggesting ideas in meetings," "stopped volunteering for extra tasks," "stopped arriving early."
2. Collect the notes and read them out loud as a group. Do not comment — just let the list build.
3. Ask: "Does any of this sound familiar? Does it have a name?"
4. Introduce the term quiet quitting and explain that most of what they just wrote fits the definition.

1.2 Why Does It Happen?

Quiet quitting is not about laziness

Before we label quiet quitting as a problem, it helps to understand where it comes from. Research consistently shows that quiet quitting is not about laziness. It is usually a response to something, a signal that something in the work environment is not working. Think of it like a warning light on a car dashboard. The light is not the problem. It is telling you something underneath needs attention.

Gallup's 2024 global research found that only 21% of employees worldwide are actively engaged at work, one of only two declines recorded in twelve years of tracking. That means nearly eight out of ten people are either doing the minimum or actively disengaged. This is not a generation problem. It is a systemic one.

According to Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001; Martinez-Inigo & Totterdell, 2023), people under sustained pressure begin to protect their remaining resources (time, energy, emotional capacity) by pulling back from demands that feel unrewarded or unsustainable. Quiet quitting, from this perspective, is not laziness. It is rational self-preservation.

Here are the most common triggers identified in recent research, particularly among young people aged 18–28:

Unclear expectations. When nobody explains what success looks like, people default to the minimum. Gutierrez (2022) found that inadequate performance feedback was cited by 62% of quiet quitters as a key driver of their disengagement.

Lack of recognition. In the same study, insufficient recognition was the single most frequently cited factor: mentioned by 68% of respondents. When extra effort goes unnoticed, people stop making it.

Burnout and overload. A cross-sectional survey of Gen Z workers (Xueyun et al., 2023) found that burnout (linked to inadequate resources, unclear expectations, and lack of managerial support) had a direct and significant negative impact on engagement and a strong positive relationship with quiet quitting intention.

No visible growth path. Research on Gen Z specifically (Popaitoon, 2022; Zhang & Chin, 2024) shows that skill variety, autonomy, and task significance are the primary drivers of meaningful work for this generation. When these are absent, disengagement follows.

Feeling invisible. Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) offers another lens: employees adjust their contributions based on perceived reciprocity. Liu et al. (2022) found that employees were 2.7 times more likely to quietly quit when they felt the exchange with their organisation or supervisor was unfair.

Micromanagement and control. Kirkpatrick and Locke (2022) demonstrated that perceived leadership authenticity (whether supervisors practise what they preach) negatively correlated with quiet quitting tendencies at $r = -0.71$ ($p < 0.001$). In short, young people are highly attuned to hypocrisy and inconsistency in those who lead them.

These factors combine and compound. A young person who feels overloaded, unrecognised, and stuck with no growth path is not choosing to disengage, they are responding to an environment that has, often gradually and invisibly, stopped supporting them.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Fuel Tank" Check-in

PURPOSE

To help young people identify which aspects of their work or volunteering are draining versus refuelling them — without requiring them to use the words "disengaged" or "burning out."

WHY IT WORKS:

This works especially well as a regular opening ritual at team meetings. Over time, patterns become visible and it creates a natural opening to ask: "What would help refuel you?" This simple question, asked consistently, is one of the most effective quiet quitting prevention tools available.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Draw a simple fuel tank on a whiteboard or shared screen. Mark it from Empty (0%) to Full (100%).
2. Ask participants to rate privately: "How full is your tank right now when it comes to [work / this volunteering role]?"
3. Then ask: "What activities or situations drain the tank fastest? What refuels it?"
4. Open for voluntary sharing, no pressure, no judgment.

Facilitator note: *This works especially well as a regular opening ritual at team meetings. Over time, patterns become visible and it creates a natural opening to ask: "What would help refuel you?" This simple question, asked consistently, is one of the most effective quiet quitting prevention tools available.*

1.3 The TikTok Effect

How Social Media Shaped the Conversation

Social media, especially TikTok, did not create quiet quitting. But it gave it a voice, a community, and a name. Although the term was first coined in 2009 by economist Mark Boldger (Buscaglia, 2022), it did not enter mainstream conversation until the post-pandemic period, when social media platforms became a place for workers (especially young ones) to process collective experiences of burnout, unfairness, and identity-work conflict (Scott & Burnett, 2022).

For many young people, the viral quiet quitting content felt like recognition. Posts talked about setting limits, protecting your energy, and refusing to let a job define your worth as a person. These messages resonated because they spoke to real experiences that had, until then, had no common language.

Some typical social media messages from the movement:

- "Do your job. Get paid. Go home."
- "Your employer is not your family."
- "Protecting your peace is not being lazy."

These sound simple. But social media always simplifies. The real picture is more layered.

Some of these messages are genuinely healthy and evidence-based. Setting clear limits is a skill, not a character flaw. Knowing your capacity is self-awareness. Communicating your needs takes courage. Research by Soren and Ryff (2023) argues for a eudaimonic vision of work environments that support employees in finding happiness through meaningful, purposeful contribution. That vision is entirely compatible with having a life outside of work.

But some social media messages go too far. When disengagement becomes an identity, when the goal becomes to do as little as possible without being dismissed, when there is silence instead of conversation — the person doing the quiet quitting often suffers the most. Studies show that prolonged disengagement is associated with lower life satisfaction, higher anxiety, and weaker long-term career outcomes (Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Hamouche et al., 2023).

The irony of quiet quitting is that what begins as self-protection can quietly become self-harm — a gradual erosion of engagement, skill-building, and connection that is very hard to reverse once it becomes habitual.

This is an important message for youth workers to hold when working with young people who identify strongly with quiet quitting culture: the goal is not to push them to do more, but to help them find a sustainable, honest way to engage, one that protects their wellbeing and supports their growth.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "TikTok vs. Reality" Card Sort

PURPOSE

To critically examine social media messages about quiet quitting, helping young people distinguish between healthy boundary-setting and harmful disengagement, without being preachy about it.

WHY IT WORKS:

This method uses participants' own media environment as the starting point. It builds critical thinking without positioning the facilitator as an authority telling young people what to think. It also surfaces individual values and experiences in a low-risk way.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Prepare a set of cards each with a real or representative social media statement about quiet quitting (e.g., "You owe your employer nothing extra," "Protect your energy," "Going above and beyond is exploitation," "Your worth is not your productivity").
2. Ask participants in small groups to sort the cards into three piles: Healthy | Harmful | It Depends.
3. After sorting, groups share their reasoning. Expect disagreement, that is the point.
4. Facilitate a brief debrief: "Which of these do you personally agree with? Which make you uncomfortable? Why?"

1.4 Myths and Reality

There are many assumptions about quiet quitting (from employers, from the media, and sometimes from young people themselves) that are not supported by evidence. As a youth worker, understanding these myths helps you avoid reinforcing harmful frames and supports more constructive, honest conversations.

MYTH: "It's just young people being lazy."

REALITY: Researchers distinguish between two types of workplace stress (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Challenge stress comes from demanding goals that stretch your abilities — this kind is associated with growth, motivation, and engagement. Hindrance stress comes from bureaucratic obstacles, unclear roles, unfair treatment, and insufficient support — and this kind consistently leads to withdrawal and disengagement. Quiet quitting is almost always a response to hindrance stress, not an absence of motivation. Bakker and Demerouti's (2022) updated JD-R model is clear: when resources do not match demands, conservation of energy — quiet quitting — is a predictable psychological outcome, not a moral failing.

MYTH: "It's just a social media trend — it will pass."

REALITY: The viral moment has faded. The underlying conditions have not. Decades of research on OCB (Organ, 1988) and employee disengagement show that when basic workplace conditions fail — clarity, fairness, recognition, growth — people withdraw their voluntary contributions. This is documented across cultures, sectors, and generations long before TikTok. Moreover, Gallup data (2024) shows that Gen Z disengagement increased by five percentage points in a single year (2023 to 2024). Post-pandemic, many young workers have permanently reset their relationship with work — researchers describe this as a structural shift in values, not a passing trend (Formica & Sfodera, 2022).

MYTH: "Quiet quitting only hurts the employer."

REALITY: While organisations pay a price — lower productivity, higher turnover, weakened culture — the individual also suffers. Studies show that prolonged disengagement is linked to higher rates of anxiety and depression (Hamouche et al., 2023), lower sense of purpose and personal fulfilment (Soren & Ryff, 2023), slower skill development and weaker career outcomes over time (Formica & Sfodera, 2022), and increased risk of full burnout, even when the original intent was to avoid it (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Buchanan et al. (2022) draw an important distinction: burnout and quiet quitting are not the same, but they are connected. Where burnout involves exhaustion, quiet quitting often begins as a purposeful repositioning — but without intervention, it frequently deepens into a state that is genuinely harmful to the person experiencing it.

MYTH: "Talking about it will only make it worse."

REALITY: The opposite is consistently supported by research. Ibrahim and Petersen's (2023) comparative study of 94 remote teams found that leaders who held regular check-ins focused on both task progress and employee wellbeing experienced 39% lower rates of quiet quitting than those who focused only on tasks. Silence is what makes quiet quitting worse. When young people feel they cannot speak up — because it is not safe, because nobody will listen, or because they lack the language — they go inward. When someone creates structured, safe space for honest conversation, things can shift surprisingly quickly. This is, at its core, what the STAY Handbook is designed to support.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — Myth Busting in Pairs

PURPOSE

To challenge assumptions about quiet quitting through peer dialogue rather than expert input.

WHY IT WORKS:

This method uses participants' own reasoning rather than expert correction. It surfaces complexity without delivering verdicts.

Facilitator note: *Avoid correcting participants who defend the myths. The goal is to surface complexity, not to deliver verdicts. Your role is to ask good questions: "Where does that belief come from? Have you seen evidence for it? Have you seen evidence against it?"*

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Print or display the four myths above, one per card.
2. In pairs, assign one myth to each pair. Their task: spend five minutes finding one real argument for the myth and one real argument against it from their own experience or what they know.
3. Each pair briefly presents both sides to the group.
4. Group vote: "Do you think this myth is more true or more false in your context?"

1.5 A Note on Values

Understanding quiet quitting also means understanding how young people today think about work — which often differs significantly from previous generations.

1

The Deloitte Global 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey — covering nearly 23,000 respondents across 44 countries — found that 77% of Gen Z said a company's purpose and values directly influence their decision to accept a job offer.

2

A Randstad survey (2024) found that 56% of employees aged 18–24 said they would rather leave a job than stay in one that did not contribute to their happiness.

Research by Rosso et al. (2010), applied to Gen Z contexts by Popaitoon (2022) and others, identifies four pathways through which young people find meaning in work:

1. Individuation — meaning from autonomy, mastery, and personal growth
2. Self-Connection — meaning from authenticity and alignment between personal values and work identity
3. Contribution — meaning from helping others or making a positive impact
4. Unification — meaning from belonging and connection to a team or community

Crucially, research shows that skill variety, autonomy, and task significance are the job characteristics most strongly linked to meaningful work for Gen Z — and that work meaningfulness directly predicts intention to stay (Zhang & Chin, 2024). This is not about entitlement. It is about what human beings — especially young ones — need to stay engaged.

None of these values are problematic in themselves. The challenge arises when young people do not have the tools to communicate these needs clearly, and when the adults and organisations around them do not have the tools to listen and respond constructively. That gap between what young people need and what they can express is exactly what the STAY Handbook is designed to help close.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — My Work Values Map

PURPOSE

To help young people identify and articulate what matters most to them in a work or volunteering context — as a foundation for later conversations about expectations and boundaries.

WHY IT WORKS:

This exercise often reveals a significant gap between what young people value and what they have actually communicated to their supervisors or organisations.

Facilitator note: *This exercise often reveals a significant gap between what young people value and what they have actually communicated to their supervisors or organisations. You can use this as a bridge to Part III of the Handbook — conversation scripts for expressing needs and setting expectations.*

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Give each participant a blank sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a simple map of their "ideal work environment" — not a job description, but a list of conditions: How do I want to feel? What kind of tasks energise me? What kind of leadership helps me thrive? What do I need to stay engaged?
2. After 10 minutes of individual reflection, share in small groups of 3: "What surprised you about your own map? What do you have in common with others?"
3. Brief group reflection: "How many of these things are present in your current role or volunteering? What is missing?"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Quiet quitting is a withdrawal of discretionary effort.

Doing the contracted minimum, without voluntary extra engagement. It is documented in academic literature under frameworks such as OCB withdrawal, the JD-R model, and Conservation of Resources theory.

It is usually a response to something specific.

Unclear expectations, lack of feedback or recognition, burnout, no growth path, or a felt sense of unfairness in the exchange with the organisation.

Social media shaped how young people talk about it.

But the behaviour predates TikTok by decades. The messaging online ranges from genuinely healthy (setting limits) to potentially harmful (disengagement as identity).

The myths are not supported by evidence.

Quiet quitting is not laziness, it is not a trend, it hurts the person experiencing it as well as the organisation, and honest conversation helps rather than harms.

Gen Z has a specific and well-documented relationship with work.

One that prioritises meaning, autonomy, authenticity, and contribution. This is not a problem to be fixed, but a reality to be understood and worked with.

REFERENCES

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2022). Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285.

Buchanan, L., et al. (2022). Quiet quitting: Reframing the disengagement debate. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 43(2), 112–129.

Buscaglia, M. (2022). Origins of the quiet quitting discourse. *Workplace Culture Review*, 5(1), 44–58.

Cavanaugh, M. A., Boswell, W. R., Roehling, M. V., & Boudreau, J. W. (2000). An empirical examination of self-reported work stress among US managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1), 65–74.

Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 874–900.

Davidson, R., & Hayes, T. (2023). Quiet quitting on a continuum. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 34(4), 311–328.

Deloitte. (2023). 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey.

Formica, S., & Sfodera, F. (2022). The great resignation and quiet quitting paradigm shifts. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 31(8), 899–907.

Gallup. (2024). State of the global workplace report.

Gutierrez, R. (2022). Leadership deficiencies and quiet quitting: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 29(3), 198–214.

Hamouche, S., Korner, M., & Abualigah, A. (2023). Quiet quitting: Conceptualization and measurement development. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 142, 103859.

Hobfoll, S. E. (2001). Conservation of resources theory. *Applied Psychology*, 50(3), 337–421.

Ibrahim, A., & Petersen, C. (2023). Check-in culture and remote team engagement. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 51(2), 144–162.

Kirkpatrick, J., & Locke, E. (2022). Leadership authenticity and employee disengagement. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 22(1), 87–104.

Klotz, A. C., & Bolino, M. C. (2022). When quiet quitting is worse than the real thing. *Harvard Business Review*.

Konovsky, M. A., & Pugh, S. D. (1994). Citizenship behavior and social exchange. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3), 656–669.

Liu, H., et al. (2022). Social exchange and quiet quitting: Leadership fairness as a moderator. *Leadership Quarterly*, 33(4), 101–118.

Martinez-Inigo, D., & Totterdell, P. (2023). Resource conservation and quiet disengagement at work. *Work & Stress*, 37(1), 22–41.

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2021). Burnout, disengagement, and quiet withdrawal: A reappraisal. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology*, 8(1), 395–422.

Organ, D. W. (1988). *Organizational citizenship behavior: The good soldier syndrome*. Lexington Books.

Popaitoon, P. (2022). Meaningful work and Gen Z retention. *Personnel Review*, 51(3), 872–891.

Randstad. (2024). *Workmonitor 2024: The voice of the worker*.

Richardson, T., & Choi, J. (2023). Predicting quiet quitting: A longitudinal JD-R study. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 140, 103821.

Rosso, B. D., Dekas, K. H., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010). On the meaning of work. *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 30, 91–127.

Scott, D., & Burnett, J. (2022). TikTok and the viralization of workplace identity narratives. *New Media & Society*, 24(9), 2103–2121.

Soren, A., & Ryff, C. D. (2023). Meaningful work, well-being, and health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 2980.

Xueyun, Z., et al. (2023). Burnout and quiet quitting among Gen Z. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(11), 6032.

Zhang, Y., & Chin, T. (2024). Job characteristics, meaningful work, and Gen Z intention to stay. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 16(2), 88–107.

PART II – Early Recognition Toolkit

How to spot quiet quitting before it becomes entrenched — and what to do

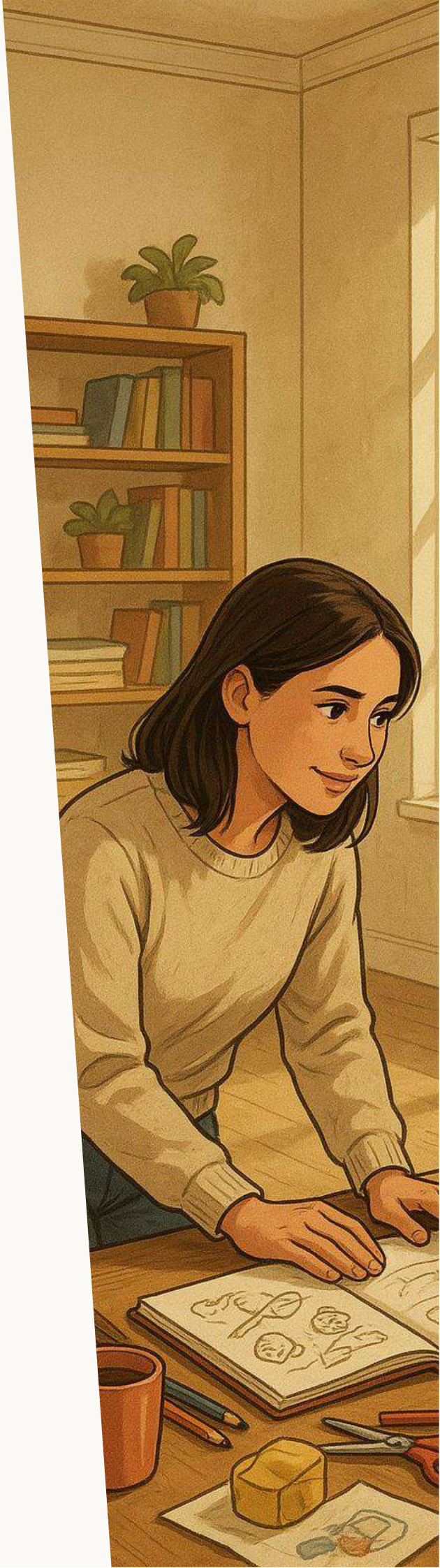
2.1 Why Early Recognition Matters

The case for acting early

Quiet quitting rarely happens overnight. Research consistently shows it develops gradually — through a series of small withdrawals, each one barely noticeable on its own, that accumulate over weeks or months into a pattern of full disengagement (Davidson & Hayes, 2023). By the time a youth worker or supervisor realises something is wrong, the young person may already have firmly settled into a minimum-effort mode that is genuinely difficult to reverse.

This is why early recognition is one of the most important skills this handbook aims to build. The earlier a signal is noticed and responded to with care, the more likely it is that a brief, honest conversation can interrupt the pattern before it becomes entrenched.

There is also a measurement dimension worth noting. Galanis et al. (2023) developed and validated the Quiet Quitting Scale (QQS) — a structured tool for assessing quiet quitting through observable behavioural and emotional indicators. Their work, validated across 922 employees in Greece, confirms that quiet quitting is not a vague impression but a measurable, observable state with consistent patterns that can be identified early. More recently, a Multidimensional Quiet Quitting Scale (MQQS) (Corbeanu & Iliescu, 2023) confirmed two distinct dimensions: behavioural quiet quitting (what a person does or stops doing) and emotional quiet quitting (how a person feels about restricting their effort). Both dimensions matter and both can be observed, with practice, by an attentive youth worker.



YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Before and After" Timeline

PURPOSE

To help youth workers recognise gradual changes in a young person's engagement over time — because single moments are easy to miss, but patterns are not.

WHY IT WORKS:

Youth workers often notice disengagement intuitively but struggle to articulate it clearly enough to act on it. This simple exercise externalises the pattern, making it visible and actionable. It also builds empathy — when you map the timeline, you often notice the context surrounding the shift, which makes the conversation that follows much more grounded and effective.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Think of a young person you work with who seems less engaged than before. On a blank sheet, draw a simple timeline of the past 3-4 months.
2. Mark moments when they were noticeably engaged — a good conversation, a task they volunteered for, a time they showed enthusiasm.
3. Now mark the moments when something shifted — a missed meeting, a short reply, a task done but nothing more.
4. Look at the pattern: When did the shift begin? What was happening around that time? Was there a specific trigger — a change in tasks, a difficult interaction, a period of overload?

2.2 Behavioural Signals

What You Can Observe

Jenkins and Petrov (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study of 1,200 employees across multiple industries and identified five consistent behavioural indicators of early quiet quitting:

Reduced voluntary participation in meetings and discussions	Decreased initiative in problem-solving or suggesting ideas	Minimal engagement with non-mandatory training or development opportunities	Strict adherence to formal working hours — arriving at the last minute, leaving at exactly the end of the contracted time
Declining participation in organisational citizenship behaviours — no longer helping colleagues with non-mandatory tasks, not attending optional events or social activities			

These patterns are not proof of disengagement on their own — context matters enormously. A young person going through a difficult period outside of work may show some of these signs temporarily. The skill of early recognition is not about labelling behaviour — it is about noticing a pattern and creating space for a conversation.

Additional signals in youth work and early careers contexts

Communication becomes transactional. Emails and messages are short, minimal, and task-focused. The warmth, curiosity, or collaborative tone that was previously present disappears.

Avoidance of feedback. The young person stops asking for feedback, avoids situations where their performance might be evaluated, or gives closed, non-committal answers when feedback is offered.

Social withdrawal from the team. Stopping casual conversations, arriving just in time, leaving quickly, not joining group activities — even informal ones like a shared lunch or a brief social moment between tasks.

Increased cynicism or indifference. Comments or tone shifting from engaged or curious to flat, dismissive, or mildly critical — especially about the organisation's direction, leadership, or goals.

Avoidance of stretch opportunities. Consistently declining tasks that go slightly beyond the job description, even when they would previously have been enthusiastic about them.

Presenteeism without presence. Being physically there or logged in but not mentally engaged. Contributions are technically adequate but noticeably lacking in the energy, creativity, or care that was previously visible.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Signal Spotter" Group Exercise

PURPOSE

To build a shared vocabulary among youth workers for recognising early behavioural signals — without reducing complex human behaviour to a checklist.

WHY IT WORKS:

When a team has discussed these signals together and mapped them to their specific context, individual youth workers are far more likely to notice and name them early — and to bring them to a colleague rather than sitting on a concern alone.

Facilitator note: *The goal is not a surveillance checklist but a shared language.*

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Present the six behavioural signals above on a shared screen or flip chart — without labels or explanations.
2. In small groups of 2–3, ask: "Have you seen any of these in young people you work with? What did it look like specifically in your context?"
3. Groups share concrete examples — anonymised, no names.
4. Together, build a shared "Signal Dictionary" — a brief document that describes what these signals look like in your specific organisation or context, in plain language.

2.3 Emotional Signals

What You Cannot Always See

Emotional quiet quitting is harder to observe but in many ways more important to understand. It refers to how a young person feels about pulling back: whether they experience it as relief, pride, sadness, anxiety, or numbness.

Research using the MQQS (Corbeanu & Iliescu, 2023) shows that emotional quiet quitting involves a positive internal orientation toward minimal effort — the person does not just reduce their contribution, they feel good about doing so. This is significant because it means the disengagement has become self-reinforcing: the less they do, the better they feel about it, which makes re-engagement progressively harder without external intervention.

Academically, this connects to what Honneth (1995, cited in Petersen & Agger, 2024) calls misrecognition — a state in which a person's contributions, identity, or worth are not acknowledged in their work environment. When young people experience sustained misrecognition — feeling invisible, undervalued, or disrespected — they begin to seek recognition elsewhere: in their personal lives, their hobbies, their social identity. Work becomes just a transaction.

Observable emotional signals for attentive youth workers

Flat affect about work topics. A noticeable absence of emotion — neither enthusiasm nor frustration — when discussing tasks, goals, or the organisation. Indifference, rather than engagement or conflict.

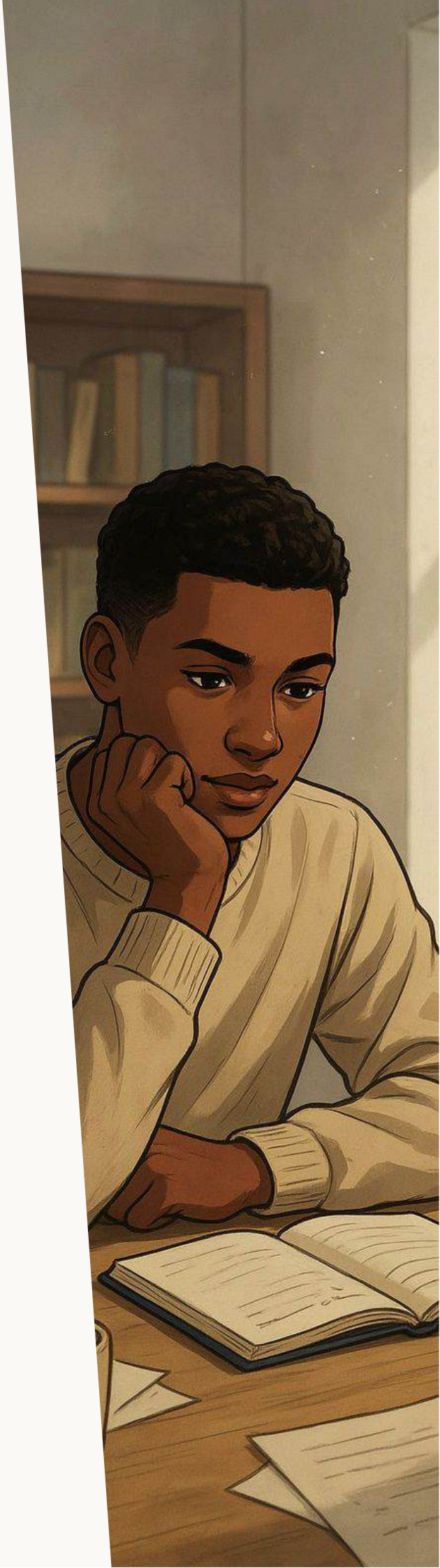
Distancing language. Moving from "we" to "they" when talking about the team or organisation. "The project is running behind" rather than "We are running behind."

Loss of future orientation. No longer talking about career goals, learning ambitions, or what they want to develop — even when previously vocal about these things.

Emotional exhaustion without visible burnout. A quiet tiredness — not dramatic or expressed as crisis, but persistent. Reduced energy, slower responses, shorter attention in conversations.

Relief when tasks are removed. Visibly relieved — not just neutral — when a responsibility is taken off their plate, in a way that goes beyond normal workload management.

It is important to note here that emotional signals must be interpreted with care and cultural sensitivity. What looks like emotional disengagement in one cultural context may be entirely normal communication style in another. Youth workers working with young people from diverse backgrounds — including migrants, refugees, or those from communities where emotional expression at work is discouraged — need to be especially careful not to pathologise quietness or reserve.



YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Temperature Scale" Check-in

PURPOSE

To create a simple, low-pressure ritual that gives youth workers regular access to the emotional layer of engagement without requiring young people to be explicitly articulate about complex feelings.

WHY IT WORKS:

The Temperature Scale makes the invisible visible, without demanding that young people use emotional vocabulary they may not have or feel safe using. BCG research (2022) found that when psychological safety is low, 12% of employees are considering quitting compared to just 3% when it is high. This simple ritual is one of the most low-cost, high-impact ways to build the psychological safety that prevents quiet quitting from deepening.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. At the start of a session, meeting, or one-to-one, ask participants to rate themselves on two simple scales from 1 to 5: Energy scale: "How is your energy today for this work?" (1 = empty, 5 = full); Connection scale: "How connected do you feel to this work right now?" (1 = very distant, 5 = very present).
2. There is no need to explain or justify the rating.
3. The youth worker notes the numbers over time and, when a pattern of low scores appears consistently, uses it as a natural opening: "I noticed you've been rating your connection pretty low lately — is there anything going on that would be useful to talk about?"

2.4 THE INCLUSION LENS

Who Is Most at Risk?

Quiet quitting does not affect all young people equally. Certain groups are significantly more likely to disengage quietly — often because they have fewer safe channels to express dissatisfaction openly, or because the structural conditions of their work situation make disengagement more likely.

Young people with disabilities — particularly those with non-visible disabilities, including mental health conditions, ADHD, or autism — often experience quiet quitting as a response to inaccessible environments, unclear expectations, or lack of reasonable adjustments. When the workplace does not accommodate their needs, withdrawal is frequently a coping strategy rather than a choice.

Young people from migrant or minority backgrounds may quiet quit because raising concerns feels too risky — whether due to precarious employment status, language barriers, cultural norms around hierarchy and deference, or previous experiences of not being heard. Mental Health America's 2023 workplace survey found that workers who do not feel their identity and perspectives are valued by leadership report significantly lower psychological safety — which is itself a strong predictor of disengagement.

Young people in NEET status (not in employment, education or training) who enter volunteering or first jobs often carry histories of previous disengagement from school, from services, from institutions that did not work for them. When new environments show similar patterns, quiet quitting can activate very quickly.

Young women, particularly in male-dominated sectors or organisations with visible gender imbalances in leadership, are more likely to experience the kind of misrecognition that Honneth's framework describes — their contributions undervalued, their voices not amplified, their growth constrained. Research confirms that gender plays a significant role in quiet quitting patterns, with young women more likely to disengage silently rather than voice concerns (Formica & Sfodera, 2022).

Young people from rural or remote areas — particularly in volunteering contexts — may quiet quit because of geographic isolation, limited access to mentorship, and a sense that the work they do is invisible to decision-makers elsewhere.

> The inclusion lens does not mean treating these groups as problems to be managed. It means actively designing recognition, feedback, and communication structures that work for everyone — not just those who are confident, vocal, and already feel safe.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The Inclusion Audit (Quick Version)

PURPOSE

To help youth workers and organisations identify structural conditions that may be driving disengagement among specific groups — without requiring formal evaluation processes.

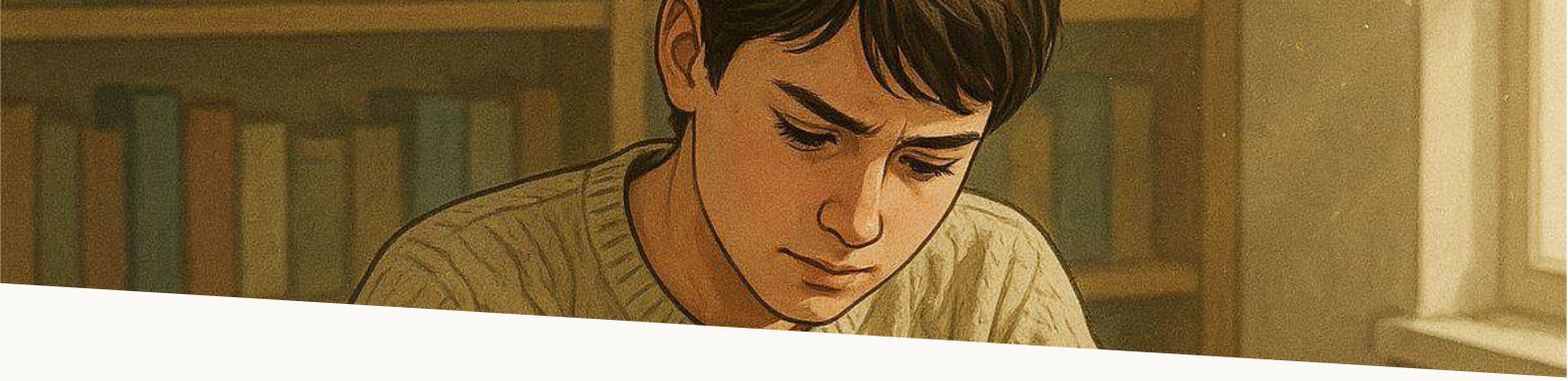
WHY IT WORKS:

This audit surfaces structural conditions that drive disengagement, without requiring formal evaluation processes.

Facilitator note: *This audit works best when done in a psychologically safe team environment where people feel they can honestly rate the organisation without fear of criticism. If the team itself does not feel safe, that is the first thing to address.*

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Go through the following questions together as a team. Rate each from 1 (not at all) to 5 (consistently): Do we give feedback in formats that work for different communication styles and needs? / Do young people with disabilities have clear, low-barrier ways to request adjustments? / Do young people from minority or migrant backgrounds have a trusted person they can raise concerns with? / Are our communication channels accessible to young people in remote or rural areas? / Do all young people see people who look like them in visible, valued roles? / Do we notice when someone goes quiet — or only when someone speaks up?
2. For any item rated 3 or below, identify one concrete action the team can take in the next 30 days.



2.5 THE SELF-CHECK

A TOOL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

One of the most powerful things a youth worker can do is give young people tools to recognise their own disengagement before it becomes invisible even to themselves. The following self-check is adapted from the validated Quiet Quitting Scale (QQS) (Galanis et al., 2023) and the MQQS (Corbeanu & Iliescu, 2023), rewritten in plain language for a youth work context. It is designed to be used in a safe, supported environment — not as a standalone diagnostic.

My Engagement Self-Check

Answer honestly — there are no right or wrong answers. This is for you, not for anyone else. Rate each statement from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true for me right now):

Statement (rate 1–5)

1. I do what is required at work/volunteering, but I rarely go beyond that.
2. I feel emotionally detached from this role.
3. I find myself taking as many breaks as possible during working hours.
4. I avoid sharing new ideas because I worry they will just lead to more work for me.
5. I feel relieved when something is taken off my plate, rather than neutral about it.
6. I have stopped doing things I used to do voluntarily — like helping others or joining optional activities.
7. I feel like my effort is not noticed or valued here.
8. I find it hard to care about the goals of this organisation.
9. I feel tired of this role, even when the tasks themselves are not that demanding.
10. I would not recommend this role or organisation to a friend.

Scoring guide (for discussion with a youth worker, not for labelling)

Answer honestly — there are no right or wrong answers. This is for you, not for anyone else. Rate each statement from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true for me right now):

- 10–20: Generally engaged — some areas may be worth exploring
- 21–35: Signs of partial disengagement — worth a conversation
- 36–50: Strong signs of quiet quitting — a structured conversation is recommended

Important: These scores are not diagnoses. They are starting points for conversations. A high score does not mean a young person has failed or that the situation is irreversible — it means they deserve support.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The Self-Check Debrief Conversation

PURPOSE

To use the self-check as a bridge into a safe, productive conversation — not as a performance evaluation.

WHY IT WORKS:

This conversation, done well, can be transformative. Research shows that young people who feel genuinely heard by a trusted adult are significantly more likely to re-engage — not because the problems disappeared, but because they no longer feel alone in facing them (Ibrahim & Petersen, 2023). The self-check creates a structured entry point into exactly that kind of conversation.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. After a young person has completed the self-check privately, ask: "Was there anything on that list that surprised you?"
2. Ask: "Was there anything that felt very true — that you recognised strongly?"
3. Ask: "Is there one thing on that list that, if it changed, would make the biggest difference for you?"
4. Do not: refer to their score / suggest they are performing poorly / link the conversation to any formal evaluation or report.
5. Do: listen more than you speak / affirm that their experience is valid / ask what support would be helpful, rather than offering solutions immediately.

2.6 Red Flags

When to Escalate

Most cases of early quiet quitting can be addressed through attentive youth work practice — better check-ins, more regular feedback, clearer expectations, and honest conversations. But some situations require more than a youth worker can or should provide alone. The following are red flags — signals that the situation has moved beyond standard disengagement and may require referral to additional support:

⚠️ Signs of significant mental health distress

Persistent low mood, withdrawal from all social contact (not just work), changes in appearance or hygiene, expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness. These are not quiet quitting — they are signs that a young person may need professional support.

⚠️ Disclosure of harassment, bullying, or discrimination

If a young person reveals that their disengagement is a response to being harassed, bullied, or discriminated against, this requires an immediate safeguarding response — not just a coaching conversation.

⚠️ Safety concerns

Any indication that a young person is at risk of harm to themselves or others must be escalated immediately, in line with your organisation's safeguarding policy.

⚠️ Sustained deterioration despite support

If a young person has been offered structured support for several weeks and disengagement continues to deepen, it may indicate an underlying issue — personal, medical, or situational — that requires specialist involvement.

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Concern Card" Protocol

PURPOSE

To give youth workers a simple, non-bureaucratic way to document and escalate concerns so that nothing slips through the gaps between conversations.

WHY IT WORKS:

Quiet quitting is, by definition, quiet. The Concern Card protocol makes the invisible visible at an organisational level — creating a lightweight system for collective awareness that does not rely on any single youth worker to notice everything alone.

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Create a simple one-page Concern Card — physical or digital — that any youth worker can complete when they notice a pattern of disengagement that concerns them.
2. The card includes: Name/identifier of the young person (or anonymous code if preferred) / Date concern first noticed / Brief description of behavioural and/or emotional signals observed / Any relevant context (recent changes in role, personal circumstances if known) / Proposed next step: Conversation | Referral | Supervision / Date for follow-up review.
3. Cards are reviewed in team supervision on a regular basis — not to monitor young people, but to ensure that no one falls through the gaps between individual youth workers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Early recognition is the most powerful intervention available.

The earlier a pattern of disengagement is noticed and responded to with care, the easier it is to reverse.

Behavioural signals are observable.

Reduced participation, minimal communication, avoidance of feedback, social withdrawal, and presenteeism without presence. These are consistent across research (Jenkins & Petrov, 2023; Galanis et al., 2023).

Emotional signals are harder to see but equally important.

Flat affect, distancing language, relief at reduced responsibility, and loss of future orientation. These require attentive, ongoing relationship rather than a single conversation.

The inclusion lens matters.

Certain groups are disproportionately at risk, and effective early recognition requires actively designing for their participation and voice, not just noticing when they go quiet.

Self-check tools empower young people

to name their own experience — creating the entry point for conversations that might otherwise never happen.

When in doubt, seek supervision.

Youth workers are not therapists, and part of effective practice is knowing the limits of what direct youth work can address.

REFERENCES (ADDITIONAL TO PART I)

Corbeanu, A., & Iliescu, D. (2023). The link between work engagement and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 22(3), 111–122.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.

Galanis, P., Katsiroumpa, A., Vraka, I., Siskou, O., Konstantakopoulou, O., Moisoglou, I., & Gallos, P. (2023). The quiet quitting scale: Development and initial validation. *AIMS Public Health*, 10(4), 828–848.

Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Polity Press.

Jenkins, R., & Petrov, K. (2023). Behavioural indicators of quiet quitting: A mixed-methods study across industries. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 44(5), 412–429.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692–724.

Mental Health America. (2023). *Mind the workplace 2023: Workplace wellness survey report*.

meQuilibrium. (2022). *Resilience and psychological safety in the workplace: Annual survey report*.

Petersen, A., & Agger, B. (2024). Quiet quitting as compensatory respect: Meaningful work, recognition, and the entrepreneurial ethic. *Philosophy of Management*, 23(1), 44–67.

Micro-skills & Conversation Scripts

How to help young people say what they need before disengagement becomes a pattern

3.1 Why Micro-skills Matter

By the time quiet quitting becomes visible, a young person may have spent weeks feeling confused, unrecognised, or overloaded before anyone notices. The issue is rarely that they have no concerns — it is that they lack the language, confidence, or structure to express them safely. That is where micro-skills matter.

Micro-skills are small, learnable communication habits that help young people move from silent withdrawal to constructive expression. They are not complicated and are not meant to solve everything at once. Their value lies in helping someone do one important thing slightly earlier than they otherwise would: name what is happening, ask for clarity, set a boundary, or seek support before disengagement hardens.

A short sentence such as "I am starting to feel unclear about what is expected from me" can open more change than weeks of silent frustration. For youth workers, this section is about helping young people communicate honestly and early, not about making them endlessly adaptable or professionally polished.

3.2 A Few Principles Before You Begin

These principles shape how the tools in this section should be used, especially in trust-based youth work contexts.

Aim for clarity, not performance.

Encourage language that feels simple, real, and manageable. A short honest sentence is more useful than a perfect one they will never say.

Work with the smallest true version of the issue.

When people are frustrated they often speak in big conclusions. Youth workers can help find the smallest version of the truth that can be said clearly: 'I'm not sure what success looks like in this role.'

Reduce risk where possible.

Not every setting is equally safe. These tools are about increasing options, not forcing directness in every context.

Separate support from escalation.

Most early disengagement can be addressed through conversation. If the issue includes harassment, discrimination, significant mental health deterioration, or safeguarding concerns, the role is to help the young person move toward the right form of support.

Youth workers are not HR and not therapists.

The role is to help young people prepare, practise, reflect, and follow up. Often that is enough to shift the direction of things.

The four micro-skills in this section work together: naming the issue without escalating it / setting boundaries without guilt / asking for feedback before disconnecting / seeking help before silence deepens.

3.3 Micro-skill 1: Naming the Issue Without Escalating It

By the time a young person decides to speak, they often carry accumulated frustration. The first micro-skill is about describing what is happening in a way that is true, specific, non-accusatory, and clear enough for the other person to respond to. It does not mean hiding emotion — it means anchoring the conversation in something observable rather than leading with blame or total shutdown.

Compare these two openings:

> "You keep dumping things on me and I'm sick of it."
>
> "I've noticed that my responsibilities have grown, but I'm still unclear about which tasks are actually mine."

A useful framework is: Observation + Impact + Need/Question. Youth workers can help young people find the smallest true version of the problem. Naming the issue is already a form of re-engagement — silence says "I am pulling back," while naming says "I still want this to work."

Examples of useful opening lines

- "I want to raise something before it becomes a bigger issue."
- "I've noticed I'm starting to pull back, and I'd rather talk about it early."

Common traps to avoid

- Starting with a conclusion rather than a concrete example
- Speaking only in absolutes: "always," "never," "everything"
- Waiting until frustration is so high that the conversation becomes impossible

YOUTH WORK METHOD — The "Smallest True Sentence" Exercise

PURPOSE

To help young people turn emotionally overloaded frustration into one clear sentence they could realistically use in a conversation.

WHY IT WORKS:

This exercise reduces overwhelm. Young people realise they do not need to explain everything at once, often one honest, specific sentence is enough to begin.

Facilitator note: Do not push participants to "soften" serious problems if the context involves genuine unfairness or harm. The point is to make the issue speakable, not to dilute it.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Give examples of emotionally loaded statements: "Nobody listens anyway." / "They keep taking advantage of me." / "I'm done trying."
- Ask participants in pairs to rewrite each into the smallest true sentence they could actually say in a constructive conversation.
- Debrief: What changed when you made the sentence smaller? Which version would be easier to respond to?

3.4 Micro-skill 2: Setting Boundaries Without Guilt

Quiet quitting often sits close to something genuinely healthy: boundary-setting. Young people do need boundaries, language for naming what is sustainable and what is not. But there is a difference between a healthy boundary and a silent withdrawal. A boundary is a communicated limit; quiet quitting often becomes an uncommunicated retreat.

A useful frame is: What I can do + What I cannot sustain + What would help. For example: "I can complete this task by Friday, but I cannot take on the second one as well without compromising quality."

A good boundary is specific, realistic, connected to sustainability, and expressed early enough to be useful. A weak boundary is often vague, over-apologetic, delayed, or followed by no behavioural change.

This also links to inclusion. Some young people experience extra pressure to over-adapt: young women in male-dominated settings, young people with disabilities, migrant youth, and rural youth in low-support contexts may all find boundary-setting harder or riskier. A young person who cannot set a boundary often ends up using disengagement as a delayed boundary.

Examples of useful boundary language

- "I want to do this well, but I need to be honest about what is realistic."
- "I'm committed to this role, but I cannot sustain last-minute changes every week."
- "I need a clearer distinction between urgent and non-urgent requests."

Common traps to avoid

- Apologising so much that the boundary disappears
- Setting a limit only internally, without communicating it
- Waiting until resentment is high

YOUTH WORK METHOD — Boundary Builder Cards

PURPOSE

To help young people distinguish between healthy boundaries, unclear communication, and silent disengagement.

WHY IT WORKS:

The exercise builds nuance. It shows that not every 'no' is disengagement, and not every withdrawal is a healthy limit.

Facilitator note: Encourage context. The same behaviour can mean different things depending on workload, safety, disability, culture, or role insecurity.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Prepare scenario cards: "A volunteer stops responding after 7pm without saying anything." / "A young employee says they can complete one task well, but not three at once." / "Someone says they are no longer available for weekend tasks unless agreed in advance."
- Ask groups to sort cards into: Healthy boundary / Unclear message / Disengagement / It depends.
- Debrief: What makes a boundary clear? What makes something feel avoidant instead?

3.5 Micro-skill 3: Asking for Feedback Before You Disconnect

Avoidance of feedback is an early signal of disengagement. Learning to ask for feedback well is therefore also a prevention skill. Many young people avoid feedback not because they do not care, but because it feels risky, they fear criticism without support, vague comments, or being told they are the problem. As a result, uncertainty grows, motivation drops, and quiet quitting becomes more likely.

Good feedback interrupts that spiral by reducing ambiguity, giving direction, and making effort feel visible. The challenge is that young people often ask in ways too broad to be helpful: "How am I doing?" A more useful approach is to ask about one specific thing:

- "Could I get feedback on how I handled that task?"
- "What is one thing I should keep doing and one thing I should adjust?"
- "What would 'good enough' look like here over the next two weeks?"

Youth workers can help by asking: What kind of feedback are you actually looking for improvement, clarity, or recognition? Asking for feedback is itself a form of engagement and self-advocacy.

Common traps to avoid

- Asking for feedback on everything at once
- Treating feedback as a verdict on personal worth
- Assuming no feedback means everything is fine

YOUTH WORK METHOD — Feedback Mapping

PURPOSE

To help young people identify what kind of feedback they need and who to ask.

WHY IT WORKS:

Naming the type of feedback needed makes the ask concrete and easier to act on, rather than leaving young people in a cycle of vague unease.

Facilitator note: Validate that some contexts are not feedback-safe. If a young person has repeatedly asked and received nothing useful, that is information, and may need addressing at a different level.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Ask each participant to think of one area of work or volunteering where they feel uncertain.
- Ask: What kind of feedback would help most, clarity on expectations, recognition, or improvement on something specific?
- Practice forming one specific question they could actually ask a supervisor or mentor this week.

3.6 Micro-skill 4: Seeking Help Before Silence Deepens

What is happening

Many young people wait until a problem is unmanageable before they seek support. They may feel that asking for help means admitting failure, or that their issue is not serious enough to deserve attention. In fact, asking for help early is a skill — and for many young people it is the most constructive step available.

What I have tried

A helpful framework is: What is happening + What I have tried + What I need now. This framing reduces shame and makes help-seeking feel thoughtful rather than dramatic.

What I need now

It is also important to help young people identify what kind of help they are seeking: emotional support, help preparing a conversation, information about options, or referral to professional support. Youth workers should recognise the moment when support needs to become referral — if the issue includes harassment, discrimination, significant emotional deterioration, or safeguarding concerns.

Examples of useful help-seeking language

- "I don't think I can solve this alone, and I'd like support figuring out the next step."
- "I'm noticing I'm becoming more detached, and I don't want to ignore it."
- "I don't need someone to fix it for me, but I do need help thinking it through."

Common traps to avoid

- Waiting until the problem feels unmanageable
- Asking only when already in crisis
- Treating all problems as either "nothing" or "serious enough for referral"

YOUTH WORK METHOD — Support Map: Who Helps With What?

PURPOSE

To help young people identify different sources of support before they urgently need them.

WHY IT WORKS:

Help-seeking becomes easier when it has already been imagined. This turns support from an abstract idea into a visible set of options.

Facilitator note: Some young people may realise they have very few safe people available. That itself is important information and may need follow-up.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Give participants a blank sheet with their name in the centre.
- Around it, map possible sources: supervisor, mentor, youth worker, trusted colleague, friend, HR, counselling service, safeguarding lead.
- For each: What kind of help could this person provide? How safe would it feel? What would I ask them for?
- Identify one support option most likely to be used if things become harder.

3.7 Conversation Scripts Library

The scripts below are not meant to be memorised. They are meant to reduce the blank-page feeling before difficult conversations. Encourage adaptation — the best script is the one that feels natural enough to actually use.

Opening a conversation

- "Could we have ten minutes this week? I want to clarify something before it starts affecting my motivation."
- "I'd rather raise this early than let it build up."
- "There's something I've been noticing in myself, and I think it would help to talk about it."

Clarifying expectations

- "I'm realising I'm not fully clear on what is expected from me in this role."
- "Could we agree on which tasks are essential and which are optional?"
- "What would a good performance look like here in a realistic sense?"

Raising overload

- "I want to be honest that the current pace is becoming hard to sustain."
- "I can continue contributing, but I need help prioritising."
- "I'm concerned that if I keep doing everything at once, the quality of my work will drop."

Setting a boundary

- "I'm committed to this role, but I need clearer limits around availability."
- "I can help with this, but not on the same timeline as everything else."
- "I want to stay involved, but I need a way of doing that that is sustainable."

Asking for feedback

- "Could I get feedback on this specific task before I keep going?"
- "What is one thing I should keep doing and one thing I should adjust?"
- "Is there a more useful way for me to focus my energy right now?"

Naming early disengagement

- "I've noticed I've been pulling back lately, and I don't want that to continue without saying anything."
- "I'm still here, but I feel less connected to the work than I did before."
- "Something has shifted for me, and I'd like to try to address it early."

Asking for support

- "I'm not sure how to handle this alone, and I'd like help thinking through the next step."
- "Could we talk about who the best person is to be involved?"
- "I'm noticing this is affecting me more than I expected."

Re-engaging after withdrawal

- "I know I've become more distant lately. I'd like to talk about how to reset, if that's possible."
- "I think I've been doing the minimum because I was not sure how to raise what was going on."
- "I want to be honest about what changed for me rather than keep drifting."

3.8 Parallel Prompts for Youth Workers

Youth workers often want to help quickly, but good support is not the same as stepping in too fast or scripting everything on the young person's behalf. The role is usually to help the person think, prepare, and choose.

To clarify the issue

- "What is the actual issue you want to raise?"
- "What is the smallest true version of that problem?"
- "What would you like the other person to understand?"

To prepare for a boundary

- "What exactly feels unsustainable right now?"
- "What would feel more manageable?"
- "What can you offer, and what can you no longer offer in the same way?"

To prepare for feedback

- "What kind of feedback do you actually need?"
- "Who is the safest person to ask?"
- "What one question would make your next week easier?"

To support help-seeking

- "Do you want help preparing the conversation, or deciding whether to have it at all?"
- "What kind of support would feel safest?"
- "Does this still feel like an everyday issue, or is it moving into referral territory?"

To support follow-up

- "What was clearer after the conversation?"
- "What next step was agreed?"
- "What support, if any, do you need now?"

What not to do

- Speak for the young person when they are able to speak for themselves
- Push directness in a context that may not be safe
- Turn every issue into a confidence problem
- Confuse a communication skill gap with a character flaw

Good youth work support does not remove difficulty. It makes difficulty more navigable.

3.9 Check-in Templates and Follow-up Notes

Conversations about disengagement are most useful when they do not disappear as soon as they end. Light-touch templates can turn reflection into follow-up — not bureaucratic paperwork, but small structures that create continuity.

Tool 1: 10-Minute Conversation Prep Card

Before the conversation, write:

- What is happening?
- What is affecting me most?
- What do I want the other person to understand?
- What am I asking for?
- What would already count as a useful outcome?

Tool 2: After the Conversation Reflection

After the conversation, note:

- What felt clear?
- What stayed unclear?
- What was agreed, if anything?
- What is my next step?
- Do I need follow-up support?

Tool 3: Youth Worker Follow-up Note

A simple internal note: Date / Topic raised / Skill practised / Young person's chosen next step / Follow-up date / Support or referral needed (Yes/No).

The purpose of these tools is not surveillance. It is continuity. Quiet quitting often develops in the gaps between moments. Good follow-up reduces those gaps.

3.10 Adapting Scripts for Different Young People and Contexts

Not all young people will use these tools in the same way, and they should not be expected to. Adaptation means making the skill usable, not diluting it.

Neurodivergent young people or those who prefer structure

- Use written prompts before speaking
- Keep scripts concrete and literal
- Offer a predictable conversation structure

Young people with low confidence or first-job anxiety

- Start with very short sentence stems
- Rehearse more than once
- Focus on one request only

Migrant youth or those navigating hierarchy carefully

- Acknowledge that direct communication may feel culturally risky
- Offer more indirect but still clear phrasing
- Avoid assuming silence equals passivity

Deaf/hard-of-hearing or accessible communication contexts

- Ensure scripts are available in written form
- Allow more processing time
- Build in alternative participation routes

Volunteering contexts

- Pay attention to gratitude pressure
- Young people may feel they must accept everything because the role is "for a good cause"
- Boundaries may need special normalisation here

Rural or remote youth

- Isolation may reduce opportunities for informal check-ins
- Written communication may play a larger role
- Support mapping is especially important where local options are limited

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Small, early conversations matter.

Quiet quitting often deepens in silence. A short, honest conversation held early can prevent much larger disengagement later.

Micro-skills are not minor.

Naming the issue, setting a boundary, asking for feedback, and seeking support are small skills with major effects on engagement.

Boundary-setting is not the same as withdrawal.

A healthy boundary is expressed. Quiet disengagement often happens when a limit stays unspoken for too long.

Feedback is a prevention tool.

Asking focused questions can restore clarity, direction, and recognition before motivation drops further.

Help-seeking protects engagement.

Young people do not need to wait until they are in crisis. Asking early is often the most constructive step available.

Youth workers do not need to fix everything.

Their role is to help young people prepare, practise, reflect, and choose the next safe action.

Part IV turns these micro-skills into practice.

The next section offers ready-to-run session plans for groups, workshops, and structured youth work settings.

REFERENCES

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2022). Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.

Gutierrez, R. (2022). Leadership deficiencies and quiet quitting: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 29(3), 198–214.

Ibrahim, A., & Petersen, C. (2023). Check-in culture and remote team engagement. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 51(2), 144–162.

Kirkpatrick, J., & Locke, E. (2022). Leadership authenticity and employee disengagement. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 22(1), 87–104.

Petersen, A., & Agger, B. (2024). Quiet quitting as compensatory respect. *Philosophy of Management*, 23(1), 44–67.

Popaitoon, P. (2022). Meaningful work and Gen Z retention. *Personnel Review*, 51(3), 872–891.

Zhang, Y., & Chin, T. (2024). Job characteristics, meaningful work, and Gen Z intention to stay. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 16(2), 88–107.

PRACTICE SESSIONS

4.1 Why Practice Sessions Matter

Young people often understand more than they can apply. A participant may recognise quiet quitting in themselves, agree with every point in earlier parts of this handbook, and still freeze when the time comes to speak to a supervisor, ask for clarity, or set a boundary. This is not because the content failed, it is because disengagement often sits at the level of habit, emotion, and social risk, not just understanding. That is why practice matters.

The six sessions in this part help young people move from recognition to action. Each is designed to increase one or more capacities that quiet quitting tends to erode: self-awareness, confidence in speaking up, realistic boundary-setting, help-seeking, reflection, and re-engagement planning.

The goal is not to push young people to perform more or tolerate unhealthy environments for longer. It is to help them act earlier, with greater clarity and agency, so that disengagement does not become the only available strategy.

Sessions are designed for youth work contexts (early career support, volunteering programmes, employability workshops, mentoring, youth centres, and non-formal learning spaces) and can be used as a six-session series, two half-day workshops, or stand-alone interventions.

> Together they create a progression: noticing disengagement early → understanding the difference between boundaries and withdrawal → practising how to speak up → learning to ask for feedback → exploring how to reset after pulling back → creating a realistic plan for sustainable engagement.

4.2 How to Use These Sessions

Keep the tone curious rather than corrective.

These sessions are not about telling young people they are wrong to feel tired or detached. They are about helping them respond with more options.

Do not force disclosure.

Participants can learn through fictional scenarios, written reflection, or pair work. All forms of participation are valid.

Use role-play carefully.

Always allow participants to pass, observe, or adapt a scenario rather than being pushed into performance.

Protect the difference between youth work and therapy.

These sessions support communication, agency, and reflection, not a substitute for professional mental health support, formal HR processes, or safeguarding action.

Allow adaptation.

Sessions can be shortened, combined, or adapted depending on age, group size, confidence level, or delivery mode.

Always end with one next step.

A session should end with one sentence, reflection, planned conversation, or personal commitment that makes the learning usable outside the room.

Each session includes: purpose • group and timing guidance • materials • facilitation steps • role-play or applied practice • debrief questions • take-home output • Youthpass-linked learning outcomes • optional adaptation notes.

4.3 Session 1. Spot It Early: What Quiet Quitting Looks Like Before It Has a Name

Purpose

To help young people recognise early signs of disengagement in themselves and others before those signs become normalised.

Group

Young people aged 18–28 in employability, volunteering, transition-to-work, or mentoring contexts.

Duration

75 minutes

Materials

- Flip chart or whiteboard
- Sticky notes and markers
- Printed or projected scenario cards
- Optional: traffic light cards (green, amber, red)

Preparation

Prepare 5-6 short scenarios showing early disengagement patterns, realistic and low-drama:

- Someone stops suggesting ideas in meetings
- A volunteer arrives exactly on time and leaves immediately
- A young employee completes tasks but no longer asks questions
- A participant stops joining optional activities but says everything is "fine"
- Someone becomes more cynical when work is discussed

Facilitation Steps

1. Opening check-in (10 min) — Ask participants: "What is one small sign that someone may be becoming less engaged, even before they say so?" Each writes one answer on a sticky note. Collect and group on a board, then read aloud without discussion first to build a shared vocabulary.

2. Naming the pattern (10 min) — Introduce the idea that quiet quitting rarely begins with one dramatic event. It often starts with small changes: less initiative, less emotional presence, less curiosity, less voluntary participation.

3. Scenario sorting (20 min) — In small groups, participants sort 4–6 scenarios into: Early sign of disengagement / Temporary tiredness or stress / Could be either. The aim is not correct answers but thinking about patterns and context.

4. Traffic light mapping (15 min) — Introduce the model: Green = normal fluctuation / Amber = repeated changes worth noticing / Red = sustained deterioration or need for extra support. Groups place each scenario on the traffic light and discuss what pushes something from green to amber to red.

5. Pair reflection (10 min) — "Have you ever noticed one of these signs in yourself? What do you think was underneath it? What would have helped earlier?" No one needs to share back.

6. Closing round (10 min) — Each participant writes: "One early sign I do not want to ignore in myself again is..."

Role-play

A young person notices a friend in their volunteering team is still attending but no longer contributing. One plays the friend, one plays the person checking in. Task: open a low-pressure conversation.

"I've noticed you seem a bit more distant lately. I might be wrong, but I wanted to check in."

Debrief

- Which signs felt easiest / hardest to recognise?
- What makes people dismiss early disengagement?
- What helps someone notice concern without becoming intrusive?

Take-home

My Early Sign Card: one sign to notice earlier + one thing to do if I notice it.

Youthpass

- Greater self-awareness about engagement and motivation
- Ability to observe patterns rather than isolated moments
- Reflection on how work and volunteering affect wellbeing

Adaptation

Online: use a shared whiteboard or chat-based scenario sort. Low-confidence groups: keep discussion on fictional examples rather than personal experiences.

4.4 Session 2. Healthy Boundaries or Quiet Withdrawal?

Purpose

To help participants distinguish between constructive boundary-setting and harmful disengagement.

Group

Young people aged 18-28, especially those navigating first jobs, volunteering, internships, or high-expectation environments.

Duration

90 minutes

Materials

- Printed statement cards or projected quotes
- Paper and pens, flip chart
- Optional: continuum line on the floor or virtual poll

Preparation

Prepare statements such as:

- "Do your job. Get paid. Go home."
- "I do not answer messages after work hours."
- "I stopped helping because no one noticed anyway."
- "I stopped volunteering for extra tasks without telling anyone."

Facilitation Steps

1. Opening question (10 min) — "What is the difference between protecting yourself and pulling away?" Participants write one sentence each and keep it for later.

2. Quote continuum (20 min) — Read or display the statements. Participants place each on a continuum: Healthy boundary / Harmful disengagement / It depends. Encourage disagreement, the point is to uncover nuance.

3. Small-group discussion (15 min) — What makes a boundary constructive? When does self-protection become silence? Why is it sometimes hard to tell the difference?

4. Mini input: boundary vs withdrawal (10 min) — A boundary is usually communicated. Withdrawal is often unspoken. Both may come from the same pressure. What matters is whether the young person still has a pathway to clarity and sustainable participation.

5. Boundary statement lab (20 min) — Participants think of one situation where they feel overwhelmed or unclear and write one statement using: What I can do + What I cannot sustain + What would help.

6. Pair practice (10 min) — Read the statements aloud and revise until they sound natural and usable.

7. Closing reflection (5 min) — Return to the opening question: "Has your answer changed?"

Role-play

A coordinator asks a volunteer to "just do one more thing" at the end of a long week. The participant practises responding honestly, respectfully, and sustainably.

Debrief

- Why do people often feel guilty when setting boundaries?
- What makes a boundary sound clear rather than defensive?
- When do people start using disengagement as an unspoken boundary?

Take-home

My Boundary Statement: one sentence the participant could realistically use.

Youthpass

- Ability to distinguish self-protection from withdrawal
- Confidence in setting realistic limits
- Communication skills related to wellbeing and self-management

Adaptation

For lower verbal confidence: participants write boundary statements anonymously first and discuss them as examples before personalising.

4.5 Session 3. Say It Before You Shut Down

Purpose

To help young people practise assertive, low-escalation communication before disengagement becomes silence.

Group

Young people aged 18-28, especially those who avoid difficult conversations or over-accommodate until they disconnect.

Duration

90 minutes

Materials

- Flip chart or slides
- Scenario handouts, pens
- Optional observation checklist for role-play

Preparation

Prepare 3-4 scenarios where a participant needs to raise an issue early: unclear expectations / too many tasks at once / lack of recognition / reduced motivation due to poor communication.

Facilitation Steps

1. Grounding check-in (10 min) — "What usually stops people from saying something early?" Collect answers (fear, awkwardness, guilt, uncertainty, not knowing the words).

2. Mini input (10 min) — Introduce the Observation + Impact + Need/Question framework. One clear sentence is often more useful than trying to say everything at once. Examples: "I'm not fully clear on what is expected from me." / "Could we agree on priorities this week?"

3. Reframing exercise (15 min) — Give emotionally loaded statements ("Nobody listens anyway" / "I'm sick of being used") and ask participants to rewrite each as the smallest true sentence that could open a conversation.

4. Role-play round one (20 min) — In pairs or trios, practise the opening of a conversation from one scenario. Third person (if trio) observes: Was the issue clear? Did the speaker avoid blame? Did they ask for something usable?

5. Feedback and second attempt (15 min) — Repeat the role-play after feedback, adjusting tone or wording.

6. Group debrief (10 min) — Discuss what felt difficult and what made the scripts easier to say.

7. Personal action line (10 min) — "One sentence I could actually use in a real conversation is..."

Role-play scripts

- "I'm no longer clear about what is expected from me."
- "I've been taking on too much without saying anything."
- "I feel like my contribution is not being seen."
- "I've started pulling back and I'd rather talk about it."

Debrief

- What made a sentence easier to say out loud?
- What is the difference between honesty and escalation?
- Why do people often wait too long?

Take-home

My Conversation Starter Script: one short sentence + one follow-up question.

Youthpass

- Practical communication and self-expression
- Confidence in addressing tension early
- Capacity to turn reflection into action

Adaptation

For participants who dislike role-play: allow written dialogue building or paired script exchange.

4.6 Session 4. Feedback Without Fear

Purpose

To help young people ask for feedback in a focused, useful way that restores clarity instead of increasing anxiety.

Group

Young people aged 18-28 in work, volunteering, internship, or training settings.

Duration

75 minutes

Materials

- Paper and pens
- Optional feedback prompt cards
- Whiteboard or shared screen

Preparation

Prepare examples of vague versus focused feedback questions.

Facilitation Steps

1. Opening prompt (10 min) — "What makes feedback feel difficult?" List answers. Common ones: fear of criticism, of being judged, of hearing something unfixable.

2. Mini input: not all feedback is the same (10 min) — Sometimes what a young person calls "feedback" is actually a need for clarity, prioritisation, recognition, direction, or reassurance. Help them distinguish between these needs.

3. Broad vs focused question (10 min) — "How am I doing?" versus "What is one thing you'd like me to prioritise differently this week?" Discuss why focused questions produce more usable answers.

4. Two Questions Only exercise (15 min) — Participants identify one real situation of uncertainty and write: one focused feedback question + one follow-up question.

5. Pair role-play (15 min) — One person asks the feedback question; the other responds as a supervisor, mentor, or coordinator, varying response type: supportive / vague / rushed / genuinely helpful. Then switch.

6. What do I do with the answer? (10 min) — How to stay grounded if the answer is not ideal. What makes feedback still useful? What is the next step after feedback?

7. Closing reflection (5 min) — "The kind of feedback that would help me most right now is..."

Role-play

A participant is unsure whether they are putting energy in the right place and wants feedback before becoming more detached.

"Could I get feedback on whether I'm focusing on the most useful things right now? If not, what would you like me to adjust?"

Debrief

- Why do vague questions often create vague answers?
- What kind of feedback feels safest to ask for first?
- How can feedback reduce disengagement instead of increasing it?

Take-home

My Feedback Question: one usable feedback question + one follow-up.

Youthpass

- Ability to ask for structured feedback
- Confidence in seeking clarity instead of guessing
- Self-management and learning-to-learn skills

Adaptation

For lower-confidence groups: practise first through anonymous questions on cards before personalising.

4.7 Session 5. Reset the Relationship: Re-engaging After Pulling Back

Purpose

To support young people who already recognise they have been withdrawing and want to think about how to re-engage constructively.

Group

Young people aged 18-28 who can recognise some disengagement in themselves and are ready for reflective work.

Duration

90 minutes

Materials

- Paper, pens, reflection worksheets
- Optional scenario cards

Preparation

This session benefits from a calm facilitation style and enough emotional safety. It should not be rushed.

Facilitation Steps

1. Opening reflection (10 min) — "What does pulling back usually look like for me?" Offer examples only if needed: speaking less / doing the minimum / feeling emotionally distant / becoming more cynical.

2. Mini input: quiet quitting is not an identity (10 min) — Pulling back can be a response, a warning sign, or a coping strategy. Re-engagement does not mean pretending nothing happened. It means acknowledging what changed and deciding whether there is still something worth rebuilding.

3. Guided reflection (15 min) — Participants write: What changed first? What was happening at the time? What did I need that I was not getting? What did I stop doing? What part of me still wants things to improve?

4. Reset script building (15 min) — Introduce the structure: What changed + What I have noticed in myself + What I want now. Example: "I've noticed I've become much more distant over the last month. Part of that is because I've felt unclear and discouraged. I'd like to talk about whether there is a way to reset expectations."

5. Role-play round (20 min) — Participants practise a reset conversation in pairs or trios. The goal is not a dramatic confrontation — it is to rehearse how to name distance honestly and open the next step.

6. Support mapping (10 min) — If this conversation goes well, what's next? If it goes badly, what support do I need? If I'm not ready to speak directly, what is the safer first step?

7. Closing round (10 min) — "One thing I would need in order to re-engage more honestly is..."

Role-play

A young person knows they have been disengaging for weeks and wants to speak before the situation worsens.

"I know I've become more distant lately. I'd rather name that honestly than pretend nothing is going on."

Debrief

- Why is re-engaging often harder than disengaging?
- What makes a reset conversation feel possible?
- What needs to happen for trust to rebuild?

Take-home

My Reset Reflection: what changed / what I need / whether I want to raise it directly / who can support me.

Youthpass

- Deeper self-reflection and responsibility without self-blame
- Confidence in naming change honestly
- Capacity to imagine constructive re-entry rather than only withdrawal

Adaptation

If the group is not ready for personal reflection, use fictional composite scenarios instead.

4.8 Session 6. My STAY Plan: Next Steps, Support, and Sustainable Engagement

Purpose

To consolidate learning from previous sessions into one realistic personal plan for communication, support, and sustainable engagement.

Group

Young people aged 18-28, ideally after at least some of the earlier sessions.

Duration

90 minutes

Materials

- STAY Plan template
- Support Sheet template
- Pens
- Optional: access to the Risk Scanner

Preparation

Prepare two take-away templates: Personal Conversation Plan and Support Sheet. These align with the broader project workshop logic in which participants leave with a conversation plan and support-oriented takeaways.

Facilitation Steps

1. Recap and grounding (10 min) — Participants briefly recall: one thing noticed about themselves / one skill that felt useful / one conversation they still want to avoid.

2. What has changed for me? (10 min) — Short written reflection: What do I understand now that I did not before? What am I more able to say? What do I still find difficult?

3. Build the STAY Plan (25 min) — Participants complete: What situation do I want to address? / What is the issue in one clear sentence? / What do I want to ask for? / What boundary, clarification, or support do I need? / Who is the best person to speak to first? / What is my first realistic next step? / What if that conversation does not go well?

4. Build the Support Sheet (15 min) — Participants identify: one person to speak to directly / one person who can help prepare / one option for extra support / one sign that tells me I should not wait any longer.

5. Peer coaching pairs (15 min) — Partners share as much of their plan as they want and ask: Is this realistic? Is it specific enough? What might make it easier to follow through?

6. Optional scanner link (5 min) — If the Risk Scanner is available, explain how it can complement the plan by helping young people reflect on patterns and receive next-step prompts linked to the handbook content.

7. Closing circle (10 min) — "The next step I am most willing to take is..."

Role-play

Final rehearsal: participants practise saying the first two lines of the conversation they most realistically need to have. The goal is not a full simulation — it is to make the first step feel speakable.

Debrief

- What makes a next step realistic rather than idealistic?
- What support makes follow-through more likely?
- What helps someone act before disengagement deepens again?

Take-home

Personal Conversation Plan + Support Sheet.

Youthpass

- Initiative and follow-through
- Ability to plan concrete action
- Self-advocacy in work and volunteering contexts
- Reflection on wellbeing, communication, and support

Adaptation

Shorter formats: combine STAY Plan and Support Sheet into one page. Online: use fillable digital templates or shared documents.

4.9 Facilitation Notes for All Six Sessions

Keep examples broad.

Not all participants are in formal employment. Use examples from work, internships, volunteering, and first-job environments.

Do not romanticise overwork.

The point is not to convince young people to care more at any cost, but to help them protect engagement through clarity and constructive communication.

Normalise different participation styles.

Offer more than one route into each activity: speaking, writing, observing, or listening.

Use role-play with consent.

Always allow participants to pass, observe, or work with a fictional scenario.

Do not force personal disclosure.

A participant does not need to share private work experiences to benefit.

Notice when the issue is bigger than the session.

If distress, harassment, discrimination, or safeguarding concerns arise, seek the relevant support route.

End with something usable.

Each session should produce a sentence, plan, reflection, question, or support option that can travel with the participant beyond the room.

4.10 How These Sessions Can Be Combined

Full 6-session series:

Best for mentoring, employability, or structured youth-work programmes.

Two half-day workshops:

Workshop 1: Sessions 1-3 / Workshop 2: Sessions 4-6.

Short thematic combinations:

Early disengagement: Sessions 1+2 • Speaking up: Sessions 3+4 • Re-engagement: Sessions 5+6.

With the Risk Scanner:

Use the scanner before Session 6 as a reflection entry point, or use handbook sessions first and the scanner as a structured follow-up. The handbook and scanner are designed to reinforce each other, helping young people move from reflection to concrete recommendations and conversation planning.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Practice makes communication more usable

young people may understand disengagement well and still struggle to act. Practice turns insight into speech.

Short sessions can create meaningful change.

Often a young person needs one clearer sentence, one safer boundary, one feedback question, or one support option.

Role-play works when it stays realistic

the point is to make difficult moments feel more speakable, not to perform.

The goal is not to "fix motivation"

but to restore clarity, agency, and support before withdrawal deepens.

Each session should end with something concrete:

a reflection, script, question, boundary statement, support map, or conversation plan.

These sessions are about transfer

helping young people apply handbook learning in real-world work, volunteering, and early-career contexts.

REFERENCES

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2022). Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273-285.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383.

Galanis, P. et al. (2023). The quiet quitting scale: Development and initial validation. *AIMS Public Health*, 10(4), 828-848.

Ibrahim, A., & Petersen, C. (2023). Check-in culture and remote team engagement. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 51(2), 144-162.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692-724.

Popaitoon, P. (2022). Meaningful work and Gen Z retention. *Personnel Review*, 51(3), 872-891.

Zhang, Y., & Chin, T. (2024). Job characteristics, meaningful work, and Gen Z intention to stay. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 16(2), 88-107.

PART V PATHWAYS & REFERRALS

When and who to escalate to mentors, HR, and counselling services.

When and who to escalate to mentors, HR, and counselling services.

5.1 Why Escalation Matters

Certain cases of disengagement require more than the support of a single youth worker. Clear pathways help ensure that young people receive the right level of support at the right time, while also protecting both the individual and the practitioner. Working alone in complicated situations can lead to missed signals, delayed action, and unnecessary pressure on everyone involved.

Quiet quitting does not happen all at once. It tends to develop over time, often through small changes in behaviour and engagement that are easy to miss at first. A young person may reduce their participation gradually, speaking less in group settings, taking longer to complete tasks, or becoming less emotionally present. These changes can be subtle enough to seem like ordinary fluctuations until they become a clearer pattern.

By recognising these signs early, a youth worker has time to interrupt the process of disengagement before it deepens. That includes involving others where needed. Doing so can bring in a new perspective, share responsibility across the team, and make the response more balanced and effective. Escalation is not a sign of failure, it is good practice.

This section provides a structured framework for identifying when and how to escalate, who to involve at each level, and how to work through referrals in a way that keeps the young person informed, respected, and supported throughout the process.

5.2 Escalation Levels Framework

The escalation framework supports youth workers in recognising various levels of disengagement and responding appropriately. It provides a clear structure for when to act, when to seek additional support, and when to involve others. Each level describes a set of observable signs and a corresponding course of action. The levels are not rigid categories: a young person may move between them, and some situations may show signs of more than one level at a time.

The framework is designed to support judgment, not replace it. Context always matters. A young person who misses sessions once may be dealing with a temporary difficulty. A young person who stops engaging across multiple areas over several weeks may need a more structured response.

Level	Observable Signs	Recommended Action
Level 1 *Early Disengagement*	Reduced participation in activities / Lower motivation or enthusiasm / Withdrawal from group discussions / Less initiative or follow-through	Use 1:1 check-in conversations / Apply active listening and micro-skills / Clarify expectations and offer encouragement / Note changes and monitor over time
Level 2 *Ongoing Disengagement*	Persistent absence or non-response / Avoidance of responsibilities / Noticeable change in attitude or behaviour / Reduced communication over several weeks	Involve a mentor or supervisor / Agree on a joint support plan / Document observations consistently / Set a follow-up review date
Level 3 *Risk Indicators*	Signs of burnout or emotional exhaustion / Expressions of distress or hopelessness / Social isolation within the group / Statements suggesting loss of purpose	Suggest access to counselling or wellbeing support / Offer to help connect the young person / Consult with a senior colleague / Increase frequency of check-ins
Level 4 *Serious Concern*	Indicators of crisis or severe distress / Serious mental health concerns / Any indication of risk of harm / Safeguarding-related disclosures	Immediate referral to professional services / Follow organisational safeguarding procedures / Do not manage alone, escalate immediately / Document and report as required

The table above is a guide, not a script. Youth workers will often find themselves making judgment calls based on incomplete information. When in doubt, it is always better to involve a colleague or supervisor than to manage a complex situation alone.

5.3 Decision-Making Principles

The principles of decision-making are about making informed and responsible choices in real situations, often under pressure and with limited information. These principles help guide judgment when deciding whether to continue support, adjust an approach, or involve others.

Start with reflection.

Before deciding on next steps, take a moment to consider what you already know. Have you already had a supportive conversation? What has changed since then? Is anything about the situation starting to feel different or harder to manage? These questions help avoid reactive responses and ground your thinking before you act.

Look at the pattern, not just the moment.

Quiet quitting develops over time, and a single observation is rarely enough to draw conclusions. Ask yourself whether what you are seeing is a one-off or part of a repeated pattern. Is the young person becoming gradually less engaged across multiple areas? Is something improving, staying the same, or getting worse?

Keep wellbeing at the centre.

Every decision should prioritise the wellbeing of the young person. This may sometimes mean making difficult choices, such as involving others or triggering a referral process, that the young person may not initially welcome. Being transparent about your reasoning and maintaining a respectful tone helps preserve trust even in more difficult moments.

Know your role and its limits.

Youth workers are important sources of support, but they are not therapists, safeguarding specialists, or HR professionals. Recognising the boundaries of your role is not a weakness — it is part of responsible practice. Knowing when to bring in other expertise is a core professional skill.

Communicate clearly and honestly.

Whether talking to the young person, a colleague, or a supervisor, clear communication reduces misunderstanding and builds trust. Avoid vague language when describing concerns. Be specific about what you have observed, when you observed it, and what you think might be needed.

Act early rather than late.

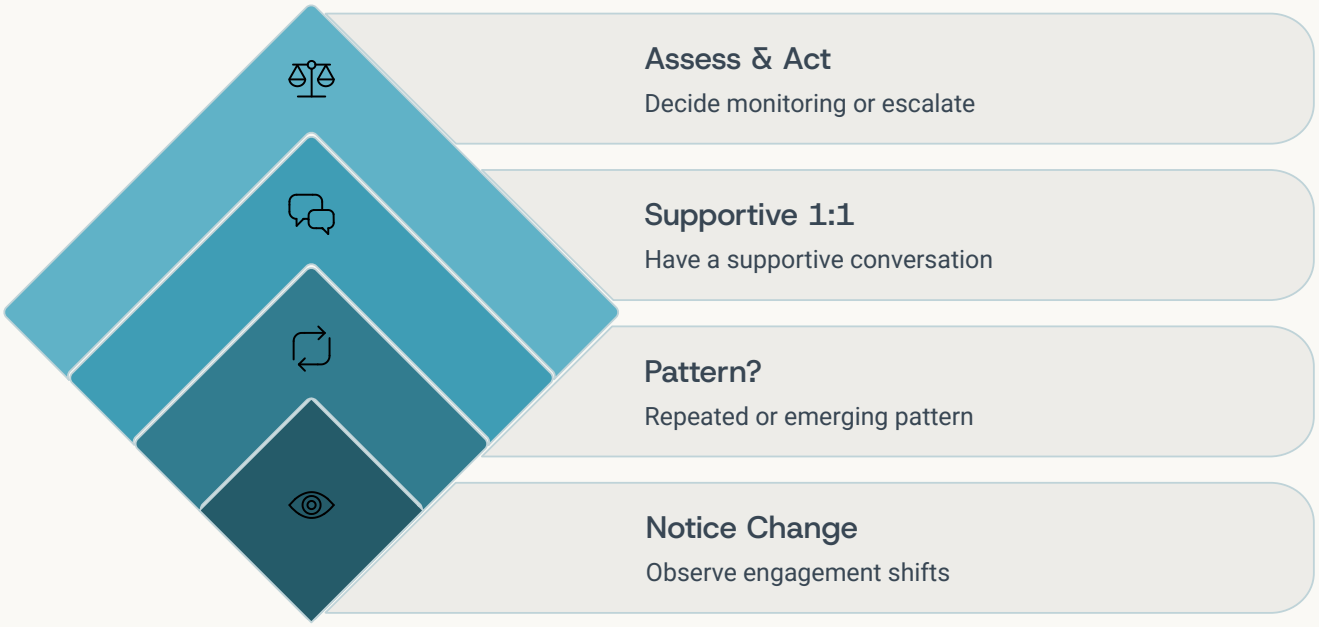
One of the most consistent findings in youth work practice is that early action leads to better outcomes. Waiting for certainty before acting can allow situations to become more entrenched. If something feels off, it is usually worth raising it sooner rather than waiting for more evidence.

If unsure: do not manage it alone – escalate.

Escalation is not a sign of failure or overreaction. It is a responsible part of any youth work role. When situations feel unclear or begin to exceed what you can manage alone, involving a colleague or supervisor is always the right call.

5.4 Decision-Making Guide: A Practical Flowchart

The decision-making flowchart offers a step-by-step guide for responding to disengagement. It is designed to complement the escalation framework and help youth workers think through situations that feel unclear or complex. The flow below represents the core questions to work through when deciding on next steps.



This flowchart is designed to be practical and quick to use. It does not replace professional judgment but provides a consistent reference point when situations feel unclear. It can also be used in team supervision sessions as a shared tool for reflecting on individual cases.

5.5 Referral Pathways

Referral pathways help ensure that young people receive the right level of support at the right time. A single youth worker cannot and should not manage every situation alone. Knowing which referral route to use, and when, is a core part of effective practice.

Referral is not a handover. When a young person is referred to another source of support, the youth worker's role does not end. They remain part of the support network and continue to offer continuity, encouragement, and connection throughout the process.

Internal Referrals

Internal referrals are often the first step when additional support is required. They allow concerns to be shared within the project or organisation and help maintain continuity. Raising concerns early can prevent issues from becoming more difficult to address.

Mentor

A mentor can offer more consistent one-to-one support and bring a different perspective. This is particularly useful when a young person needs regular engagement from someone they already trust, or when the youth worker's relationship has become complicated by the issues being raised. Mentors can provide a stable, reliable presence during periods of disengagement.

Project Coordinator

A project coordinator helps guide decisions and keeps things aligned with project procedures, especially when situations become unclear, require coordination across staff, or begin to approach the boundaries of standard practice. Coordinators are important contacts when internal processes need to be activated.

Senior Youth Worker

A senior youth worker can provide guidance in more complex situations, particularly where there are safeguarding concerns, signs of risk, or a need to escalate beyond the immediate team. Their experience in managing serious cases makes them an important resource when standard approaches are not sufficient.

External Referrals

When situations require external referrals, staff should make decisions carefully and involve the young person wherever possible. These referrals are usually more structured than internal ones and may require documentation, consent, or formal processes depending on the organisation and the nature of the concern.

Counselling Services

Counselling services offer a safe and confidential space where young people can talk through personal or emotional challenges with a trained professional. They are appropriate when a young person is experiencing persistent distress, anxiety, or difficulties that are beyond the scope of youth work support. Counselling services may be internal to the organisation, available through partner agencies, or accessible via national or regional health services.

Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals should be involved when there are signs of significant emotional deterioration, ongoing clinical concerns, or risk of harm. This includes psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and clinical counsellors. Youth workers are not expected to assess mental health but should recognise when concerns fall outside their competence and act accordingly.

Career or Educational Guidance

Career or educational guidance is particularly relevant when disengagement relates to a young person's uncertainty about their future, their sense of purpose in a role, or their direction after a volunteering or training experience. Career advisors, employment services, and vocational guidance practitioners can help young people explore realistic pathways and re-anchor their motivation.

Safeguarding Services

Safeguarding services must be involved whenever there are concerns about risk of harm, abuse, or a young person's safety. All organisations working with young people should have a designated safeguarding lead. Youth workers are not expected to investigate but are required to report and follow the relevant organisational and legal procedures.

5.6 Working with Referrals in Practice

The way a referral is handled shapes how a young person experiences it. A referral that is poorly communicated can feel like abandonment. One that is handled with care, transparency, and follow-through can strengthen trust and reinforce the young person's sense that support is available. The following principles guide good referral practice.

Communicate clearly.

Be clear about why you are involving others and what it means. Use simple, supportive language and take time to check that the young person understands. Avoid language that might make them feel judged, dismissed, or passed on without care. Phrases like "I want to make sure you have the right kind of support" or "I'm bringing someone else in because this matters and I want us to handle it well" can help frame the referral constructively.

Involve the young person.

Where possible, include the young person in decisions about their own support. Encourage them to share their views and preferences about who is involved and how. It helps build trust and ensures they feel heard. Even when full consent is not possible, keep them informed so they do not feel sidelined or uncertain about what is happening.

Be open about confidentiality.

Be honest about the limits of confidentiality from the beginning of any support relationship. Explain what can stay private and what you may need to share, especially where safety is a concern. Being clear early prevents misunderstandings later and sets realistic expectations. Most young people can accept that some information may need to be shared if they understand why.

Keep it manageable.

Referrals can begin with a simple conversation. Focus on one clear next step rather than presenting the young person with a complex set of options or an overwhelming process. Starting small reduces anxiety and makes it easier for both the youth worker and the young person to stay engaged and move forward.

Follow up and stay involved.

Check in after the referral to make sure the young person understands what is happening and what comes next. Ask how they feel about the support they are receiving. A referral is not a handover — the youth worker remains part of the process. Continuity of relationship, even in a reduced role, can make a significant difference to how a young person experiences external support.

Practical example: making a referral feel supportive

> A youth worker notices that a young volunteer has been arriving late, contributing less, and has recently said she is "just tired all the time." After a 1:1 conversation, it becomes clear that she is dealing with significant anxiety outside of the volunteering context. The youth worker discusses the idea of speaking to a counsellor, explains what counselling involves, and offers to help arrange a first appointment. She checks in again two weeks later to ask how things are going. The young person later says that the way the referral was handled made her feel supported rather than removed.

When making decisions about escalation and referrals, youth workers must act in ways that are ethically sound. Ethical practice is not just about following procedures — it is about acting with integrity, transparency, and genuine care for the young person's wellbeing.

Be transparent about information sharing.

Be clear from the outset about what can and cannot stay confidential. Explain early on that you may need to involve others if concerns arise, and give the young person the opportunity to ask questions. If possible, let them know before you share any information about them with a third party. Transparency does not mean sharing everything indiscriminately — it means being honest about the process.

Work within your role.

Youth workers are trained to offer support, not to provide clinical assessment, legal advice, or specialist intervention. If a situation requires support that goes beyond your training or your organisational remit, raising it with the appropriate person is not just acceptable — it is required. Acting within your competence protects both the young person and yourself.

Involve the young person in decision-making.

Wherever possible, decisions about a young person's support should involve that person. This respects their autonomy and helps maintain their trust and engagement. Even when the young person cannot consent to a particular course of action, they should be kept informed and their perspective should be taken into account.

Avoid assumptions.

Not every sign of disengagement reflects a personal problem. Cultural background, disability, communication style, or situational stress can all produce behaviours that look like disengagement but are not. Before escalating, ensure that observations are based on consistent patterns rather than single incidents, and that the young person has had the opportunity to explain their perspective.

Document appropriately.

Keep brief, factual records of significant observations, conversations, and decisions. Documentation protects the young person, the youth worker, and the organisation. It also creates a shared record that makes continuity of support more likely when multiple people are involved.

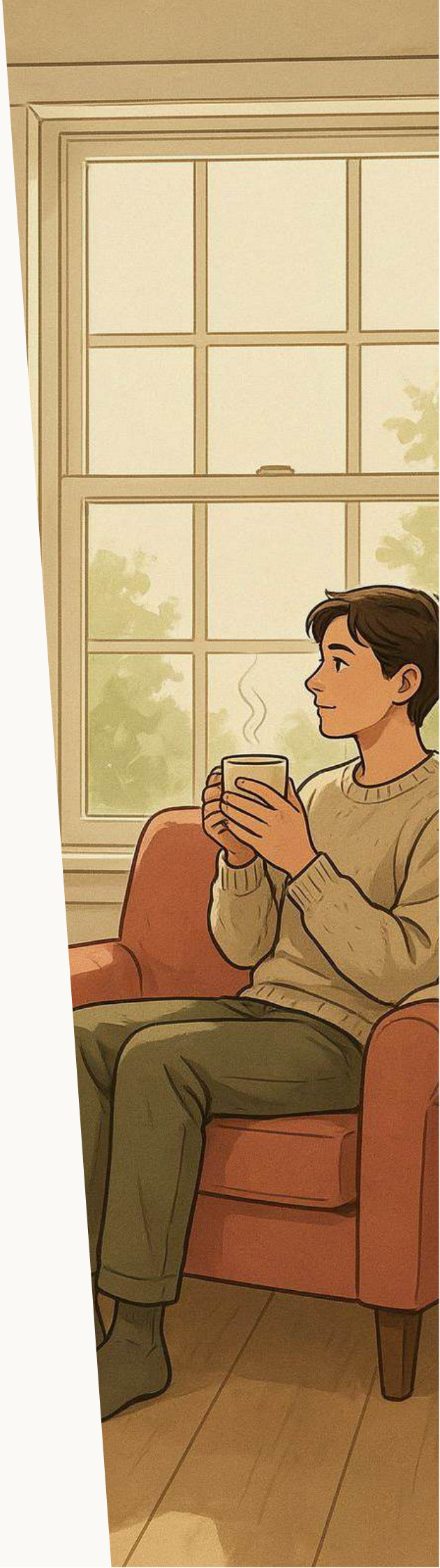
5.8 Self-Care for Youth Workers

Supporting young people through disengagement, emotional difficulty, or crisis is demanding work. Youth workers who regularly engage with these situations can experience fatigue, secondary stress, or uncertainty about their own decisions. Attending to your own wellbeing is not a personal indulgence — it is part of being able to do the work consistently and well.

Some practical ways to support your own sustainability in this role:

- Use supervision and team meetings as spaces to reflect on difficult cases, not just to report on progress.
- Seek peer consultation when a situation feels uncertain or heavy. Sharing the responsibility reduces the risk of carrying too much alone.
- Recognise when you are becoming overextended. Signs of worker fatigue often parallel the early signs of disengagement in young people: reduced energy, less initiative, more detachment.
- Know your organisation's support resources for staff, including access to supervision, employee assistance, or wellbeing support.
- Celebrate what works. Youth work is a long-term investment, and small positive changes matter.

The STAY project acknowledges that sustainable youth work depends on practitioners who are themselves supported, reflective, and able to maintain the quality of their engagement over time.



5.9 Closing Words

Clear escalation pathways, well-structured referral routes, and ethical decision-making principles work together to ensure that young people receive support that is timely, appropriate, and respectful. Youth workers do not need to have all the answers. They need to know when to act, who to involve, and how to keep the young person at the centre of the process.

The framework and tools in this section are designed to make that easier. They provide a structure that reduces uncertainty, supports confident decision-making, and helps youth workers respond to disengagement in ways that are proportionate, transparent, and grounded in good practice.

Part VI takes the next step: looking at how organisations can embed these practices into everyday working life so that good escalation and referral become part of normal professional culture, rather than exceptional responses to unusual situations.

PART VI IMPLEMENTING IN ORGANISATIONS

6.1 Why Implementation Matters

Light routines, ethical structures, and hybrid approaches for embedding the STAY framework into everyday practice.

Implementation gap

A well-designed framework can only make a difference if it is actually used. Even when youth workers understand the theory of disengagement and escalation, translating that understanding into consistent day-to-day action is a separate challenge. This section focuses on that gap: between knowing what to do and being able to do it reliably within the pressures and structures of real organisational life.

Common barriers

Implementation often fails not because of resistance or poor will, but because the new practices feel disconnected from existing routines, add complexity to already full workloads, or require judgment calls that workers do not feel equipped to make without support. Understanding these obstacles honestly is the first step toward designing approaches that actually work.

What this part covers

This part of the handbook offers practical guidance for organisations introducing the STAY framework. It covers why implementation can fall short, how to build simple and sustainable routines, how to embed practices into existing workflows, how to navigate the particular challenges of hybrid and online settings, and what a minimum viable implementation looks like for organisations with limited time or resources.

6.2 Why Implementation Fails

Research on behaviour change in organisations consistently shows that even well-designed guidance often does not translate into changed practice. For the STAY framework to work, it is useful to understand what typically gets in the way.

Common obstacle	What it looks like in practice	How to address it
The framework feels too complex	Youth workers cannot recall the steps under pressure; the escalation table is not consulted in real time	Break down into one or two core actions per level; laminate a one-page quick guide
Unclear ownership	Staff assume someone else will raise a concern; issues are noticed but not acted on	Assign a named coordinator for escalation decisions; clarify each person's responsibility
Lack of regular reflection	Problems accumulate between team meetings; early signs are missed	Build short check-ins into regular team rhythms; use supervision as a reflective space
Ethical uncertainty	Workers are unsure what they are allowed to share or when to escalate	Provide a clear, written confidentiality and escalation protocol; run a short training session
Framework not updated	Guidance reflects how the organisation used to work, not how it works now	Review the escalation pathways annually; update contacts and procedures
Burnout and capacity limits	Staff are too stretched to engage consistently with monitoring and follow-up	Reduce monitoring burden through simple templates; name it as a team issue, not just individual responsibility

Acknowledging these obstacles in advance is not pessimistic — it is strategic. Organisations that discuss likely barriers before introducing new practices are more likely to adapt them successfully and sustain them over time.

6.3 Building Simple, Sustainable Routines

The most effective implementation strategies rely on small, repeatable actions that become part of the natural rhythm of a programme or organisation. Large, complex systems are harder to sustain, especially in organisations where capacity is limited and staff roles are varied. Simple routines, by contrast, build awareness and consistency without adding disproportionate administrative load.

The following routine structures can be adapted to fit different organisational contexts:

Regular check-ins individual

Short, structured conversations between a youth worker and a young person, held at a predictable interval (for example, weekly or fortnightly). These do not need to be formal meetings, a five-minute check-in at the start or end of a session is often enough. The purpose is to notice small changes early, maintain the relationship, and give the young person a regular opportunity to raise concerns before they grow.

Team notes observation

A simple, shared log where staff can note brief observations about individual participants. Notes should be factual, not interpretive, and should record specific behaviours rather than general impressions. Over time, these logs allow patterns to become visible that might not be apparent in any single session. They also support continuity when different staff members work with the same young person.

Brief team check-ins

A short slot at the beginning or end of team meetings where staff share observations about engagement and raise any early concerns. These do not need to be lengthy or formal. A round of two or three minutes per staff member is often enough to surface patterns that one person alone might miss. This also helps distribute the responsibility of noticing disengagement across the team rather than placing it on one individual.

The "one question" check-in

A single question built into a session or programme activity — for example, a brief written prompt at the end of a workshop asking participants to rate their engagement on a simple scale or complete a sentence stem such as "This week I am finding it difficult to..." These micro-check-ins surface early signals without requiring significant time or discussion, and can be used to identify who might benefit from a follow-up conversation.

Routines work because they reduce the cognitive load of deciding when to check in. If the question is always "when should I have this conversation?" it is easy to defer. If the check-in is always on Monday morning, the decision is already made.

6.4 Embedding Practices into Existing Workflows

One of the most effective ways to ensure that new practices are adopted is to connect them to things that are already happening. When teams can see how the STAY framework fits within their existing structures and rhythms, it feels less like an additional task and more like a natural extension of what they already do.

The following examples show how elements of the framework can be embedded into common organisational workflows:

01

Programme planning and induction

Build an initial engagement baseline for new participants. Note starting levels of participation, confidence, and communication. This creates a reference point for identifying change over time.

02

Weekly or fortnightly sessions

Add a brief opening check-in or closing reflection prompt. Use the Risk Scanner as a periodic self-assessment tool. Rotate responsibility for observation notes across staff.

03

Team meetings

Include a five-minute segment for staff to flag any participant concerns. Use the escalation framework as a shared reference point when discussing individuals. Review follow-up actions from previous meetings.

04

1:1 mentoring or coaching sessions

Structure sessions to include one check-in question related to engagement. Use the conversation scripts from Part III to support difficult topics. Document key points and agreed next steps.

05

End-of-programme review

Include an engagement and wellbeing component in programme evaluations. Collect participant feedback on what supported or hindered their engagement. Use findings to update local implementation of the framework.

06

Staff supervision

Use supervision to reflect on escalation decisions and referral cases. Discuss how the framework is working in practice and where adjustments may be needed. Address any worker wellbeing concerns connected to managing disengagement.

The principle behind embedding is that new practices are more likely to stick when they are attached to existing habits and structures. Starting with one or two points of integration is more effective than trying to change everything at once.

6.5 Ethical Considerations in Organisational Implementation

When implementing escalation and referral pathways at an organisational level, ethics must guide not only individual decisions but also the design of systems and routines. Practices that seem efficient on paper can create problems if they are not carefully aligned with ethical principles.

Transparency with participants.

Young people who engage with the programme should understand how information about them is collected, stored, and shared. This does not mean sharing every operational detail, it means being honest about what happens when a concern is raised, and what their rights are within that process. Informed participation builds trust and reduces anxiety about being monitored or judged.

Proportionality.

Not every observation needs to trigger a formal response. Organisations should ensure that monitoring systems are proportionate to the level of concern and are not experienced by young people as intrusive or stigmatising. A check-in culture should feel like care, not surveillance.

Staff competence and role clarity.

Organisations have a responsibility to ensure that youth workers have the training, supervision, and clear role boundaries they need to implement the framework confidently. Introducing escalation pathways without supporting staff to use them is both ineffective and unfair to the workers involved.

Data protection and confidentiality.

Any documentation of participant behaviour or wellbeing must comply with relevant data protection legislation (including GDPR where applicable). Observation notes should be stored securely, accessed only by those who need them, and reviewed or deleted when no longer required. Young people should be informed of how their data is used.

Equity and inclusion.

Monitoring systems can inadvertently amplify bias if they are not designed carefully. Youth workers should be aware that some behaviours associated with disengagement may reflect cultural norms, disability-related differences, or communication preferences rather than actual withdrawal. Training in inclusive observation reduces the risk of misinterpretation.

6.6 Hybrid Working Considerations

Hybrid work (combining in-person and online settings) presents particular challenges for recognising and responding to disengagement. Many of the early signs described in Part II of this handbook (reduced body language cues, shorter responses, less voluntary contribution) are harder to observe when communication happens through a screen or in asynchronous formats.

The core principles of the STAY framework remain the same in hybrid settings, but the approach must be adapted to account for the different conditions of online engagement.

Challenge: Reduced visibility of engagement cues

In online settings, cameras may be off, responses may be typed rather than spoken, and group dynamics are harder to read. It is more difficult to notice someone becoming quieter or more withdrawn when the baseline communication is already filtered through a screen.

Response: Build in structured participation moments — short polls, sentence completion prompts, or individual responses — that make engagement visible even in digital formats. This creates data points that can be compared over time.

Challenge: Silence is harder to interpret online

A participant who says nothing in an online session may be fully engaged, temporarily distracted, experiencing a technical problem, or beginning to disengage. Without face-to-face cues, it is harder to distinguish between these possibilities.

Response: Do not rely only on group communication to assess engagement. Build in regular individual check-ins, even brief ones, so there is a direct line of contact with each young person outside the group setting.

Challenge: Isolation is less visible

Social isolation, one of the Level 3 risk indicators, can be particularly hard to detect in hybrid settings where every participant appears equally "present" in the digital space even if they are not meaningfully connected.

Response: Pay attention to who is connecting with peers outside structured activities, who responds to others' messages, and who initiates contact. These relational patterns are important signals.

Challenge: Referral feels more impersonal online

When a referral is initiated in person, a youth worker can offer reassurance through presence, tone, and body language. In online settings, this human quality is harder to convey and referrals can feel more abrupt or clinical.

Response: Where possible, use video or voice calls rather than written messages for referral conversations. Take more time to check understanding, ask how the young person is feeling about the process, and follow up promptly.

Hybrid settings require more deliberate communication, not less. The key is not to replicate in-person practice online, but to identify which elements are most important and find the best available equivalent in the digital environment.

6.7 Minimum Implementation Model

Not all organisations have the same capacity to implement a full escalation and referral framework from the outset. A minimum implementation model provides a starting point that is achievable for organisations with limited time, staff, or resources, while maintaining the core elements that make the framework effective.

The minimum model is built around four core elements. Each can be introduced incrementally, and each adds value independently even before the full model is in place.

Core element	What it involves	Minimum requirement
Awareness	Staff understand what quiet quitting looks like and why it matters	One team session using Parts I and II of this handbook; all staff can describe the early signs
Check-in routine	Regular, structured moments of contact with young people that make engagement visible	At least one individual check-in per young person per fortnight; brief observation note after each
Escalation clarity	Staff know when and how to involve others	Escalation framework visible in the team space; each staff member can name the Level 1-4 actions
Referral contacts	Relevant internal and external referral contacts are known and accessible	A current referral contact list, reviewed at least once per programme cycle; staff know who to call at each level

This minimum model does not require new systems, significant budget, or restructuring. It asks only for shared awareness, a small routine, a clear framework, and a short contact list. Organisations that achieve these four elements consistently will be well placed to expand their implementation over time.

6.8

Building a Whole-Organisation Culture

Individual practices and structured routines are important, but sustained impact comes from embedding the principles of the STAY framework into the culture of an organisation: the shared values, norms, and expectations that shape how people behave day to day, including when no one is checking.

A whole-organisation culture around engagement and escalation has several recognisable features:

Speaking up is normalised.

Staff and participants feel safe raising concerns early, without fear of judgment or overreaction. The message is consistent: noticing and naming disengagement is a sign of good practice, not interference.

Responsibility is shared.

No individual carries the full weight of monitoring and responding to disengagement. It is understood as a team responsibility, and structural supports are in place to make that distribution practical.

Learning is continuous.

The organisation reflects regularly on how its implementation is working, what is being missed, and how practices can be improved. This includes gathering feedback from young people about their experience.

Young people are partners, not just recipients.

Young people are involved in shaping the conditions that support their own engagement. Their perspectives are sought in programme design, feedback processes, and the review of support structures.

Workers are supported.

The organisation takes seriously the wellbeing of its youth workers, provides regular supervision, and creates space for staff to name when they are struggling with difficult cases or high workloads.

Building this kind of culture takes time and cannot be achieved through a single training session or a revised policy document. It develops through consistent practice, visible leadership, and genuine commitment to the values that underpin the STAY project: that quiet quitting is not a character flaw, that early support matters, and that staying engaged (both for young people and for the workers who support them) depends on having the right conditions in place.

6.9 Using the Risk Scanner in Organisational Practice

The STAY Engagement & Quiet-Quitting Risk Scanner is a digital tool developed as part of this project. It is designed to complement the handbook by offering young people a structured, private way to assess their own engagement and receive personalized next-step guidance. Within an organisational context, the scanner can be integrated into implementation in several practical ways.

At programme intake

Use the scanner as part of an initial participant assessment to establish a baseline engagement profile. This helps youth workers identify early which participants may benefit from additional check-in support.

At regular intervals

Ask participants to complete the scanner every four to six weeks. Changes in scores over time can surface gradual disengagement that might not be visible in day-to-day interactions.

Before 1:1 conversations

Use the scanner as a preparation tool before a scheduled check-in. The personalised PDF report gives both the youth worker and the young person a starting point for discussion that feels structured and non-confrontational.

As a self-referral prompt

Make the scanner available to young people independently, so they can use it when they want to reflect on their own engagement without necessarily disclosing to a youth worker first. This supports autonomy and early help-seeking.

In team review sessions

Use anonymised scanner data (where consent allows) to review overall engagement patterns across a programme cohort. This can help organisations identify systemic factors in disengagement as well as individual ones.

The scanner is available in four languages and is accessible across devices. It is designed to be used alongside the handbook, not as a replacement for human support and conversation.

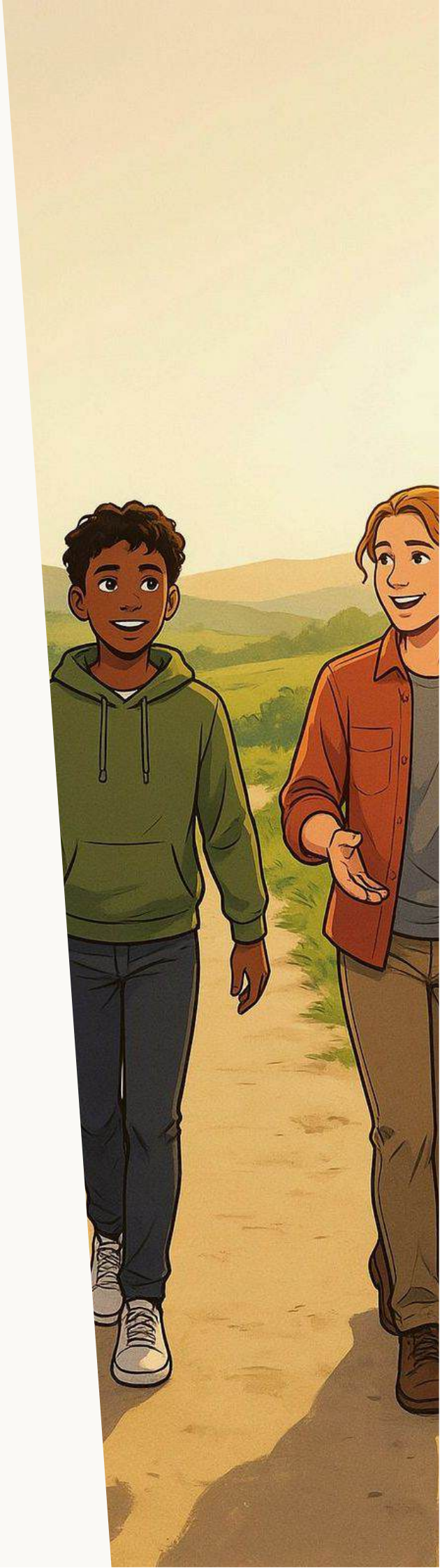
6.10 Closing Words

Implementing the STAY framework effectively is not about achieving a perfect system. It is about creating conditions in which youth workers feel supported and confident, young people feel heard and helped early, and organisations can respond to disengagement consistently and proportionately.

> The practices in this section are designed to be achievable. They build on what most youth work organisations already do, and they ask for sustained attention rather than dramatic change.

> A check-in that happens every week, a team that discusses concerns together, a referral pathway that everyone knows: these small structures, maintained consistently, can change the experience of many young people who would otherwise drift into disengagement without anyone noticing in time.

> That is what the STAY project is for. Not to prevent every form of disengagement, but to ensure that no young person has to disengage in silence for lack of a conversation, a pathway, or a person who noticed early enough to help.



KEY TAKEAWAYS – PARTS V AND VI

Escalation is good practice.

Involving others when situations require additional support is a sign of professional confidence, not failure.

The four-level framework provides structure without rigidity.

Levels describe patterns and appropriate responses, not rigid categories. Context always matters.

Referral is not a handover.

A youth worker's role continues after a referral. Continuity of relationship supports the young person throughout the process.

Simple routines outperform complex systems.

Small, repeatable actions embedded in existing workflows are more effective than comprehensive frameworks that are too burdensome to use in real time.

Hybrid settings require adapted approaches.

The principles stay the same; the methods must account for reduced visibility, harder-to-read signals, and more deliberate communication.

Whole-organisation culture matters.

Sustainable implementation depends on shared values and norms, not just written procedures.

The Risk Scanner is a practical companion tool.

Used alongside check-ins and structured conversations, it supports early identification and personalised next-step guidance for young people.

REFERENCES

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2022). Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.

Eurofound (2024). Youth wellbeing in Europe: Trends and challenges after COVID-19. Publications Office of the European Union.

Galanis, P., Katsiroumpa, A., Vraka, I., Siskou, O., Konstantakopoulou, O., Moisoglou, I., & Gallos, P. (2023). The quiet quitting scale: Development and initial validation. *AIMS Public Health*, 10(4), 828–848.

Gallup (2024). State of the Global Workplace report. Gallup Press.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692–724.

Popaitoon, P. (2022). Meaningful work and Gen Z retention. *Personnel Review*, 51(3), 872–891.

Zhang, Y., & Chin, T. (2024). Job characteristics, meaningful work, and Gen Z intention to stay. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 16(2), 88–107.

STAY

Skills for Thriving, Agency and Youth Engagement

RISI

PANNONIA CONSULTING

PILCROW

Co-funded by the European Union