



# Facilitator's Guide for Implementing Storytelling Rooms

## *A Practical Handbook for Facilitators in the SAFE Project*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. SAFE Project Overview

Project *SAFE: Social Awareness for (War) Experience* creates inclusive spaces where young people affected by war can share their stories, be heard, and find support. Through storytelling and dialogue, SAFE fosters resilience, understanding, and community engagement.

This manual guides facilitators in leading Storytelling Rooms, a key activity that not only helps young people share their experiences but also supports intercultural dialogue, refugee integration, and collaboration with European youth workers dealing with displaced communities. The project also develops recommendations for discussing war and peace with young people, ensuring their voices shape more inclusive and effective youth work across Europe.

By using this manual, facilitators help create safe spaces for healing, connection, and empowerment – because every story matters.

## 1.2. Who is this Guide For?

This guide is intended for facilitators, youth workers, and educators who will implement the SAFE Storytelling Rooms. It provides facilitation techniques, emotional support strategies, and best practices to ensure sessions are meaningful and impactful. It is also a resource for project coordinators and partner organizations integrating storytelling methodologies into their work with refugee youth.

## 1.3. Structure of this Guide

This guide is structured around the key components of the Storytelling Room sessions, including the overarching methodology, the three main phases of the session itself, and concluding considerations for facilitators. The five components are as follows:

1. **SAFE Storytelling Methodology**
2. **Introduction Phase**
3. **Core Storytelling Phase**
4. **Debriefing & Closing Phase**
5. **Additional Facilitator Considerations**

The guide will walk facilitators through each phase, offering practical tools, suggested activities, and techniques for handling sensitive discussions. The goal is to ensure that every participant, regardless of background or comfort level, feels supported in sharing their story in a way that is meaningful to them.

# 2. SAFE Storytelling Room Methodology

## 2.1. Why Storytelling Rooms?

Storytelling Rooms provide structured spaces where youth affected by war, conflict, and displacement can share personal narratives in a safe and respectful environment. Through voluntary participation and active listening, participants foster resilience, belonging, and mutual understanding. While not therapy, Storytelling Rooms promote emotional healing through collective reflection and connection.





*"Our stories are designed to tell us how to act in the world, how to relate to each other. They were designed to make us stronger, more human, more courageous." – James Baldwin*

This guide serves as a practical resource for facilitators leading these sessions, ensuring that storytelling is conducted ethically, inclusively, and with emotional sensitivity. It offers a step-by-step framework for creating an environment where participants feel heard, respected, and in control of their own narratives.

## 2.2. Target Audience of Storytelling Rooms

The primary participants of the Storytelling Rooms are young people (aged 15-29) affected – directly or indirectly – by war and displacement. This includes:

- Youth fleeing Russian war against Ukraine, including both refugees in receiving countries and internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Ukraine;
- Young people living in receiving communities, including both local youth and those who experienced displacement due to other conflicts and have since become part of European host societies.

The sessions are designed to bring together diverse perspectives and experiences. This inclusive setting fosters intercultural dialogue, empathy, and a sense of shared humanity while offering participants a safe and structured space to explore and reframe their personal stories.

## 2.3. Core Objectives of the Storytelling Rooms

### 1. Foster a Safe and Supportive Space for Expression and Connection

Provide a structured, inclusive environment where young people can safely explore and share their personal stories, build trust, and connect with others through mutual understanding.

### 2. Empower Youth to Make Meaning of Their Experiences

Strengthen self-expression, agency, and resilience by equipping participants with storytelling tools that help them navigate and reframe complex themes such as war, displacement, and identity.

### 3. Generate Insight and Innovation for Youth Work in Conflict Contexts

Deepen understanding of youth narratives to inform recommendations, shape effective practices, and contribute to the development of a Youth Toolkit that supports innovative, high-quality youth work across Europe—especially for those affected by war.

## 2.4. Facilitation Team & Data Collection for Toolkit Development

### 2.4.1. Facilitation Setup

To ensure emotional safety, manage group dynamics effectively, and accurately document key insights, each Storytelling Room session should be facilitated by two to three trained facilitators:

- **Lead Facilitator:** responsible for guiding the session, moderating discussions, and ensuring emotional safety. If possible, they should be supported by a **Co-Facilitator** who can help share the workload, and offer individual support to participants as needed, without interrupting the flow of the main process.
- **Note-Taker:** captures anonymized observations, thematic insights, and key moments from the session, ensuring that relevant data is collected for future analysis.





**Group Size:** 8-15 participants per session is ideal to ensure depth of conversation while allowing space for each voice.

**Duration:** 4-6 hours, though this can be adjusted based on the context, available time, group size and dynamics, allowing for either a shorter or longer session as needed. See Annex I for the timeline template.

#### 2.4.2. What Data Should Be Collected and Why

The Storytelling Rooms serve not only as safe spaces for personal expression but also as **research-informed spaces** that shape the development of a Youth Toolkit for youth workers across Europe. To do this meaningfully, facilitators must capture structured yet **qualitative, anonymized insights** from each session. These notes will directly feed into toolkit design, ensuring it reflects the realities, challenges, and needs of displaced youth and their peers in receiving societies.

**Facilitators should collect:**

##### 1. Topics Raised by Young People

- What subjects emerged organically (e.g., loss, identity, hope, trauma, integration)?
- Were there recurring themes across stories?
- Were some issues only hinted at or left unspoken?

##### 2. Moments of Being Heard / Not Heard

- Did participants share situations in which they felt *heard*, understood, or acknowledged while discussing war-related experiences (by peers, adults, institutions)?
- Conversely, did they share experiences of *silencing*, dismissal, or being ignored?

##### 3. Emotional & Social Dynamics

- What visibly resonated across the group?
- Were there notable emotional responses (e.g., relief, resistance, solidarity)?
- Did certain storytelling methods foster more openness or trust?

##### 4. Challenges in Talking About War & Peace

- What barriers (emotional, cultural, linguistic) surfaced?
- What strategies or settings helped participants overcome these challenges?

##### 5. Reflections on Youth Work

- What did participants say they wish youth workers understood better about their experiences?
- Were any successful or failed methods of dialogue mentioned?
- Did participants offer any explicit or implicit recommendations for improving youth work?

#### 2.4.3. Documentation Format, Participant Consent, and Transparency

To ensure comparability across sessions and countries, facilitators and note-takers should use a **shared documentation template (see Annexes II and III)**, including:

- Session date, location, number of participants





- Participant demographics (age range, displacement status – without names or identifiers)
- Key themes, illustrative quotes (anonymized), and emotional tone
- Notes on facilitation methods that worked well (or didn't)

Facilitators must ensure that all data is captured ethically and with full anonymity. No names or personal identifiers should be recorded.

At the start of the session, facilitators should explain clearly and simply why session notes are being taken and reassure participants about how their contributions will be treated. A suggested explanation could be:

*“During our meeting, we will take anonymous notes on the general themes and ideas discussed. We will not record any names, personal details, or specific stories without your explicit permission. Our aim is to better understand how young people affected by war experience themes like peace, belonging, and resilience, and to create recommendations for youth work in Europe. Sharing is entirely voluntary. You can always choose not to answer a question, not to share your story, or to ask us not to include something you said in the final materials. Your safety, privacy, and consent are our priority.”*

Facilitators may also repeat this information visually (on a poster or slide) and in any shared communication spaces (e.g., group chats or handouts) to reinforce understanding.

Consent for participation and note-taking must be ongoing – participants can modify or withdraw their consent at any point during the session.

## 2.5. Sensitivity to Context

Participants may share a national background or war-related experiences, but their individual realities differ widely. These differences – regional origin, trauma exposure, displacement status – must be acknowledged. Assuming a shared war experience can harm trust and inclusion.

### Before the Session

Facilitators are encouraged to prepare in advance by considering questions such as:

- What regions/communities are represented among participants (e.g., frontline, occupied, recently displaced)?
- Have any participants disclosed recent traumatic experiences?
- Could certain topics, symbols, or phrases trigger strong emotional reactions?
- During registration or check-in, facilitators may (optionally) ask participants whether there are specific topics they prefer not to address. This ensures maximum safety and respects the emotional boundaries of each individual story.

### During the Session

- Avoid generalizations like “We all experienced...”
- Validate diverse perspectives; war affects people differently.
- Emphasize voluntariness: no one has to share or explain.





Sample facilitator phrasing: *“You choose what to share. Different stories are okay – even if they contradict each other. There’s no ‘right’ experience here.”*

### Key Reminders

- Everyone has the right to pass or step out.
- No need to compare pain, timelines, or emotions.
- Respect both silence and difference.

## 3. Introduction Phase: Setting the Foundation

The introduction phase is critical for establishing a sense of safety, trust, and openness in the storytelling room. Many participants may feel hesitant or vulnerable about sharing their experiences, so facilitators must carefully create an environment where youth feel comfortable engaging in the process.

### 3.1. Preparing the Space

The physical and emotional atmosphere of the room plays a significant role in how participants engage with the session. Arrange seating in a circle or semi-circle to foster equality and open dialogue, ensure the room is well-lit but not harsh, with good airflow and a comfortable temperature. Soft background music, herbal tea, and small personal touches (such as cushions or plants) can help create a warm atmosphere. Close the door, turn off notifications, and ensure the session remains confidential.

### 3.2. Introducing the Storytelling Process

After the welcoming, facilitators should introduce:

- The purpose of storytelling rooms (a space to explore personal narratives, not a forced sharing exercise).
- The role of the facilitator (to guide and support, not to lead the conversation).
- Session flow (briefly outlining the three phases – Introduction, Core Storytelling, Debriefing, the duration of the session, and when the breaks will take place).
- Storytelling Methods (explaining the different activities participants may engage in (verbal storytelling, art, writing, music, etc.)).
- The note-taking process (a transparent explanation that anonymous notes will be taken on general topics discussed, that no personal details will be recorded, and that sharing is fully voluntary).

### 3.3. Establishing Group Agreements

Before storytelling begins, it is essential to set clear guidelines for respect, confidentiality, and participation. These agreements help create a structured yet flexible space where participants feel empowered to share at their own comfort level.

Facilitators should introduce the following key principles and allow participants to contribute additional rules:

- **Confidentiality** – What is shared in the room stays in the room.
- **No Pressure to Share** – Participants may always choose to pass.
- **Respect for All Stories** – No interruptions, no dismissive remarks.





- **Active Listening** – Show engagement by nodding, maintaining eye contact, or acknowledging others' words.
- **Emotional Awareness** – Everyone processes stories differently; participants should be mindful of their reactions.
- **Phones & Distractions** – Silence mobile devices and focus on the present moment.
- **Right to Step Away** – If someone feels overwhelmed, they may take a break or leave if need be.

Once the group agrees on these principles, facilitators should write them on a visible board or flipchart as a reminder throughout the session. If any of the agreements are breached, you can then always refer to them to remind them of what they agreed on.

### 3.4. Icebreakers & Trust-Building Activities

Since storytelling can be deeply personal, a strong warm-up exercise is essential for building rapport among participants. These activities should be light yet meaningful, gradually easing participants into deeper conversations.

#### Suggested Icebreakers

1. **Step Forward If...** – Participants step forward if they relate to a statement (e.g., "Step forward if you have ever had to start over in a new place"). When conducting this exercise, use a gradual progression of prompts, starting with light-hearted topics and gently moving toward more personal and sensitive ones. Here are some suggestions:
  - Step forward if you prefer mornings over nights (or vice versa).
  - Step forward if you like to dance (even if you're not good at it!).
  - Step forward if you speak more than two languages.
  - Step forward if you've ever felt nervous about speaking in front of a group.
  - Step forward if you have ever had to move to a new place.
  - Step forward if you have ever missed someone deeply.
  - Step forward if you've ever had to adapt to a completely new environment.
  - Step forward if you have ever had to leave a place or situation you loved.
  - Step forward if you've ever had to adapt to a completely new environment.
  - Step forward if you've ever felt conflicted about your identity or where you belong.
  - Step forward if you have ever found comfort in someone else's story.
2. **Story Fragments** – Each person adds a sentence to continue the story before folding the paper to hide previous parts (if desired) and passing it along. This continues until everyone has contributed, and then the final stories are read aloud for a fun and often surprising result.
3. **Movement-Based Icebreaker (Samurai Game)** – A fast-paced movement game to shake off nerves and create a playful atmosphere. Participants form a circle and take on the role of samurais, mimicking quick, exaggerated movements like drawing swords, blocking attacks, or striking dramatic poses. A leader or facilitator calls out commands, and players must react instantly – any hesitation or incorrect movement leads to elimination.





## 4. Core Storytelling Phase: Guiding the Stories

The Core Storytelling Phase gives young people structured, supportive space to share their personal narratives. It encourages deep reflection, active listening, and meaningful exchange, while ensuring emotional safety.

We recommend selecting three out of the four activities below to create a rich and varied storytelling experience. If emotional or time constraints arise, two activities may be selected. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt activities to fit group dynamics and comfort levels. Plan for approximately three hours total, including storytelling, reflection, and breaks.

### 4.1. Activity 1. Life Map (Visual Learners & Reflective Thinkers)

In this activity, participants are asked to create a visual timeline of key moments in their lives, mapping out their personal journey before and after displacement/war.

#### Educational Objectives

- Support participants in visually mapping how conflict, displacement, and other key events shaped their personal trajectories.
- Foster self-awareness around transitions, ruptures, and resilience across time.
- Encourage peer exchange around diverse life paths, reducing assumptions of a shared war experience.

#### Purpose for the Toolkit

- Identify key life transitions linked to war and displacement.
- Map emotional trajectories for dialogue around identity and resilience.
- Develop visual storytelling methods for conflict-affected youth.

**Materials:** Large sheets of paper, colored markers, colored pens and pencils, sticky notes, stickers, and magazines for collage (optional).

#### Instructions:

1. Ask participants to draw a path or river representing their life journey, starting from an early memory up to the present. They can use words, symbols, or drawings to represent key moments. Give the participants sufficient time to finish this exercise (recommended: 15 minutes).
2. Encourage them to include turning points, challenges, moments of joy, and things they have lost or gained along the way. Provide optional prompts to guide their reflection:
  - What were the turning points in your life (e.g., war, displacement, new environment, new job, a relationship)?
  - Can you represent a moment of hope, strength, or fear on your map?
  - What places, people, or objects have been most significant in your journey?
3. After creating their maps, participants explain their journey in small groups of 2 or 3 (recommended: 20 minutes).
4. Reflection in the bigger group where participants share how the experience was for them (recommended: 30-40 minutes). Below are possible debriefing questions:
  - What was it like to map out your story?
  - Were there any patterns or themes that stood out to you?
  - Did you notice any similarities between what you shared within your group?





- What is something that you heard that resonated with you?
5. **Note-taker's task:** During the Life Map activity, listen for key moments where participants describe major life changes, especially related to displacement, conflict, or rebuilding. Capture emotional responses linked to these events (such as grief, hope, fear, or resilience), and note any references to sources of support (like family, peers, youth spaces) or obstacles faced (such as discrimination or isolation). Pay special attention to themes around belonging, identity, and recovery.

#### 4.2. Activity 2. The Soundtrack of My Life (Auditory Learners & Emotionally Expressive Participants)

In this activity, participants associate their personal experiences with music and sounds that hold meaning, using auditory memory as a tool for storytelling.

##### Educational Objectives

- Use sound and music to access and externalize emotional experiences linked to war and peace.
- Strengthen emotional literacy and storytelling through sensory associations.
- Enable reflection on non-verbal coping strategies and cultural memory.

##### Purpose for the Toolkit

- Capture emotional coping strategies through sound associations.
- Explore the role of music in resilience and recovery.
- Expand arts-based methods for trauma-sensitive youth work.

**Materials:** Speakers or headphones (if feasible), paper and pens (to write down lyrics).

##### Instructions:

1. Ask participants to think about their lives as if they had a soundtrack.
2. Have them choose (or describe) songs, sounds, or melodies that represent different periods of their lives. If access to music is limited, they can describe a made-up song that would tell their story. You can guide them using these questions:
  - What song reminds you of home?
  - Is there a sound (e.g., waves, birds, laughter, sirens) that brings back a strong memory?
  - If you had to describe your journey through music, what would it sound like?
  - What song would play during a moment of strength or change in your life?
3. Participants can write a few lines explaining their choices and then share in pairs or small groups (recommended: 15-20 minutes).
4. Reflection within the bigger group (recommended: 30-40 minutes):
  - What was it like to find sounds for these memories?
  - Were there any patterns or themes that stood out to you?
  - Did you notice any similarities between your selections and those of others?
  - What surprised you during this process?
5. Optional deeper reflection questions:
  - How did music or sound help you cope with difficult times?
  - Were there sounds or songs that made you feel less alone, more hopeful, or more connected to others?



- What do these sounds tell us about what young people need during times of conflict and displacement?
6. **Note-taker's task:** During the Soundtrack of My Life activity, listen for how participants describe emotional coping, resilience, and connection through music and sound. Capture references to songs or sounds that symbolize hope, fear, loss, rebuilding, or belonging. Pay attention to mentions of people, spaces, or communities linked to these musical memories, and note any expressions of emotional needs or support systems reflected through sound.

#### 4.3. Activity 3. Object Storytelling (Tactile Learners & Abstract Thinkers)

In this activity, participants use a physical object to symbolize a part of their story, allowing for deeper metaphorical exploration.

##### Educational Objectives

- Use metaphors to enable safe, layered storytelling around conflict experiences.
- Support exploration of values (resilience, fear, hope) through symbolic representation.
- Build trust by inviting participants to share stories without full verbal disclosure.

##### Purpose for the Toolkit

- Develop low-verbal methods for storytelling about conflict.
- Identify how symbolic objects can support dialogue on trauma and identity.
- Contribute to intercultural approaches for inclusive youth work.

**Materials:** A collection of symbolic objects (e.g., stones, keys, scarves, photographs, toys) placed in the center of the room. Participants may also bring personal items if informed beforehand.

##### Instructions:

1. Lay out a variety of objects in the center of the room. Ask each participant to choose one object that speaks to them.
2. Give them time to reflect, then instruct them to share or tell a story and possibly guide them with questions (recommended: 30-40 minutes):
  - How does this object represent your past, present, or future?
  - If this object could talk, what story would it tell?
  - Does it remind you of a person, place, or feeling?
  - How has its meaning changed for you over time?
3. After participants have shared in a group circle, lead a reflection session (recommended: 20-30 minutes):
  - How was it to tell your story through an object?
  - What emotions surfaced during the storytelling?
  - Were there any common themes or patterns among the objects?
4. Optional deeper reflection questions:
  - What stories of resilience, survival, or recovery does your object represent?
  - How has the meaning of this object changed for you over time?
  - If this object could teach youth workers something about supporting young people affected by war, what would it say?





5. **Note-taker's task:** During the Object Storytelling activity, listen for the symbolic meanings participants give to their objects, especially related to conflict, loss, resilience, and rebuilding. Note how participants connect their objects to sources of hope, memory, belonging, or survival. Pay attention to any mentions of community, support networks, or the absence of support.

#### 4.4. Activity 4. Unfolding Stories (Verbal & Reflective Thinkers)

This activity helps participants explore personal and collective meanings behind powerful words related to their experiences, encouraging deep reflection and storytelling.

##### Educational Objectives

- Reflect on key social and emotional concepts (e.g., justice, home, belonging).
- Deepen understanding of how youth define and relate to peace/conflict through language.
- Encourage connection through shared and divergent meanings.

##### Purpose for the Toolkit

- Identify emotionally resonant or sensitive concepts for conflict-affected youth.
- Map language-based entry points for dialogue and reflection.
- Develop vocabulary tools for inclusive discussions on war and peace.

**Materials:** A bowl or box filled with folded slips of paper, each containing a word (e.g., peace, home, belonging, welcoming, safety, journey, hope, loss, resilience, future, strength). If you collect expectations during the introduction, you can use this opportunity to add the topics the participants are expecting to discuss. Paper and pens (optional for those who prefer writing before speaking).

##### Instructions:

1. Each participant picks a folded paper from the bowl without looking.
2. They unfold it and take a moment to reflect on what this word means to them personally.
3. Start a guided discussion (recommended: 30-40 minutes). While participants are unfolding their personal stories around their chosen words, you can use questions like:
  - When was a time in your life when this word felt especially significant?
  - Does this word remind you of a specific place, person, or moment?
  - Has the meaning of this word changed for you over time, especially through conflict, displacement, or rebuilding?
  - What emotions come up when you think about this word today?
4. After the group finishes sharing their individual stories, guide a brief reflection focused on the experience of the exercise itself (recommended: 20-30 minutes):
  - How was it for you to explore such personal meanings through single words?
  - Were there any words that brought unexpected emotions or memories?
  - Did you notice patterns in how different people related to similar words?
  - Were there words that were particularly easy or particularly hard to talk about? Why do you think that was?
5. **Note-taker's task:** During the Unfolding Stories activity, note-takers should listen for how participants define and emotionally relate to concepts like peace, home, belonging, resilience, and justice. They should capture shifts in meaning over time, and





note the emotional weight attached to certain words. It is important to observe which words seem generative, painful, or difficult for participants, and any group patterns in how meanings are constructed or challenged.

## 5. Debriefing & Closing Phase: Reflection & Emotional Grounding

The debriefing phase is just as important as the storytelling itself. This is the time to help participants process their experiences, reflect on key takeaways, and transition back to a grounded emotional state.

### 5.1. Grounding & Emotional Regulation Techniques

Since storytelling can evoke strong emotions, facilitators must help decompress and ground themselves before leaving the session.

After completing the storytelling activities, facilitators guide the group through a structured closure that fulfills two goals: (1) collecting insights to improve youth work practice, and (2) wrapping up the session emotionally.

#### Step 1. Reflection Toward Youth Work Practice

Explain to participants that their experiences and reflections can help improve how youth workers, educators, and peers support young people affected by war, displacement, and integration. Suggested guiding questions:

- In the stories we shared today, when did people feel heard, understood, or supported?
- When did people feel silenced, dismissed, or isolated?
- What made spaces or conversations feel safe or unsafe?
- What support, skills, or behaviors from adults or peers helped – or could have helped – in these experiences?
- What advice would you give to youth workers or educators who work with young people affected by conflict?

**Facilitators note:** Encourage participants to be specific while respecting their comfort levels. Remind them that their insights will help shape future youth work practices.

**Note-taker's task:** Note-takers must capture key themes, illustrative quotes, and recommendations shared during this phase. These reflections are critical inputs for the SAFE project's final toolkit.

#### Step 2. Emotional Closing of the Session

After the structured reflection, offer the group a moment for emotional closure. Participants should be invited to share a word, a feeling, or simply sit together in silent acknowledgment. Suggested prompts:

- What are you taking away from today?
- Is there a word, a gesture, or an image you want to leave with?
- Anything you would like to say to the group or to yourself as we close?

#### Optional Anonymous Feedback



Facilitators may also provide an opportunity for participants to leave anonymous feedback if they prefer not to share verbally. It can be either a physical feedback box for written notes, or a digital anonymous feedback form shared after the session.

End the session by thanking participants for their courage, openness, and contributions, and by reminding them of available support resources.

*"Thank you for being part of this space today. Your stories, your presence, and your reflections are valuable. Please take care of yourselves and remember that support is available if you need it."*

## 5.2. Emotional Support & Follow-Up

Some participants may need additional support after the session. Facilitators should:

- Provide access to mental health resources if a participant experiences emotional distress.
- Encourage peer support by reminding participants they are not alone.
- Offer a follow-up check-in if appropriate, especially for individuals who shared particularly intense stories.

If a participant seems highly affected by the session, facilitators should:

- Gently check in with them one-on-one after the session.
- Reassure them that their emotions are valid.
- Encourage grounding exercises before they leave.

## 6. Additional Facilitator Considerations

### 6.1. Avoiding “Trauma Tourism”

- Never open a heavy without addressing or providing sufficient mental support
- Never pressure participants to share painful details.
- Ensure stories are respected and not just consumed as "tragic narratives."
- Keep the focus on agency and resilience, not just suffering.

**Be mindful of trauma triggers** (e.g., war sounds, graphic memories). If someone becomes emotional:

- Offer a break or grounding technique.
- Validate and acknowledge their emotions and feelings: “It’s okay to feel this way.” Or “I hear that this memory is difficult for you. Would you like to pause or continue?”
- Allow others to support if comfortable.
- Use physical de-escalation techniques:
  - Deep breathing exercises.
  - Grounding objects (a stone, fabric, or soft item to hold).

### 6.2. Emotional Safety and Crisis Response

Emotional safety is central to the success of Storytelling Rooms. Discussions about war, displacement, and personal identity can surface strong emotions, and participants must feel supported in managing difficult feelings.



Facilitators must be prepared to recognize emotional distress, respond with sensitivity, and prioritize the well-being of each participant. It is equally important to ensure that facilitators themselves feel equipped and supported in these situations.

### Preparation Before the Session

- Agree in advance which facilitator will take the lead if a participant needs individual support.
- Identify a nearby private area where participants can go if they need to calm down.
- Prepare a printed or digital list of crisis support services, such as free hotlines or mental health resources, in your country or region.
- Make it explicit during the opening that sharing is voluntary, and that participants have the right to step out at any time if they feel overwhelmed.

### Recognizing and Handling Emotional Distress

If a participant becomes visibly upset, overwhelmed, or shows signs of a panic attack (e.g., rapid breathing, shaking, crying, sudden withdrawal), facilitators should:

1. Move towards the participant gently and quietly, respecting their personal space.
2. Ask softly if they would like to move to a quiet space or prefer to stay.
3. If the participant is struggling to calm down, you can gently suggest breathing together (slow inhales and exhales), focusing on physical sensations (feet on the floor, feeling the texture of a chair), or identifying objects in the room ("Can you name three things you can see right now?").
4. Do not pressure the participant to talk. Being quietly present can be more supportive than verbal reassurance.
5. The other facilitator(s) should continue guiding the group without drawing attention to the situation.

### Follow-up Care

- **Individual Check-In:** After the session or once the participant feels better, check in privately. Respect their choice if they do not want to discuss the incident.
- **Group Check-In:** Without mentioning individuals, normalize emotional reactions ("It's okay if today brought up strong feelings."). Remind the group about available support resources.
- In the Facilitator Reflection Sheet, briefly note (without names) if a crisis occurred, what was observed, triggers, how the situation was handled, and any follow-up steps suggested.

### Key Principles to Remember

- **Voluntariness:** Participants control what, when, and how much they share.
- **Anonymity:** Never discuss emotional incidents with others outside the facilitation team.
- **No Comparison of Pain:** Avoid statements that minimize or compare suffering ("It could have been worse..." etc.).
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Prioritize safety, empowerment, and choice at every moment.





### 6.3. Facilitator Self-Care & Boundaries

- **Know your limits** – Facilitating these conversations can be emotionally draining. Take breaks and check in with yourself.
- **You are not a therapist** – Offer support, but do not take on the role of a counselor. If needed, refer participants to appropriate resources.
- **Take a step back if triggered** – If a topic is personally challenging, have a co-facilitator take over.

*"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." – Maya Angelou*





## ANNEX I: STORYTELLING ROOM TIMELINE TEMPLATE

This template provides a general outline for the structure and duration of a Storytelling Room session. Facilitators are encouraged to adjust the timing as needed based on the context, available time, size and dynamics of the group.

Time	Duration	What	Who leads	Notes
<b>PREPARATIONS</b>				
	30-60 min	Room setup and preparation (arrange chairs, materials, printouts), review of roles and session objectives		
<b>INTRODUCTION PHASE</b>				
	15 min	Welcoming participants, introduction to the storytelling process, and session overview		
	10 min	Group agreements (rules for participation, confidentiality, etc.)		
	15-30 min	Ice-breaking activities		
<b>CORE STORYTELLING PHASE</b>				
	60-75 min	Activity 1		
	10 min	SHORT BREAK (and/or after Activity 2)		
	60-75 min	Activity 2		
	60-75 min	Activity 3		
<b>DEBRIEFING PHASE</b>				
	15 min	Emotional regulation and grounding		
	30-45 min	Group reflection and closing feedback		
<b>POST-SESSION REFLECTION</b>				
	15-30 min	Facilitators and note-taker reflection		





## ANNEX II: NOTE-TAKING FORM

To be used by note-takers during or directly after the session. Focus on participants' shared stories and insights that reflect identity, emotional experience, support, resilience, and implications for youth work. All notes must remain anonymous.

### SESSION DETAILS

- **Date:**
- **Location:**
- **Country:**
- **Facilitator(s):**
- **Note-Taker:**
- **Number of Participants:**
- **Participant Profile:**
  - Age range:
  - Gender balance:
  - Background:
    - Ukrainian IDPs
    - Ukrainian protection seekers
    - Youth from the host community
    - Youth displaced from other conflicts
    - Others (specify):

### PART I. ACTIVITY NOTES

#### Activity 1. Life Map

*Focus: key life events, emotions, and support/barriers shared in personal journeys.*

Significant life transitions related to war/displacement and emotional responses (e.g., fear, resilience, confusion):

Stories of being supported or excluded – by people, systems, or institutions – at key moments:

Expressions of identity, belonging, or recovery, including moments of silence, rupture, or reconnection:





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### Activity 2. Soundtrack of My Life

*Focus: emotional coping through sound, symbolic meanings, and community links.*

Songs/sounds connected to moments of loss, hope, or strength — and why they mattered:
Music as connection: who/what was remembered or held close through sound (e.g., home, friend, language):
Reflections on emotional needs, barriers, or absence of support voiced through musical memories:

### Activity 3. Object Storytelling

*Focus: symbolic expressions of experience, emotion, and survival.*

What participants' objects represented about their journey — especially around conflict, identity, or transformation:
Implicit or explicit stories of being seen, helped, ignored, or hurt – as told through the object:





Themes of safety, community, or disconnection that we reflected in the meaning of the object:

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#### Activity 4. Unfolding Stories

*Focus: personal meanings of key concepts like home, peace, justice – and how they evolved.*

Words that triggered strong personal memories or emotional reactions (grief, joy, anger, healing):

--

Narratives of inclusion or exclusion, of emotional turning points linked to these concepts:

--

Changes in meaning over time (e.g., what "home" or "belonging" meant before and after displacement):

--

#### PART II. DEBRIEFING INSIGHTS

*Focus: practical reflections for improving youth work with war-affected young people.*

Moments or stories that illustrated when young people felt supported – or deeply unsupported – and by whom:

--

What made people feel emotionally or physically safe/unsafe in past experiences (schools, camps, families, peers):

--





Advice, wishes, or demands for youth workers, educators, or institutions working with youth like them (quotes welcome):





## ANNEX III: FACILITATOR REFLECTION SHEET

To be filled out by the facilitator(s) shortly after the session. Focus on what stood out, what was difficult, and what needs to be improved. These notes inform the SAFE toolkit and help strengthen future sessions and facilitator support.

### SESSION DETAILS

- **Date:**
- **Location:**
- **Country:**
- **Facilitator(s):**

### REFLECTION NOTES

#### 1. Session Highlights:

What stood out? A key moment, emotional shift, or something that surprised you about the group?

#### 2. Group Dynamics & Emotional Climate:

How did the group respond overall? Any emotional highs/lows, trust-building, hesitations?

#### 3. Participant Needs or Insights for Youth Work:

Did participants express (explicitly or implicitly) anything they need from youth workers, peers, or society? Any gaps in support revealed through the stories?

#### 4. Challenges or Ethical Dilemmas Faced:

Moments that were difficult to handle, personally or professionally. How did you respond?





**5. Support for You as a Facilitator:**

What would you need to improve future sessions or feel more resourced? (e.g., training, co-facilitation, emotional debrief, tools...)

**6. Recommendations for the Toolkit:**

Insights or suggestions that should be included in the final SAFE toolkit – from methodology to youth needs.

