2nd edition!

A LIFE of CHOICES...

empowering youth enriching communities
foróige

Youth Diversion Projects' Manual

A Resource for Facilitators

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EUCPN Conference, Lisbon
30th September 2026

Irish Context

- Detention is the last resort (Children Act 2001)
- Age of Criminal Responsibility 12 (10 in exceptional circumstances)
- Garda Diversion Programme (Irish Police Force)
  - Accept Responsibility
  - Agree to Caution and Supervision
- Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs)
  - Community based crime prevention initiatives to divert young people from offending or reoffending

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Youth Diversion Project: Ireland's National Support Network

This infographic details the nationwide network of Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) managed by the Department of Justice. With 96 active projects, the network is co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund+ (2021-2027) to provide intervention services across the State.

NETWORK SCALE & FUNDING

96
Total Active Projects

The network consists of **92 standard YDPs** and **4 Targeted YDPs** nationwide.

Irish Government
European Social Fund+

European & State Co-funding

Funded by the Irish Government and the ESF+ Programme 2021-2027.

National Coverage

Projects span from Donegal and Sligo to Kerry and Wexford.

REGIONAL HUBS & CONCENTRATIONS

30 Dublin Projects

The capital holds the highest density of YDPs across various postal districts.

8 Projects in Limerick & Cork City

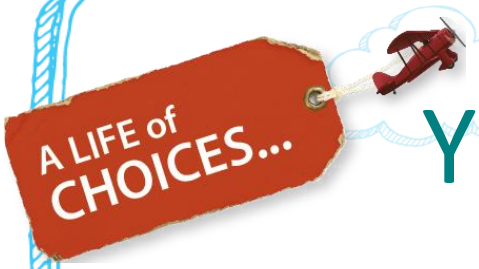
Dedicated clusters include 5 projects in Limerick and 3 in Cork City.

DIVERSE LOCAL REACH

Includes specialized projects like Greentown, Janus Justice, and various county-specific initiatives.

Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

Gemini Notebook



Youth Crime in Ireland

- 430,000 young people 12 and 17 years
- 7,843 young people committed offences (1.8%)
- 15,813 offences
- 20% reduction since 2018 (9,842)
- 74% male and 26% female
- 71% one offence, 7% 4 to 9, 3% 10+ referrals
- Theft and related offences, Public Order, and Traffic offences accounted for over 56% of offences

Annual Report of the Committee Appointed to Monitor the Effectiveness of the Diversion Programme (2023)

Aim of A Life of Choices

A Life of Choices is a resource for YDPs which enables facilitators to explore crime and offending behaviour with young people with the aim of equipping participants with the knowledge and skills to engage in pro-social behaviour and ultimately reduce their risk of offending

Background

- Alignment of practice with offence related issues
- Developed and piloted with 10 YDPs
- Supported by Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána
- Oversight from policy, practice and academics
- Published in 2012, Second Edition 2016
- Implementation evaluation by University of Galway
- Awarded Irish Youth Justice Accreditation 2025
- EUCPN Knowledge Centre inclusion 2026

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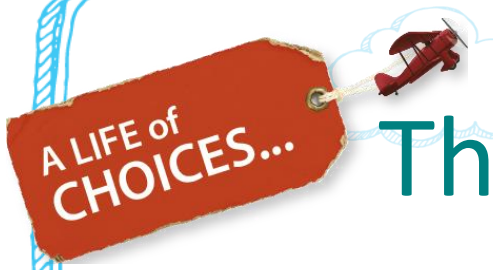
Target Group

- Young people aged 12 to 17
- Moderate to high risk of offending (YLS/CMI 2.0)
- General Offending
- Most prevalent youth crimes in Ireland
- Addressing the underlying causes of offending
- Potential impact on all types of offences

Overview

1
SECTION 1
Introduction & Background
2
SECTION 2
Assessments
3
SECTION 3
Core Programme Content
4
SECTION 4
Elective Programme Content
5
SECTION 5
Information Sheets
6
SECTION 6
Irish Law
7
SECTION 7
A Life of Choices – Board Game
8
SECTION 8
Appendices & References



Theoretical Underpinning

- Youth Offending
  - RATIONAL CHOICE
  - ROUTINE ACTIVITIES
- Structure
  - RISK NEED RESPONSIVITY
  - KOLBES LEARNING CYCLE
  - SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY
- Facilitator Training
  - EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING,
  - WHAT WORKS LITERATURE
- Content
  - COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL PRINCIPLES
  - TRANSTHEORETICAL MODEL
  - MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES
  - TOPIC SPECIFIC RESEARCH LITERATURE E.G. THE BRAIN AND MINDFULNESS ETC.
  - WHAT WORKS LITERATURE

Youth Offending

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

Offenders make decisions about whether to commit crime based on weighing up the advantages and disadvantages

Youth Offending

ROUTINE ACTIVITIES THEORY

For a crime to occur:

- A motivated offender
- A suitable target
- Lack of capable guardians

Regards crime as the norm and dependant on the opportunities available

Structure of Programme

RISK, NEED, RESPONSIVITY

- Level of intensity of intervention based on the level of risk
- Interventions target criminogenic needs
- Interventions responsive to learning needs/circumstances of individual

Structure of Programme

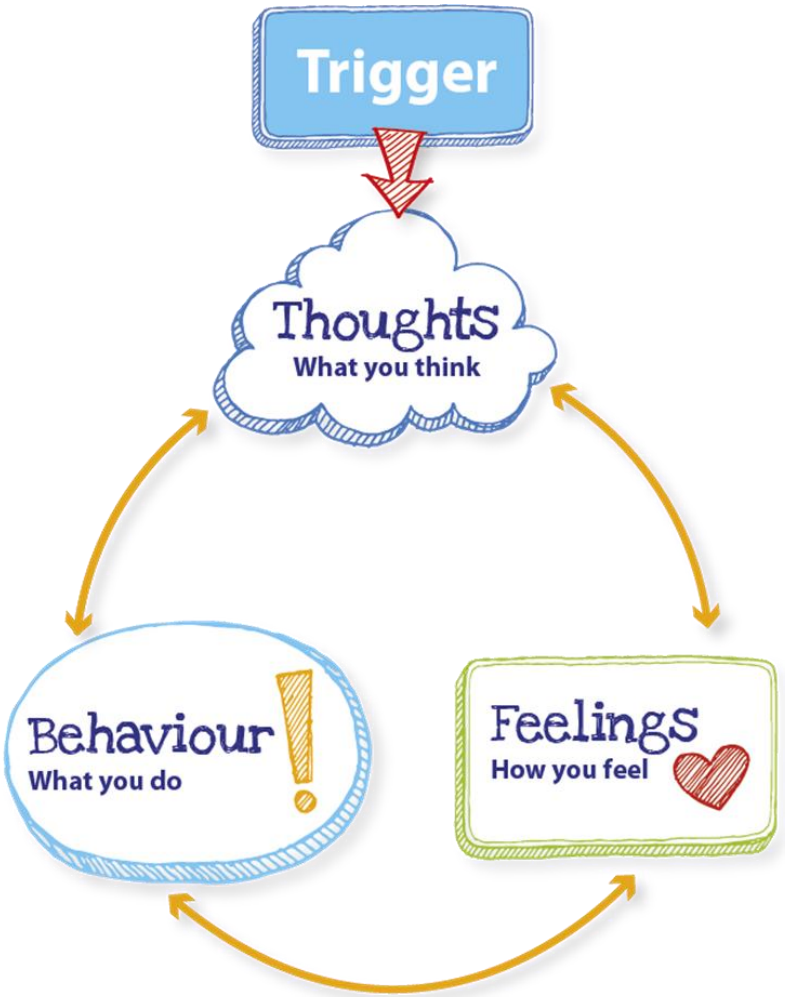
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

All activities incorporate Kolb's learning cycle in the process for reflection and application of learning

Contents

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THEORY

Thoughts, feelings, actions and physiology are all interconnected



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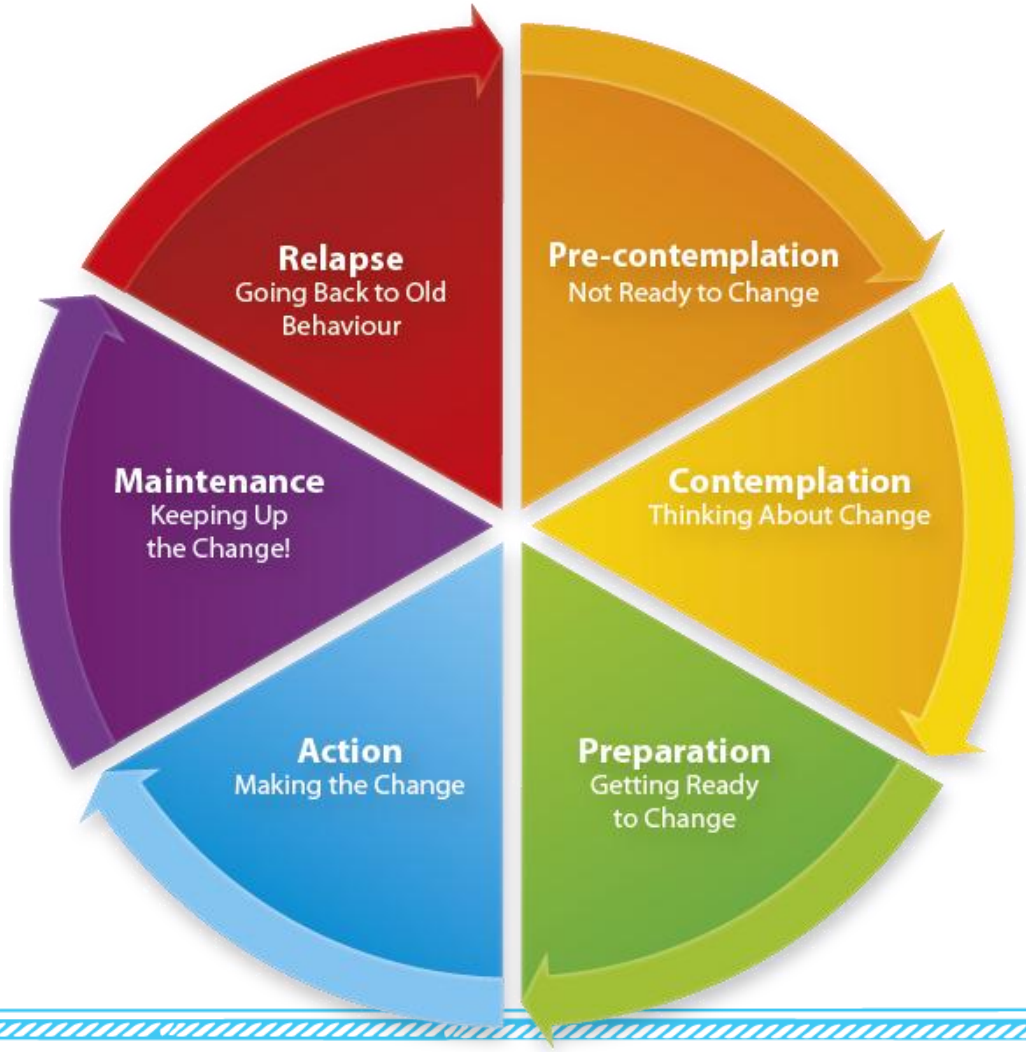
Transtheoretical Model



Facilitator Training

DAY 1

- Introduction & background
- Theoretical underpinning
- 11.20 Tea/coffee
- Use of the manual
- Activities
- 13.00 Lunch
- 15.30 Tea/coffee
- 17.00 Finish

DAY 2

- 10.00 Start
- Activities
- 11.15 Tea/coffee
- 13.00 Lunch
- Tips for using ALOC
- 17.00 Fir

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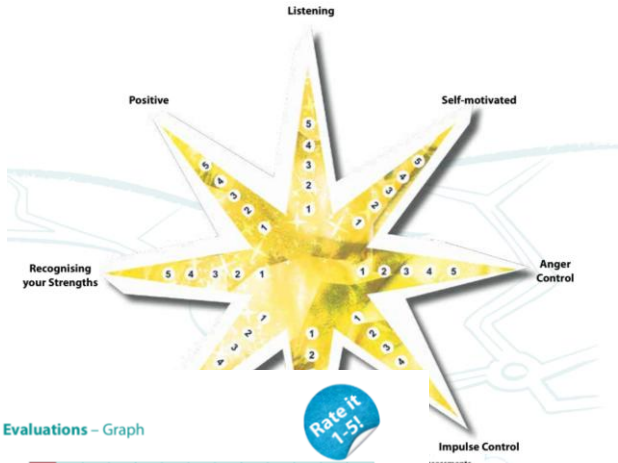
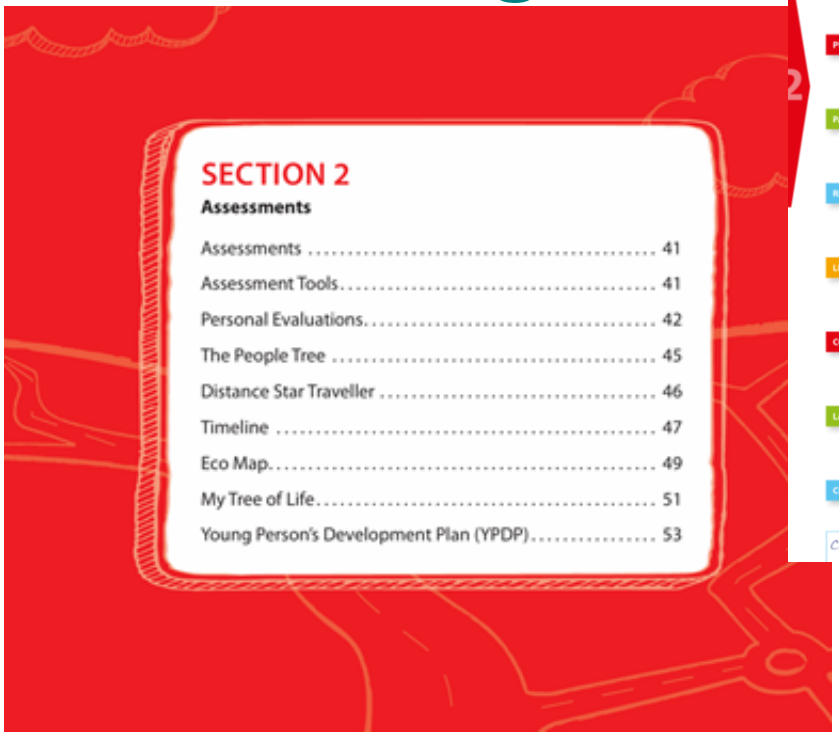
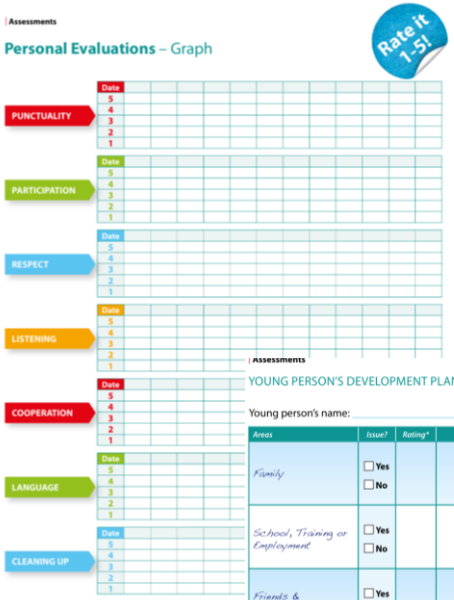
Planning and Capturing Progress







Layout

MODULES

- Introduction
- Learning outcomes
- Activities
- Mindfulness Activity
- Additional Activities

SESSIONS

- Purpose
- Outcomes
- Materials
- Time
- Method
- Processing

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A Life of Choices Manual Framework

Core Modules

- Social Skills
- Communication and Relationships
- Peer Influence
- Anger Management
- Problem Solving
- Conflict Resolution
- Understanding Offending Behaviour
- Values
- Decision Making
- Motivation to Change
- Victim Empathy
- Impulsivity Control

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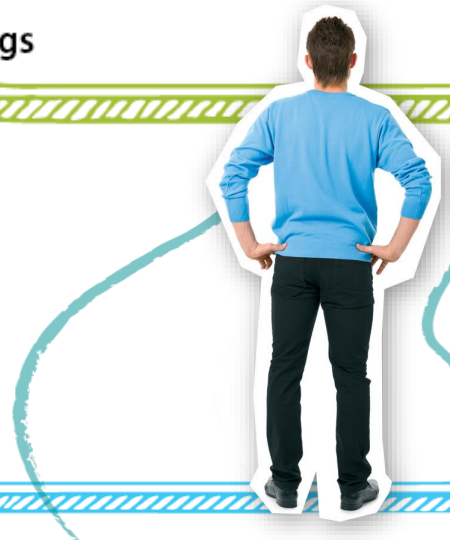
A Life of Choices Manual Framework

Elective Modules

- School Attachment and Attainment
- Understanding Public Order
- Understanding Property Damage
- Understanding Trespassing and Burglary
- Anger Management
- The Impact of Drug Related Crime
- The Impact of Racism and Discrimination
- Understanding Gangs
- Understanding Theft
- The Impact of Harming Others
- Road Safety
- Understanding Weapons and the Law
- Employment Readiness
- Civic Engagement
- My Offending Behaviour
- Role Models and Motivation



Programme Implementation

- 450+ Youth Justice Workers trained
- "Commonly used by YDP's" Research Matters, (2023)
- 53% YJWs daily use of formal programmes such as ALOC
- YDP Annual Plans ALOC named under:
  - Leisure and Recreation
  - Substance Use
  - Attitudes and Orientation ☆
  - Personality and Behaviour ☆
  - Peer Relations ☆
  - Prior/Current Offences ☆
- Employment/Education activities correspond with module contents
- Fidelity to the programme- 43% full fidelity, 43% minor adaptations Brady & Canavan (2016)

☆ Most commonly cited intervention

Programme Evaluation

- 100% Strongly Agree/Agree- Need for Programme
- 100% Strongly Agree/Agree- Adequate Training
- 94% Strongly Agree/Agree Valuable Resource
- Core Modules: 64% All, 36% Some
- Electives: 57% All or Some

Brady & Canavan (2016) University of Galway

Programme Evaluation

STAFF

- Reflect on the factors that influence their behaviour (peers and thought processes)
- Awareness of their emotions and how to deal with them
- Manage anger
- Deal with conflict
- Develop communication skills, including listening
- Build self efficacy (choices)

YOUNG PEOPLE

- Helping them to realise that they have choices
- Managing anger
- Problem-solving
- Helping with family problems
- Understanding who their real friends are
- Helping them to keep out of trouble
- Getting on better with the community.

Brady & Canavan (2016)

Programme Evaluation

- It helps us ‘to know what we should or shouldn’t’ do’
- ‘to stay out of trouble and keep your mind off things’
- …hanging around with older boys in their estate and they ‘get pushed into things’. They said ALOC helps with this, as it ‘helps us to realise who our real friends are’
- It tells you ‘how to stay out of trouble and they tell you what sort of thing to do, and it’s just good advice’
- ‘It keeps you cool and helps you control your anger and solve your problems’
- ALOC was helpful in ‘teaching us to control our anger and all that’
- ‘It helps with your choices…Like not getting into trouble that much. I used to get in trouble a lot, now I don’t…I just liked getting in trouble when I was young. I wasn’t thinking about [it]; I got a court appearance a few times. I thought I wouldn’t change but I did’

Outcomes

- Reduction in (almost) all dynamic risk factors
- Youth Justice Workers report reductions in:
  - Public order
  - Criminal Damage
  - Assault Minor
  - Theft from Shop
- Challenging

Research Matters (2023)

Future Developments

- 3rd Edition
  - Contemporary research, policy and legislation
  - New Modules for emerging needs
- Complementary Resources
  - Companion Guide for Individual work
  - Adaptations for 8 to 11 years
- Quality Assurance
  - Programme fidelity
- Research
  - Implementation
  - Outcomes
  - Recidivism

Thank You!

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