

ENCOURAGING ‘SISU’ IN YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

What is Sisu?

Sisu is a Finnish concept describing determination, resilience and inner strength during difficult situations. It involves continuing forward despite challenges, uncertainty or fear. Unlike basic resilience, sisu focuses on courage and perseverance when situations feel overwhelming (Lahti, 2019). Within Youth Work practice, encouraging sisu can help young people build confidence, emotional wellbeing and positive coping strategies.

Why is Sisu Important in Youth Work?

Young people may experience:

- Anxiety and stress
- Family difficulties
- Social exclusion
- Low self-esteem
- Educational pressures
- Mental health challenges

Youth workers can support young people by helping them recognise their strengths and develop the confidence to overcome setbacks.

Benefits of Encouraging Sisu

- ✓ Increased confidence
- ✓ Emotional resilience
- ✓ Better problem-solving skills
- ✓ Positive relationships
- ✓ Improved perseverance
- ✓ Stronger sense of identity and belonging



Strategies to Encourage Sisu in Practice

1. Build Trusting Relationships

Positive and supportive relationships are central to Youth Work. Young people are more likely to develop resilience when they feel respected, listened to and emotionally safe.

Youth Work Approaches:

- Active listening
- Consistency and reliability
- Non-judgemental communication
- Safe spaces for discussion

2. Encourage Meaningful Challenges

Providing opportunities for manageable risk-taking helps young people develop confidence and perseverance.

Examples:

- Outdoor education
- Team projects
- Leadership activities
- Community volunteering
- Experiencing success after difficulty strengthens self-belief and emotional endurance.

3. Promote Reflection and Self-Awareness

Reflection allows young people to recognise how they overcame challenges and what coping strategies helped them succeed.

Strategies:

- Journaling
- Group discussions
- Creative activities
- Goal-setting exercises

4. Model Resilience as a Youth Worker

Youth workers influence behaviour through role modelling. Demonstrating calmness, persistence and positive coping strategies can encourage young people to respond positively to adversity.

5. Develop Collective Sisu

Resilience can be strengthened through peer support and community belonging.

Group Activities:

- Peer mentoring
- Team-building activities
- Restorative practice
- Collaborative projects

Working together helps young people feel supported and less isolated.

Encouraging sisu within Youth Work practice can empower young people to face challenges with courage, resilience and determination. Through supportive relationships, reflective practice and meaningful experiences, youth workers can help young people build lifelong emotional strength and confidence.



References

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