

# Youth Engagement Survey

Manual and Guide

Updated March 2022



## Introduction

The **Youth Engagement Survey (YES)** asks young people to describe the **thoughts and feelings** they experienced while participating in provision, as a measure of mental engagement. This is important because young people’s mental engagement with the provision is expected to promote growth in socio-emotional skills. The YES should be completed regularly by young people at the end of a provision session. This manual includes the following section to support successful implementation and understanding of the YES:

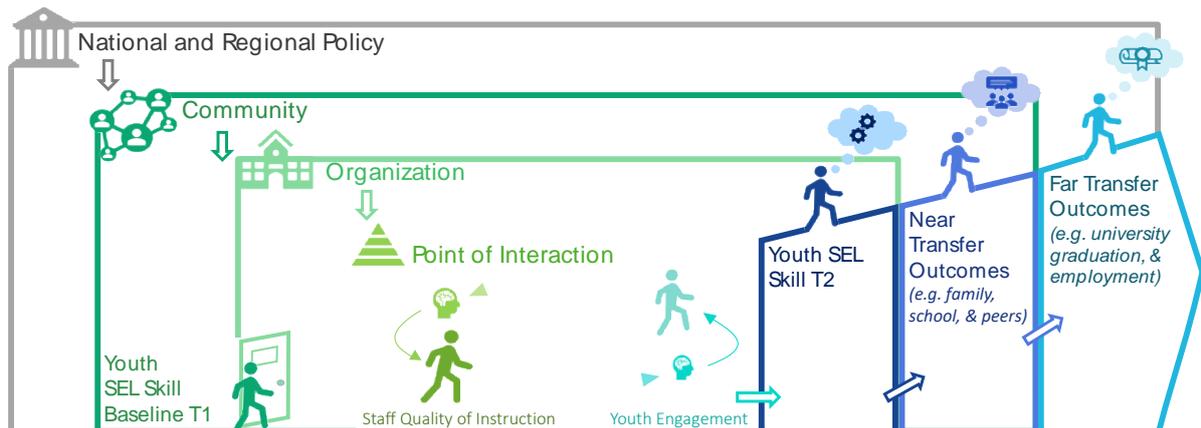
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## Theory of Change

The user guide is based on the Outcomes Framework 2.1, which sets out how youth provision contributes to improvements in outcomes for young people. The Outcomes Framework 2.1 includes a theory of change that details how quality youth provision can lead to socio-emotional development for young people. In summary of Figure 1:

- High-quality staff practices and content offered at the point of interaction, where staff and young people meet during provision, are likely to lead to higher levels of youth engagement during each session or interaction.
- Young people bring with them a set of experiences and beliefs about themselves and the world around them, shaped by the contexts in which they are living and learning. This affects how young people engage with youth provision.
- Over time and multiple interactions, the combination of high-quality staff practices and young people's engagement at the point of interaction promotes the growth of socio-emotional skills.
- With sufficient participation in, and intensity of exposure to, high-quality settings, the effects of socio-emotional skill growth will transfer to other settings.
- This includes the 'near transfer' of socio-emotional skills to family, school, and peers and the 'far transfer' of socio-emotional skills to subsequent life course events or experiences, such as early adulthood health, education, and employment. Young people continue to further apply and grow their socio-emotional skills in these settings.
- Improvement in socio-emotional skills is linked to longer-term impacts including an improved ability to cope with the transition into adulthood, alongside long-term improvements in mental and physical health, educational attainment, sustainable employment, finances, secure housing, positive relationships and personal safety.

**Figure 1: Theory of Change**



## About the YES

The Youth Engagement Survey (YES)<sup>1</sup> is a self-report survey, completed by young people, that is used to assess *mental engagement* (e.g., enjoyment, inclusion, attention, voice) during provision. Mental engagement refers to the *conscious thoughts* and *feelings* that result from the interactions between the events occurring within provision and young people's mental skills (i.e., their schemas, beliefs, and awareness). Thoughts and feelings of enjoyment, inclusion, attention, and voice indicate active mental engagement that is expected to promote SEL skill growth. Conversely, lack of mental engagement is expected to prevent SEL skill growth. YES scores tend to reflect closely the quality of provision, so these scores can be an especially efficient way to assess how well staff understand the socio-emotional skills of participating young people and adjust their practices to 'meet young people where they are at'

The items included on the YES are very similar or identical to widely used items on other instruments designed to measure youth engagement (e.g., Ramey et al., 2015; Shernoff et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2009). However, the YES includes engagement items pertaining only to *mental* engagement, or what are typically referred to on traditional engagement measures as "cognitive" and "emotional" engagement.

### Validity

Although detailed psychometric information about the criterion validity (e.g., the ability to predict young people's socio-emotional skill growth) and reliability of the current version of the YES is pending, given the very close alignment between our conceptual definition of mental engagement and the item content on the YES, the YES can be viewed as highly face valid measure of young people's mental engagement during provision. In addition, given our experience with this and similar mental engagement measures, the YES total score can also be described as sufficiently reliable; that is, alpha coefficients of reliability of the total score for these kinds of measures generally exceed 0.70. However, it is also common to calculate and use only sub-scale scores (e.g., Hansen & Larson, 2005), which generally have higher alpha coefficients of reliability than the total score. In two samples of mostly teenage young people who have used the YES, alpha coefficients of reliability were .66 (using standardised items that were recoded to three response scale values [i.e., 1 = 0, 2-3 = 1, 4-5 = 2];  $n = 398$ ) and .72 (using standardised items on the original five-point response scale values;  $n = 215$ ) for the YES total scores.

### Analysis

Data collected with the YES measurement tool can be entered into the Centre for Youth Impact's Data Portal. This will enable you to view change for individuals, cohorts and the results for your whole organisation. After calculating the YES total score, this information can be used to inform decisions about future training decisions or provision planning (e.g., organizations serving high percentages of young people who score very low on the YES total score may decide to focus more closely on ways of conducting provision activities that young people will find more interesting). If the YES is also used as a follow-up measure, then the YES total scores can be used to assess changes in mental engagement at the point of interaction (e.g., by comparing YES total scores from a baseline assessment to YES total scores from a follow-up assessment).

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<sup>1</sup> The YES is also known as the Youth Report of Point-of-Service Engagement (YRPE); for more information, see: <https://www.qturngroup.com/>

## Summary of Items

The YES includes 11 core items and 2 additional questions about the young people and their attendance. The response scale for items 3-13 is: 1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Occasionally 4 = Most of the time 5 = All of the time.

Items 1 and 2, are useful for understanding important factors that may help you to interpret your findings. However, if you are already collecting this information about young people as part of your monitoring data and are able to link it to the questionnaire responses, you do not need to include these two questions.

1. How old are you?
2. How many hours do you attend provision in a typical week?
3. I felt accepted by the adult working with me (and other people who were involved).
4. I felt excluded or disrespected by the adult working with me (or other people who were involved). (R)
5. I felt like the things we did and talked about were interesting.
6. It was hard for me to concentrate. (R)
7. I enjoyed what I was doing.
8. I disliked what I was doing. (R)
9. It felt challenging but not overwhelming.
10. I felt stressed out by the things we did and talked about (or other things that were happening). (R)
11. I felt like my ideas and contributions were heard and respected.
12. I felt like there were no opportunities to contribute or offer my opinions. (R)
13. Please use the space below to tell us anything else you'd like us to know about your experiences in this program:

## How and When to Use

Young people should complete the YES immediately after a provision session. If you want to understand the relations between the quality of provision and young people's engagement, it is best to have young people complete the YES on the same day that the session was observed and rated for quality (using the PQA). It may also be useful to collect mental engagement data using the YES at multiple time points (e.g., for provision planning or evaluation purposes), but there is no requirement for using it as either a baseline assessment or a pre- and post-provision assessment to estimate changes in mental engagement. Note, in particular, that the YES is *not* a measure of socio-emotional skills and should not be used to assess socio-emotional skill change. With some assistance (e.g., having a staff person read and discuss each question with each child), children as young as 6 years old can use the YES, but we recommend using the YES with young people ages 10 and older. We also recommend encouraging all young people to ask questions about any words or concepts about which they are uncertain.

The YES can be used within the context of any type of provision and should take about two or three minutes to complete.

### Scoring.

1. Young people's responses to all items marked by "(R)" should be reverse scored, such that:  
 $1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1$
2. The mean of the response values for items 3-12 should be calculated to yield a single Mental Engagement scale score for each young person. If some item responses are missing, scale scores can be calculated as long as there are responses to at least 6 of the 10 items (but remember to calculate the mean score based on the number of questions for which the young person actually responded). The resulting scale scores should range from 1 to 5.

**Prompt.** In this brief survey, we are asking you questions that will help us better understand how to create the best possible program experiences for young people. We will keep all of your responses completely confidential, which means no one will ever know how you answered the questions. You are not required to answer any of the questions and can stop at any time.

**Instructions.** Please read each statement, and then think about your experiences in today's session. If you are not sure about the meaning of any of the words, please ask for more information. Mark the box that best describes your experience in the session that you just participated in. If you want to change any of your answers, please mark an "X" through the old response and mark the new one.

Please note that higher scores are not better or worse – most people will have a mix of high and low scores, and we want to know your unique mix!

Please try to be as "true to you" as possible. When you are not sure, just pick the response option that is closest to how you felt and keep moving. Thank you!

**Protocol.** Place each young person's unique identification number on each survey. Right before the end of the session, distribute the surveys to the corresponding young people, and ask them to return it to you (or put it in a designated location) after they complete it. Ask young people to read the instructions and ask any questions they may have. While they complete the survey, encourage them to ask for clarification about the meaning of any words about which they are uncertain. Give them approximately 5 minutes to complete the survey.

## FAQ

1. Can the YES be delivered verbally with staff asking questions, or do young people need to fill this out by themselves? *The YES was designed for young people to fill out by themselves, but it can be administered verbally and scored by the adult staff, per the student's instructions.*
2. Can the YES be delivered digitally? *Yes.*
3. Can the YES be adapted to align with our specific activities? *The YES was designed to be applicable to all settings in which adults and young people interact. We generally recommend that the YES be used "as is" (i.e., with no amendments to, or exclusions of, any items). However, there is always potential to modify any instrument in relation to local needs, in which case you should consult with a professional evaluator.*
4. What if I have some people in the session who are under the age of 10? *With some assistance (e.g., having a staff person read and discuss each question with each child), children as young as 6 years old can use the YES, but we recommend using the YES with young people ages 10 and older. We also recommend encouraging all young people to ask questions about any words or concepts about which they are uncertain.*
5. Do we have to collect YES data at the specified time points with the same cohort of young people? *The YES can be used with different groups of young people, at different time points, for a variety of purposes. We recommend consulting with a professional evaluator to ensure that the results generated from using the YES are aligned with your goals.*
6. Is there a recommended time period for a young person to be on the programme before they fill out the YES? *If by "programme" you mean a series of sessions that occur over a period of days, weeks, or months, then: No. Young people can fill out the YES after completing any session; that is, participating in one complete session is the only requirement for completing the YES.*

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