

Toolkit: On track with VR together

A systemic approach to virtual reality in youth work



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1. The added value of VR and digital skills

Why VR in youth work?

The world of young people is inextricably linked to the digital world. Virtual reality (VR) offers a unique opportunity to connect these worlds. It's more than just technology; when you use it right, it can become a pedagogical tool. VR enables youth workers to create safe practice spaces for social skills, increase empathy by literally stepping into someone else's shoes, and lower the barriers to difficult conversations. In the virtual space, physical barriers disappear, enabling new forms of encounter and talent development.

Working safely: the safer space method

Safety in VR activities rests on two inseparable pillars: social and technical safety. We have chosen the **safer space-methode**. This means we create an environment where everyone feels respected and safe to express themselves and experiment.

- **Social security:** Through the Safer Space method, we make shared agreements (the promises). This ensures that young people are not only physically safe but also emotionally protected from hatred, exclusion, or transgressive behavior.
- **Technical safety:** A safe experience hinges on good technical management. This includes everything from the physical layout of the space (such as secure seating) to hygiene and the technical implementation of virtual boundaries (the "personal bubble").

Strengthening youth work through official frameworks

To use technology like VR effectively and responsibly, youth workers need specific organisational skills. This toolkit aligns with the **European Competence Framework for Digital Youth Work**, specifically within **competence area 2: digital resources in the organisation**:

1. **C2.1 – Availability and use of shared guidelines for digital resources:** By working with this toolkit and the safer space method, the youth worker ensures a clear and professional standard for VR within the organisation.
2. **C2.2 – The ability to create and filter reliable knowledge through digital means:** The youth worker learns which VR apps are of high quality and safe for the target group.
3. **C2.3 – Using digital tools to share ideas and experiences with colleagues:** By using the Cities of Learning platform and Open Badges, the acquired knowledge becomes measurable and exchangeable.

Why youth workers need these competencies: In a digitally evolving society, youth workers also serve as guides in the digital world. These competencies are essential because safety is a prerequisite (C2.1), the quality of apps determines their impact (C2.2), and professionalism must be made visible to the sector (C2.3).

Youth participation and skills for the future

We do not organize VR 'for' young people, but **together with**. By involving young people in decision-making and contributing ideas from the very beginning, we not only create ownership but also teach them essential skills for the future. This approach aligns with the European framework **DigComp 3.0**. By actively participating, young people develop skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and responsible behavior in digital environments.

2. Safe together in VR: our principles

I. Creating a safer space

In the virtual world, we take good care of each other through our promises:

- **I remain open and listen actively:** even if an avatar or opinion differs from mine.
- **I'm not making any assumptions:** I don't assume that others think or can do the same in VR.
- **I value diversity:** I give others space to express themselves.
- **I respect personal space and boundaries:** both physically in the room and virtually.
- **I show care:** for myself, for others and for the things we use.
- **I contribute to a positive atmosphere:** Together we make VR a place where everyone is welcome.

II. Well-being and care for the participant

- **Discover while sitting:** Each participant sits on a stable chair to move safely.
- **On the road together:** There is always supervision present to monitor the physical space.
- **Short adventures:** We hold 15-minute sessions to prevent overstimulation.
- **Listening to your body:** At the slightest bit of discomfort the glasses come off immediately.

3. The roles and their responsibilities

The young person: co-owner and participant

Your focus: guarding your own boundaries and the atmosphere in the group.

- **Participation:** You will help decide on the choice of apps and the goals of the workshop.
- **Safety:** You guard your own 'personal bubble' and that of others in the virtual world.
- **Well-being:** You immediately indicate when you are not feeling comfortable or when the glasses need to be removed.
- **Reflection:** You share your experiences at the discussion table to learn from them.
- **Badge: VR Community Builder.**

The VR guide: technology and safety

Your focus: monitoring the technical frameworks and physical boundaries.

- **Physical security:** You ensure that the young person preferably works while sitting and applies the 15-minute rule.
- **Technical management:** You take care of hygiene, wristbands and batteries.
- **Social limit:** You technically set up the 'personal bubble'.
- **The transfer:** You share your technical observations with the youth worker.
- **Badge: VR Facilitator Youth Work.**

The youth worker: pedagogy and relationship

Your focus: social safety and the meaning of the experience.

- **Maintaining the atmosphere:** You ensure that the 'safer space' promises are kept by the entire group.
- **Content match:** You look at which experience suits which young person and which learning goal.
- **The conversation table:** You lead the follow-up discussion and link the VR experience to personal growth.
- **Validation:** You officially recognise the young person's growth through the Open Badge.
- **Badge: Strategic Manager Digital Innovation.**

4. Continue learning together

The world of VR and technology is changing rapidly, and we're changing with it. This toolkit is a starting point, not an end point. We believe in the power of community: if you'd like to adapt, improve, or add to this text based on your own practical experiences, you're more than welcome to do so. Please share your changes with us. Together, we'll ensure the continued development of VR in youth work. We love sharing, will you?

Attachments (Printable)

The VR Start: Defining Our Focus Together

Distribution of the contribution:

- **The youth:** Indicate where their interests lie and what goal appeals to them.
- **The VR guide:** Advises on technical possibilities and suitable apps.
- **The youth worker:** Monitors whether the goal fits the group and the personal growth of the participants.

Use this format 14 days before the workshop starts. Everyone sits together at the discussion table.

1. What is our goal for the VR experience? (The 'why')

Discuss what you want to achieve. Choose a maximum of two:

- **Relaxation:** Just have a good time and explore the technology.
- **Empathy:** Experience what it is like to be in someone else's shoes.
- **Cooperation:** Learning how to achieve a goal together in a digital world.
- **Limits:** Practicing with the 'safer space' and your own 'personal bubble'.
- **Future:** Discover which talents or professions match VR.

2. What experience fits this? (The 'what')

The VR facilitator will suggest two or three apps based on the objective, at least one week before the VR workshop takes place. The young people and youth worker will choose:

- **Choice:** For apps/experiences see attachment
- **Why this one?** Does this align with our goal? Is it accessible to everyone?

3. How do we keep it safe? (The 'how')

Briefly repeat the promises to set the mood:

- Which of the **promises** is particularly important to us today? (e.g., "Today we're paying extra attention to our personal bubble")
- Who's keeping track of the time? (The VR instructor will stick to the 15-minute rule.)

4. What do we want to be able to say afterwards? (The 'badge')

Take a look ahead at the badges:

- What needs to happen today so that we can award badges **VR community builder** or **facilitator badge**?

The VR cheat sheet: together for success

This document will help you as **VR workshop Team** (young person, VR supervisor and youth worker) to ensure that the VR workshop runs smoothly and safely.

1. The start: determining focus (together)

- ☐ **Select goal:** What do we want to achieve today? (Relaxation, cooperation, practicing boundaries?)
- ☐ **App choice:** Which VR experience suits this goal?
- ☐ **Promises:** The poster with the 'safer space' promises is prominently displayed and has been briefly discussed.
- ☐ **Badge-check:** Everyone knows which badge can be earned today.

2. During the session: who does what?

The VR guide (technology & safety)

- ☐ **Seated use:** Is the young person sitting in a stable chair? Enough space around to move arms?
- ☐ **Wristbands:** Are the controller strings around your wrists?
- ☐ **Timekeeping:** Is the 15-minute rule per person being observed?
- ☐ **Hygiene:** Are there supplies (such as hygienic wipes) to clean the glasses after each use?
- ☐ **To upload:** Do you have enough AA batteries? Do you have all the cables?

The youth worker (relationship & group)

- ☐ **Well-being:** Is the young person in the VR experience okay? (Watch for sweating or freezing.)
- ☐ **Group dynamics:** Is the atmosphere among the waiting young people positive and safe?
- ☐ **Safer space:** Are the promises kept? (No assumptions, respect for space).
- ☐ **Casting on computer:** Is the screen on so the rest of the group can watch?

The youth (experience & atmosphere)

- ☐ **Own borders:** Do I immediately indicate if I am not feeling well or if I want to stop?
- ☐ **Social boundaries:** Do I respect the 'personal bubble' of others in the virtual world?
- ☐ **Concern:** Am I careful with the stuff and do I contribute to a pleasant atmosphere?

3. The closing: the discussion table

- ☐ **To land:** Has the young person been given some time to get used to the 'real' world?
- ☐ **Reflection:** Have the three steps been discussed? (What did you see? What effect did it have on you? What will you take away?)
- ☐ **Validation:** Has the youth worker assessed whether the badge has been earned?
- ☐ **Clean up:** Is all equipment cleaned and tidied away in the box?

Fancy a virtual adventure?

To keep it fun and safe for everyone, we agree on the following:

A pleasant place for everyone (safer space)

- **I remain open:** I listen to others, even if their avatar or opinion differs from mine.
- **I'm not making any assumptions:** I don't assume that everyone thinks or can do the same thing in VR.
- **I give space:** I appreciate that we are all different and give everyone the opportunity to be themselves.
- **I respect boundaries:** I keep my distance from other avatars (personal bubble) and pay attention to the people around me in the real room.
- **I show care:** I am careful with the stuff and pay attention to whether others are still feeling comfortable.
- **I am positive:** Together we're making VR a place where everyone feels welcome. No hate, just fun!

Take care of yourself

- **Stay seated:** We prefer to use the VR headset on a stable chair. This way, you won't fall and you'll always know where you are.
- **Check your time:** We'll agree on how long you'll wear the glasses (15 minutes at the start). This way, you'll stay fit.
- **Stop direct:** Feeling dizzy or a little strange? Take off your glasses immediately. Don't worry, you can always continue later.

Fresh and clean

- **Clean glasses:** We clean the glasses and controllers after each use. This way, they're fresh for the next one.
- **Wristbands for:** Always tie the controller straps to your wrist.

Join the conversation

- **The conversation table:** After your VR experience, we'll have a chat. What did you see? What did you think? Your opinion counts!
- **Open Badge for your experience:** Did you keep these promises and actively participate in the follow-up discussion? Then you earn the badge: **VR Community Builder**.

For the youth worker: pedagogy and relationships

Your focus: social safety and the meaning of the experience.

- **Maintaining the atmosphere:** You make sure that the **promises** are adhered by the entire group.
- **Content match:** You look at which experience suits which young person.
- **The conversation table:** You lead the follow-up discussion and link the VR experience to the personal growth of the young person.
- **Validation:** You are the one who officially recognizes the young person's growth (Open Badge).

Your reward: By bridging the gap between technology and personal development, you'll earn the badge: **Strategic Manager Digital Innovation** (or the specific role of a supporting professional).

The discussion table: reflection in 3 steps

After the VR session, take 5 to 10 minutes to discuss the situation. Use these questions to structure the conversation.

Step 1: The Landing (What Happened?)

Objective: To allow the young person to 'land' and share first impressions.

- **"What did you see?"**(Have the young person briefly describe where he/she was.)
- **"What was the most impressive or surprising moment?"**
- **"How did your body feel?"**(Were you relaxed, tense, or enthusiastic?).

Step 2: The Deepening (What did it do to you?)

Objective: Reflect on emotions and the 'safer space' promises.

- **"How did you like being in that environment with others (avatars)?"**
- **"Were you able to keep the promises (e.g. the personal bubble)?"**
- **Was there a time when you felt uncomfortable? How did you deal with it?**

Step 3: The translation (What do you bring?)

Goal: To make the connection between the real world and the badge.

- **"Does this situation resemble something you might experience in real life?"**
- **"What did you discover about yourself today that you can use outside of VR?"**
- **Do you think you earned the VR Community Builder badge today? Why/why not?**

Tips for the youth worker

- **Listen actively:** There are no wrong answers. The young person's experience is the truth.
- **Keep it short:** Don't make it feel like a test. Make it a natural conversation.
- **Use the casting:** If the group has been watching on a screen, involve them: *"What did you see happening at...?"*

For the VR instructor: technology and safety

Your focus: monitoring the technical frameworks and physical boundaries.

- **Physical security:** You ensure that the young person preferably **sitting** works and the **15-minute rule**, do not exceed when this is not healthy.
- **Technical management:** You take care of the **hygiene** and use of **wristbands**.
- **Social limit:** You technically set up the 'personal bubble'.
- **The transfer:** You share your technical observations with the youth worker.

Your reward: As an expert who has ensured that safety and technology run smoothly, you earn the badge: **VR Facilitator Youth Work**.

Colophon

Partners:

The Netherlands:

- Sandra Zoomers van Dutch Cities of Learning & Breakthrough Foundation
- Maartje Simons from Life on Marzj
- Joey de Deken