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THE CENTRE
FOR YOUTH
IMPACT

Part of YMCA George Williams College

Youth Engagement Survey (YES) Technical Guide

June 2023

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The Youth Engagement Survey

Technical Guide

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 (or equivalent).

Young people's socio-emotional development in context

The Youth Engagement Survey (YES) is based on the Outcomes Framework 3.0,¹ which sets out how youth provision contributes to improvements in socio-emotional outcomes for young people. The Outcomes Framework 3.0 includes a theory of change that details how quality youth provision can lead to socio-emotional skill development for young people (see Figure 1, below). In summary:

- High-quality staff practices and content offered at the point of engagement are likely to lead to higher levels of youth engagement during each session or activity.
- 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. These 'pre-existing' (or, baseline) socio-emotional skills affect how young people initially engage with youth provision.
- Over time and multiple interactions, the combination of high-quality staff practices and young people's engagement 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 development 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

¹ <https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/Framework%20SE%20Outcomes%203.0%20AUGFINAL1.pdf>

people continue to further apply and develop 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 and long-term improvements in mental and physical health, educational attainment, sustainable employment, finances, secure housing, positive relationships and personal safety.

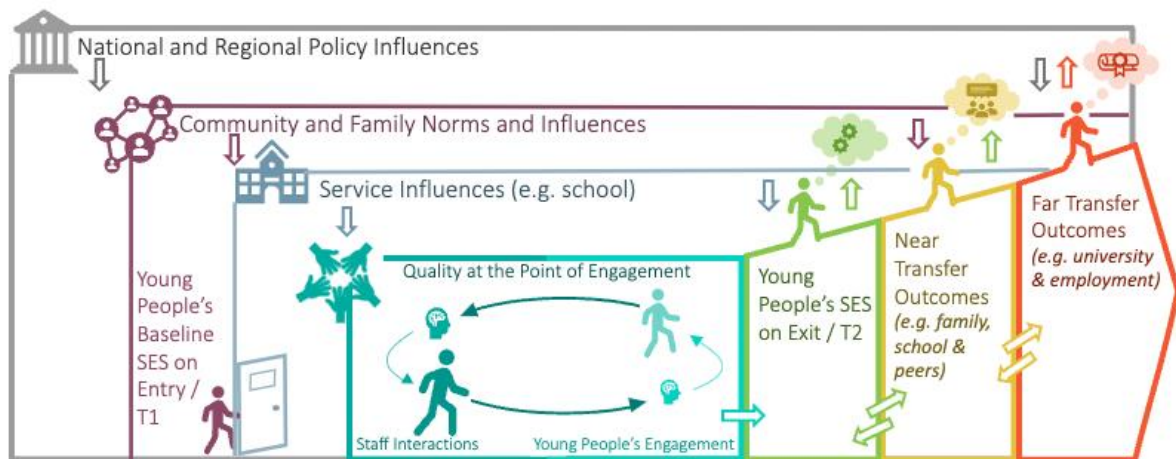


Figure 1: The Young People's Socio-emotional Skills in Context Model.

About the YES

The Youth Engagement Survey (YES)² 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 socio-emotional skill development. Conversely, lack of mental engagement is expected to prevent socio-emotional skill development. YES scores tend to reflect closely the quality of provision, so these scores can be an especially efficient way to assess how well practitioners (staff and volunteers) understand the socio-emotional skills of participating young people and adjust their practices to 'meet young people where they are at'.

² The YES is based on the Youth Report of Point-of-Service Engagement (YRPE); for more information, see: <https://www.qturngroup.com/>

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.

The Survey

The YES includes two background questions about the young person’s age and attendance (A and B), 10 core items (C 1-10), and one open-ended item that allows young people to provide additional information (D). The two background questions are useful for understanding important factors that may help you to interpret your findings, and the open-ended item helps ensure that (a) young people have the opportunity to ‘voice’ their thoughts and feelings about experiences that were not sufficiently represented by the core items and (b) stakeholders have the opportunity to consider whether additional items in future versions of the YES might strengthen the tool.

The response options for each of the 10 core items are:

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Always

A. How old are you? (please clearly circle your response)

8 or less	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18 to 21	22 to 25
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B. How many hours do you come here in a typical week? (please clearly circle your response)

Less than 1 hour	1 to 2 hours	3 to 4 hours	5 to 6 hours	7 or more hours
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C: Thinking about the session or activity you just took part in (please clearly tick your answer):

Item	Answer
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1	I felt accepted by the adult(s) working with me (and other people who were involved).	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
2	I felt like the things we did and talked about were interesting.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
3	It was hard for me to focus.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
4	I felt excluded or disrespected by the adult(s) working with me (or other people who were involved).	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
5	I felt my contributions were heard and respected.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
6	It felt challenging, in a good way.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
7	I disliked what I was doing.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
8	I felt stressed out by the things we did and talked about (or other things that were happening).	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
9	I felt unable to contribute or offer my opinion.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
10	I enjoyed what I was doing.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

How and When to Use

Young people should complete the YES during or immediately after a provision session (or equivalent). If you want to understand the relationship between the quality of provision and young people's engagement, it is best to invite young people to complete the YES on the same day that the session was observed and rated for quality (using the Quality Practice Tool - QPT). 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., an adult reads and discusses each question with each child), children as young as six 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 less than ten minutes to complete.

Protocol

Place each young person's ID (unique identification number), project ID and site ID on each survey. 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.

It is possible for young people to complete the YES anonymously (without the ID number) but note that it will then not be possible to connect YES scores to QPT scores, or to track YES scores over time. It will also not be possible to analyse YES scores alongside demographic information to understand, for example, whether particular groups of young people are experiencing lower mental engagement – a key equity consideration.

Prompt

We would like to know how engaged you feel when you come here so that we can make your experience here as positive as possible.

Set Up

Explain to the young people that you want them to help you improve your work by giving you some feedback on how engaging the session or activities are. Explain you would like

them to complete this survey and outline who will see the data and how you will use it. Explain how they will consent (for example by taking part or by filling in a consent form) and that they are free to decide not to take part too. A required prompt and set of instructions are provided below.

Instructions

Please read each statement and then think about your experiences in today's session or activity.

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 or activity that you just took part in.

Make sure you only mark one box! If you want to change any of your answers, please mark an "X" through the old response and tick the new one.

Completing this is voluntary, you are not required to answer all of the questions and you can stop at any time.

Remember 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!

No one outside your organisation or research team will be able to access your answers.

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

Thank you!

Wrap Up

Thank the young people for completing the forms and remind them you will use this information to make your sessions even better than they already are. Explain to the young people whether they will get to see the results of the surveys or not. Give them an opportunity to ask any other questions to give you any further feedback.

Input Choices

There are three ways you can collect and input data with each of the measures. These are:

1. Download the PDF form from the SES Measurement Hub in size 12 or 16 point font, print and use as a paper copy. If you choose this approach you will need to manually transfer the data into either our data portal, or into your own system or spreadsheet.
2. Complete the information on a webform within the data portal. This means your data is automatically entered into the portal. This is a good option for the measures the practitioners complete (the demographic form, Practitioner Observation Tool and the Quality Practice Tool) but would not be appropriate for young people. This is also where data collected in a paper format are entered into the data portal.
3. Enter the data using our mobile friendly survey software. This is suitable for young people and practitioners and again means that data is entered straight into the data portal.

Which type of data entry works best for you will depend on the preferences of the young people you support and the practitioners and volunteers who work with you.

Scoring

1. Young people's responses to items 3, 4, 7, 8, & 9 should be reverse scored prior to calculating the YES total score, such that:
 $1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1$
However, please note: Only the original 'raw' scores should be recorded on the rating forms and/or entered into the data portal.
2. The mean of the response values for items 1-10 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 YES Mental Engagement total score should range from 1 to 5. Maximum total score is 50 (5 x 10 items).
3. Note: If, after having reverse-scored the relevant items, average responses to each of the YES items are used in a graph, a note should be included with the graph indicating that the item scores shown in the graph were reverse-scored prior to producing the graph.

Interpretation

It is useful to meet with your practitioner team to review the data and to work out what it means for their practice. Seeing that the data supports practice development is key to practitioners wanting to use the data over time.

Data collected with the YES measurement tool can be entered into the Data Portal hosted by the Centre for Youth Impact at George Williams College. This will enable you to view average mental engagement scores for the young people who participate in sessions that include the YES, obtain initial estimates of changes in mental engagement across a project or set timeframe (e.g. where the YES is used at baseline and follow up), and see how much young people are engaged across your provision where the results from several different activities or 'offers' are aggregated to the site or organisation level. After calculating the YES total score, this information can be used to inform decisions about future training decisions or provision planning (e.g. organisations serving high percentages of young people who score very low on the YES total score may decide to focus more closely on ways of facilitating provision or activities that young people will find more engaging). 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 (e.g. by comparing YES total scores from a baseline assessment to YES total scores from a follow-up assessment).

Validity

Although detailed psychometric information about the reliability and validity of the current version of the YES is limited, based on the data we have analysed to date, the YES can be viewed as a reliable and valid measure of young people's mental engagement during provision. Reliability has thus far been assessed only in terms of the *internal consistency* among the items, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient (e.g., we have not conducted test-retest reliability analyses of YES scores). However, across five samples of YES data (with n's averaging 212 young people, about 82% of whom were aged 10-14), alpha reliability estimates for the YES total score ranged from .67 to .79 and averaged .74. Given our experience with this and similar engagement measures, where alpha coefficients of reliability for these kinds of measures generally exceed .70, the YES total score can be described as sufficiently reliable indicator of young people's mental engagement during provision.

Given the very close alignment between our conceptual definition of mental engagement and the item content on the YES, along with its sufficient measurement reliability, the YES

total score can be viewed as highly face valid measure of young people's mental engagement during provision (e.g. higher scores on the YES can be confidently interpreted as indicating higher levels of mental engagement). In terms of criterion validity (e.g., the ability to predict young people's mental engagement from measures of practice quality), YES total scores have been found to vary systematically, in the expected direction, in relation to measures of practice quality at the point of engagement. For example, where practice quality was assessed using the Staff Programme Quality Survey (SPQS) total score, and where high-quality staff practices were defined by SPQS total scores that were above the 3.5 total score benchmark for high quality, young people (mostly aged 10-14) who experienced high-quality practice reported higher levels of mental engagement (as measured by the YES) than young people who experienced lower-quality practice. In addition, in another study, where practice quality was assessed using the four SPQS domain scores (i.e. Safe, Supportive, Interactive, and Engaging Environment) to construct multivariate instructional quality profiles (i.e. high-, moderate-, and low-quality instructional quality profiles), YES total scores varied systematically and in the expected direction across all three SPQS profile groups. For example, young people (mostly aged 10-14) who experienced high-quality practice reported average YES scores of 4.7 (i.e. almost 'always' engaged), and young people who experienced low-quality practice reported average YES scores of 3.5 (i.e. slightly more than 'sometimes' engaged). Taken together, these criterion validity results suggest that YES total scores vary in relation to other measures in theoretically predicted and meaningful ways.

FAQ's

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, we have a version of the survey available online which can be sent to young people's email addresses or completed on an iPad or laptop in your setting.*
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 young 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 in 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.*
7. Can I use the YES score to show my provision is high quality? *The YES shows the extent to which young people are engaged in a session and the extent to which you are able to meet them where they are at. This is very closely aligned to, but not the same as a quality measure. To understand whether practice is high quality or not we recommend use of our Quality Practice Tool or QPT.*

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About us

YMCA GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. Established in 1970, the College works to provide transformational support to practitioners, funders, and policy makers across the sector, to improve the quality and impact of provision and outcomes for children and young people across the UK. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three Centres of Expertise. The Centre for Youth Impact at YMCA George Williams College supports organisations to generate and act on evidence of the impact of their provision. Using a robust evidence base, The Centre for Youth Impact designs, tests, and champions shared approaches to quality and impact that facilitate collective insight and learning, consolidating and sharing open access resources, research, and training for all those working in informal and non-formal youth provision.

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