

Youth Workers Guide



4 E Q U A L I T Y



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Introduction to the Youth Workers Guide

Preface

The Youth Workers Guide you are holding is the result of a shared European effort - a collaboration among six partner organisations united by a single belief: that every young woman deserves equal opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed, regardless of the barriers she may face.

Developed under the Erasmus+ project “4equality - Implementing innovative tools and methodologies for employability and equal opportunities of young women facing bias in male-dominated future-oriented sectors” (Project No. 2023-2-PL01-KA220-YOU-000178863), this guide represents months of cooperation, reflection, and knowledge exchange across Poland, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus.

The partners of the 4equality consortium -

- Centre for Education and Entrepreneurship Support (CWEP, Poland),
- E&D Knowledge Consulting (Portugal),
- Asociatia de Dezvoltare Economico-Sociala - ADES (Romania),
- Asociatia pentru Dezvoltarea Antreprenoriatului Feminin - ADAF (Romania),
- Know and Can Association - SDRUZHENIE ZNAM I MOGA (Bulgaria), and
- Lovila Limited (Cyprus) -

have brought together their diverse expertise in education, gender equality, entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital learning to create a practical, empowering resource for youth workers.

Through this guide, we aim to equip youth workers, educators, and mentors with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to support young women in navigating and challenging gender bias in STEM and business. It is our collective contribution to a more inclusive and equitable Europe - one where talent, creativity, and ambition are never limited by gender.

The development of this guide has been a deeply collaborative process - shaped by research, good practices, and the lived experiences of both youth workers and young women. Each chapter reflects our shared commitment to ensuring that gender equality is not just a principle, but a daily practice in education, employment, and community life.

We hope that this guide will inspire action and reflection, spark new ideas, and empower youth workers to become agents of lasting social change.

*“When we empower young women, we strengthen entire communities - and shape a future where every voice can lead.” - **The 4equality Project Consortium***

About the Guide

The Youth Workers Guide is a practical resource for youth workers, educators, and mentors who support young women in STEM and business. It combines research-based insights, European good practices, and hands-on activities to promote gender equality, empowerment, and inclusion in youth education and employment.

By offering adaptable strategies, real-life examples, and reflection tools, the guide helps youth workers build confidence, resilience, and opportunity among young women - fostering environments where equality and inclusion can thrive.

Introduction to the Youth Workers Guide

Across Europe, young women continue to face barriers when pursuing careers in male-dominated, future-oriented sectors such as business and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Despite growing awareness and progress in education, gender bias continues to affect access, participation, and career advancement.

The Youth Workers Guide has been developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ Project **“4equality - Implementing innovative tools and methodologies for employability and equal opportunities of young women facing bias in male-dominated future-oriented sectors”** (Project No. 2023-2-PL01-KA220-YOU-000178863) - a two-year initiative (2024-2025) bringing together organisations from Poland, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus.

The project aims to equip young women and youth workers with the awareness, resilience, and practical tools needed to recognise and overcome gender bias in professional environments. Its main outcomes include:

- An e-mentor platform for self-development and career readiness;
- A youth workers' toolkit with resources for mentoring, inclusion, and empowerment;
- An e-training programme supporting resilience, confidence, and leadership skills.

Together, these tools contribute to a broader vision of gender equality, employability, and inclusive participation in future-oriented fields.

Executive Summary

The Youth Workers Guide is organised into eight thematic chapters, each addressing a specific dimension of gender equality and empowerment in business and STEM.

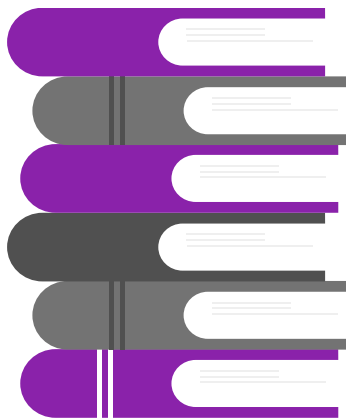
1. Understanding Gender Bias in STEM and Business - explores the roots and effects of bias in education and employment.
2. Identifying At-Risk Young Women and Their Needs - guides youth workers in recognising vulnerability factors and tailoring support.
3. Confidence Building and Resilience in Male-Dominated Industries - provides tools for fostering self-belief, assertiveness, and coping strategies.
4. Preparing for Workplace Challenges and Gender Bias - helps youth workers address real-world bias and discrimination scenarios.
5. The Importance of Upskilling and Continuous Learning - encourages lifelong learning and self-development for empowerment.
6. Shaping Inclusive Mindsets in STEM and Business - promotes gender-sensitive values and allyship among young people.
7. Strategies for Motivating Young Women to Enter STEM and Business - inspires engagement through role models and positive storytelling.
8. Practical Activities for Youth Workers to Promote Gender Equality - offers interactive workshops, exercises, and reflection tools.

Each chapter blends context, practical guidance, and action-based learning, enabling youth workers to build inclusive mindsets, strengthen confidence, and foster equality in their communities.

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Chapter 1 - Understanding Gender Bias in STEM and Business



Introduction

Nowadays, approximately 30% of women comprise the global STEM workforce. [1] Similarly, women hold only 33.5% of senior management roles globally, highlighting the persistent impact of gender bias in the business sector. [2] Compared to their male counterparts, women are permanently forced to challenge themselves with gender bias and discrimination. Those discriminatory behaviours or actions often lead to decreased motivation, engagement, and self-confidence. Moreover, the lack of understanding and support contributes to women suffering from many mental problems.

Not only does the detrimental gender bias cause women's under-representation in STEM and business sectors, but also it prevents young women from pursuing "male-orientated" careers. This chapter not only explains gender bias but also gives you tools to spot it, talk about it with others, and support young women in everyday situations – especially in mentoring roles. Understanding the roots, mechanisms, and consequences of gender bias is essential for creating inclusive, equitable environments where talent can thrive regardless of gender.

The chapter begins by defining the gender bias and determining its types. Then it explores workplace discrimination mechanisms, such as tokenism or the glass ceiling, and the reasons behind them. Particular attention is given to the discrimination's effect on career advancements and how it influences career opportunities, promotions, and leadership roles. In the subsequent sections, the psychological impact of gender bias is thoroughly discussed. Additionally, the chapter provides practical tools through interactive learning activities, emphasising the role of classroom discussions as an effective way to bring together diverse viewpoints, foster empathy, and challenge existing assumptions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points and additional resources.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, learners will be able to:

1. **Understand what gender bias is and** learn to tell the **difference between its main types:** systemic, hidden (implicit), and unfair rules in organisations (institutional discrimination).
2. **Identify key mechanisms of workplace discrimination,** including microaggressions, tokenism, and the glass ceiling.
3. Analyze the impact of gender bias on career advancement, leadership opportunities, and workplace culture, particularly in STEM and business sectors.
4. **Examine the psychological effects of gender bias and discrimination** on women, including its consequences on mental health and well-being.

Defining Gender Bias in Professional Settings


Women account for 57% of the nation's college graduates and form nearly half of the workforce. Additionally, research has demonstrated that women are generally

more attentive and serious than their male counterparts. So, why do women continue to be underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and businesses? (Fletcher, 2015)

Definition and Types of Gender Bias

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality *gender bias* “refers to prejudiced actions or thoughts based on the perception that individuals are not equal in rights and dignity due to their gender” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025). Gender bias is the act of an individual or system favouring one group over another based on protected characteristics, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This bias can be observed in everyday situations like conversations at work, performance reviews, or hiring. For instance, in the workplace, gender bias may lead to women being passed over for promotions or opportunities because of stereotypes or unfair assumptions about their skills or behaviour. (Baker, Meyer & Johnson, 2008).

Example



Imagine a situation in which a tech company is evaluating two candidates for a project management role on a high-profile engineering team: Candidate A, a woman, and Candidate B, a man. Both possess equivalent technical qualifications, leadership experience, and a strong track record of success in similar roles. Nevertheless, the hiring manager may unconsciously favour Candidate B due to implicit gender biases, assuming he is more assertive, technically capable, or better aligned with leadership roles in high-pressure environments.

What role might stereotypes play here?

The gender disparity starts at an early stage. Overall, males are falling behind women academically. Even though women make up 41% of science and engineering graduates, males usually seek STEM jobs in larger numbers. Women with STEM degrees are less likely than their male counterparts to work in STEM occupations, according to the Department of Commerce.

Barack Obama

“One of the things that I really strongly believe in is that we need to have more girls interested in math, science, and engineering. We’ve got half the population that is way underrepresented in those fields and that means that we’ve got a whole bunch of talents...that is not being encouraged.”



1

Gender bias is further divided into systemic bias, implicit bias, and institutional discrimination.

- **Systemic bias** is directed by health, educational, governmental, judicial, legal, religious, political, financial, media, or cultural institutions toward members of an oppressed or marginalised group and is characterised by prejudice, discrimination, or inequity.
- **Implicit (unconscious) bias** is an attitude of prejudice, discrimination, or injustice that an individual from a privileged group demonstrates towards members of less-advantaged groups.

In other words, systemic biases are barriers that are sustained by institutions, whereas implicit biases are those that are carried by individuals (Renée, 2018).

In turn, **institutional discrimination** refers to unfair rules or practices in organisations that repeatedly limit opportunities and resources for certain groups of people. This form of discrimination is maintained by the laws, organizational guidelines, or traditions of an institution (Cunningham & Light, 2016).

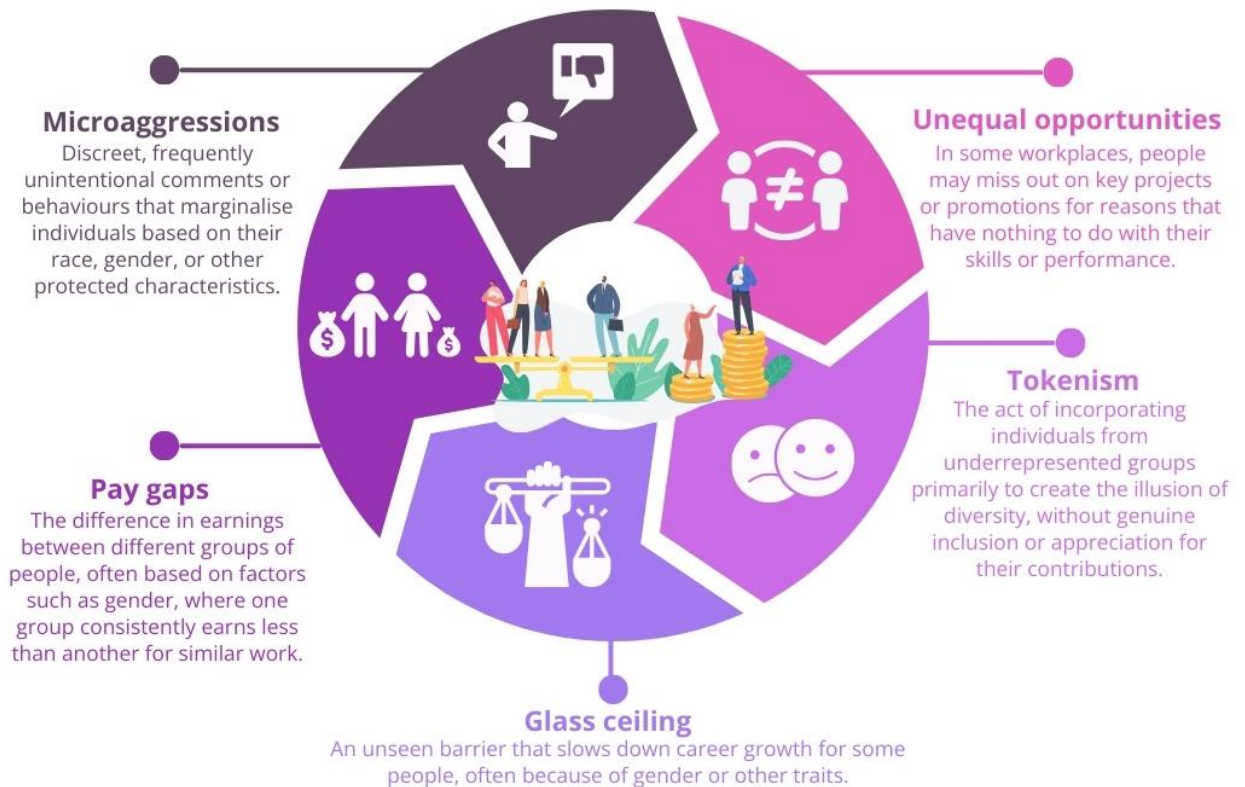
Workplace Discrimination Mechanisms

Research cited in *Harvard Business Review* shows that women leave STEM not because they lack skills, but because of bias - like having to prove themselves again and again or being judged for being confident. Nearly 50% of women in STEM say they’ve faced gender-based discrimination, and 43% leave full-time STEM jobs within a few years of becoming mothers (Williams, 2015).

Even though obvious forms of bias are being reduced, more subtle and hidden types of discrimination still exist. It’s important to notice and understand these hidden issues to help create a fair and inclusive workplace (Hantzes & Associates, 2023).

¹ Barack Obama, Google+ Hangout, February 14, 2013, quoted in The White House Archives, “Women in STEM,” accessed May 7, 2025, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/ostp/women>

Hidden types of workplace discrimination



2

Microaggressions and other discriminatory actions may harm the wellbeing of women employees by fostering a hostile work environment. Similarly, unfair opportunities cause workers to be overlooked for training programs, promotions, or significant projects because of factors unrelated to their abilities and performances. Women who believe their presence is just symbolic may experience emotions of unworthiness and loneliness as a result of tokenism. Regarding the glass ceiling problem, inequalities in leadership roles still exist in many businesses, even with ongoing progress. These hidden forms of discrimination hold back women’s career growth and keep inequality going (Hantzes & Associates, 2023).

It has been challenging to determine the reasons why women are still under-represented in the STEM and business sectors. The majority of researchers have concluded that a big part of the solution lies in the complex and long-standing ideas about gender roles, societal expectations, self-confidence, and how men and women view success and failure. (Fletcher, 2015).

² Hantzes & Associates, 2023

Example



A young woman working in an engineering firm has quickly earned recognition for her leadership skills, innovation, and consistent performance in a mid-level management role. Despite her qualifications and strong results, she is repeatedly passed over for senior positions in favour of older male colleagues with comparable or lesser experience. When she expresses interest in advancement, she is told she needs “more time to grow” or that clients may prefer someone with “more presence”.

Which type of hidden workplace discrimination does this reflect?

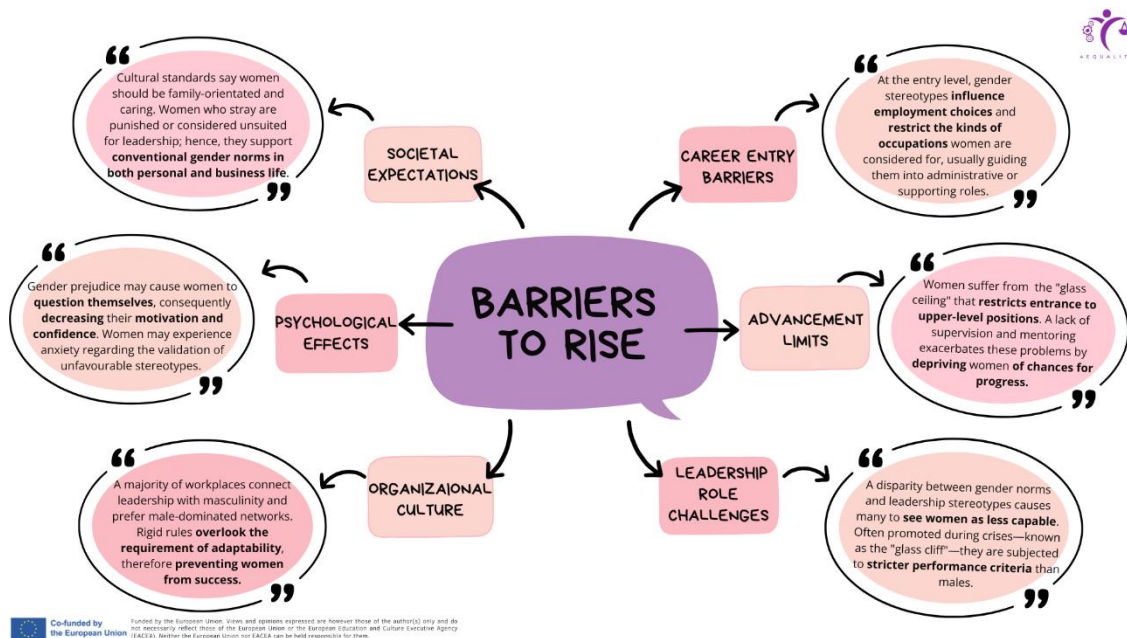
Among the reasons there are the following:

- **Career inequality:** Even when women have higher educational qualifications than men, they often don't receive better pay. Interestingly, organisations tend to see overqualified women as more committed and less likely to leave, while overqualified men are seen as more likely to quit.
- **Societal expectations:** According to a study, men are more adept at gaining influence and advancing in organisations than women. Although competence and confidence are enough for males, women are also expected to meet stereotypical expectations, such as being considerate, nurturing, and compassionate (Shape Talent 2023).
- **Workplace culture and female burden:** Although the majority of women are employed for payment, they continue to perform the majority of unpaid care work, which results in exhaustion, underpayment, and guilt. 30% of women report feeling inadequate or like a poor carer (Deloitte 2024).
- **Motherhood penalty:** The increasing gender disparity is one of the most striking effects of the "motherhood penalty". The World Economic Forum discovered that women experienced a 7% wage cut per child, while males did not. The combined effects of having children become clear when this issue is added to the existing gender gap (Fawcett Society 2025).
- **Assumed incompetence:** Part-time and flexible work are still frequently perceived as indicators of a lack of commitment towards a career, which can result in discrimination. The outcome can manifest as lost promotions, uncertainty regarding reliability, or prejudice, such as the assumption that family obligations restrict ambition (Shape Talent 2023).

Gender Bias and Its Effects on Career Advancements

How gender bias influences career opportunities, promotions, and leadership roles

Women confront various challenges when attempting to achieve and maintain positions in the STEM or business sectors. External factors, such as gender biases and stereotypes, significantly hinder the career advancement of women. These biases, which can be explicit and implicit, can affect decisions regarding employment, promotions, and perceptions of competence. The glass ceiling and unequal opportunities, which are prevalent gender stereotypes, present additional obstacles for those who aspire to high-level leadership positions and limit women's opportunities. Likewise, internal factors strongly influence the challenges women face in leadership. Internalised biases and gender stereotypes can affect their confidence, career choices, and how they see their own abilities. Women's confidence and ambitions may be weakened by the fear of confirming negative stereotypes and the pressure to fit traditional gender roles. Tokenism and gender stereotype threats make these challenges worse, as women in minority positions often face extra psychological pressure and scrutiny (Setyaningrum & Juansih, 2022).



Mentoring tip: When mentoring a young woman who says, for instance, “I’m not leadership material”, try asking:

- “What makes you feel that way?”
- “Can you tell me about a time you successfully led something, even a small task?”

Help her name her strengths. Remind her that confidence often grows with action.

Psychological Impact of Gender Bias

Mental health is significantly impacted by gender inequality on a global scale. Stress, anxiety, melancholy, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are among the psychological consequences of gender inequality that women experience. Gender inequality is demonstrated by various methods. Females may develop mental health conditions as a direct consequence of gender-based discrimination or violence, for

instance. In addition, they may develop conditions indirectly because of exposure to detrimental messages in the media, chronic stress and marginalisation (Leonard, 2021).



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

A Nigerian author

“We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls: ‘You can have ambition, but not too much.’”

3

According to the Vigod and Rochon (2020), women with mental health conditions outnumber men by as much as two or threefold, depending on the condition. Women have a much greater incidence of some mental health disorders than men. Studies indicate that women are over twice as likely to suffer panic disorder and generalised anxiety disorder, and they are also almost twice as likely to have depression during their lifetime. Women are four to ten times more likely to experience eating disorders, highlighting a significantly larger difference compared to men. Women are also more than twice as likely as males to get post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although biological sex differences do contribute to mental health, these statistics also illustrate a more profound pattern of gendered health disparities. Numerous studies have highlighted the strong connection between experiences of discrimination – particularly sexism – and mental health struggles. Chronic stress, reduced self-worth, and trauma are all well-established risk factors for mental health conditions that are frequently induced by exposure to systemic discrimination (Leonard, 2021).

✓ **Quick check for mentors:** Signs a young woman may be affected by gender bias or low confidence:

- Often apologises for her ideas.
- Hesitates to apply for leadership roles.
- Avoids speaking up in mixed-gender groups.
- Says things like: “I’m not smart enough for that”, “Someone else would do it better than me”
- Seems nervous or disengaged in STEM/business settings.

If you see these signs, create space to talk. Listen first. Validate her experience. Encourage her by reminding her of her strengths and past successes.


³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, TEDxEuston, filmed December 2012, 30:30, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists

Interactive Learning

Shared discussions in class are a powerful way to bring diverse perspectives together, encourage empathy, and challenge assumptions. They help participants reflect critically on their experiences and promote inclusive, respectful dialogue that supports diversity and understanding.

To foster these conversations, use the **“Photos for thought”** cards. Begin by introducing the topic of gender roles, representation, and diversity. Divide participants into small groups, display the photos or distribute materials, and give them time to reflect on each image. Use the provided questions to guide their conversations, encouraging them to connect the topics to their lives. After all the photos are discussed, gather the groups to share insights and explore actions that can advance inclusion. Ensure the space remains open, safe, and respectful.


Photos for thought
Front and center



- What power dynamics can you observe in this photo?
- What challenges might this woman face in this setting?
- Why is representation in leadership important?
- Have you ever felt like a minority in a group? How did you respond?

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Photos for thought
Future engineers



- How does this photo break the typical narrative of boys in tech?
- What does these girls' expression tell you about her confidence or focus?
- Have you ever tried something "unusual" for your gender? How was it received?
- What support might they need to continue in STEM?

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Photos for thought
Shared responsibilities



- What does this image say about changing gender roles?
- How could this image relate to women's professional opportunities?
- Why is it important to see men taking part in caregiving?
- What would need to change in workplace culture to make this image more common?

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Photos for thought
Hack the bias



- How does this image challenge the stereotype of a male-dominated tech industry?
- What skills or qualities do you think these women are using right now?
- Why is it important to see diverse representation in technology?
- Can you imagine yourself in a similar environment?

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 Conversation starters for workshops:

- “Have you ever noticed a moment when a woman was treated unfairly in class or at work?”
- “Why do you think people sometimes doubt women in leadership?”
- “What would you say to a younger girl who says: ‘STEM isn’t for girls?’”

Use the **discussion cards** to explore gender equality in STEM and business. Divide participants into small groups, give them the cards, and ask them to discuss the questions together. Encourage sharing of views and personal experiences. After group discussions, invite everyone to share key ideas in a larger group. Keep the space open and respectful. The activity helps **raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and inspire actions for more inclusive workplaces and schools.**

Let's talk equality: Women in STEM and business
DISCUSSION CARDS



Should women miss out opportunities at work if they have chosen to have a family?



Should women look a certain way to gain positive attention, look attractive to others and be successful?



Why do you think women are underrepresented in science and engineering?

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Let's talk equality: Women in STEM and business
DISCUSSION CARDS



Is it easier for men to take risks in business without being criticised?



Why might women feel like they have to prove themselves more than men?



What small changes could help make business or tech careers more gender-equal?

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Let's talk equality: Women in STEM and business
DISCUSSION CARDS



How can men and women work together to challenge stereotypes in the workplace?



Is it fair that there are fewer women in leadership roles in tech and business?



Should only men be given jobs which require physical strength?

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Let's talk equality: Women in STEM and business
DISCUSSION CARDS



Should confidence be valued differently in women than in men?



Should women hide their personality to fit into male-dominated industries?



Should schools do more to promote science and business careers to girls?

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Lessons Learned

- ✓ **Gender bias** means **unfair actions or beliefs** based on the idea that **people are not equal** just because of their gender. This can lead to women being treated unfairly at work, school, or in daily life.
- ✓ Bias can be **systemic** (in institutions), **implicit** (unconscious attitudes), or **institutional** (unfair rules in organizations).
- ✓ Workplace discrimination can take hidden forms like **microaggressions, unequal opportunities, pay gaps, tokenism, and the glass ceiling**, which limit growth, fairness, and inclusion for underrepresented groups.
- ✓ Women's underrepresentation in STEM and business is linked to **deep-rooted gender roles, workplace inequality, societal expectations, and the motherhood penalty**. These factors create extra **barriers for women**, affecting their pay, career progression, and work-life balance.
- ✓ Women's career progress in STEM and business is blocked by **external factors** like stereotypes, bias, and glass ceilings, as well as **internal factors** such as self-doubt and fear of confirming gender roles.
- ✓ **Gender inequality harms women's mental health**, causing higher rates of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and eating disorders due to discrimination, violence, and chronic stress.

Additional Resources



Brown, Brittlea, Renee Carlucci, and Sarah Stewart. 2020. "The Consequences of Bias: We Live in a World Designed for Men." *Phalanx* 53, no. 4 (December): 26-33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26964303>



Setyaningrum, Retno, and Juansih Juansih. 2022. "Examining the Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Women's Leadership in STEM and Business Fields." *Gender & Society* 37, no. 1. [Gender Bias in Stem Hiring: Implicit In-Group Gender Favoritism Among Men Managers - Enav Friedmann, Dorit Efrat-Treister, 2023](https://doi.org/10.1177/08912464221100000000000000000000)



What it takes to be a Woman in STEM | Fatima AlKaabi | TEDxGEMSNewMillenniumSchool: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waD95VUbWC0>



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Chapter 2 - Identifying At-risk Young Women and Their Needs



Introduction

Youth workers play a vital role in supporting young women who are most vulnerable to systemic gender bias and social exclusion. Early identification and tailored support are key to empowering these groups. Traditional gender preferences and structural barriers still shape vocational choices. Legal barriers further compound gender inequalities.

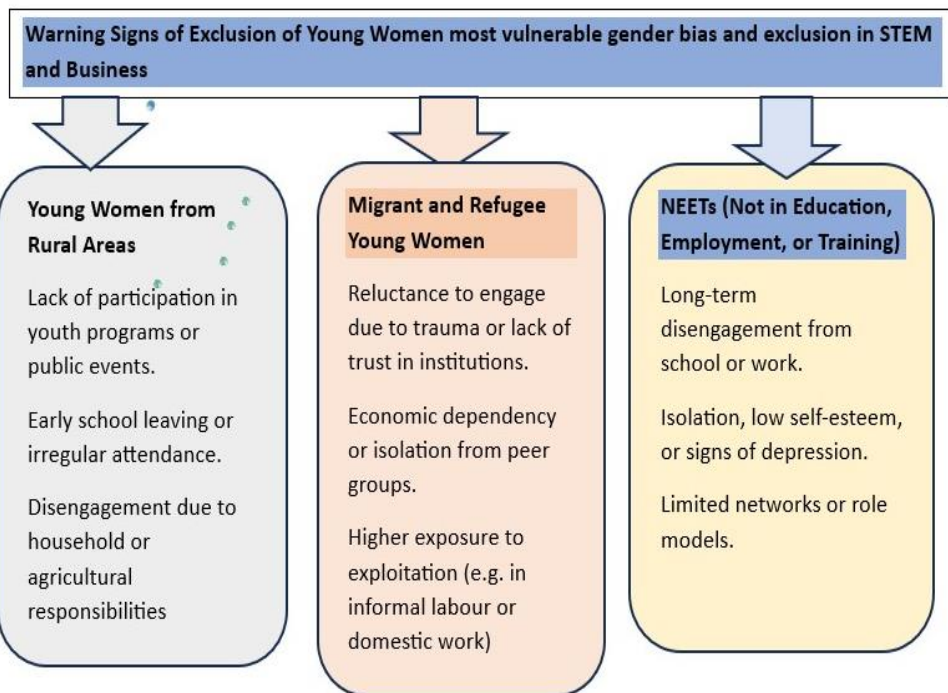
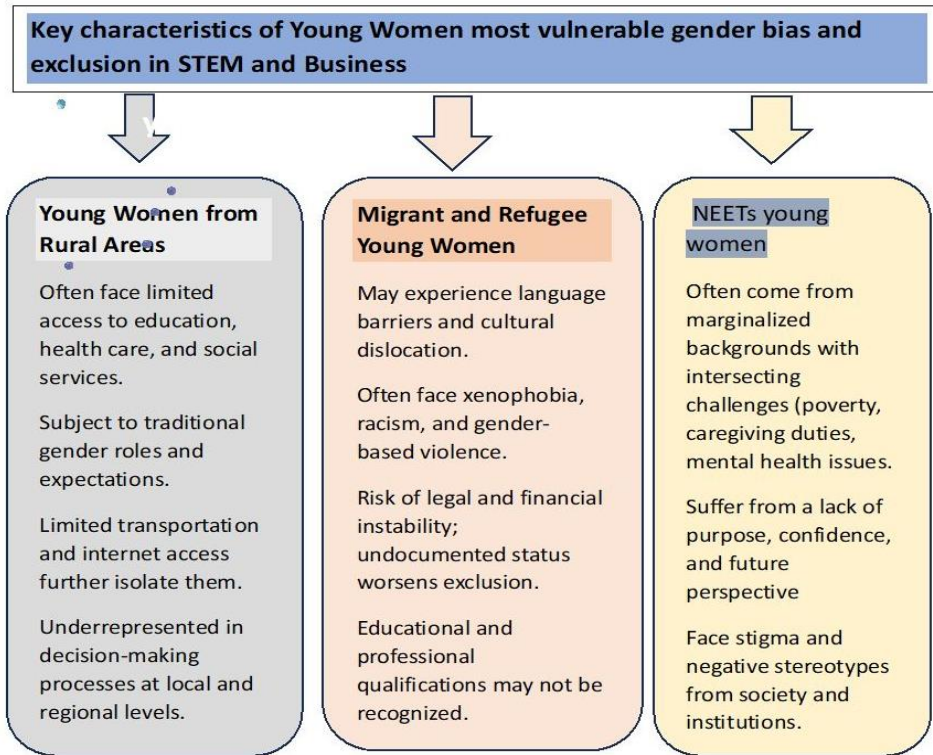
The Chapter 2 begins by defining young women most vulnerable gender bias and exclusion in STEM and Business such like: young women from rural areas, migrant and refugee, NEETs- Not in Education, Employment, or Training. It continuous by defining the key characteristics and signs of exclusion for each category (economic, cultural social) and presenting as well as the role of intersectionality in gender bias (race, disability, socio-economic background). Knowledge of these aspects by youth workers will allow them to report cases of discrimination in the most vulnerable categories of young women and to mentor them the most appropriate measures to overcome the barriers faced in careers in fields such as STEM and business. The content of the chapter 2 pays attention to equip youth workers with practical exercises, best practices, success stories to capture the attention of learners, create an environment conducive to active participation, debates and correct understanding of the topics presented. The final part of the chapter presents the conclusions of the main points approached and additional resources.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, learners will be able to:

1. **Define young women most vulnerable gender bias** and **exclusion** in STEM and Business (young women from rural areas, migrant and refugee, NEETs- Not in Education, Employment, or Training).
2. **Define the key characteristics** and **warning signs of exclusion** for each young women most vulnerable segment in gender bias (economic, cultural social).
3. Understand the **role of intersectionality in gender bias** (race, disability, socio-economic background)
4. **To equip** the youth workers with **strategies for outreach and engagement** with at-risk young women
5. **Identify how can support** in offering programs, practical exercises, best practices, and case studies tailored to specific realities of each category of young women facing with gender bias and exclusion in fields main-dominated.

Defining Young Women Most Vulnerable to Gender Bias and Exclusion in STEM and Business



Economic, Cultural & Social Barriers of Most Vulnerable Gender Bias

Women from Rural Areas

- **Economic barriers:** limited local job options, dependency on agriculture, scarce public transport, poor knowledge and skills in education and experience, access to facilities and services needed for setting up, managing, and developing businesses, lack the collateral and credit histories required by lending institutions.
- **Cultural barriers:** Traditional gender roles (home chores prioritized), low parental expectations for careers, demographics conditions. Women face occupational segregation, as well as gender-based violence-due to cultural mindsets and stereotypes. These obstacles make it harder for women to get on an equal footing with men in the world of work.
- **Social barriers:** Isolation due to distance and poor connectivity; underrepresentation in leadership; lack of role models. Social norms further restrict women's ability to pursue entrepreneurship, prioritizing household roles over business activities and limiting access to networks and mentorship.

Empowering Rural Women Initiative	
Economic Barriers	
HIGHLIGHTING CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE TODAY	
01 	JOB OPTIONS Limited local job opportunities hinder women's economic advancement.
02 	DEPENDENCY Many women rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods and income.
03 	TRANSPORT Scarce public transport limits access to opportunities and resources.
04 	CAPITAL ACCESS Limited access to necessary capital stifles entrepreneurial growth.
05 	INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS Organisational barriers affect women's economic participation and empowerment.

LEARN MORE

Support initiatives that address these economic barriers for rural women.

EMPOWER RURAL

Cultural Barriers for Women from Rural Areas



DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

Demographic conditions such as limited access to education and healthcare further marginalize rural women, making it difficult for them to break free from oppressive cultural norms.



PARENTAL INFLUENCE

Low parental expectations hinder women's career aspirations, often leading to a cycle of limited opportunities and reinforcing traditional roles within the community and family dynamics.



VIOLENCE AND CONTROL

Gender-based violence persists due to deeply rooted cultural mindsets that prioritize male authority and often blame women for incidents, perpetuating a cycle of fear and oppression.


TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

Gender Roles Impact Progress




FAMILY DYNAMICS

Family characteristics, including male dominance, often dictate women's roles in society. This dynamic reinforces cultural barriers, leaving women vulnerable to discrimination and limiting their potential.



BEHAVIORAL CONDITIONS

Personality traits shaped by societal expectations often result in low self-esteem among rural women, preventing them from pursuing ambitions beyond their prescribed roles within the home.






Women's Social Barriers

SOCIAL BARRIERS FACED BY WOMEN

- **Women in rural areas face numerous social barriers that restrict their growth. Isolation, poor connectivity, and lack of representation create significant obstacles in their pursuit of success.**

KEY ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

	<p>Underrepresentation in leadership roles hinders progress.</p>
<p>Restrictive norms affect women's entrepreneurial ambitions.</p>	
	<p>Isolation limits access to resources and opportunities.</p>

Join us in advocating for change!

Migrant and Refugee Young Women

Forced migration around the world has reached unprecedented levels; according to the UNHCR (2021), 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of 2019. Of these, 26 million were refugees and 73% of these refugees live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin.

- **Economic barriers:** Legal restrictors may prevent work; downward job mobility; unrecognized credentials, limited access to formal employment, lower educational attainment, financial constraints, unrecognised credentials got in their country of origin hindering their access to essential services like healthcare, housing, and education.


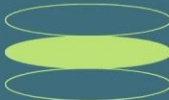

- **Cultural barriers:** Traumatic displacement, multi-layered bias (racism, xenophobia), lack of language skills, obstacles in western school systems. Female refugees are confronted with dual discrimination in the labour market of being female and having an asylum status that impedes permanent integration into the labour market and prevents female refugees from having a job that matches their skills and knowledge.
- **Social barriers:** Language and trust barriers, family responsibilities, isolation, poor education. Women are confronted with additional household and childcare duties. Multiple vulnerability factors including migration status, loss of family support and of their familiar social/cultural networks, socioeconomic circumstances, and being a single mother put women at increased risk of social isolation and loneliness, which are associated with negative health outcomes.

Migrant Women Matter

ECONOMIC BARRIERS FACED

Migrant and refugee women encounter numerous challenges in the labor market, including discrimination, legal obstacles, and a lack of recognition for their skills and education.

KEY CHALLENGES

	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Many face downward job mobility, impacting financial stability.</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Unrecognized credentials make it hard to find suitable employment.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Legal restrictions hinder many from securing jobs.</p>

Support migrant and refugee women by advocating for equitable employment opportunities.

Empowering Refugee Women

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

Migrant and refugee women face multiple challenges in labor market integration, including discrimination and lack of support, leading to underemployment despite their skills and qualifications.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

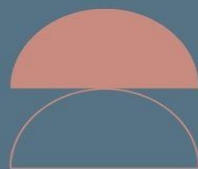


Language skills significantly affect job opportunities.

Cultural differences can create misunderstandings in the workplace.



Traumatic experiences hinder their ability to adapt.



Support their journey toward meaningful employment!

Migrant Women Matters

SOCIAL BARRIERS FACED

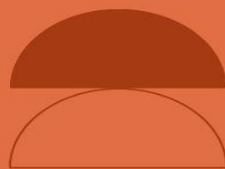
Migrant and refugee women face unique challenges that impact their social integration and overall well-being. Addressing these barriers is essential for fostering inclusion and support.

KEY CHALLENGES



Isolation can lead to negative mental health outcomes.

Family responsibilities often limit opportunities for personal growth.



Language barriers hinder communication and connection.

Join us in raising awareness and advocating for change!

NEETs Young Women

Globally, two out of three NEETs are female, highlighting a structural gender bias.

- **Economic barriers:** Lack of professional training or even basic numeracy and literacy skills, lack of relevant labour market experience, unstable income due to the temporary employment, difficulties re-entering the workforce after childbirth, largest difficulties to keep the jobs they are holding, higher likelihood of engaging in precarious work, family duties.
- **Cultural barriers:** Unemployment carries a social stigma that intersects with age and gender, impacting how individuals are perceived and treated. The incidence of poor health and single parenthood is much higher among NEETs. Women often drop out from education or do not enter the labour force due to family responsibilities.
- **Social barriers:** Isolation of NEETs appears frequently in case of single mother with small child, lack of social activities, non-involvement in community life. Women who tried few times to apply without success for a job lost their confidence and give up looking for a job. The lack of tailored networks for young women NEETs, becomes a social barrier, too.

Economic Barriers Facing NEET Women

Understanding these challenges is crucial for improvement.

Key Economic Challenges

EDUCATION GAP	Limited access to quality education
PROFESSIONAL TRAINING DEFICITS	Lack of skill development
REDUCED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	Many lack relevant labor market experience



Support initiatives that empower women today!

Empower NEET Women

CULTURAL BARRIERS FACED

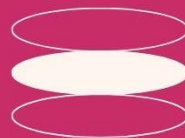
Many NEET women face significant challenges due to cultural barriers that hinder their ability to engage in education or employment, affecting their self-esteem and well-being.

IMPACT OF STIGMA



Single parenthood often compounds challenges in finding sustainable employment opportunities.

Health issues frequently arise due to stress and lack of support.



Unemployment leads to social stigma and isolation for many women.

Together, we can create change!

LACK OF CONFIDENCE

Low confidence limits engagement in community activities.

ISOLATION CHALLENGES

Single mothers face frequent social isolation daily.



LIMITED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Few activities lead to community disconnection.



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Non-involvement in community decreases opportunities.



NEED FOR INFORMATION

Access to information is crucial for progress.



BUILDING NETWORKS

Create connections to battle social isolation.

ENGAGEMENT
Take Action

The Role of Intersectionality in Gender Bias (Race, Disability, Socio-Economic Background)

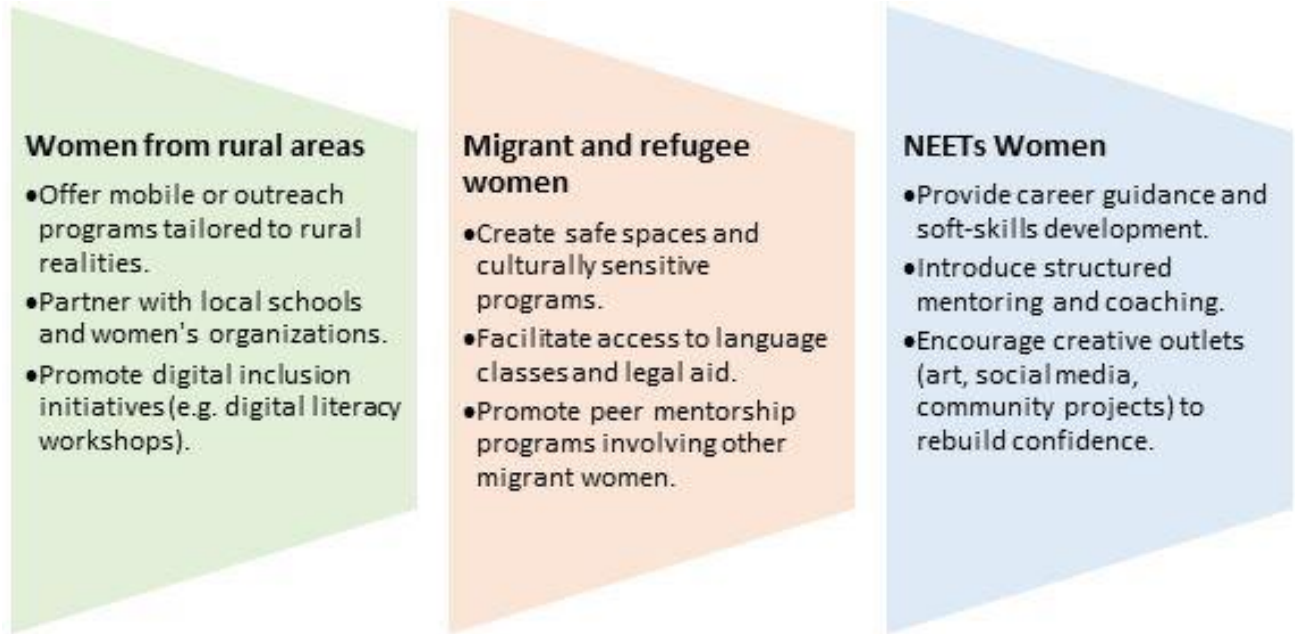
Definition: Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how aspects of a person’s identity (such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, etc.) intersect and interact to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege. The term "intersectionality" was coined by legal scholar Kimberli Crenshaw. Her work highlighted how existing legal and theoretical frameworks often failed to account for the specific ways in which black women experienced discrimination, as they faced both racism and sexism simultaneously. Essentially, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provides a lens for understanding how various forms of inequality can combine and compound, leading to unique experiences of oppression. It emphasizes the need to consider the interconnectedness of social categories and power structures when analysing social inequality.

Key concepts of intersectionality

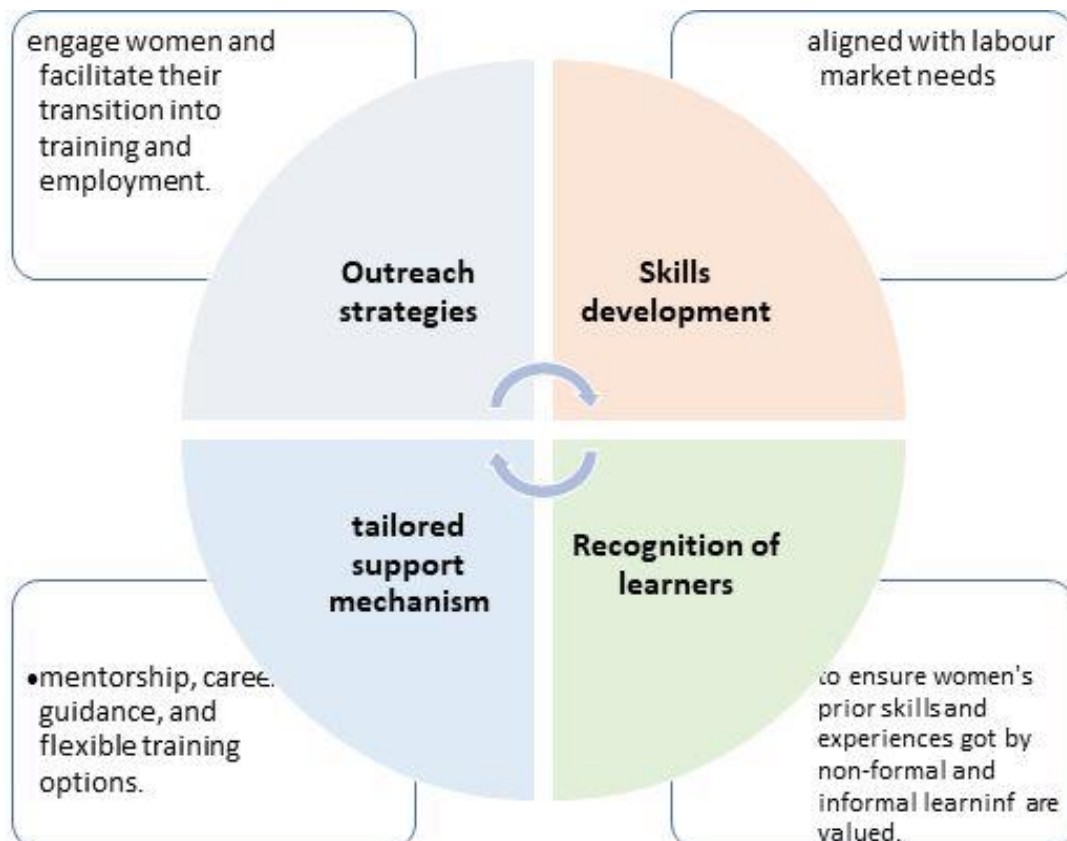
Term	Meaning	Example
Privilege	Unearned benefits based on identity	Being white in a majority-white workplace
Marginalization	Systemic exclusion or disadvantage	LGBTQ+ individuals facing hiring bias
Systemic Barriers	Institutional practices that hinder equity	Lack of ADA accommodations
Compound Disadvantage	When multiple marginalized identities increase discrimination	A Black woman with a disability facing job bias

Strategies for Outreach and Engagement with At-Risk Young Women

How youth workers can support:



Strategy of Youth Workers with At-Risk Young Women



Practical Tools for Youth Workers

- **Risk Assessment Checklist** - to help identify early signs of exclusion.
- **Community Mapping Tool** - to locate services and safe spaces in the area.
- **Cultural Sensitivity Guidelines** - to build trust with marginalized youth.
- **Youth Voice Toolkit** - to include young women in designing programs for themselves

In **Appendix 1**, you will find a structured set of practical templates that youth workers can adapt and use directly with their teams and communities.

Skills Development Strategy for Vocational Training

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) equips practitioners with valuable resources to support young women vulnerable at risk by VET, offering opportunities for reskilling. The toolkit comprises following steps:

Fully understand the characteristics, needs, and trajectories of young women like as: unavailability for work and training due to family responsibilities, living in remote areas, migration background, lack of support measures, or single parenthood.

Targeted outreach and activation measures for young women by tailoring support to individual needs: clearly defining key characteristics; building trust and connection by actively listening to their concerns and showing empathy; empowering and enabling young women to take control of their lives and with the confidence they need to succeed.

Providing childcare by partnerships with local childcare providers or vouchers for or financial contributions to childcare services.

Mentoring for young women providing (female) role models, guidance, support and opportunities for growth, building confidence and self-esteem, improving skills.

Bringing young women in need into VET by promoting flexible VET programmes, validating existing skills or use non-formal education techniques like workshops, discussions, arts, sports, and experiential learning, micro credentials.

Creating secure and sustainable labour market attachment by flexibility through remote/online jobs, fostering female entrepreneurship, looking at new opportunities on the market.

Interactive Learning

Discussion cards



Let's Talk Together

Join Our Community Discussion Event on barriers to career access using intersectional approach: A low-income woman of color may face both racial and economic discrimination. Which of these barriers have you seen in your organization or field? What might an intersectional response look like?

Engage, Share, Learn, Discuss

Let's talk on young women who are most vulnerable to gender bias and exclusion in STEM and business

DISCUSSION CARDS



What are the characteristics of young women in rural areas



What are the characteristics of young women migrant?



What are the characteristics of NEET young women

12

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BARIERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Scenario: A young, queer, Black woman named Imani found herself navigating a challenging job market. She excelled in her field, but her resume and interview performance were often met with subtle biases, stemming from a combination of her race, gender, and sexual orientation. Interviews would stall after she mentioned her partner, or she'd encounter microaggressions during the interview process. Employers, even those with good intentions, seemed unable to see past her intersecting identities, viewing her as "too Black", "too feminine", or "too queer" for certain roles, despite her qualifications

Discussion Questions:

- What are the intersecting identities here?
- What barriers are present?
- How could you support this person



Interview with a migrant woman with a disability

Scenario: You are a career advisor supporting a first-generation immigrant woman with a learning disability. She is unsure about disclosing her condition during interviews.

Roles:

- Advisor (active listener and problem-solver)
- Job Seeker (explains concerns)
- Observer (notes bias, empathy, inclusion)

Debrief Questions:

- What went well?
- What assumptions were made?
- How can this be improved?

Group Mapping Activity - Template



Identity Factors:

- Gender
- Class –
- Race Connections:

Gender and Class: A female nurse from a lower economic class may face additional barriers such as wage gap and limited opportunities for advancement.

Presentation to the group: Despite her skills and dedication, she might face a wage gap compared to her male counterparts. Additionally, her opportunities for advancement might be limited due to her economic background. This intersection of gender and class creates additional barriers that we need to acknowledge and address in our profession.

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Appendix 1

The set of **practical templates** that youth workers can adapt and use directly with their teams and communities.

Risk Assessment Checklist Template

Purpose: To help identify early signs of exclusion among young people.

Risk area	Indicators /Early signs	YES	NO	Follow-up Action
School Engagement	Frequent absence, low grades, lack of participation			
Social Connections	Isolated from peers, experiences bullying, withdrawn			
Family Support	Limited parental involvement, family stress, lack of supervision			
Community Belonging	Lack of access to clubs, safe spaces, or positive role models			
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Signs of anxiety, depression, stress, or low self-esteem			
Risk Behaviors	Substance misuse, petty crime, unsafe online activity			
Economic Challenges	Unemployment, financial stress, housing insecurity			

Action Plan Section:

- Priority concerns identified: _____
- Immediate referrals/support needed: _____
- Responsible person: _____
- Timeline for follow-up: _____

Community Mapping Tool

Purpose: To locate services, safe spaces, and resources available to young people.

Template:

Step 1 - Map Categories

- Youth clubs & community centres
- Schools & training institutions
- Health services (physical & mental health)
- Employment & skills agencies
- Religious & cultural centres
- Sports & recreation facilities
- Safe spaces (parks, drop-in centres, libraries)
- Local authorities / social services
- Peer networks / youth-led groups

Step 2 - Mapping Table

Service/space	Location	Contact person	Opening Hours	Accessibility (cost, transport, inclusivity)	Notes
Community Youth Hub	main	Street, no	Mon-Fri 3-8 pm	Free, wheelchair access	Offers mentoring

Step 3 - Visual Map (Optional)

Draw or use Google Maps / mapping apps to highlight where services are concentrated and identify gaps.

Cultural Sensitivity Guidelines

Purpose: To build trust and respectful relationships with marginalized youth.

Principle	Practical Guidance
Respect diversity	Acknowledge different cultural, religious, and gender identities without assumptions.
Active Listening	Allow youth to share their experiences without interruption or judgment.
Representation	Ensure diverse youth voices are included in program design and leadership.
Accessibility	Consider language barriers, translation needs, and physical accessibility.
Trust Building	Consistency in showing up, confidentiality, and respecting personal boundaries.
Self-Reflection	Encourage youth workers to reflect on their own biases and privileges regularly.

Checklist for Youth Worker Reflection:

- Did I listen more than I spoke?
- Did I adapt activities to be culturally inclusive?
- Did I create a space where young women felt safe to contribute?
- Am I aware of my own assumptions?

Youth Voice Toolkit

Purpose: To ensure young women are directly involved in shaping programs.

Methods to Capture Youth Voice

- Focus groups with young women
- Anonymous surveys (online/in-person)
- Youth advisory board / council
- Suggestion boxes / digital polls
- Creative methods (art, storytelling, theatre, photovoice)

Engagement Questions

1. What are the biggest challenges you face in your community?
2. What services or spaces feel safe and welcoming for you?
3. What barriers prevent you from participating in youth programs?
4. What kind of support would help you reach your goals?
5. How would you like to be involved in decision-making?

Action Plan Framework

Idea/Needs Identified of Young Women	How It Will Be Addressed in the Program	Who Is Responsible	Timeline	Feedback Mechanism
Example: Need for mentorship	Pair young women with female mentors in careers of interest	Program Coordinator	3 months	Regular feedback circles

Youth Feedback Loop

- Collect input → Implement changes → Report back to youth → Repeat.

Chapter 3 - Confidence Building and Resilience in Male-Dominated Industries



Introduction

Young women entering male-dominated fields like STEM and business often encounter not only external barriers like discrimination and bias, but also internal struggles—self-doubt, imposter syndrome, and lack of support. These emotional and psychological challenges can inhibit their potential before their talents even have a chance to shine. This chapter aims to equip youth workers with practical tools and approaches to help young women build confidence and foster resilience in challenging professional environments.

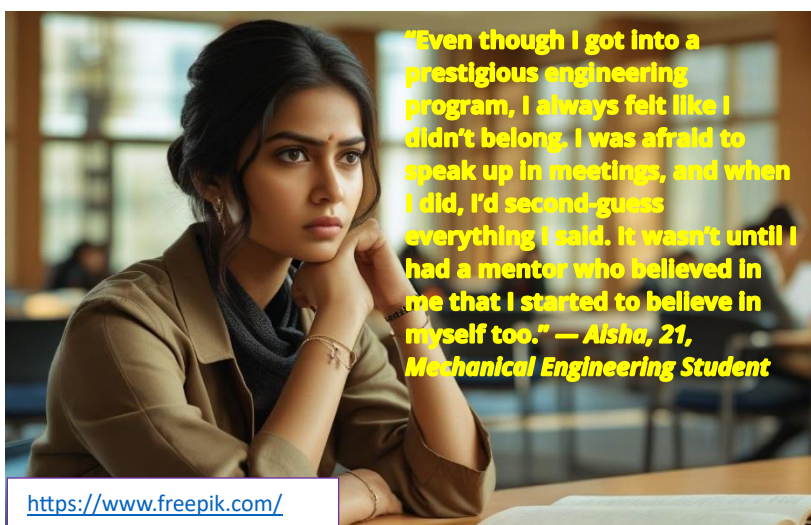
Confidence and resilience are not inherent traits—they can be cultivated through support, practice, and intentional strategies. By helping young women build these strengths, youth workers play a critical role in empowering them to pursue and persist in their ambitions.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, youth workers will be able to:

- Recognize the impact of imposter syndrome and self-doubt in young women's career development.
- Apply strategies for building self-confidence through affirmations, reflective exercises, and communication coaching.
- Support the development of emotional resilience to cope with criticism, exclusion, and setbacks.
- Facilitate mentorship and peer networks that reinforce support, belonging, and ambition.
- Model and promote assertive communication and boundary-setting behaviours.

Real Stories: Lived Experiences in STEM and Business





Practical Strategies and Tools

Overcoming Self-Doubt and Imposter Syndrome

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome—the persistent internal belief that one is a fraud despite evidence of competence—is a powerful journey that involves mindset shifts, self-awareness, and proactive strategies. Here's a structured explanation to guide that process:

Understanding Imposter Syndrome

Definition: Imposter syndrome is a psychological pattern where individuals doubt their accomplishments and fear being exposed as a “fraud,” even when they are demonstrably capable.

You can test yourself with the Personality Test, by selecting your language among many, at: <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>

There are five types of imposter syndrome, as categorized by Dr. Valerie Young. These types describe different ways individuals with imposter syndrome define competence and struggle with self-doubt. Here's a breakdown of each type:

1. **The Perfectionist:** These individuals set extremely high standards for themselves and are highly critical of any perceived shortcomings or mistakes. They may feel like a failure if they don't meet their unrealistic expectations.
2. **The Expert:** This type constantly worries about not knowing enough and fears being exposed as a fraud, despite having significant knowledge and



<https://www.freepik.com/>

expertise. They may downplay their skills and experience or avoid situations where their knowledge might be questioned.

3. **The Soloist:** These individuals prefer to work alone and avoid asking for help, believing that needing assistance is a sign of weakness or incompetence. They may struggle with collaboration and feel validated by their self-reliance.
4. **The Natural Genius:** This type equates competence with ease and speed, feeling inadequate when they struggle with tasks or need effort to succeed. They may view effort and practice as signs of a lack of natural talent.
5. **The Superwoman/Superman:** These individuals push themselves to overachieve and take on excessive workloads to prove their worth and avoid being perceived as incompetent. They often equate hard work with validation and may neglect their own needs.



Practical Strategies to Overcome Imposter Syndrome



You may be experiencing imposter syndrome if you:

- Attribute success to luck or timing rather than skill
- Constantly compare yourself to others
- Feel undeserving of praise
- Fear being "found out"
- Overwork to compensate or underperform due to fear

1.Track Achievements

- Keep a "wins" journal or brag sheet
- Review positive feedback and milestones regularly



2.Talk About It

- Share with trusted peers, mentors, or coaches
- Vulnerability often invites support and perspective



3.Stop the Comparison Game

- Limit time on social media or activities that trigger comparison
- Focus on your path and growth



4.Set Realistic Standards

- Replace perfectionism with progress orientation
- Allow space for mistakes as part of learning



5.Visualize Confidence

- Mentally rehearse success
- Use power poses and affirmations before high-stakes situations





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4 EQUALITY

Final Thought

Imposter syndrome may not disappear entirely, but it can lose its power when you stop believing it as truth. Replacing self-doubt with curiosity and compassion is a key step toward resilience and confidence.

Assertive Communication and Self-advocacy in Professional Settings

Assertive communication and self-advocacy are essential professional skills that empower individuals to express themselves clearly, confidently, and respectfully. In professional settings, mastering these skills helps build strong relationships, foster mutual respect, and navigate complex dynamics like conflict resolution, negotiations, or career development.

What is Assertive Communication?

Assertive communication is the ability to express your thoughts, feelings, needs, and rights in a direct, honest, and respectful way—without passivity or aggression.

✦ Characteristics of Assertive Communication:

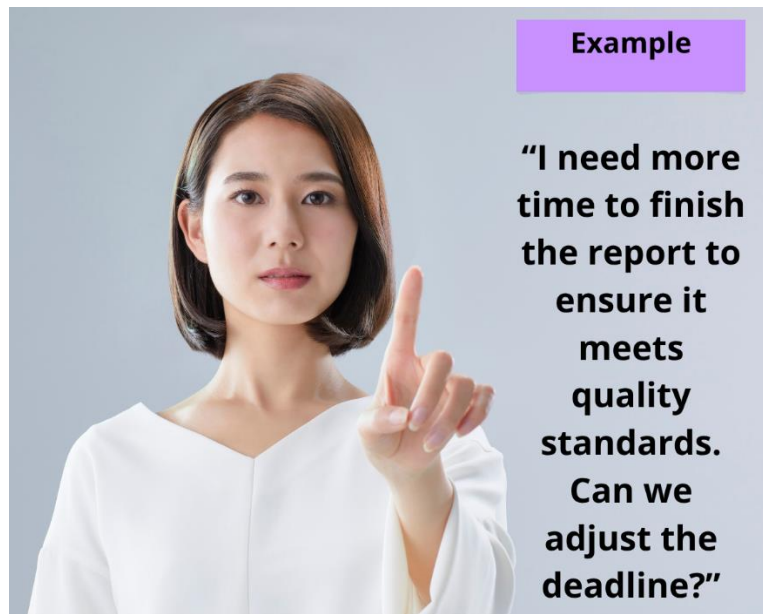
- Clarity: Saying what you mean without ambiguity.
- Respect: Valuing your own rights and the rights of others.
- Confidence: Standing by your words without needing to dominate.
- Responsibility: Using “I” statements to own your perspectives.

What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy is the ability to stand up for your own needs, interests, goals, and values, especially in situations where they may be overlooked or challenged.

🎯 Elements of Effective Self-Advocacy:

- Awareness: Knowing your strengths, needs, and rights.
- Preparation: Understanding the context, stakeholders, and your goals.
- Articulation: Clearly communicate your message or request.
- Persistence: Following up professionally and maintaining consistency.



Example

“I need more time to finish the report to ensure it meets quality standards. Can we adjust the deadline?”



 **Key Skills for Assertive Communication & Self-Advocacy**



Using "I" Statements
 "I feel concerned when deadlines shift suddenly" instead of
 "You always change things last minute."

Active Listening
 Validating others' perspectives before stating your own:
 "I hear that you're under pressure, and I'd like to share my constraints as well."

Non-Verbal Alignment
 Maintain eye contact, open posture, calm tone—align your body language with your message.

Stating Needs with Solutions
 "I'd be more productive with flexible hours. Could we try a trial period to assess its impact?"

Setting Boundaries
 Politely saying no:
 "I'm unable to take on additional tasks right now without compromising quality."

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 **Common Challenges**

Challenge	Strategy to Overcome
Fear of being seen as difficult	Reframe: You're advocating, not complaining
Cultural norms discouraging self-promotion	Use data and shared goals to frame your value

Challenge	Strategy to Overcome
Tendency to over-apologize	Replace with gratitude: "Thank you for your patience" instead of "Sorry for the delay"
Intimidating power dynamics	Prepare talking points; rehearse with a mentor or friend

 **Practical Scenarios**

Practical scenarios

Assertiveness & Self-Advocacy



 **In Team Discussions**

Assertive

"I'd like to finish my point before we move on. It's important for our decision."

 **In Performance Reviews**

Self-Advocacy

"Here are three examples where I exceeded my targets. I believe I'm ready for more responsibility."

 **In Time Management:**

Assertive

"To maintain quality, I can complete this by Friday—not Wednesday."

 **In Giving Feedback:**

Assertive

"When meetings start late, it affects my schedule. Can we agree to begin on time?"



SCENARIO



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4 EQUALITY

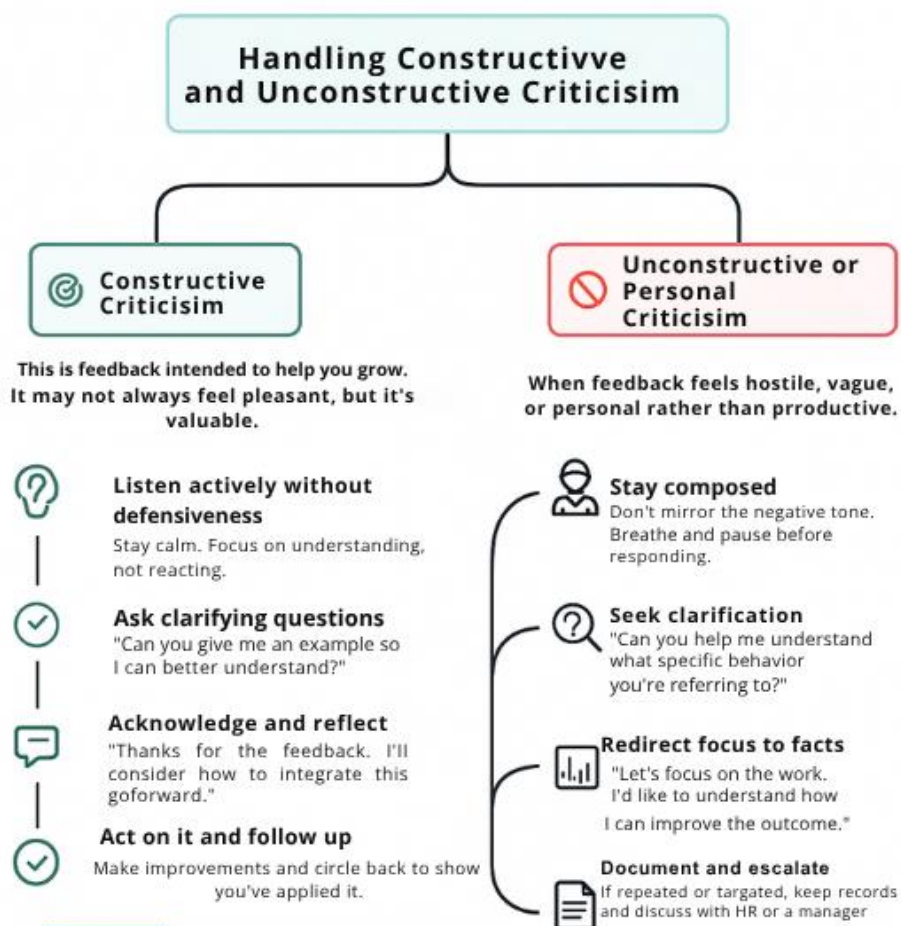
Final Thought

Assertive communication and self-advocacy are **learned skills**, not inherent traits. When used appropriately, they create **space for mutual respect, honest dialogue, and personal empowerment** in the workplace. It's not about being forceful—it's about being clear and firm, while also being kind.

Strategies for Handling Criticism, Bias, and Exclusion in the Workplace

Handling criticism, bias, and exclusion in the workplace requires a combination of emotional intelligence, assertive communication, and strategic action. These situations can deeply impact your confidence and professional growth, so having well-practiced strategies ensures you remain resilient, respected, and proactive.

✿ Handling Constructive and Unconstructive Criticism

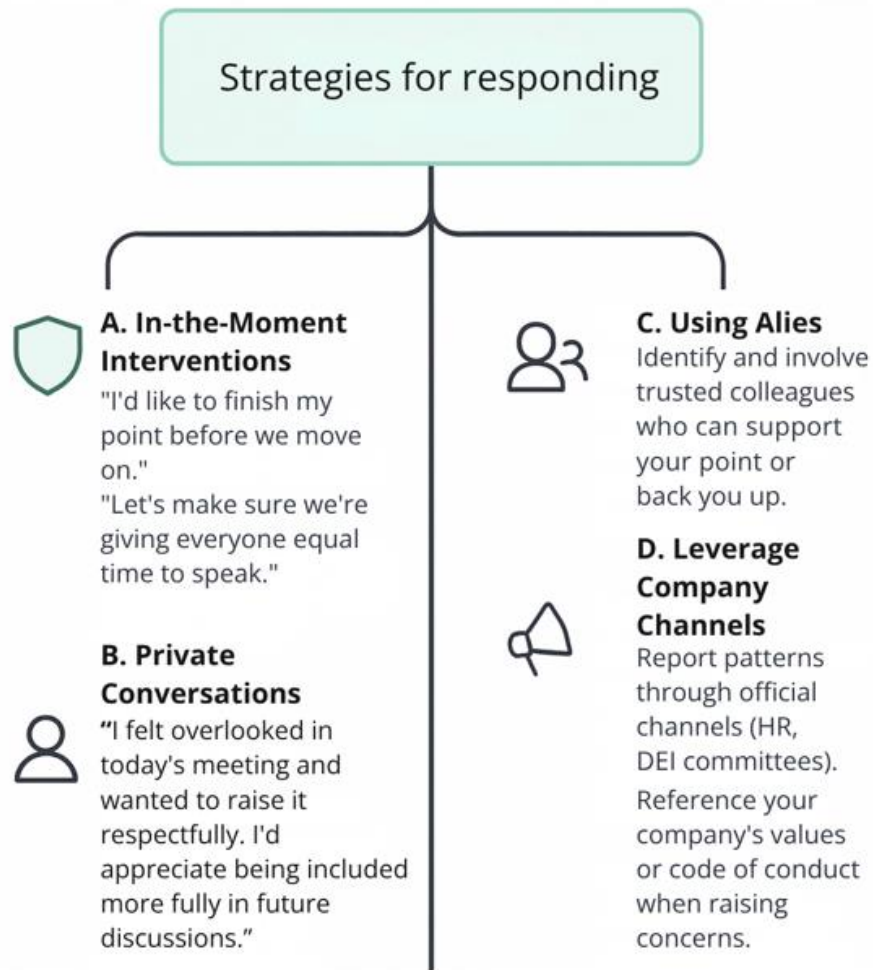


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Addressing Bias (Implicit or Explicit)

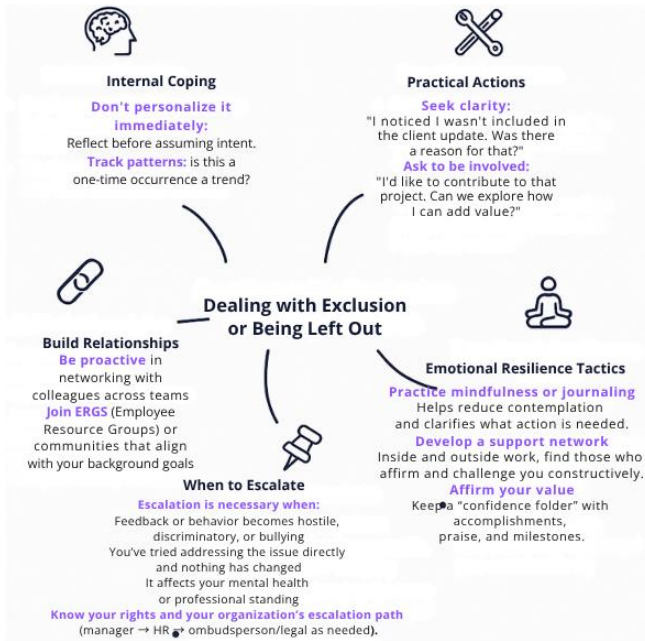
Bias—whether based on race, gender, age, disability, or other aspects—can be subtle or overt. Either way, it must be addressed tactfully and strategically.



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👉 Dealing with Exclusion or Being Left Out

Exclusion can range from being left out of meetings to missing out on key projects or informal networking.

Final Thought

Facing criticism, bias, or exclusion is tough-but how you respond defines your trajectory. Approach each challenge with confidence, clarity, and composure. You have a right to be heard, respected, and supported.

Resilience-Building Framework

🔄 The 3 R's of Resilience

Resilience isn't about suppressing difficulty - it's about meeting challenge with intention and clarity. The 3 R's provide a structured, practical process for building resilience in moments of stress, exclusion, or self-doubt.

1 Recognize

Objective: Increase emotional awareness.

"You can't change what you're unaware of."

Practices:

- Identify internal signals of stress (tight chest, racing thoughts, fatigue).
- Notice common triggers (e.g., being interrupted, receiving unclear feedback).
- Observe automatic emotional reactions (withdrawal, anger, defensiveness).

Example:

"I feel anxious every time this person leads a meeting - why is that?"

2 Reframe

Objective: Shift unhelpful thinking to more empowering perspectives.

"Our thoughts shape our emotions. Reframing shapes resilience."

Practices:

- Challenge cognitive distortions:
 - From *"I'm not good enough"*
 - To *"I'm still learning and improving."*
- Use positive self-talk grounded in truth.

- Ask: *“What’s another way to interpret this situation?”*

Example:

“They didn’t reply right away - maybe they’re busy, not dismissive.”

3 Respond

Objective: Move from reactive to intentional action.

“Resilience is not the absence of reaction - it’s the presence of response.”

Practices:

- Set boundaries when needed (*“I need time to process this, can we continue tomorrow?”*).
- Seek support from a trusted person or mentor.
- Focus on your sphere of influence - act aligned with your values and goals.

Example:

“I’ll schedule a 1:1 to clarify expectations instead of stewing in uncertainty.”

Final Thought

The 3 R’s equip you with a mini-playbook for difficult moments:

Phase	Focus	Example
Recognize	Awareness of thoughts/emotions	“I feel dismissed.”
Reframe	Adjust interpretation	“Maybe it wasn’t intentional.”
Respond	Take meaningful action	“I’ll address it calmly and directly.”

The Role of Mentorship and Peer Support Networks

Mentorship and peer support networks are vital components in fostering inclusion, resilience, and career development. They offer both emotional grounding and strategic guidance, especially when navigating challenges like exclusion, bias, or uncertainty at work.

💛 Why Mentorship and Peer Support Matter

Mentorship provides:

- Guidance from someone more experienced
- Perspective on workplace dynamics and career paths
- Confidence through validation and encouragement
- Accountability for your personal and professional growth

Peer Support Networks offer:

- Shared understanding from colleagues with similar experiences
- Safe space to process issues and emotions
- Real-time feedback and collaborative problem-solving

🕒 Types of Mentorships and Support

Type	Description	Example
Formal Mentorship	Structured, often assigned by the company	Monthly check-ins with a senior leader
Informal Mentorship	Organically built relationships	A trusted colleague you reach out to for guidance

Type	Description	Example
Peer Circles	Group of peers with shared goals or identities	Slack groups, cohort learning, accountability partners
Affinity-Based Support	Communities aligned with your identity or interests	ERGs, DEI spaces, or interest-based communities

What Mentors and Peer Networks Can Help With

- Navigating **exclusion or difficult feedback**
- Identifying **career opportunities or skill gaps**
- Exploring ways to **build visibility and influence**
- Practicing **boundary-setting or self-advocacy scripts**
- Strengthening **resilience and emotional regulation.**

How to Make the Most of It

1. Be Intentional:

Set goals for what you want from the relationship (e.g., feedback, networking, growth).

2. Communicate Clearly:

Be honest about your needs and boundaries. Ask specific questions.

3. Give Back:

Offer support to others. Peer networks thrive on reciprocity.

4. Document Lessons:

Keep notes on key insights or strategies to apply later.

Long-Term Benefits

- Greater **career satisfaction**
- Broader **organizational awareness**
- Stronger **sense of belonging**
- Enhanced **confidence and decision-making**

Reflection Questions for Youth Workers

- When was the last time you observed a young woman doubting herself despite clear success?
- How do you usually respond to expressions of self-doubt?
- What personal biases might you hold about who appears “confident” or “resilient”?
- How do you model resilience in your own work?

Quick Reference: 5 Confidence Boosters

1. Encourage positive self-talk (“I’m capable and learning.”).
2. Reframe failure as feedback.
3. Celebrate small wins regularly.
4. Introduce role models with relatable stories.
5. Practice visibility: give young women space to speak, present, and lead.

Hands-On Activity: “Resilience Timeline”

Objective: Help participants recognize past challenges they’ve overcome.

Instructions:

1. Each young woman draws a timeline of her life with key moments where she felt challenged or doubted herself.
2. Next to each moment, she writes how she overcame it or what she learned.
3. In pairs or small groups, they share insights and notice patterns of strength.

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Paper, pens, markers

Outcome: Reinforces the narrative that “I’ve done hard things before-I can do this too.”

Role-Play Scenarios: Practice Assertiveness

- **Scenario 1:** A male colleague interrupts repeatedly during a project meeting. How do you assertively bring attention to this?
- **Scenario 2:** A supervisor gives vague criticism without guidance. How do you ask for constructive feedback confidently?
- **Scenario 3:** A peer questions your qualifications in a subtle way (“Wow, didn’t expect you to be so technical.”). How do you respond without internalizing doubt?

Motivational Corner

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.”
— Eleanor Roosevelt



Developed with Canva.com

“Confidence doesn’t mean you have all the answers—it means you’re willing to find them.”
— Youth Mentor Quote

Developed with Canva.com

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- Dweck, C. (2014, November). *The power of believing you can improve* [Video]. TEDxNorrköping. https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve

Explore More: Additional Resources

This selection prioritizes practical relevance, credibility, and direct support for building **confidence and resilience** in **male-dominated environments**:

Additional Books

Books

- Cuddy, A. (2015). *Presence: Bringing your boldest self to your biggest challenges*. Little, Brown Spark.
→ Focuses on how body language and non-verbal behavior influence confidence and performance.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
→ Introduces the growth vs. fixed mindset framework, central to building resilience.
- Frankel, L. P. (2004). *Nice girls don't get the corner office: 101 unconscious mistakes women make that sabotage their careers*. Warner Business Books.
→ Offers practical coaching on navigating professional environments confidently

Additional Podcasts

- Harvard Business Review. (n.d.). *Women at Work* [Audio podcast]. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/podcast-women-at-work>
→ Features workplace strategies and real-life stories addressing gender dynamics and leadership.

Additional Articles & Toolkits

- Mind Tools. (n.d.). *Building personal resilience*. <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/resilience.htm>
→ A clear toolkit with exercises to foster resilience under pressure.
- Kay, K., & Shipman, C. (2014, May). The confidence gap. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/the-confidence-gap/359815/>
→ Landmark article exploring why competent women often underestimate themselves-and how to change that.

Additional Talks & Videos

- Cuddy, A. (2012, June). *Your body language may shape who you are* [Video]. TEDGlobal. https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are
→ A widely viewed TED Talk on using body language to “fake it till you become it.”
- Brown, B. (2010, June). *The power of vulnerability* [Video]. TEDxHouston. https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability
→ Explores vulnerability as a strength and foundation of authentic confidence

Additional Communities & Networks

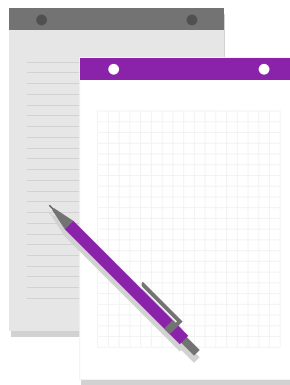
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→ Peer-support groups focused on developing leadership and confidence through shared experience.

- Women Who Code. (n.d.). *Women Who Code global network*. <https://www.womenwhocode.com/>
→ A leading global platform offering mentorship and visibility for women in tech.

Additional Self-Assessment Tools

- 16Personalities. (n.d.). *Free personality test*. <https://www.16personalities.com/>
→ Helps users reflect on their strengths and workplace behaviours.
- Mind Tools. (n.d.). *Confidence quotient quiz*. https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_84.htm
→ Offers a quick self-check to identify areas of self-confidence improvement.

Chapter 4 - Preparing for Workplace Challenges and Gender Bias



Introduction

Entering the workforce is a major transition for any young person, but for young women, it often comes with a unique set of challenges that are not always obvious at first glance. One of the most persistent (and frequently overlooked) obstacles is gender bias. While blatant sexism is less common than in the past, bias today often appears in subtle, everyday situations: a woman being talked over in meetings, having her ideas attributed to male colleagues, or being passed over for leadership roles despite equal or greater qualifications. These experiences, though often minimised or dismissed, can have long-lasting impacts on confidence, career progression, and mental health.

This chapter focuses on the practical side of addressing gender bias in the workplace. It aims to help youth workers prepare young women, especially those entering traditionally male-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and business, for the realities they may face. The goal is not to intimidate or discourage, but to offer clear, actionable strategies that foster resilience, self-awareness, and professionalism.

Rather than providing a general overview of workplace issues, this chapter takes a focused approach: it looks closely at how gender bias operates in modern professional environments, how it affects early-career women, and what youth workers can do to support them in navigating it effectively. From recognising subtle forms of bias to building the confidence to speak up, the content that follows is designed to equip mentors with both insight and tools. In doing so, it contributes to building a more equal and inclusive future - one conversation, one training, and one empowered young woman at a time.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, learners will be able to:

5. **Identify subtle and overt forms of gender bias** in early-career workplace situations, **especially in male-dominated environments.**
6. Develop **strategies to support young women in recognising and responding to biased behaviour** professionally and confidently.
7. **Understand the role of youth workers** in preparing young women for workplace dynamics that may involve power imbalances and gender-based assumptions.
8. **Apply practical mentoring techniques** to help young women build resilience, self-advocacy skills, and professional presence when facing bias.

Understanding Power Dynamics and Gender Stereotypes in the Workplace

For many young women, entering the workforce – especially in business or STEM – means stepping into environments still shaped by traditional expectations. While formal equality has improved, informal norms often favour behaviours more typically associated with men: assertiveness, independence, and competitiveness. These are seen as strengths in male employees, but when expressed by women, can be judged differently – sometimes as arrogance or being “too much”.

Subtle gender stereotypes play out in everyday situations: women being interrupted more often, given less credit for ideas, or judged more harshly when mistakes happen. In male-dominated fields, this can lead to a quiet but constant pressure to perform without visible error, to avoid being seen as confirmation of a stereotype (Williams, 2015).

These dynamics are rarely intentional. Most bias is unconscious – shaped by past experiences and cultural messages. But its impact is very real: it influences who gets mentored, who is trusted with responsibility, and who is promoted. (Leonard, 2021; Hantzes & Associates, 2023). Power in the workplace isn’t just about titles – it’s also about who gets invited into decision-making and whose voice carries weight.

Howard J. Ross
 one of the world’s foremost leaders in identifying and combating unconscious bias

“Possessing bias is part and parcel of being human. And the more we think we are immune to it, the greater the likelihood that our own biases will be invisible or unconscious to us!”



4

Helping young women recognise these patterns, without becoming discouraged by them, is a key step. When they can name what’s happening, they’re better able to respond strategically – without doubting their own competence. And when youth workers support them in this process, they’re not just building confidence – they’re giving them a realistic map of the terrain ahead.

Workplace Survival Skills: Negotiation, Leadership, and Teamwork

Young women entering the workforce often bring strong academic knowledge and motivation but succeeding in professional settings also depends on less visible skills: **navigating team dynamics, speaking up with confidence, and negotiating fairly for what they need.** These aren’t just “extras” - they are essential to staying in the


⁴ Howard J. Ross, *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*. <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/40809850>

game, especially in competitive or male-dominated environments (Friedmann & Efrat-Treister, 2023).

Negotiation, for instance, is not only about salary. It's about communicating boundaries, asking for resources, or taking credit for work done. Many young women hesitate to negotiate, not because they don't know how, but because they've internalised the fear of being seen as “demanding” or “ungrateful” (AlKaabi, 2023). But failing to ask often means missing out on opportunities, responsibilities, or fair compensation.

Leadership can also look different than expected. While some workplaces still reward dominant, visible leadership styles, others are learning to value inclusive, listening-based leadership. Still, young women often feel pressure to “prove” they can lead by working harder or speaking louder. What matters is helping them recognise their own leadership strengths – whether they're quiet organisers, effective communicators, or calm problem-solvers, and giving them space to practice those skills without having to mimic someone else's style (Friedmann & Efrat-Treister, 2023).

Teamwork brings its own challenges. In mixed-gender teams, women may be expected to do more emotional labour – organising meetings, smoothing over conflict, or picking up extra tasks. These expectations aren't always spoken, but they show up in how work is divided and who gets credit. Learning how to set limits without guilt, and how to share responsibilities fairly, is part of navigating professional teams with clarity (Brown, Carlucci & Stewart, 2020).

 **Mentoring tip:** Ask your mentee to describe a recent group project or teamwork experience. Then explore:

- *What role did she naturally take on?*
- *Did she feel heard and respected by the group?*
- *Was there a moment when she wanted to speak up but didn't? Why?*
- *What would she do differently next time?*

Use this to help her name her leadership strengths and identify specific communication habits she'd like to develop.

Navigating Male-Dominated Work Environments Professionally

Even today, many industries – especially engineering, IT, finance, or construction – remain heavily male-dominated, not only in numbers but in culture. This doesn't always mean open hostility or exclusion. Sometimes the challenge is more subtle: being the only woman in the room, having to adjust your tone to be taken seriously, or being talked over in meetings where your input is just as valid (Heijltjes et al., 2023).

For young women, the experience of being “*the only one*” can bring a quiet kind of pressure. They may find themselves second-guessing their tone, over-preparing for meetings, or avoiding small talk because it feels uncomfortable or alienating. These are coping strategies, but over time, they can erode confidence and make a talented person feel like a guest in their own field (Vitek & Stasiowski, 2022).

Professionalism in these settings doesn't mean blending in or staying silent. It means developing a clear sense of self – knowing how to speak up when necessary, how to push back respectfully, and how to maintain boundaries without apologising. It also means building support systems: allies in the workplace, mentors outside of it, or simply peers who understand what it means to walk into a room and feel like you're representing more than just yourself (Savio, 2023).

There's also the **emotional side**. Being in the minority can lead to self-monitoring: wondering how others are perceiving you, if your success is really yours, or if you're being held to a different standard. For some women, this is compounded by assumptions about age, appearance, or personality. A young woman might be treated as inexperienced, regardless of her actual skills. Or, she might feel pressure to prove her seriousness by distancing herself from anything perceived as too "soft" (Savio, 2023).

These aren't flaws in the women – they're reflections of the work culture they're trying to succeed in. Acknowledging that reality doesn't mean lowering expectations; it means being honest about the extra work some people carry into the room with them (Vitek & Stasiowski, 2022).



Dealing With Unconscious Bias from Colleagues and Superiors

What Unconscious Bias Looks Like at Work

Unconscious bias in the workplace rarely shows itself as open exclusion or hostility. Instead, it's often **subtle**: embedded in habits, routines, and quick judgments that go unquestioned. For a young woman entering the workforce, these moments might feel small in isolation. But over time, they shape how welcome, trusted, or visible she feels in a team (Ross, 2014).

It might sound like this:

- “You’re so organised! Maybe you could take notes for the meeting?”
- “You’re great with people. You’d be perfect for the client call.”
- “We just need someone more experienced to lead this, but you’re really promising.”

These aren’t insults – and they often come with a smile. But patterns start to emerge. Technical or leadership roles go to others. She’s praised for soft skills but rarely challenged with strategic work. Her ideas may be acknowledged, but only after someone else echoes them. Feedback becomes vague (“You’re doing well, just keep going”), while her male peers receive direct input and stretch assignments (Carnes et al., 2015).

These behaviours may come from colleagues who see themselves as supportive. That’s what makes it difficult to call out. Most of the time, there’s nothing concrete to report – only a growing sense of being underestimated, misread, or gently sidelined.



Joan C. Williams

an American psychologist and a director of the *Equality Action Center*

“Bias, whether intentional or unconscious, has the power to shape careers not just through what is said, but through what is assumed - who is trusted, who is given a chance, and who is overlooked.”

5

For youth workers, helping young women identify these patterns early is essential. Not to encourage defensiveness, but to help them name what they’re experiencing, trust their instincts, and avoid internalising unfair treatment. Without this awareness, many simply work harder, take on more, and question themselves when the results don’t match the effort. Understanding that unconscious bias is a systemic issue – not a personal flaw – can lift a quiet weight off their shoulders. It invites a shift from self-doubt to strategic thinking: **What is happening here? What do I want to do with it? What is within my control?** (Ross, 2014).

Actionable Steps to Address Discrimination and Bias in Professional Settings

Addressing bias, especially when it’s subtle or unintentional, requires a careful balance of awareness, professionalism, and strategy. For women at the beginning of their careers, speaking up can feel risky, particularly in environments with rigid

⁵ Joan C. Williams, *The 5 Biases Pushing Women Out of STEM*. <https://hbr.org/2015/03/the-5-biases-pushing-women-out-of-stem>

hierarchies or limited openness to feedback. In such situations, the goal isn't always direct confrontation, but rather building practical tools and responses that help maintain self-respect, encourage honest communication, and create space for long-term growth. While there is no universal response that fits every situation, there are approaches that feel realistic and safe, even for someone in a junior position (Niemann, 2021).

1. Name the experience (privately or with support)

Before taking any action, it helps to understand what's happening. Was a comment dismissive? Was someone given credit for her work? Did she feel she was being assessed differently than her peers? Writing it down or talking it through with a mentor helps clarify whether it was a one-off or part of a pattern (Powell & Sang, 2015).

2. Ask for clarification, not justification

Sometimes, a gentle question can shift a conversation without escalating it. Asking, *"Can you explain what you mean by that?"* or *"I'd like to understand that feedback a bit more clearly – could you give an example?"* gives the other person a chance to reflect and offers an opening for correction without accusation (Sandberg & Grant, 2015).

3. Use neutral language to reclaim credit or set boundaries

It's possible to assert oneself without creating tension. If a colleague restates her idea, a quick *"Yes, as I mentioned earlier..."* or *"Thanks for building on that point I raised..."* can reclaim ownership with confidence. If she's repeatedly asked to handle office admin or care tasks, a calm, *"I'm happy to support, but I'd also like to focus on..."* can subtly reinforce her priorities (Tulshyan & Burey, 2022).

4. Document repeated patterns

If unconscious bias is recurring and affecting opportunities or evaluations, keeping a simple record of dates, situations, and what was said or done can be valuable. Not for conflict – but for clarity. If things escalate, this log offers credibility and precision (Niemann, 2021).

5. Find or build peer support

Whether it's a mentor in another department, a women's network, or simply a trusted friend, having someone to talk to can change the experience of bias from isolating to manageable. Others may offer validation, perspective, or ideas for how to respond next time (Powell & Sang, 2015).

6. Know when to let it go – and when to escalate

Not every moment needs to be addressed. Sometimes, silence is strategic. But if the pattern continues or deepens – if it affects professional growth, mental well-being, or safety – it's worth exploring formal channels. Knowing HR policies, rights at work, or speaking to a trusted supervisor can help prepare for that step (Thomas, 2023).

 **Mentoring tip:** Ask your mentee:

- “Have you ever let something slide because you weren’t sure how to respond?”
- “What do you wish you could’ve said or done differently?”
- “If this happened to a colleague, what advice would you give them?”

These questions can help her rehearse safe, confident responses for the future – and remind her that taking action doesn’t always mean confrontation. It can mean choosing clarity, help maintain confidence, support constructive dialogue, and open pathways for future development.

Case Studies

Doctor Mae Jemison

Read the story of Doctor Mae Jemison – an engineer, physician, and former NASA astronaut who became the first African-American woman to travel into space.



“Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.”

Dr. Mae Jemison

In a time when science, engineering, and business were seen as “men’s fields,” Dr. Mae Jemison broke boundaries. Born in 1956 in Alabama and raised in Chicago, she loved science and space from a young age. Despite being told that science wasn’t “for girls,” she remained determined, inspired by the civil rights movement and the Apollo missions—which had excluded both women and people of color.

Mae studied chemical engineering at Stanford University, often the only Black woman in her classes. She went on to earn her M.D. from Cornell Medical School and worked as a general practitioner before applying to NASA. In 1987, she was chosen from thousands of applicants.

In 1992, Dr. Jemison became the first Black woman in space aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour. Her achievement shattered stereotypes about who belongs in science and space.

After NASA, she focused on education and business, founding *The Jemison Group* and launching the 100 Year Starship initiative to promote science for future generations. She remains a strong advocate for STEM education, especially for girls from underrepresented communities*.

*Jemison, Mae. 2002. Teach Arts and Sciences Together. TED2002. Filmed February 2002. Video, 16:45. She remains a strong advocate for STEM education, especially for girls from underrepresented communities.



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Having read the story of Dr. Mae Jemison, answer the questions below based on her life, challenges, and accomplishments.

Inspiring change: Mae Jemison

Read the Mae Jemison's story and complete the questions below.

What inspired Mae Jemison to pursue a career in space and science, despite the barriers she faced?

Write your answer here

What stereotypes did Dr. Jemison challenge during her life and career? Provide at least two examples from the text.

Write your answer here

How did Dr. Jemison continue to make a difference after leaving NASA? What does this say about leadership outside of traditional roles?

Write your answer here

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Inspiring change: Mae Jemison

Read the Mae Jemison's story and complete the questions below.

What lessons from Mae Jemison's story can help young women interested in STEM or business today?

Write your answer here

Dr. Jemison said, "Never be limited by other people's limited imaginations." What does this quote mean to you personally?

Write your answer here

Imagine you are creating a school campaign to inspire girls in science. How would you use Mae Jemison's story? What key message would you focus on?

Write your answer here

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Debbie Sterling

Watch the story of Debbie Sterling - an engineer, businesswoman and the founder of *GoldieBlox*.



Click to watch

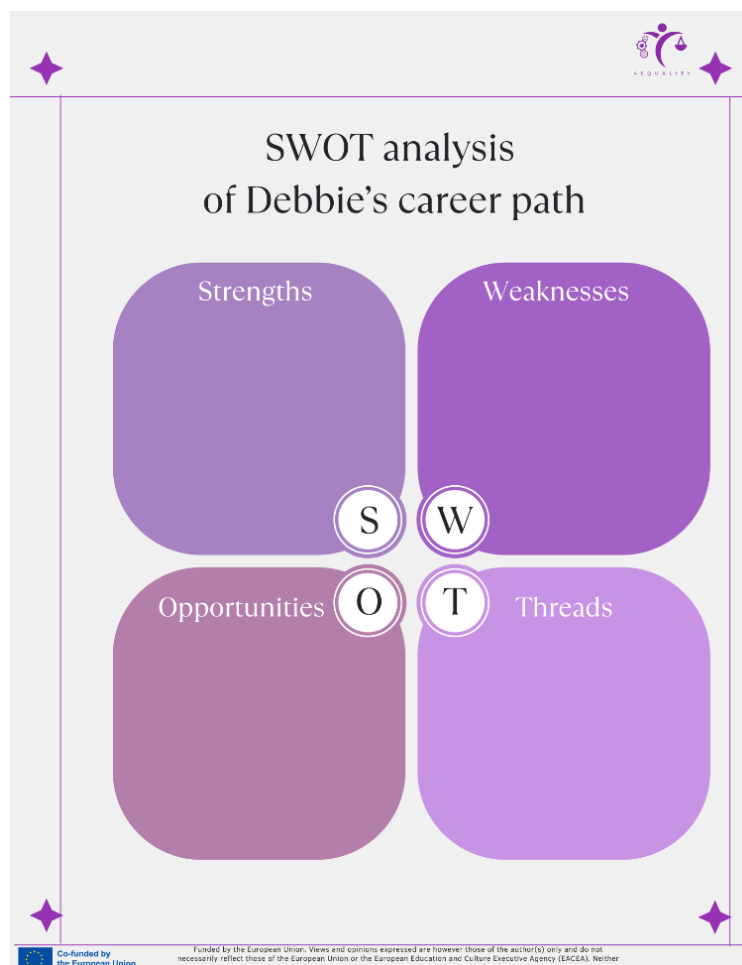


Work together in groups to discuss the following questions. Try to explore different viewpoints and support your opinions with examples or arguments.

Discussion prompts:

- *What part of Debbie Sterling’s story resonated with you the most, and why?*
- *What specific workplace or societal challenges did Debbie face? How are they similar or different from what women face today?*
- *How did she transform a challenge (gender stereotypes in toys) into an opportunity?*
- *Why do you think gender stereotypes in toys and education persist, even today?*
- *How might your career path differ if you had more role models like Debbie growing up?*
- *If you had the chance to build something like GoldieBlox, what gap or inequality would you address?*

Next, using the template below, conduct a SWOT analysis—a tool used to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in a person’s career path. First, focus on Debbie Sterling’s journey by listing her strengths (e.g. creativity, determination), weaknesses (e.g. early self-doubt), opportunities (e.g. market gap for girls’ STEM toys), and threats (e.g. gender bias in engineering). Then, create your own personal SWOT analysis to reflect on your future in STEM or business, identifying what supports you, what may hold you back, and how to prepare for possible workplace challenges.



Interactive Learning

Think of a woman who inspires you – she can be famous or someone you know. Add her name and picture, then answer the questions about her achievements, why she inspires you, how she’s influenced your goals, and what you’d ask her if you could. Be honest and thoughtful!



My inspirational woman

My inspirational woman is:

Write your answer here

What are her most impactful achievements?

Write your answer here

Why do you see her as inspirational?

Write your answer here

How has her story changed the way you think about your own goals?

Write your answer here

If you could ask her one question, what would it be—and why?

Write your answer here



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Form groups of 4 people. Each person chooses one role from the scenario. Read the situation carefully, act it out, and then discuss as a group. Focus on how bias or fairness appears and how the issue can be handled respectfully and effectively.

Role play scenarios

READY TO LEAD

Context: A junior female tech employee interviews for a lead role. The interviewer questions her ability to manage a mostly male team.

Roles:

- Applicant (female):** Confidently presents her case and tactfully addresses gender-based doubts.
- Interviewer:** Expresses concern about “team dynamics” or “her readiness.”
- Mentor:** Prepares her to respond to implicit bias.
- Observer:** Assesses how bias is addressed by both parties.

Scenario goal: Practice responding to gendered doubts in leadership interviews.



SAME SKILLS, SAME PAY

Context: A female software developer discovers that a male colleague with similar experience earns more. She prepares to negotiate her salary with her manager.

Roles:

- Developer (female):** Presents evidence and advocates for fair compensation.
- Manager:** Needs to address the request professionally, balancing budget and fairness.
- Colleague:** Confirms pay disparity and offers peer support.
- Observer:** Evaluates the developer’s negotiation techniques and manager’s response.

Scenario Goal: Practice confident and data-backed salary negotiation strategies.



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Role play scenarios

NOT A JOKE

Context: During a team meeting, a senior employee makes a sexist joke. A junior female developer feels uncomfortable but worries speaking up might harm her relationships or reputation.

Roles:

- Developer (female):** Decides whether to speak up, report it, or ignore it.
- Senior employee:** Makes the inappropriate joke, possibly unaware of the impact.
- Team leader:** Hears the comment and chooses whether to intervene.
- Observer:** Notes how the situation is handled and the effectiveness of responses.

Scenario goal: Practice responding to everyday sexism and explore allyship and escalation paths in informal settings.



THE STOLEN IDEA

Context: A woman suggests an idea during a meeting. It’s ignored until a male colleague repeats it — then it gets full attention and praise.

Roles:

- Female team member:** Navigates how to tactfully reclaim credit and reassert her voice.
- Male colleague:** May or may not realize he repeated someone else’s idea.
- Team leader:** Has the chance to acknowledge the original contributor and guide respectful collaboration.
- Observer:** Notes how idea ownership is (or isn’t) respected and how the issue is resolved.

Scenario goal: Practice how to assert authorship and support fair acknowledgment in team settings.



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Role play scenarios

THE MOMMY TRACK

Context: A woman returns from maternity leave and finds she’s no longer included in key projects, despite her interest and availability.

Roles:

- Returning employee:** Asks for equal opportunities and clarifies her commitment.
- Manager:** Believes he’s being “considerate” by lightening her load.
- HR partner:** Explains how bias can impact career progression.
- Observer:** Watches how assumptions about motherhood affect roles.

Scenario goal: Address well-meaning bias that limits women’s advancement.



THE BOSSY LABEL

Context: A confident woman leads a project decisively. Later, she’s told by colleagues that she came off as “bossy” — while a male colleague with the same style is praised.

Roles:

- Woman (team leader):** Responds to the feedback and advocates for fair evaluation.
- Male colleague:** Shares the feedback, possibly unaware of the bias.
- Manager:** Facilitates a conversation about bias in feedback and helps the team reflect on their language.
- Observer:** Watches for double standards in leadership perception.

Scenario goal: Address how confidence is perceived differently by gender.



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Lessons Learned

- ✓ **Power dynamics and stereotypes still shape how young women are perceived.** Assertiveness and leadership may be welcomed in men but questioned in women, leading to double standards in evaluation and feedback.
- ✓ **Unconscious bias affects decisions about who gets mentored, promoted, or trusted.** These decisions aren't always based on merit but on ingrained assumptions, which can quietly limit women's growth.
- ✓ **Workplace survival skills - like negotiation, boundary-setting, and self-advocacy - are essential for young women.** Supporting them in building these skills helps ensure they're not overlooked, underpaid, or sidelined.
- ✓ **Navigating male-dominated environments can be emotionally and mentally taxing.** The experience of being "the only one" often leads to over-preparation, self-monitoring, and burnout.
- ✓ **Bias doesn't have to be confronted aggressively to be addressed.** Youth Workers can support young women in responding calmly and strategically, reclaiming credit, setting boundaries, and seeking allies without confrontation.
- ✓ **Mentoring matters.** Youth workers who validate young women's experiences and equip them with tools for resilience and self-respect play a vital role in preparing them for success in challenging environments.

Additional Resources



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTo3ZDYr7Js>



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Chapter 5 - The Importance of Upskilling and Continuous Learning



Introduction

The new paradigm in which STEM and business are evolving, the dynamic development of IT, robots, artificial intelligence with impact in all economic and social fields requires a permanent updating of knowledge and skills, especially in the analyzed fields, but not only. The segment of young people familiar with new technologies has much greater prospects for getting involved in STEM and business.

The Chapter 5 begins by defining key skills for success in STEM and business: technical skills, leadership, networking. It continues by defining approachable learning opportunities (online courses, mentorship programs, scholarships) tailored with the characteristics of different vulnerable groups of young women. Related to learning opportunities, youth workers must enrich their knowledge and skills on the role of professional organizations in career advancement, being able to guide the young women to access the most suitable providers of professional education. Based on presentation of good practices, exercises the content of the chapter 5 pays attention how to encourage young women to take in view ownership of their professional development and overcoming barriers to education and professional growth. The final part of the chapter presents the conclusions of the main points approached and additional resources.

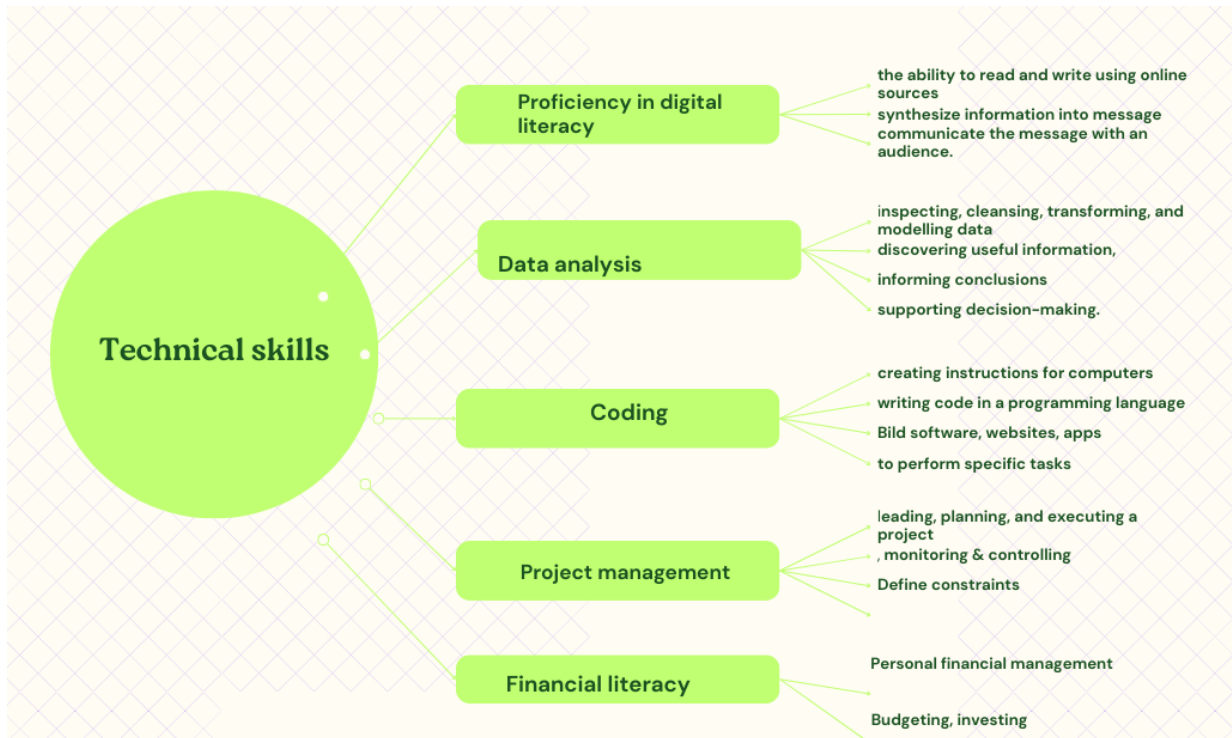
Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, learners will be able to:

1. Define key skills for success in STEM and business: technical skills, leadership, networking
2. Gather approachable learning opportunities (online courses, mentorship programs, scholarships);
3. Understand the role of professional organizations in career advancement and ready to inform young women in need on the most appropriate education provider.
4. Get knowledge on how to encourage young women to take ownership of their professional development.
5. Identify barriers to education and professional growth and address young women how to overcome it.

Key Skills for Success in STEM and Business

a) Technical skills, known as hard skills, are the abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks, often related to a particular industry, job role, or technology. These skills are typically developed through formal training, education, and practical experience. Technical skills include:



b) Leadership skills: are the abilities and traits that enable an individual to guide, motivate, and inspire others towards achieving a common goal. These skills encompass:

- **Confidence** is a belief in oneself, the conviction that one has ability to meet life's challenges and to succeed-and the willingness to act accordingly.

“Confidence — it is probably the most important resource in human well-being and human performance. When you feel confident, you are more likely to succeed because confidence activates brain circuits that produce an elevated mood, lower anxiety and sharper thinking — all of which raise the odds of success. The greatest source of success is success, and success, like confidence, acts like compound interest: It’s exponential. A little bit grows steadily”.

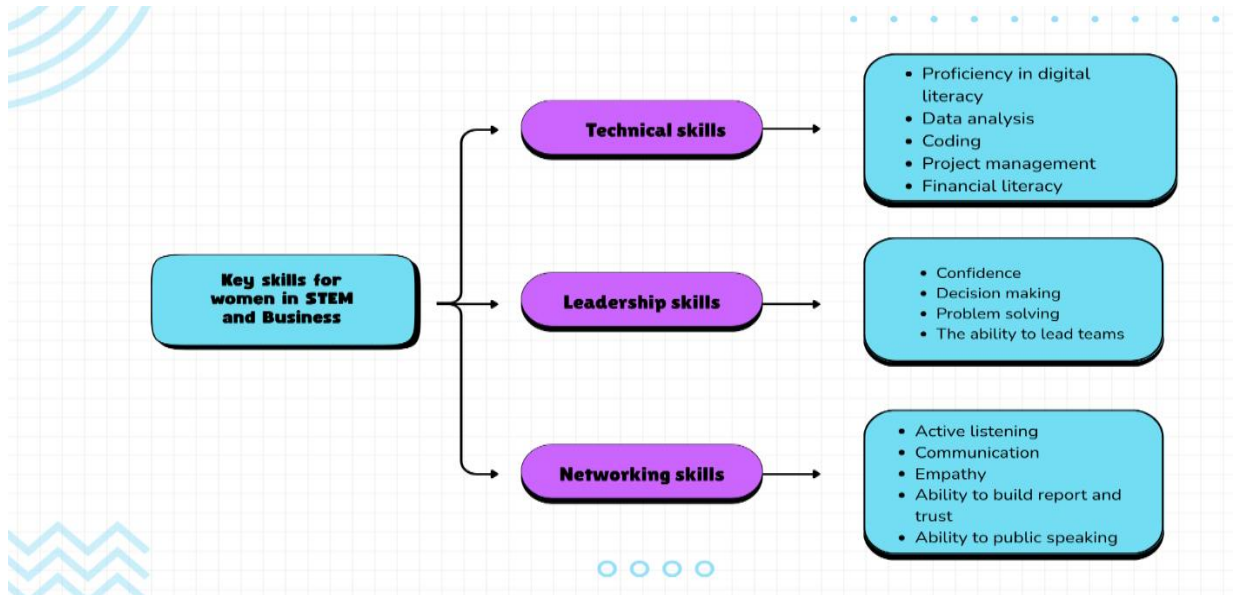
(Declaration at CNN of Ian Robertson neuroscientist and psychologist, codirector of the Global Brain Health Institute at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland.

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/14/health/confidence-success-anxiety-wellness>

- **Decision-making** is the process of making choices by identifying a decision, gathering information, and assessing alternative resolutions.
- **Problem-solving** is the process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues. It involves identifying a problem, analysing its root cause, developing potential solutions, choosing the best option, and implementing it.
- **The ability to lead teams** is crucial for women seeking to advance beyond entry-level roles. Developing leadership skills, particularly the ability to

effectively manage and motivate teams, is a key factor in career progression for both men and women.

c) Networking skills are a set of interpersonal abilities that help individuals build and maintain professional relationships, mentorship and peer support- crucial for career advancement. Key networking skills include active listening, communication (both verbal and non-verbal), empathy, the ability to build rapport and trust, ability to public speaking



Learning Opportunities

For marginalized women, traditional educational paths may be inaccessible due to cost, location, language, or other barriers. Innovative and inclusive learning options can bridge this gap.

Online courses offer a flexible, low-cost access to technical and business skills and accessible way to learn new skills or gain knowledge from anywhere with an internet connection. Popular topics include digital marketing, data science, web development, and project management. Examples of online platforms: <https://www.coursera.org/>; <https://www.edx.org/> <https://www.mooc.org/>; <https://www.openuped.eu/>;

<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/european-industrial-relations-dictionary/eu-skills-panorama>; <https://www.futurelearn.com/> <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/ro>

Microcredits have emerged as a transformative force, offering flexible pathways for acquiring new skills and knowledge they need for personal and professional development. Microcredits certify learning outcomes from short-term learning experiences.

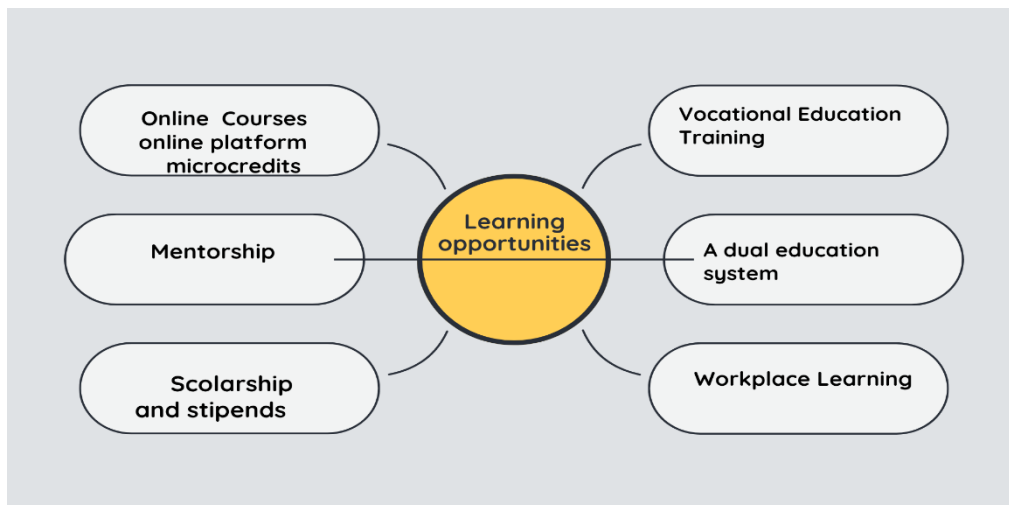
These small units of learning are seen as complementing formal education and qualifications systems by offering targeted training in a flexible way and addressing labour market needs in a timely manner. They are frequently portrayed and promoted as a new way for individuals to build their own skills profile (portfolio) by collecting and ‘stacking’ learning in a flexible way, at their own pace and according to their specific priorities. THE MICROCREDIT MONITOR is a newly launched platform dedicated to providing up-to-date information on microcredit in Europe.

Example of short courses: critical thinking (8 hours), introduction to social media (24 hours)

Workplace learning (on-the-job training) is used for two types of professional development: upskilling and reskilling and includes: apprenticeships, mentorships, chat interfaces for sharing knowledge, volunteering, workforce education programs, email newsletters, E-learning portals, webinars.

Mentorship programs designed to pair individual young women (mentees) with women professionals (mentors) to provide guidance, support, and knowledge transfer.

Scholarships and stipends: Financial support based a grant or payment made to support education, awarded based on academic, internet access, or even childcare.



Vocational Education Training known as technical or trade education, prepares individuals for specific occupations. It can be offered through formal education systems, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training programs.

A dual education system combines apprenticeship in a company and vocational education at a vocational school in a single course, providing students with both practical knowledge and theoretical skills. This system is practiced in several countries, notably in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, South Tyrol, France and South Korea.

The Role of Professional Organisations in Career Advancement

Professional and women-focused organizations play a key role in career development:

- **Offer training, certifications, and networking** opportunities.
- **Promote female role models** and amplify underrepresented voices.
- Provide a **safe space for learning, collaboration, and advocacy**.

Examples of professional organizations:

The Women in STEM Network is open to all women working across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including those in academic, industry, teaching, or interdisciplinary roles.

A women's incubator is an organization or program designed to support and accelerate the development of women-owned businesses, providing a range of services, tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs (mentorship, training, networking opportunities, access to resources).

Refugee-led learning initiatives are educational programs, primarily organized and run by refugees themselves, both formal and informal, addressed the specific educational needs.

Rural women's cooperatives are member-owned, democratically controlled businesses, typically in agricultural or related sectors, that are specifically formed and run by women in rural areas.

Youth Worker Toolkit

Here's an example of how one youth worker provides an assessment of a refugee women looking for a job:

Scenario: A refugee woman seeks help integrating into work life but is struggling because her educational qualifications from her home country are not recognized. You are youth worker in an organisation. *How would you answer and recommend doing?*


Sample Response to the Refugee Woman:

"Thank you for trusting me with your situation. Many women face similar challenges, and there are ways we can help. Let's look at your qualifications and see which authority can assess them. Meanwhile, we can explore jobs or courses that don't require immediate recognition. I can also help you connect with organizations that support refugee women in finding work."

Approached steps and communication toolkit used:

6 STEPS FOR THE YOUTH WORKER COMMUNICATION WITH REFUGEE WOMEN

Translator



01. Listen and Assess Her Situation

Identify the responsible authority, government recognition office. Gather necessary documents. Understand possible fees, timelines, and outcomes.


What qualifications do you have?
What kind of work do you hoping to do?
What is language level in the host country?



02. Inform Her About Qualification Recognition

Consider partial recognition plus further study/training. Seek bridging courses or adaptation programs. Obtain local professional licenses if needed.

CV and cover letter writing tailored to local standards. Job search strategies. Interview preparation. Explore volunteering or internships to gain local experience



03. Explore Alternative Pathways

CV and cover letter writing tailored to local standards. Job search strategies. Interview preparation. Explore volunteering or internships to gain local experience

04. Focus on Employability.

Connect her with:
Refugee support organizations.
Women's associations.
Migrant integration offices.
Employment services or job coaches experienced with refugees.



05. Refer to Specialized Organizations

Be mindful that recognition issues often affect mental health and confidence. Encourage participation in social groups to reduce isolation. Refer to counselling services if needed.

06. Psychological and Social Support

Empathy:
Confidentiality: Handle personal documents and information discreetly.
Realistic Guidance



Important Values

How To Encourage Young Women to Take Ownership of Their Professional Development

Young women must be encouraged and empowered to see themselves as active agents in their growth through:

- **Goal-setting workshops:** Help young women define their personal and professional aspirations.

- **Career coaching:** Builds clarity and motivation and connect them to accessible learning opportunities: free/low-cost online courses, facilitate learning sessions with internet access, translation support, or childcare if needed, help navigate scholarship applications or enrol in vocational training programs.
- **Peer-led learning circles:** Encourage collaboration and mutual accountability, facilitate mentorship and peer support with female mentors in relevant fields who can offer guidance, encouragement, and role modelling, invite successful local women to speak and inspire - showing that success is possible.
- **Celebrating small successes:** Builds confidence and reinforces positive self-image, use micro-certification and goal setting to track progress and celebrate small wins.

Overcoming Barriers to Education and Professional Growth

Addressing systemic and personal barriers is essential for inclusion:

- **Digital divide:** Provide mobile data, community internet hubs, or offline learning materials.
- **Language barriers:** Offer training in local languages and promote multilingual education.
- **Cultural and gender norms:** Engage families and communities in awareness programs that support girls' education and careers.
- **Psychosocial challenges:** Integrate mental health support and trauma-informed education, especially for refugees and survivors of violence.
- **Policy advocacy:** Push for national and local policies that fund inclusive education and remove structural barriers for marginalized women.

MODEL CONTINUOUS LEARNING



Exercises and Case /Stories for Supporting Engagement and Awareness of Young Women






How can they be used by youth workers?

- Organise workshops or training sessions for young women
- Inspiring examples in awareness campaigns
- Role-play or discussion activities

Digital Changemaker - Fatima's Story

Fatima, 20, from Morocco, is passionate about mental health awareness. She noticed that many young women in her community felt isolated and stigmatized if they talked about anxiety or depression. Using social media, Fatima started a bilingual Instagram page sharing stories, resources, and live chats with mental health professionals. Her audience grew rapidly, especially among girls aged 15-25.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY PLAN STORY BASIS: FATIMA'S ON-LINE ADVOCACY

 <p>01 OBJECTIVES</p> <p>60-75 minutes</p>	<p>Understand how digital tools can create positive social change</p>
<p>03 MATERIALS NEEDED</p> <p>Warm up discussion(10 min) Story reading (5 min) Group discussion (10 min) Design your digital campaign (25 min) Presentation & feedback (10-15 min) Reflection & Wrap up (5 min)</p>	<p>02 DURATION</p> 
<p>05 PARTICIPANTS WORKSHEET</p> <p>Move you over followed a social media that inspired you What issues do you wish people talked more about online?</p>	<p>04 ACTIVITY FLOW</p> 
<p>07 GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p> <p>Name your campaign or social media page Decide: - What platform you use - What kind of posts you share(e.g. stories, videos) - Who your audience is? - What action do you want people to take?</p>	<p>06 WORM UP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p>  <p>What challenges did Fatima face? Why do you think her project became successful? What risks might someone face when starting an on-line campaign?</p>
<p>09 REFLEXION & WRAP - UP</p>	<p>08 DESIGN YOUR DIGITAL CAMPAIGN</p>  <p>What's one thing you learned today? Would you like to start a project like Fatima's ?</p>


Use story beginning a debate session helping participants relate personally to issues on digital empowerment and see that change is possible from someone “like her.”

Economic Empowerment - Ana's Microenterprise

Role-Play Scenario

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Ana, 23, lives in a rural area of the Philippines. She loves making traditional handicrafts but lacks the confidence and resources to start a business. Through a youth entrepreneurship program specifically for young women, she receives training in financial literacy, marketing, and digital tools. Ana launches an online shop selling her crafts. She forms a cooperative with other young women artisans, advocating for fair prices and sustainable materials. Her earnings help her pay for her sister's schooling.

	<p>Issue to identify</p>
	<p>Key Themes for Engagement: Economic independence; Building confidence and skills; Women supporting women; Digital tools for business.</p>
<p>Questions for reflection</p>	<p>Conclusion</p>
<p>What would you have done in her place? What support systems helped her succeed? Do we have those here? What's one small action we could take to start something like she did? What did you learn? How does this relate to real life?</p>	<p>The story can be used link it to a practical exercise for skills-building application. Youth worker can develop brainstorming session on "What STEM projects could we start?" and simulate creating a mini business plan.</p>

Civic Leadership - Maria Runs for Student Council

Civic Leadership

Maria, 17, is a high school student in Brazil. She's frustrated that girls in her school face harassment and don't feel safe speaking up. Encouraged by a girls' leadership club, Maria runs for student council president, proposing policies for safer schools and hygiene products in bathrooms. Despite initial resistance, she wins the election and helps establish new school rules and awareness campaigns on gender-based violence.

Key Themes for Engagement:

- Leadership opportunities for young women
- Advocacy for gender equality
- Overcoming barriers in traditionally male-dominated spaces
- Youth voice in policy change

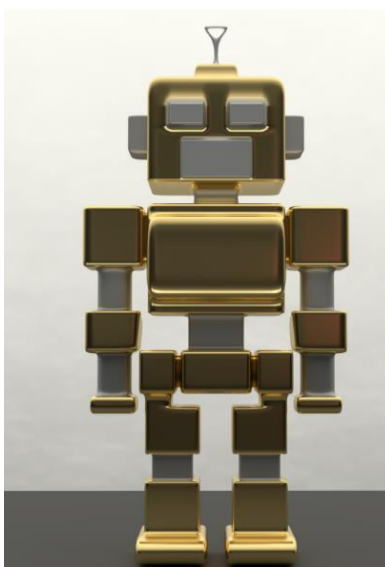


Key Themes for Engagement: Leadership opportunities for young women; Advocacy for gender equality; Overcoming barriers in traditionally male-dominated spaces; Youth voice in policy change. The story can be used as a role play session for doing advocacy actions for the community.

Use questions for discussion and reflection like:

- What would you have done in her place?
- What barriers do girls in your community face that are similar?
- What support systems helped her succeed? Do we have those here?
- What's one small action we could take to start something like she did?

STEM Inspiration - Rhea Builds Robots



Rhea, 16, from India, discovers robotics in a science class. She's one of only three girls in her school's robotics club. Often discouraged by classmates who say, "tech is for boys," Rhea almost quits. But a woman engineer visiting as a guest speaker inspires her to keep going.

She later wins a regional robotics competition and starts weekend classes to teach other girls how to code and build robots. Her workshops are free and open to girls aged 12-18.

Key Themes for Engagement: *Breaking stereotypes in STEM; Importance of female role models; Peer mentoring; Creating safe spaces for girls in male dominated fields.*

Additional Tips for Facilitators

- **Localize the stories:** Adapt names, settings, or issues to reflect the local culture or realities of the participants.
- **Make it multimedia:** Use visuals, story cards, or short video clips for added engagement.
- **Encourage storytelling:** Invite participants to create and share their *own* stories afterward, building confidence and connection.

Conclusion

Upskilling and continuous learning are not luxuries - they are lifelines for young women trapped in cycles of poverty and exclusion. With the right skills, support systems, and opportunities, even the most vulnerable women can become innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders. Empowering them is not only a matter of equity, but also an investment in stronger, more resilient societies. Youth workers are not just facilitators - they are catalysts for change. By championing upskilling and continuous learning, they can help young women reclaim their futures and break cycles of poverty and marginalization. Every coding lesson, conversation, or mentorship link is a step toward equity, empowerment, and transformation.

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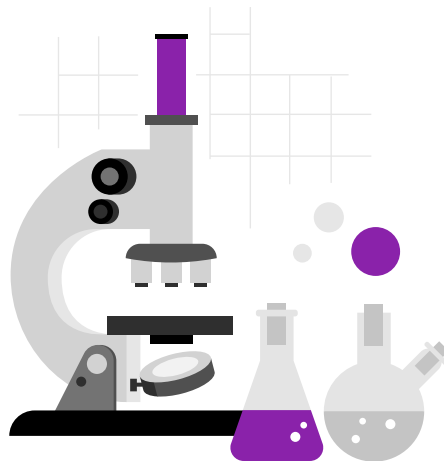
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Chapter 6 - Shaping Inclusive Mindsets in STEM and Business



Introduction

Young people begin forming beliefs about careers, identity and potential at an early age. In male-dominated fields like STEM and business, persistent gender stereotypes, which are often subtle and unspoken, can shape how young women see themselves and how others perceive them. These biases influence everything from classroom confidence to long-term career choices.

Youth workers have a powerful role to play in shaping and shifting these mindsets. By fostering inclusive, reflective environments, you can help all young people (regardless of gender) explore new paths, challenge limiting beliefs and build a broader sense of paths before them. This chapter provides practical tools and real-world strategies to support you in doing just that.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand how gender bias forms and shows up in STEM/business.
- Spot and gently challenge gendered dynamics during youth activities.
- Use inclusive, bias-aware language in everyday interactions.
- Support growth mindset development across all genders.
- Guide critical conversations on media and stereotypes.
- Promote balanced leadership and participation among youth.
- Handle resistance with empathy and curiosity.
- Create safe, respectful spaces for all young people.

Gender Bias in Context

How It Starts


Gender bias doesn't begin in the workplace - **it's rooted in childhood**. These influences often go unnoticed but can have a lasting impact on how young people see themselves and others, especially in relation to roles in STEM and business.

From the moment children are born, they are often steered toward different paths based on their gender. For instance, if you walk into a toy store, you'll likely notice some repeating patterns: building kits, robots, and adventure games marketed to boys; dolls, kitchen sets, and "beauty" toys aimed at girls. **The message is clear, even if unspoken - boys build and lead, girls care and support.**

In classrooms, similar patterns emerge. Studies show that boys are more likely to be praised for their ideas, while girls are more often complimented on neatness or behaviour. Boys may be called on more frequently in math and science discussions,

“We need to reshape our own perception of how we view ourselves. We have to step up as women and take the lead.”

- Beyoncé



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while girls are encouraged to help others or take notes. These patterns shape self-perception, confidence and career aspirations from a young age.

➤ *Example: A youth worker noticed that during a creative tech workshop, boys gravitated toward the coding tools while girls started decorating the presentation board. When asked, the girls said, “We’re not really the techy ones.” No one had told them this, but the years of subtle messaging had already shaped their beliefs.*

By adolescence, these biases become internalized. Girls might opt out of technical clubs, leadership roles, or business competitions, not because they lack interest or ability, but because they’ve learned those spaces aren’t “for them.” Boys, on the other hand, might feel pressure to dominate or perform, avoiding vulnerability or collaboration for fear it’s seen as weakness.

These early influences often go unnoticed but can shape the types of subjects young people enjoy or avoid, how confidently they speak in mixed-gender groups or even the kinds of careers they think they can pursue in the future.

Where It Shows Up in STEM and Business

Even in informal or extracurricular settings, youth workers may notice these patterns unfolding during workshops, camps, and group projects. These moments might seem subtle or incidental, but they can carry deep implications for how young people view themselves and others. Here are some realistic scenarios you might observe as a youth worker:

A confident, outspoken girl is labelled “bossy” during a group task, while a boy exhibiting the same behaviour is called a “natural leader” or “go-getter.” Over time, this kind of framing can lead girls to tone down their leadership impulses to avoid judgment, while boys are reinforced for assertiveness.

A girl in a robotics or coding session defers to male teammates, saying she’s “not good with wires” or “better at organizing,” even if she’s never had the chance to try hands-on tasks. Sometimes, even facilitators unintentionally steer her toward administrative or supportive roles.

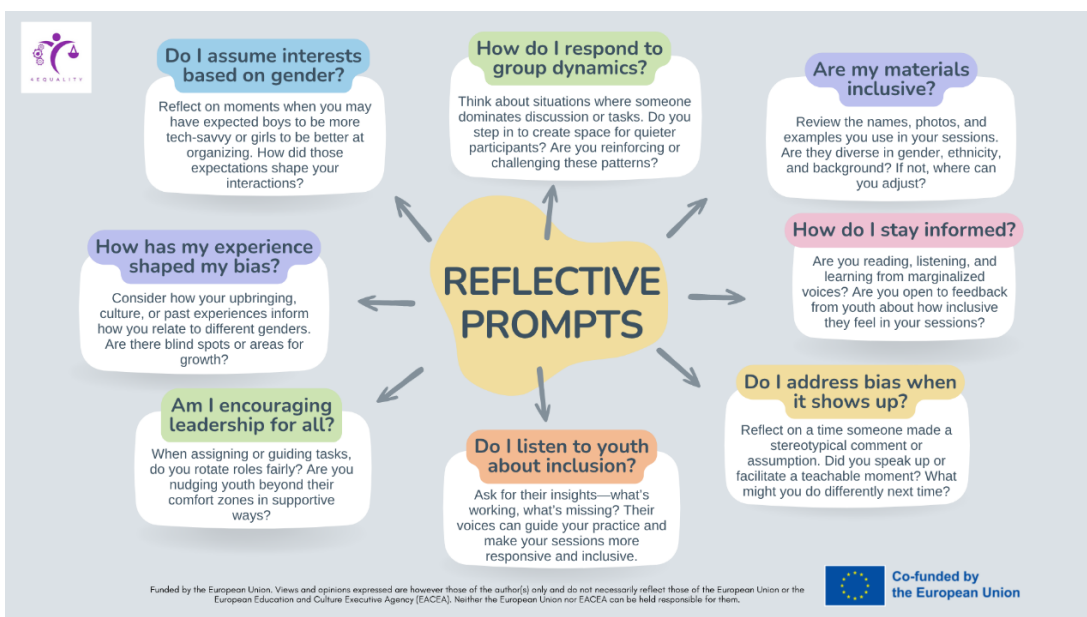
A boy in a financial literacy game is praised for his risk-taking and drive, with suggestions that he could become a CEO or entrepreneur. Meanwhile, a girl who shows equal ambition might be encouraged to think about roles in communication, customer service, or design instead.

In innovation challenges or tech competitions, girls may self-select out, stating “this isn’t really my thing,” even when they have strong ideas or relevant skills. These moments often trace back to years of exclusion from similar opportunities.

These patterns don’t always result from intentional exclusion or discrimination. More often, they reflect deep-seated cultural expectations about gender roles that go unnoticed and unchallenged. However, once you begin to recognize these moments, you can start to gently interrupt the pattern. A well-timed question like “*What makes you think you’re not good with this?*” or an invitation like “*Want to take the lead on this next step?*” can nudge youth out of limiting beliefs and toward new possibilities.

Reflective prompts for youth workers

Reflection is key to growth. As a starting point you can use the suggested below prompts to examine your own biases and assumptions, and how they might affect your facilitation. These questions are designed to spark insight, improve your practice and help you become a more effective ignitor of inclusion:



Use these questions in supervision, journaling, peer exchanges, or end-of-day reflections. Small insights can lead to big change when practiced consistently.

Tools And Strategies for Youth Workers

Shaping inclusive and progressive mindsets in STEM and business starts with small, intentional practices that challenge assumptions and open up possibilities. Youth workers can play a transformative role by helping young people see themselves as capable leaders, creators, and innovators. Consider applying some of the following strategies and tools when planning and implementing learning sessions with youth. You can find also examples of some common situations you might face and how to turn them into teachable, inclusive experiences.

Build Awareness

Be mindful of gendered patterns that appear in subtle ways. Perform observation on a daily basis and consider the following aspects:

- How are roles and tasks distributed among the participants? Are boys encouraged to take the lead in building tasks while girls are asked to decorate or organize?
- Do girls hesitate to speak up when the topic is tech-related?
- Are leadership traits praised differently, like assertiveness in boys, helpfulness in girls?
- Who volunteers first to do a task?
- Who speaks more in mixed-gender groups?

✦ *Example: Make it a habit to quietly track participation during an activity. Use this data to guide follow-up questions like: "Who hasn't shared yet?" or "Let's switch up roles today so we all try something new." This helps surface unconscious patterns and gently shift them.*

Model Inclusive Facilitation Practices

Facilitators set the tone. Use inclusive, gender-neutral language and diversify your examples. You can say "engineers and designers of all genders" instead of "he or she." Share stories and case studies that include both women and men in nurturing or collaborative roles.

✦ *Example: When preparing session materials, review your language and references to ensure you're not unintentionally reinforcing*

stereotypes. Intentionally use diverse examples that reflect a wide range of gender identities and backgrounds to normalize inclusion. When discussing innovation or leadership, aim to include examples like Dr. Hayat Sindi (biotech entrepreneur) or Whitney Wolfe Herd (tech startup founder) alongside Elon Musk or Steve Jobs. This helps normalize diversity at the top.

Representation in Everyday Materials

Visuals matter. So do names, case studies, and the stories you bring into the room. For your future sessions you might consider to use photos of diverse role models on workshop slides or handouts. When using games or simulations, make sure character names and traits aren't reinforcing stereotypes.

✦ *Example: Instead of using a business scenario featuring "John the CEO," swap the name for "Amina" or "Laura." Vary the character's background - perhaps they come from a rural area or are the first in their family to go to college. This kind of representation can expand youth expectations and engagement.*

Create Gender-Reflective Discussion Spaces

Encourage youth to unpack their own social conditioning. Use relatable, low-stakes entry points:

"When you were younger, what colors or toys were you told were for boys/girls?"

"Have you noticed how leaders are portrayed in your favorite shows or games?"

✦ *Example: As an icebreaker or a warm-up activity try using toy catalogues or ads and ask youth to sort items based on function rather than colour or gendered marketing. This often opens up surprising reflections, such as youth realizing they were subtly steered away from building toys or tech gadgets.*

Introduce Inclusive Challenges and Team Structures

Use cooperative models that reward diverse contributions, not just technical skills. Group youth so all voices are needed (e.g., brainstormer, builder, tester, presenter). Set team goals that reward listening, creative problem solving, and adaptability.

✦ *Example: In a simulation or challenge, assign roles randomly or rotate mid-way. This gives each youth the opportunity to try something outside their comfort zone whether it's presenting, coding, or prototyping. Debrief afterward to reflect on what they discovered about themselves and others.*

Overcoming Resistance and Challenges

Working to foster inclusive mindsets doesn't always go smoothly. Youth workers are likely to face various forms of resistance - some subtle, some direct. A boy might roll his eyes when gender inclusion is brought up. A girl might say, "I'm just not a science person." These reactions can be frustrating, but they are also opportunities.

Resistance often stems from discomfort, unfamiliarity, or a fear of losing status. For boys, it might feel like they're being blamed for something. For girls, stereotypes can be so internalized that challenging them feels risky. Youth workers must learn to meet resistance with curiosity, not confrontation.

Discomfort is the price of admission to meaningful change.

What can you do in practice? First, normalize disagreement and avoid shutting down difficult comments. Instead of arguing, ask questions like, "Where do you think that idea comes from?" or "Have you seen something different?" This shifts the space from defensive to reflective. Second, ground your sessions in data or relatable stories. Sharing a short story of how a girl's participation changed after a role rotation can be more effective than citing statistics. Third, always return to values: fairness, opportunity and belonging.

💡 *Facilitation tip: Use anonymous question boxes or sticky notes to surface quiet resistance. It creates space for honest conversation without putting youth on the spot.*

The Role of Language

Language isn't neutral. It reflects, reinforces, and can rewire the way people think. The words we choose signal who belongs, who leads, and who gets noticed. Youth workers, often without realizing it, model language that either opens doors or closes them.

Using "he" as the default pronoun in examples, calling a group "you guys," or praising boys as "brilliant" and girls as "sweet" might seem harmless. But over time, such language subtly limits possibility. Research shows that repeated exposure to gendered language affects children's self-perception and even career aspirations.

Language is not just how we describe the world - it's how we build it.

Adopting inclusive language means being intentional. Swap “he or she” for “they,” use professional terms like “chairperson,” and include a mix of names and genders when giving examples. It also means listening to how youth talk and gently encouraging reflection. If a participant says, “Girls just don’t like tech,” ask, “*Do you think that’s always true? What might change that?*”



“Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong... It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as two opposing sets of ideals. If we stop defining each other by what we are not and start defining ourselves by what we are—we can all be freer.

– *Emma Watson*

Source: UN HeForShe campaign speech, 2014



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Combating Stereotypes Through Media Literacy

The stories young people see every day shape their understanding of gender, power, and potential. From video games to Instagram influencers, from YouTube ads to school textbooks - media is everywhere and it’s rarely neutral. Often, it reinforces traditional gender roles: men as innovators, leaders, risk-takers; women as supporters, followers, caregivers.

Youth workers play a key role in helping young people become not just consumers of media, but critics of it. Teaching media literacy means asking questions, not giving answers. It means looking at a poster or game or ad and asking: “*What does this say about who leads, who builds, who speaks?*” or “*Who’s missing from this picture?*”

Start by making media a subject of dialogue. Don't just ban problematic content, analyse it. Challenge youth to spot biases, rewrite headlines, or redesign ad campaigns with more inclusive representation. Help them realize that media isn't just something they watch, it's something they can question. Once they see the patterns, they're better equipped to break them.

ANALYZE A MOVIE OR TV SERIES CLIP WITH A GENDER LENS

Select a short, recognizable clip (2–5 minutes) from a movie or series popular with your group (e.g., *Stranger Things*, *Black Panther*, *Wednesday*, *Spider-Man*, *Bridgerton*, etc.). Choose one where team dynamics, conflict, leadership, or problem-solving are shown.

Instructions:

Watch the clip together. Then ask:
Who is taking action or solving the problem?

Who is emotional, passive, or "supportive"?

What gendered behaviors are shown or expected?

Discussion prompt:

If you were to recast this scene with the genders flipped, how would it feel? Would we react differently?

MEDIA ACTIVITIES

GENDER IN THE LYRICS

Choose a few popular songs across different genres that are trending with your group. Prepare printed lyrics or short clips (with appropriate content, of course).

Instructions:

Divide youth into small groups. Ask them to look at the lyrics and reflect on:

Who is speaking? What's their role—powerful, passive, emotional, aggressive? How are different genders portrayed in the song?

What does the song suggest about relationships, success, confidence, etc.?

Discussion prompt:

Can you think of a song that challenges gender norms in a positive way?

SPOT THE STEREOTYPE

Print out a selection of stills from ads, movie posters, influencer profiles, or magazine covers. Choose visuals that vary in gender portrayal—some stereotypical, some progressive.

Instructions:
Create a “Media Wall” (physical or digital). Invite youth to walk around, observe, and place sticky notes or comments on:
What message does this image send about gender?
Who is this ad/post speaking to?
What are the people doing, wearing, leading, or saying?

Discussion prompt:
Which felt empowering or limiting?
What patterns did you notice?

SCROLL AND DECODE

Invite participants to use 1–2 screenshots or saved posts from their TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube feeds that feature influencers, celebrities, or creators they follow. Choose posts that portray lifestyle, career, or “success.”

Instructions:
Ask youth to describe:
What gender is the creator? What is their role –expert, motivator, entertainer, fashion icon, etc.?
How is gender expressed through clothing, language, body posture, or setting?

Discussion prompts:
Do you see any content that breaks stereotypes? What makes it stand out?
How does this shape how people feel about what’s “normal” or expected for their gender?

MEDIA ACTIVITIES

Encouraging Growth Mindset across Genders

Many youth believe that people are either born with a talent or not. This belief (a fixed mindset) limits potential, especially in areas like science, math, or leadership. It’s also often gendered. Boys are told they’re naturally smart. Girls are praised for being careful and hardworking. Over time, this can lead to girls avoiding risk and boys avoiding vulnerability.

A growth mindset flips this. It says: skills are built, not born. Struggle is not failure; it’s learning in progress.

Youth workers can model this mindset by how they respond to effort and mistakes. When a participant says, “I’m not good at coding,” respond with: *“That just means you’re learning something new.”* When someone makes a mistake, celebrate it: *“Great, now we know what not to do!”*

Failing isn’t falling - it’s refusing to get back up.

Use stories of people who succeeded through persistence, not brilliance. Include examples from different genders, backgrounds and learning styles. Avoid only highlighting elite success, show real growth journeys as well.

💡 Try this in a session: Create a “Failure wall” where youth anonymously share a time they struggled but kept going. Read a few aloud each week and reflect on what was learned.

Promoting growth mindset across genders doesn't mean ignoring challenges. It means teaching all youth (especially those who've been underestimated) that their potential is limitless with practice, support, and belief.

5 Effective Ways to Promote Inclusive Mindsets

Fostering inclusive mindsets among youth doesn't require big interventions or complicated strategies. Often, small, intentional actions made consistently create lasting change. As a youth worker, your everyday interactions shape how young people think about themselves, others, and what's possible. Inclusion is not just a topic, it's a practice. It's embedded in how we speak, who we spotlight, and how we create space for each voice.

Here are five fundamental approaches you can adopt right away to help youth see beyond stereotypes and feel empowered.

5 EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE MINDSETS



1 REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Young people are inspired by stories of success they can relate to. Highlight diverse role models who break traditional molds. Whether it's sharing videos, inviting guest speakers, or telling stories, this helps youth envision themselves in these fields. For example, mentioning a local female engineer or entrepreneur can have a bigger impact than distant celebrities.

2 USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Be mindful about avoiding gendered language that implies certain behaviors or roles belong to one gender only. Instead of saying "you guys," try "everyone" or "team." Notice if you praise assertiveness in boys but helpfulness in girls, and aim to balance your feedback to all participants. Small changes in phrasing reinforce big changes in mindset.



3 DISTRIBUTE LEADERSHIP

Encourage sharing roles and responsibilities so all youth get a chance to shine. Rotate tasks like note-taking, presenting, or organizing. This approach helps youth develop diverse skills and reduces the dominance of more confident or socially assertive individuals, creating a more balanced environment.



4 CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES GENTLY

Directly telling young people they're "wrong" about stereotypes can backfire. Instead, use curiosity to guide reflection. Ask questions like, "Why do you think tech is mostly for boys?" or "Can you think of women who are great at math or science?" This encourages critical thinking and self-discovery, making shifts in mindset more genuine and lasting.



5 ENSURE ALL VOICES ARE HEARD

Inclusion thrives in environments where youth feel safe to take risks, ask questions, and make mistakes. Model respect, listen actively, and respond positively to all contributions. Make clear that questions or uncertainty are welcome, and everyone's experience and perspective have value. Emotional safety reduces fear of judgment and boosts confidence across all genders.



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Chapter 7 - Strategies for Motivating Young Women to Enter STEM and Business



Introduction

Despite the growing demand for talent in STEM and business fields, young women remain underrepresented. This is not due to lack of ability, but rather systemic biases, limited exposure, and a lack of role models and encouragement from an early age. Motivation isn't only about interest—it also involves self-efficacy, identity, and belonging. This chapter empowers youth workers to actively ignite interest and sustain motivation among young women by creating an environment where they see themselves as capable and welcome in these fields.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, youth workers will be able to:

- Identify internalized beliefs and external barriers that hinder girls' interest in STEM and business.
- Apply motivation-enhancing strategies such as storytelling, experiential learning, and mentoring.
- Integrate role models and narratives that align with young women's identities.
- Facilitate engaging activities that demystify STEM and business careers.
- Promote long-term commitment by nurturing confidence and curiosity.

Real Stories: Lived Experiences in STEM and Business



These stories illustrate that motivation often hinges on exposure, validation, and context that feels relatable. Youth workers play a pivotal role in creating such transformative moments.

Practical Strategies and Tools

Addressing Internalized Gender Bias and Self-Limiting Beliefs

Internalized gender bias is the subconscious belief that certain roles or careers are better suited to one gender. For young women, this often leads to **self-limiting thoughts** like “I’m not good at math” or “I don’t belong in business.”



These beliefs take root early, reinforced by stereotypes, lack of role models, and subtle discouragement from others. Even without external barriers, many girls hold themselves back.

Youth workers play a key role in helping girls recognize, challenge, and replace these narratives with empowering beliefs.

INTERNALIZED BIAS vs. EMPOWERED BELIEF

How youth workers can help girls rewrite their inner story

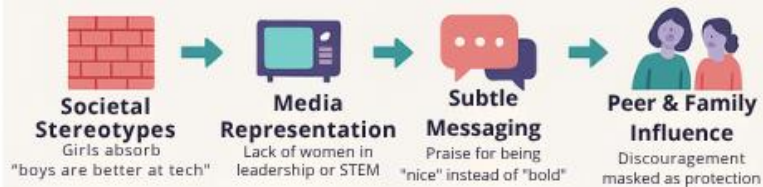


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WHERE DO THESE BELIEFS COME FROM?



TOOLS FOR REWRITING THE NARRATIVE



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Developing a Growth-Oriented Mindset

Carol Dweck's research on **growth vs. fixed mindsets** is especially relevant. A young woman with a growth mindset believes her abilities can develop through effort, learning, and perseverance. Youth workers can model this mindset by:

- Praising effort, not just outcomes (*"You worked hard on that project-it shows!"*).
- Encouraging curiosity over perfection.
- Framing challenges as learning opportunities.

Coaching Prompts for Youth Workers

Use these open-ended questions in dialogue or journaling:

- *"What's one thing you've done that you didn't think you could?"*
- *"Where do you think that belief came from?"*
- *"What would it look like to try anyway, even if you're unsure?"*

Final Thought

Internalized gender bias doesn't vanish overnight-but it can be softened and reshaped. When youth workers model belief in a young woman's potential and provide tools to reframe her thinking, the result is powerful: she begins to believe it too.

The goal isn't to create instant confidence-but to nurture self-awareness, encourage self-compassion, and plant the seeds of boldness.

The Impact of Representation: Why Female Role Models Matter

Representation inspires. When young women see relatable female role models thriving in STEM or business, they begin to believe, "I can do that too." These role models challenge stereotypes, validate ambition, and show success is possible.

Without visible examples, doubt takes root. Youth workers can change that by showcasing diverse, confident women who lead, create, and break barriers.

WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN STEM & BUSINESS

"You can't be what you can't see. But once you see it—you just might become it."



The Mirror & Window Effect




"I see someone like me doing it"
Builds identity, confidence & self-belief

"I didn't know this was even possible."
Opens new paths & inspires ambition

Fast Facts

- 28% STEM workers are women
- 2x more likely with role models
- 60% say lack of visibility lowers confidence

5 Qualities of Powerful Role Models

100%
Authentic
Shares both wins & struggles

Relatable
Reflects young women backgrounds and challenges

Visible
Present in learning spaces, not abstract

Engaged
Interacts, mentors, answers, questions

Empowering
Leaves young women saying "If she can, I can too"

Do I rely only on famous figures - or do I showcase relatable women, too?

Practical Strategies to Introduce Role Models

- Create "In Her Words" profiles - a collection of short, real-life profiles highlighting women in STEM/business
- Host Guest Talks & Q&A Sessions
- Shadowing or "Day in the Life" Activities - a short visit or video tour to observe female professionals at work
- Build a Media Role Model Wall
- Launch a Virtual Inspiration Board

Inspirational Resources

- **Women Rock Science** (YouTube Playlist - Michigan Science Center)
- **She Did It Her Way** Podcast - Entrepreneurial journeys
- **Women in Tech Stories** - <https://www.womenintech.co.uk>
- **Lean In Circles Toolkit** - <https://leanin.org/circles>
- **Girls Who Code - Alumnae Spotlights** - <https://girlswhocode.com/>

Strategies for Engaging Young Women in STEM and Business-Related Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular programs offer a unique space where young women can explore STEM and business with **creativity, confidence, and community**—outside the pressure of formal academics. When designed with inclusion in mind, these experiences can be truly transformational.

This section shares **practical strategies** youth workers can use to increase participation and keep motivation high—especially for those who may feel unsure or underrepresented.

Why Extracurriculars Matter

- **Hands-on learning** activates curiosity and confidence
- **Informal peer settings** reduce fear of judgment
- **Real-world relevance** shows the impact of STEM and business
- **Leadership and collaboration skills** are strengthened
- **Safe spaces** nurture identity, self-expression, and empowerment.
- Young women who engage in well-designed clubs or projects are **more likely to continue in STEM or business paths.**



7 Ways to Boost Young Women's Engagement in STEM & Business Activities

"When young women help shape the experience, they're more likely to stay and thrive."

Co-Create the Program
Involve young women in designing clubs and choosing content. Ownership fuels engagement.

Connect to Real-World Impact
Frame STEM/business around causes they care about like environment or mental health.

Blend Tech with Creativity
Mix coding, design, storytelling, and empathy-based challenges.

Use Peer Leadership
Let experienced young women lead activities and mentor newcomers.

Celebrate All Effort
Highlight growth, collaboration, and curiosity—not just success or "winners"

Quick Wins
 ✓ Let participants name their club or
 ✓ Add "Why it matters" prompts to every session.
 ✓ Ask: "What would you love to learn or create?"

Am I designing with young women—or just for them? Engagement grows when young women feel seen, heard, and in charge of their learning.

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Storytelling: Sharing Success Stories of Women who Overcame Gender Barriers

Stories inspire change. For young women exploring STEM and business, real stories create emotional connection, visibility, and shared possibility—far beyond what stats or theory can offer.

By sharing voices of women who've overcome gender barriers, youth workers can spark courage, belonging, and leadership. This section offers tools to help young women see themselves as capable and resilient.

Why Storytelling Matters in Motivation

- **Humanizes success** by highlighting effort, mistakes, and learning
- **Normalizes struggle** and reduces shame or fear of failure
- **Models resilience** and strategic action against bias
- **Expands possibilities** by showing diverse ways women enter and thrive in STEM/business
- **Inspires reflection** on personal goals and barriers

When stories are authentic, diverse, and contextually relevant, they not only engage minds—they shift mindsets.



Storytelling as a Tool for Motivation

How real stories help young women see possible in STEM and business

- Makes success feel real and relatable
- Normalizes struggle and growth
- Inspires confidence and goal-setting
- Shows diverse ways to thrive in male-dominated fields

When young women hear real stories, they start to believe their own success is possible too.

Storytelling in Action

- Curate relatable stories**: Choose women from diverse backgrounds
- Share stories through multiple formats**: Video, podcast, spoken word, comics
- Create space for reflection**: "What part of her story reminds you of yourself?"
- Encourage personal storytelling**: Let young women map their own growth stories and dreams

Storytelling Tools for Youth Workers

- "Future Me" Journaling**: Imagine life in a future STEM/business role
- Success Timeline**: Reflects on moments of bravery and creativity
- Story Circles**: Share challenges and insights in small groups
- Voices of Resilience**: Invite real women to speak as a mentor
- Visual Story Wall**: Create a display or digital board of role models and quotes

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Final Thought


Stories have the power to whisper “you belong” where doubt once lived. Sharing narratives of women who pushed past gender barriers is not just inspirational—it’s transformational. When young women hear the truth about what it takes to succeed, they begin to believe they can write their own success stories too.


“Your story could be the spark for someone else’s fire. Let’s keep telling them.”


Mentorship & Networking

Opening doors for young women


Belonging
"I'm not the only one navigating this."



Validation
"Someone sees my potential."


Visibility
"She introduced me to a new opportunity."


Confidence
"I now believe I can speak up and lead."

Mentorship


Long-term, growth-focused relationship



Networking


Web of connections and opportunities


Includes peers, professionals and collaborators





Can be one-time or ongoing


Tools & Strategies for Youth Workers

 **Mentor Match Events**
Let participants meet multiple mentors


 **Speed Networking**
Rotate short chats with women in STEM/business fields

 **Peer mentorship**
Let young women lead and support each other


 **Demystify mentorship**
Teach what mentors "are and aren't" (e. g.)

 **Online platforms**
Use LinkedIn, Lean in Circles, Ellevest, Girls in Tech

"Am I helping young women build relationships-or just giving them information?"



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The Importance of Professional Networking and Mentorship

In STEM and business-fields often dominated by men-**young women thrive when they're connected.** Mentorship and networking offer support, visibility, and opportunity. These relationships help young women overcome barriers, find their voice, and build lasting careers.

This section provides practical ways for youth workers to introduce and grow these connections.

Key Benefits

- **Mentorship** offers guidance, validation, and role models.
- **Networking** opens access to ideas, allies, and opportunities.
- Both build **confidence, belonging, and visibility**-especially where young women are underrepresented.

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HOW TO START A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP



Reach Out
Introduce yourself through your network, email, or a professional platform.



Be Clear
Share why you admire their work and what you're hoping to learn from them



Set Expectations
Agree on meeting frequency, duration, and ways you both prefer to communicate



Prepare
Think of questions to get advice, feedback, or discuss your goals and progress




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Final Thought

Mentorship is not a privilege-it's a right that every young woman should be able to access. Networking isn't about collecting contacts-it's about **building trust, curiosity, and shared growth**. When youth workers normalize these tools early on, they equip young women not just to survive in professional spaces-but to thrive.

 **Success doesn't happen on its own.** *When we create networks that support, encourage, and invest in young women, we make their success possible-sometimes before they see it themselves.*

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Reflection Questions for Youth Workers

- When do I see young women light up with curiosity or confidence-and how do I nurture that spark?
- What assumptions do I hold about who "fits" in STEM or business-and am I actively working to challenge them?
- How do I model resilience, bravery, and ambition in my daily work?
- Do I intentionally celebrate small wins and growth, not just achievements or outcomes?
- How often do I ask young women what they want-not just what they're good at or what others expect of them?

Quick Reference: What Youth Workers Can Do

1. Model curiosity, resilience, and confidence
2. Use inclusive, strength-focused language
3. Celebrate small wins and visible effort
4. Provide safe spaces to explore identity, ambition, and self-expression
5. Keep asking: "Who is still missing from this space-and how do I invite her in?"


Hands-On Activity: “My Future in STEM/Business Map”

Objective:

Help participants envision themselves in STEM or business fields by connecting personal strengths, inspiration from role models, and imagined future scenarios.

Instructions:

1. **Step 1** - My Strength Snapshot (10 min)
Each participant writes down 3-5 personal strengths or skills they already have (e.g., curiosity, organization, creativity, problem-solving, teamwork).
2. **Step 2** - Role Model Reflection (10 min)
They select or are shown 1-2 short bios or images of female role models in STEM/business.
Then they answer:
 - “What do I admire about her?”
 - “What challenge did she overcome?”
 - “What can I learn from her story?”
3. **Step 3** - Future Self Visualization (10 min)
Participants draw or describe their “Future Self” working in a STEM or business role.
Prompts:
 - What am I doing?
 - What skills am I using?
 - Who am I helping or leading?
4. **Step 4** - Sharing in Pairs/Groups (10-15 min)
In small groups or pairs, participants present their future maps. Encourage questions and affirming feedback:
 - “What stands out about her vision?”
 - “What strength do you see in her map?”

 **Time:** 45-50 minutes

Materials:

- Paper or printed templates
- Pens, markers, colored pencils
- Pre-selected role model cards or short bios
- Optional: stickers or icons for decorating maps

Outcome:

- Participants articulate their own path into STEM or business, rooted in strengths and inspired by real stories.
- It affirms: “If she did it, maybe I can too-and here’s what I bring to the table.”

Role-Play Scenarios: Motivating Through Confidence and Visibility

These short, realistic role-play situations are designed to help young women practice how to assert their ambition, express interest in STEM/business, and confront discouraging attitudes. Use them in pairs or small groups, rotating roles

between the young woman, peer, and observer. Each scenario includes a reflection or coaching question at the end.

◆ **Scenario 1: “STEM Is Just Not for Girls”**

A classmate (male or female) casually comments during a robotics workshop:
“Girls never stick with this stuff anyway.”

Practice:

- How do you challenge that stereotype respectfully but confidently?
- What personal example or role model could you mention to reframe the narrative?

Prompt for Debrief:

- *“What assumptions did you notice in this comment?”*
- *“How did it feel to respond with self-belief?”*

◆ **Scenario 2: “You’re Too Quiet to Be a Business Leader”**

During a group brainstorming session, someone says:
“You should handle the notes—you’re not really the leading type.”

Practice:

- How do you assert your leadership skills and interest in taking a more active role?

Prompt for Debrief:

- *“What’s one-way quiet leadership shows up as a strength?”*
- *“How can you make space for yourself in team settings?”*

◆ **Scenario 3: “I’m Not Good Enough for This” (Internal Dialogue)**

You’re preparing for a pitch competition or STEM fair and thinking:
“I don’t belong here. Everyone else is smarter and more confident.”

Practice:

With a partner, role-play your internal voice and the “coach” or mentor helping you reframe the thought. Use affirmations or facts about your strengths.

Prompt for Debrief:

- *“What reframed thought helped most?”*
- *“How can you use this technique in real life?”*

◆ **Scenario 4: “That’s a Pretty Ambitious Career Goal”**

You’ve just shared that you want to work in AI ethics or start your own tech company. A peer responds:
“Wow. That’s a big dream. Don’t you think you should start smaller?”

Practice:

- How do you stand by your ambition without being defensive?
- How can you use your response to inspire-not shut down-the conversation?

Prompt for Debrief:

- *“How did it feel to defend your dream with confidence?”*
- *“How can you spot the difference between concern and discouragement?”*

◆ **Scenario 5: “I Don’t See Anyone Like Me in That Field”**

You’re helping a friend who says:
“I’d like to try computer science, but it doesn’t feel like a space for someone like me.”

Practice:

- How do you respond as a peer mentor or ally?
- What stories, communities, or resources could you share to help her see her place?

Prompt for Debrief:

- “What helped her shift her thinking?”
- “What did you learn about how representation shapes motivation?”

Motivational Corner

“Don’t wait for permission to lead. If you’re passionate, prepared, and present—you already belong.”

— Reshma Saujani, Founder of Girls Who Code



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“Your voice, your ideas, your vision—they matter. Even when the room doesn’t expect you to speak, speak anyway.”

— Inspired by women leaders in male-dominated fields

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References

📖 Books

- Saujani, R. (2019). *Brave, Not Perfect: Fear Less, Fail More, and Live Bolder*. Crown Publishing.
(Empowers girls to embrace imperfection and take risks, especially in tech and leadership.)
- Kay, K., & Shipman, C. (2014). *The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance-What Women Should Know*. HarperBusiness.
(Groundbreaking insights on confidence gaps and how to close them.)
- Sandberg, S. (2013). *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Knopf.
(Encourages women to pursue their ambitions and change the conversation on gender in the workplace.)

🎧 Podcasts

- She Did It Her Way - Hosted by Amanda Boleyn
(Stories from women entrepreneurs navigating business with confidence.)
- The Broad Experience - Hosted by Ashley Milne-Tyte
(Candid conversations about women in the workplace and gender dynamics.)
- Women at Work - Harvard Business Review
(Focused episodes on speaking up, overcoming self-doubt, and building leadership visibility.)

💡 Articles & Toolkits

- Google's re:Work - *Psychological Safety Toolkit*
<https://rework.withgoogle.com>
(Tools for building inclusive, supportive environments that foster bold thinking.)
- Catalyst - *Inclusion and Allyship Tools*
<https://www.catalyst.org>
(Practical advice for organizations and mentors supporting women.)
- Learning for Justice - *Speaking Up Against Bias Toolkit*
<https://www.learningforjustice.org>
(Activities and resources to help young people respond to bias and microaggressions.)

🌐 Communities & Networks

- Girls in Tech
<https://girlsintech.org>
(Global nonprofit focused on eliminating the gender gap in tech.)
- Lean In Circles
<https://leanin.org/circles>
(Support groups designed to help women build confidence and leadership skills.)
- Ellevest Network
<https://ellevestnetwork.com>
(Community of women committed to equality and leadership advancement.)
- Women Who Code
<https://www.womenwhocode.com>
(Dedicated to empowering women to excel in technology careers.)

Additional Self-Reflection Tools

- VIA Strengths Survey
<https://www.viacharacter.org>
(Identify personal strengths to support motivation and self-confidence.)
- Confidence Quiz - MindTools
<https://www.mindtools.com>
(Self-assessment for evaluating and developing confidence.)
- 16Personalities Test (MBTI-based)
<https://www.16personalities.com>
(Useful for self-awareness and career motivation insights.)

Explore More: Additional Resources

Books

- Presence - Amy Cuddy
Explores how body language influences confidence, performance, and perception-especially useful in business and leadership contexts.
- The Likeability Trap - Alicia Menendez
Offers insight into the double standards women face and how to navigate professional ambition while staying authentic.
- Mindset: The New Psychology of Success - Carol Dweck
Introduces the transformative concept of growth vs. fixed mindsets, foundational for developing resilience and motivation.

Podcasts

- Hello Monday - LinkedIn
Explores career growth and professional purpose with a focus on navigating change and challenge.
- Lead to Win - Michael Hyatt
Great for exploring practical leadership habits, goal setting, and influence.
- The Confidence Chronicles - Erika Cramer
Straight-talking reflections on confidence, self-doubt, and overcoming limiting beliefs.

Talks & Videos

- Amy Cuddy - "Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are" (TED Talk)
https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are
- Reshma Saujani - "Teach Girls Bravery, Not Perfection" (TED Talk)
https://www.ted.com/talks/reshma_saujani_teach_girls_bravery_not_perfection
- Carla Harris - "How to Find the Person Who Can Help You Get Ahead at Work" (TED Talk)
https://www.ted.com/talks/carla_harris_how_to_find_the_person_who_can_help_you_get_ahead_at_work

Communities & Networks

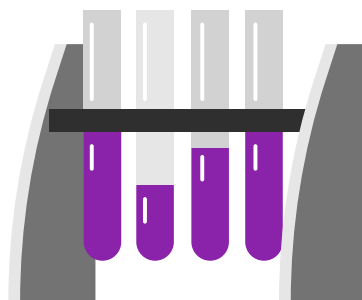
- SheEO - <https://sheeo.world>
A global community supporting radically generous women-led ventures.

- The Riveter - <https://www.theriveter.co>
A platform for women in leadership, advocacy, and business innovation.
- TechLadies - <https://www.techladies.co>
Offers job boards, community support, and events for women in technology.
- STEMettes - <https://stemettes.org>
Inspires girls and non-binary youth to pursue careers in STEM through events and mentoring.

Interactive Toolkits & Learning Platforms

- Lean In Toolkits - <https://leanin.org/toolkits>
Practical resources on mentorship, confidence building, and leadership training.
- EngineerGirl.org - <https://www.engineergirl.org>
STEM career resources and role model profiles designed for girls and educators.
- MindTools Confidence Toolkit -
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_84.htm
Self-assessments and action plans for boosting confidence and assertiveness.

Chapter 8 - Practical Activities for Youth Workers to Promote Gender Equality



Introduction

Youth workers play a crucial role in shaping the values, attitudes, and aspirations of young people. In male-dominated sectors like STEM and business, young women often face both visible and subtle barriers that can discourage their participation or limit their potential. Chapter 8 provides youth workers with practical, hands-on activities to engage young people (particularly girls and young women) in critical discussions about gender roles, bias, and inclusion. These activities are designed to inspire reflection, challenge stereotypes, and foster a supportive environment where all youth feel empowered to explore and thrive in STEM and business pathways.

The activities in this chapter support the development of inclusive mindsets, encourage peer dialogue, and equip youth with the tools to question societal norms and embrace diversity.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, youth workers will be able to:

- Facilitate engaging and inclusive activities that promote gender equality in STEM and business contexts.
- Create safe, supportive spaces for young people to explore and discuss gender roles, biases, and challenges.
- Identify and challenge stereotypes and unconscious biases that affect youth.
- Encourage empathy, allyship and active inclusion among all genders.
- Strengthen young women's confidence and resilience through experiential learning.
- Integrate practical mentoring strategies into group-based sessions.

Implementing Gender Equality Activities with Youth

Before being able to successfully facilitate gender equality sessions, it is vital that youth workers understand both the practicalities and deeper dynamics involved in guiding young people through discussions about stereotypes, inclusion, and opportunity. In the following sections you may find a framework for how to deliver these sessions effectively, with an emphasis on sensitivity, inclusivity and youth empowerment.

Building the Right Environment

Creating a safe and respectful space is essential. Young people are more likely to share their thoughts and challenge their own assumptions when they feel heard and supported. Start by co-creating ground rules with participants. These might include

listening without interrupting, being open to new perspectives, using respectful language and maintaining confidentiality.

Introduce every session with warmth, clarity, and openness. Make it clear that the goal is to learn together, and that making mistakes is part of the process. Acknowledge that some of the topics may challenge beliefs or personal experiences and let participants know that their voices matter.

Creating a safe learning space

10 key principles

01. 

Listen to understand

Take time to really hear each other. Let people finish speaking—no interrupting.

02. 

Speak with respect

Share your own thoughts honestly, but kindly. Avoid hurtful or dismissive words.

03. 

Support each other

We all come from different backgrounds. Be kind and lift each other up.

04. 

Build trust

What's shared here stays here. Respect people's privacy.

05. 

Respect different learning styles

Some people talk it out, others draw or write. There's no one right way to learn.

06. 

No judging

We're here to explore, not to shame. Ask questions with curiosity, not criticism.

07. 

Step up, step back

If you always speak, make room for others. If you're usually quiet, try to share.

08. 

Use "I" statements

Speak from your own experience. Say "I feel..." or "I think..." instead of making generalizations.

09. 

Keep an open mind

You don't have to agree with everything, but stay open to hearing new perspectives.

10. 

We're all learning

It's okay to make mistakes. What matters is that we try, reflect, and grow together.



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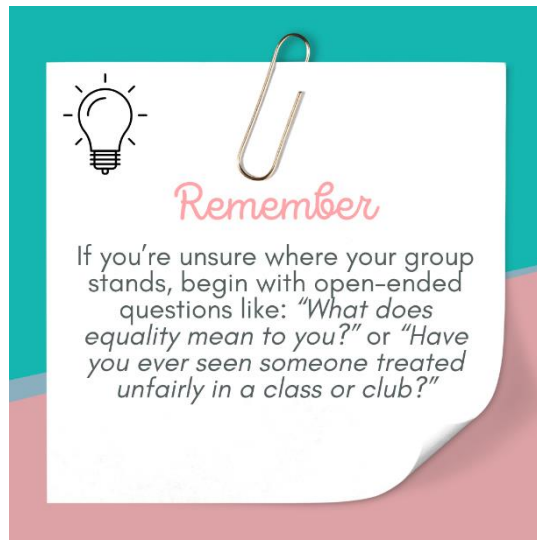
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Understanding the Audience

Not all youth are the same. When planning your delivery, take time to understand the age, cultural context, learning styles, and lived experiences of your group. This doesn't require a lengthy survey, it can start with casual conversation, observation, or reflection on who is in the room. For instance, younger teens may respond best to games and visual storytelling, while older participants might prefer debate and real-world case studies. Be conscious of the cultural and social contexts participants come from, especially regarding how gender roles are perceived in their communities.

Ask yourself:

- Are participants from urban or rural areas?
- Do they have role models in STEM or business?
- How familiar are they with gender equality topics?
- Are there language or accessibility considerations?




💡 Mentoring tip: Use brief one-on-one check-ins with quieter participants before or after a session to build trust and gather feedback.

Managing Group Dynamics

Youth groups are dynamic and unpredictable. You may have outspoken participants, quiet observers, resistant attitudes, and deeply personal disclosures all in the same session. The facilitator's job is not to control every response, but to guide the energy of the room with sensitivity and presence.

- “What surprised you today?”
- “Have you seen this situation happen in real life?”
- “How would you respond differently now?”

Offer options for individual, small-group, or creative reflection (like drawing, short videos, or writing letters to future selves). Some young people need quiet time; others thrive on discussion. Honoring different processing styles reinforces psychological safety.

 *Mentoring tip: Share a brief personal story of when you changed your mind about something important. This models humility and lifelong learning.*

Sustaining Impact Beyond the Sessions

Creating change doesn't end when the workshop does. For young women navigating gendered environments in STEM and business, sustaining impact means transforming insights into personal confidence, long-term strategies, and proactive engagement with the world around them.

Youth workers play a critical role in helping participants connect what they've learned to real-life challenges like being the only girl in a coding class, questioning pay disparities, or navigating power dynamics in internships or group projects. The goal is not just awareness, but self-efficacy - the belief that “I can take action, I belong here, I can lead.”

Encourage young women to set personal goals related to the session themes:

- Speaking up in male-dominated classrooms
- Joining or creating women-led clubs or initiatives
- Seeking out female mentors or role models
- Advocating for fairness and inclusion among peers

Action keeps learning alive. Invite participants to design their own mini-projects:

- Create a digital story about a woman in STEM and business
- Develop a peer workshop on gender bias
- Write a letter to their future self about resilience and leadership

These small steps build agency and reinforce the session's values long after the room is empty.



Provide opportunities for follow-up, whether it’s through WhatsApp check-ins, alumni meet-ups, or mentorship circles. Help them build a network of support. Share scholarships, clubs, and internship opportunities. Let them know they are not alone in the journey.

💡 Mentoring tip: Support each young woman in identifying her own “next step,” no matter how small. It could be starting a conversation, reading a book, or speaking up in class.

Practical tools for sustaining impact:

- Confidence journals: A space to record successes, insights, and affirmations.
- Accountability partners: Pair participants to check in on each other’s goals.
- Visibility exercises: Encourage youth to claim space - online, in meetings, in leadership roles.

Practical Do’s and Don’ts When Facilitating Sessions

Working with young people on gender-related topics requires not only strong intentions but also thoughtful delivery. Even the most well-planned sessions can present unexpected dynamics, resistance, or emotional responses. Drawing from field experience and tested approaches, these practical do’s and don’ts will help you stay inclusive, responsive, and impactful, even in challenging moments. Use them as both preparation and reflection tools to strengthen your practice.

DO'S AND DONT'S WHEN FACILITATING GENDER EQUALITY ACTIVITIES

DO

Foster open dialogue

Encourage questions and curiosity without judgment.

Set clear ground rules

Being flexible and open will only help you in the long-run.

Normalize uncertainty

Let youth know it's okay not to have all the answers.

Validate diverse experiences

Honor different backgrounds and beliefs while gently challenging stereotypes.

Debrief after each activity

Give space for reflection to help consolidate learning.

Prepare alternatives

Be ready to shift if something isn't working.

Remain neutral in conflicts

Ask, don't accuse.

DON'T

Use shaming

Asking questions will help you clarify all doubt.

Let voices dominate

Ensure everyone has a chance to speak; support quieter participants.

Lecture

Facilitate learning through questions and exploration, not one-way talking.

Impose your views

Stay open-minded and encourage participants to think critically.

Ignore resistance

Stay open-minded and encourage participants to think critically.

Assume knowledge

Meet participants where they are, adapting to their needs and interests.

Judge

Refrain from labeling or criticizing.



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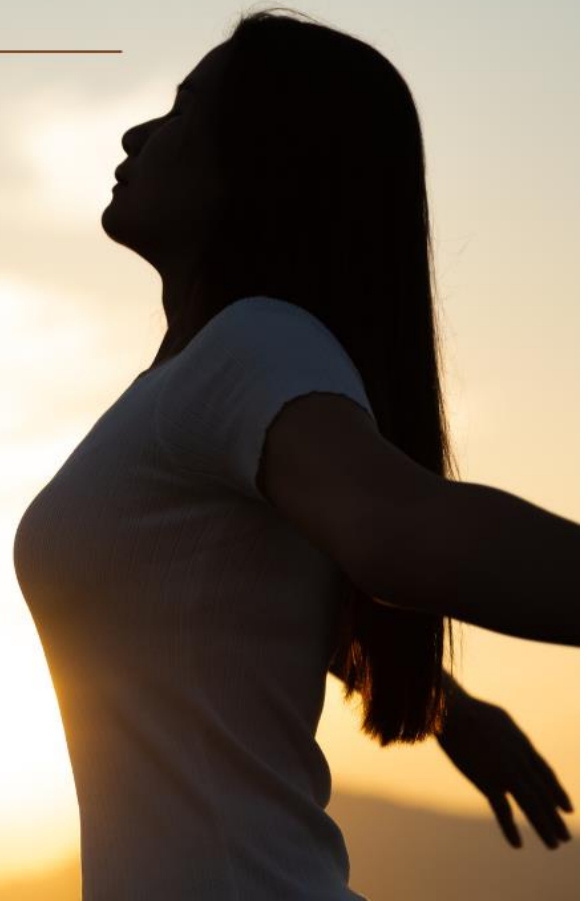
Practical Activities and Sessions

Once a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment has been established, the next step is to engage young people in interactive learning experiences that put gender equality into action. The following section provides fully developed sessions you can implement directly with youth. Each session is designed to last approximately 60 minutes and includes step-by-step guidance, materials, and templates to ensure that youth workers feel confident, equipped, and inspired to lead.

These sessions are structured to build understanding, foster discussion, and promote empowerment among young people, with a special emphasis on the experiences of girls and young women in male-dominated spaces. You may use them in order or adapt each session independently depending on your group's needs. Each activity can be used independently or together.

Words of inspiration

“You don’t need permission to take up space. The world needs your perspective. Step forward, and others will follow.”



Activity 1: Breaking the Bias

Topic: Recognizing and challenging popular gender stereotypes in STEM, business and everyday situations

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials needed

- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Multimedia screen (optional)
- Markers, colour pencils, pens
- Sticky notes (2 colours)
- Printed scenario cards (provided below)
- Bias reflection template (provided below)
- Timer or bell to manage time blocks (optional)

Step-by-step instructions

1. Warm-up Activity: “Word Web” (10 minutes)

Purpose: Activate prior knowledge and uncover unconscious associations with roles.

Write the word “Scientist” (or “Engineer” / “Business leader”) in the center of a flipchart or whiteboard. Ask participants to call out the first words or traits that come to their mind. As they speak, write responses around the word in a mind map style. Common responses might include: “Male,” “Glasses,” “Serious,” “Old,” “Wears a suit,” etc.

After the web is full, prompt a discussion:

“What patterns do you notice?”

“Where do these images come from? TV? School? Social media?”

“Is this always true?”

2. Stereotype Scenario Cards (20 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people and give each group one Scenario card (see below). Each group will have the task to discuss the situations. After 10-15 minutes, invite the teams to share key insights with the whole room.

✓ *Facilitator tip: If time allows, rotate scenarios between groups or assign multiple scenarios to advanced groups.*

3. Group Bias Map (15 minutes)

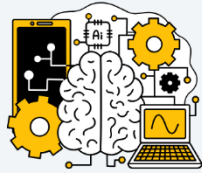
Draw a large “Bias map” on the flipchart. Title one side: “Observed stereotypes” and the other “Ways to challenge them”. Ask the groups to write examples from the

Scenario Cards (Step 2)

Scenario 1

Fixing the bike

Sara offers to help fix her younger brother's bike. Her dad doesn't say anything but steps in "just to check," even though Sara has done this before. Later, Sara notices her brother's friends complimenting her skills but also acting surprised. No one says it outright, but Sara wonders if it's unusual for girls to do things like this.



Discussion Questions

- What is happening in the described situation?
- What bias or stereotype is present?
- How could this situation be addressed or challenged?
- What is the impact on the participants in the scenario described?



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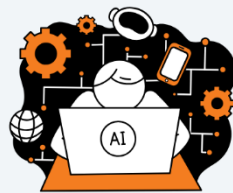


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Scenario 2

Weekend hobbies

Tom enjoys coding and talks about his latest game idea. Some friends listen but then shift the conversation to football. When Tom brings up coding again, a friend jokes, "You and your computers!" Tom laughs, not wanting to feel out of place, but thinks about whether his interests fit in socially.



Discussion Questions

- What is happening in the described situation?
- What bias or stereotype is present?
- How could this situation be addressed or challenged?
- What is the impact on the participants in the scenario described?



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Scenario 3

Parents' concerns

Emma tells her parents she wants to study engineering. They listen carefully but later suggest she consider “something with more balance.” They don’t say it’s because she’s a girl, but Emma feels a mix of support and subtle doubt – like they’re worried about how hard the path might be for her.



Discussion Questions

- What is happening in the described situation?
- What bias or stereotype is present?
- How could this situation be addressed or challenged?
- What is the impact on the participants in the scenario described?



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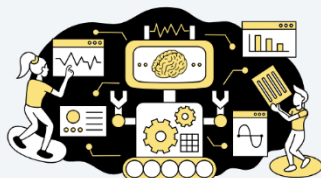


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Scenario 4

The presentation feedback

After presenting a business proposal, Mario and Yara receive feedback. Mario’s style is described as “bold and confident,” while Yara’s is called “nice and clear.” Yara appreciates the compliment but wonders if she could have been encouraged to be more assertive. Mario notices he was asked about future leadership roles, while Yara’s feedback focused on teamwork.



Discussion Questions

- What is happening in the described situation?
- What bias or stereotype is present?
- How could this situation be addressed or challenged?
- What is the impact on the participants in the scenario described?



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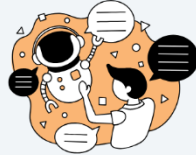


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Scenario 5

The team meeting

During a group project in a STEM class, the team is brainstorming solutions. When Amina, who is usually quiet, offers an idea, the group quickly moves on without acknowledging it. Later, one of the male team members suggests a similar idea, and everyone immediately gets excited. Amina wonders if her voice matters as much as others', but she also notices that sometimes her teammates don't realize they are overlooking her input.



Discussion Questions

- What is happening in the described situation?
- What bias or stereotype is present?
- How could this situation be addressed or challenged?
- What is the impact on the participants in the scenario described?



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Scenario 6

Confidence misread

In a youth entrepreneurship challenge, Ana takes the lead in organizing the group and presenting their business pitch. She speaks clearly and confidently, outlining a solid plan. Afterward, a teammate says, "She's kind of bossy, isn't she? Like, she doesn't let anyone else talk." The others laugh, even though they'd followed her lead earlier.



Discussion Questions

- What is happening in the described situation?
- What bias or stereotype is present?
- How could this situation be addressed or challenged?
- What is the impact on the participants in the scenario described?



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Activity 2: Confidence Circuit

Theme: Building confidence and self-advocacy skills

Duration: 60 minutes

Goal: To strengthen young women's confidence to speak up and own their ideas in academic and professional spaces.

Materials needed

- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Multimedia screen (optional)
- Markers, colour pencils, pens
- Sticky notes (2 colors)
- Confidence ladder template (provided below)
- Timer or bell to manage time blocks (optional)

Step-by-step instructions

1. Warm Up and Icebreaker: Power Pose (5 mins)

Invite all participants to stand and ask them to stand in a strong, expansive “power pose” (according to their perception) for 1 full minute. After that ask them how they felt during the 1 minute, or “What do you notice in your body or thoughts when you shift your posture?”

✓ *Mentoring tip: Highlight that our body language can influence our mental and emotional state and we can use this in stressful moments (for example before exams or before interviews or public speaking).*

2. Confidence Killers (10 mins)

Use a flipchart or a whiteboard and divide it in two sections labelled “UP” and “DOWN.”. Distribute 2 different colours of sticky notes to all participants and ask each of them to describe briefly:

→ A moment when they felt confident (on one sticky note)

→ A moment when they felt shut down/their confidence is at its lowest (on the other sticky note)

Invite them to post their answers anonymously on the two separate areas. Read out a few examples and group them into themes (e.g., public speaking, fear of judgment, peer feedback).

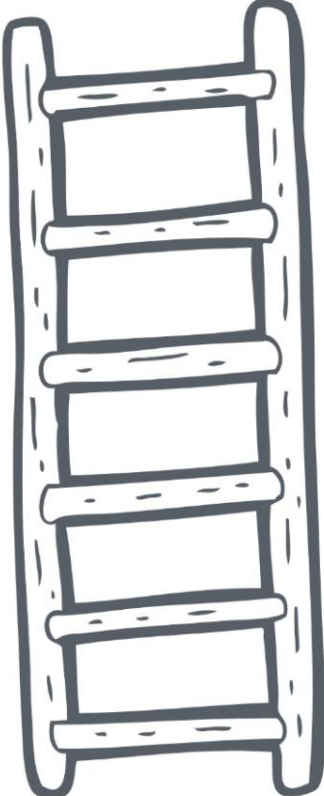

3. Confidence Ladder (15 mins)


This activity can help the participants reflect on moments when they lack confidence and break down small, achievable steps to build self-assurance.

Draw a large ladder on the board/flipchart or give each participant a printed version (provided below). The bottom step represents low confidence, and the top step represents full confidence or “owning my voice.” Ask each participant to think of a situation where they often feel unsure or lack confidence (for example: speaking in front of a group, sharing ideas in class, asking questions, applying for a program). Invite them to write just one realistic step they could take to move up just one step up the ladder (for instance: “Next time, I’ll share one idea in my group.” or “I’ll ask a question, even if I feel nervous.” or “I’ll remind myself my ideas matter before I speak.” Invite them to repeat this reflection until they fill up all the steps with actionable simple actions and boost their confidence. If there are volunteers, invite them to share their “next step.”


CONFIDENCE LADDER

The bottom step represents low confidence, and the top step represents full confidence or “owning my voice.”





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4. Pitch Your Passion (20-25 min)

Ask each participant to prepare and deliver a short presentation (about 1-2 minutes) on a topic that is personally meaningful to them. It can be anything they feel connected to, such as a hobby, a passion, a dream job, a business idea, or a cause they care about. Encourage them to think about what they want others to understand or feel about their topic. They can follow a basic structure: introduce the topic, explain why it matters to them, and share something specific or personal related to it.

After each presentation, invite peers to share brief positive feedback, focusing on what they heard that was clear, strong, or inspiring. They can use encouraging affirmations like: “You spoke with confidence when you said...” or “I relate to your story about...” or “Your idea was awesome because...”

5. Wrap-up and Debrief (5 minutes)

Bring the group together. Invite some volunteers to share their reflections on the whole activity. Discuss what the common confidence blocks are and what are the ways to overcome them and “step up the ladder”.

Activity 3: Future Self-Mapping

Theme: Visioning empowered professional futures

Duration: 60 minutes

Goal: To help young people, especially girls and young women, imagine their future selves in STEM or business and identify personal strengths, challenges, and action steps toward that vision.

Materials needed

- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Multimedia screen (optional)
- Large paper sheets (A3)
- Magazines, newspapers, scissors, glue (for collage)
- Markers, colour pencils, pens
- Sticky notes
- Timer or bell to manage time blocks (optional)

Step-by-step instructions

1. Warm-up and Icebreaker “Would you rather...?” (10 minutes)

Prepare a list of several fun and thought-provoking “Would you rather...” questions related to professional and personal identity. Read each question aloud, one at a time. Ask the participants to move to one side of the room depending on their choice (e.g., left for Option A, right for Option B). After each round, invite 1-2 people to briefly share why they chose that side.

Example “Would you rather...?” statements:

- *Would you rather build a robot or design an app?*
- *Would you rather speak in front of 100 people or record a video and post it online?*
- *Would you rather design your dream apartment or design your dream app?*
- *Would you rather be the leader of a group project or be the behind-the-scenes planner?*
- *Would you rather solve a mystery or create a brand-new story?*
- *Would you rather lead a team or work independently on a big idea?*
- *Would you rather never use social media again or never watch movies again?*
- *Would you rather go one week with no phone or one week with no internet?*
- *Would you rather start your own small business or get a job with a big company?*
- *Would you rather always be the one asking questions or always be the one answering them?*

2. Future Self-Map (25 minutes)

The participants have the task to create a visual map or collage of their future selves. This can be drawn, written, or built using magazine clippings. The map should include:

- A title or role (real or invented)
- Symbols or words for what matters to them (values, goals)
- Strengths they want to use and weaknesses they would like to overcome
- What they're doing in that vision (tasks, projects, leadership, etc.)
- Keywords or visuals showing how they feel in that future

This is an open-ended, expressive activity. Reassure them that it doesn't have to look a certain way.

3. Barriers and Bridges (15 minutes)

The aim of this activity is to help participants identify potential obstacles they may face on their way to achieving their future goals and explore the supports and strategies that can help them overcome them.

Ask the participants to divide a large paper into two columns or draw a simple path/bridge layout:

- On the left side (or riverbank), they draw or write about their current self - where they are today.
- On the right side, they place their future self from the vision collage or the guided visualization.

In between is a river, gap, or road they must cross. Ask them to fill this middle space with:

- Barriers (rocks, currents, blockages): fears, lack of access, discrimination, low representation, family pressure, etc.
- Bridges (stepping stones, ropes, supports): mentors, education, peer groups, skills, resilience, etc.

Encourage them to be specific and personal. Afterward, invite a few volunteers to share what one of their "bridges" is and how they plan to strengthen it.

✓ *Trainer tip: Make sure participants know it's OK to include both personal and structural challenges. Help reframe perceived weaknesses as opportunities for growth, or signals that they'll need allies and systems of support.*

4. Gallery Walk and Peer Encouragement (10 minutes)

Display the Future Self-Maps around the room. Invite participants to walk around silently and leave encouraging sticky notes on others' papers. Comments can reflect strengths, dreams, or simply cheer each other on.

You may also invite a few volunteers to briefly share their vision or a goal they've set.



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