

# When it happens... TURNING DIFFICULT MOMENTS INTO LEARNING MOMENTS



## PURPOSE

In youth work settings, moments of bias, exclusion, discouragement or imbalance often appear subtly and unexpectedly. A comment, a joke, a dismissal of an idea, or silence after feedback can shape how girls see themselves and their future possibilities. How a youth worker responds in these moments can either reinforce existing barriers or turn the situation into a learning experience that strengthens confidence, agency and resilience.

## WHAT "DIFFICULT MOMENTS" CAN LOOK LIKE

Difficult moments are not always openly discriminatory. More often, they appear as everyday interactions: ***a girl's idea being ignored until repeated by someone else; a joke that makes her withdraw; feedback that focuses on personality rather than effort; or a situation where she stops participating after a mistake.***

These moments matter because they accumulate. Over time, they influence whether girls feel capable, welcome and prepared to pursue ambitious educational or professional paths, including STEM and business.

## Effective responses

- do not shame or accuse
- do not ignore what happened
- do not over-dramatise the situation

The goal is not to correct people, the goal is to protect learning.

## WHY THIS MATTERS FOR GIRLS' FUTURE PATHWAYS

Girls often receive stronger social signals to avoid risk, hide uncertainty and withdraw after negative experiences. In education and professional environments, especially in competitive or male-dominated fields, this can limit participation and ambition long before formal barriers appear. Youth work plays a critical role in interrupting this pattern early.

By responding effectively in difficult moments, youth workers help girls practice:

- speaking again after being ignored
- staying engaged after a mistake
- trusting that their contributions matter

These are foundational skills for future education, leadership, STEM, business and civic participation.

## A PRACTICAL RESPONSE FLOW



### 01 NOTICE

Pause and identify what is happening before reacting.  
Ask yourself: ***Did this moment reduce someone's participation, confidence or visibility?***  
Recognising the moment is already an intervention.



### 02 PAUSE

Slow the interaction briefly. This can be done with silence, a neutral comment, or a short break.  
Pausing prevents automatic reactions and gives you space to respond intentionally rather than emotionally.

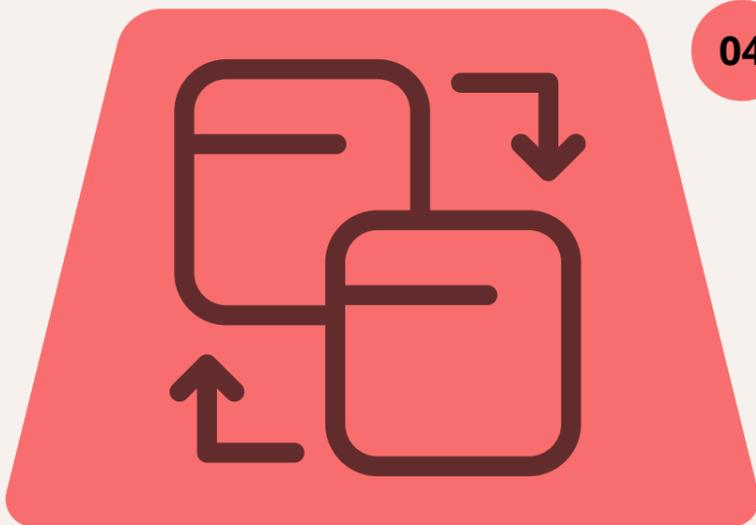


### 03 NAME (without blame)

Acknowledge what happened in a neutral, descriptive way.  
Focus on the situation, not the person.  
Example framing:

- ***"Let's pause for a moment — I think an idea was missed."***
- ***"I noticed the discussion moved on quickly there."***

Naming helps restore fairness without putting anyone on the defensive.



### 04 REDIRECT TOWARDS LEARNING

This step is crucial for preventing disengagement. Bring the focus back to contribution, process and growth.

This might include:

- ***inviting the girl to restate her idea***
- ***reframing a mistake as part of learning***
- ***shifting attention from performance to exploration***

Ignoring difficult moments may feel easier in the short term, but it often confirms to girls that silence is safer than participation. Overcorrecting or publicly calling out individuals can also backfire, shifting attention away from learning and onto conflict. Effective youth work responses are calm, proportionate and focused on restoring participation.

Small moments shape big trajectories. When handled well, difficult moments become opportunities for learning and growth.