

Scenario 1: Maya – Fading into the background

Maya has been part of your youth group for over a year. Normally upbeat and talkative, she has gradually become withdrawn over the past month. She often keeps her hoodie up, avoids eye contact, and spends breaks scrolling silently on her phone. During a recent activity, she whispered, “It doesn’t matter, I don’t care anymore,” when someone suggested she present her work. On social media, she posted a plain black image with the caption: “Tired of pretending.”

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- What behaviors in Maya are cause for concern?
- How would you approach her about what you’re noticing without overwhelming her? If she refuses to talk, what could be your next steps?

Scenario 2: Jonas – Breaking down

Jonas has always been the reliable one in the group—on time, helpful, and focused. But in recent weeks, he’s started arriving late, looking unkempt and exhausted. His attention span is short, and last week, he unexpectedly cried during a small disagreement. He apologized repeatedly, saying, “I’m just under pressure, I’m fine,” but he seemed ashamed and hasn’t spoken much since.

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- How can we explore what’s happening beneath the surface of Jonas’s behavior?
- What risks might be present if we dismiss this as “just stress”?
- How do we create space for someone like Jonas to feel safe asking for support?

Scenario 3: Alex – Drowning in silence

Alex, usually a steady participant, has stopped handing in work and barely speaks during sessions. When you found him sitting alone behind the building last week, he said quietly, “Sometimes I wonder if anyone would notice if I just stopped showing up.” He smiled awkwardly after and said, “I’m just tired, really.”

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- How can we respond when someone hints at thoughts of invisibility or worthlessness?
- What actions would you take to ensure follow-up support and safety?
- When should you consider referring to a mental health professional?

Scenario 4: Ivana – Giving Up on herself

Ivana used to take pride in her appearance and loved taking part in creative projects. Over the last few sessions, she’s appeared in the same clothes, often unwashed, and doesn’t participate unless prompted. When asked how she’s doing, she answers, “I don’t have the energy for anything anymore. I just want to disappear for a while.”

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- What signs point to possible depressive symptoms?
- How can we support Ivana while respecting her autonomy?

What boundaries do we need as youth workers when someone is deeply struggling?

Scenario 5: Sam – Cutting Off the World

Sam used to be deeply involved in your program, often helping behind the scenes and encouraging others. They’ve recently withdrawn from all communication—no replies in group chats, skipped meetings, and unfollowed several peers online. When you texted directly, Sam wrote, “I just need to not exist in people’s lives for a while. Please respect that.”

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- How can we balance respect for Sam’s boundaries with concern for their wellbeing?
- What non-invasive ways might we keep the door open for connection?
- What team approach could be helpful here?

Scenario 6: Emilia – Exploding Under Pressure

During a routine group project, Emilia suddenly lashed out at a teammate and stormed out of the room. When you called her later, she admitted, “I’ve been carrying everything at home—no one else helps. I haven’t slept properly in a week.” She apologized but said she didn’t know if she wanted to keep coming to sessions.

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- What role might burnout or family stress be playing here?
- How can we help Emilia feel supported without making her feel like a burden?

How do we adapt expectations for young people under serious home stress?

Scenario 7: Luka – Carrying Too much alone

Luka signs up for everything, always offers to help, and never says no. But lately, he looks drained, forgets details, and seems emotionally distant. In a quiet moment, he confided, “I’m the one keeping the house running while my dad recovers from surgery. I don’t really have a choice right now.”

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- How can we support young carers who are “coping too well”?
- What is the danger of invisible resilience?
- What concrete supports could you offer someone in Luka’s situation?

Scenario 8: Amir – Cry for help in disguise

Damir is known for his dark humor. During a stressful session, he joked, “Guess I’ll just disappear for good.” No one laughed, but he smirked and changed the subject. Later that evening, he posted a quote: “Smiling outside, breaking inside. Classic.” He deleted it within an hour.

Discussion Focus for Youth Workers:

- What are the risks of masking distress with humor?
- How can we open a conversation about emotional safety and check for suicidal thoughts, even when it feels uncomfortable?
- What is your role as a youth worker when a young person makes concerning comments—even if they say they were joking?