INCLUSIVE PATHways TO PEACE

House of Inner Shadows

Methodological guide

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AGENCY FOR MOBILITY AND EU PROGRAMMES

Udruga Studio B

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Enriching lives, opening minds.

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Introduction

The “Block H8 - Peace puzzles Toolkit” methodological guide presents a methodology and innovative tools to engage and empower youth with conflict resolution skills through game-based educational resources and aims to increase the quality of youth work by equipping youth practitioners and organizations with new skills, approaches and methods. It strives to promote common values such as tolerance, inclusivity, and understanding, ultimately contributing to building cohesive and peaceful societies.

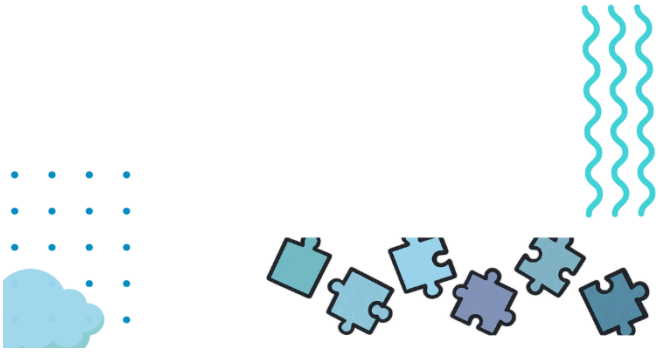
By providing Open Educational Resources (OERs) as a dynamic and interactive environment, we want to equip practitioners with hands-on experience that they can directly apply in their youth-focused initiatives, thereby contributing to enhancing the capacity of Youth and for Youth organizations by offering a practical resource for youth work.

This toolkit’s incorporation of digital elements, such as 360-degree photo/videos and Augmented Reality, provides a cutting-edge approach to non-formal education, available in English, Croatian, Serbian, Spanish, Greek and Turkish, ensuring that YPs, youth organizations, and training providers can use it in a way that respects diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Concerning the Youth, the overarching goal of these Open Educational Resources is to contribute to the enhancement of critical thinking and problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, media literacy, communication and collaboration, leadership, professionalism, and strong empathy among young people, through active participation, in order to enhance conflict prevention and resolution abilities among youth.

Block H8 – Peace Puzzles Toolkit – Methodological Guide is a practical handbook for preparing and implementing 8 educational escape room activities focused on peacebuilding, human rights, inclusion, non-violent communication, emotional intelligence, digital safety, and the prevention of discrimination.

The guide provides detailed methodologies for each room. For every escape room, it presents the visual setup of the space, educational objectives, target group, accessibility and adaptation options, scenario, game objective, room layout, required materials, preparation process, the role of the Game master, gameplay flow, tips, hints, and debriefing questions, thereby providing a comprehensive tool for every practitioner in both non-formal and formal learning settings.



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Project context

"Inclusive pathways to peace, 2024-2-HR01-KA220-YOU-000279458" is an Erasmus+ KA2 *Cooperation partnerships in youth* project, coordinated by Association Studio B (Croatia) with partners from Serbia (Udruženje Svetlost), Spain (ASOCIACIÓN JUVENIL ERASMIAU), and Cyprus (Neolea gia antalagi kai katanoisi – Youth for Exchange and Understanding). The project aims to engage and empower 181 youth with conflict resolution skills through game-based educational resources and to increase the quality of youth work by equipping 130 youth practitioners with new skills, approaches and tools. The project promotes common values such as tolerance, inclusivity, and understanding, ultimately contributing to building cohesive and peaceful societies. After participatory action research and using creative gamification approach, partners co-created open educational resources - including interactive escape rooms enhanced with 360° and augmented reality elements - that support young people in building empathy, communication, and conflict resolution skills. By combining non-formal education and digital innovation, the project is strengthening the quality of youth work and contributing to more cohesive, democratic, and peaceful communities across Europe.



This guidebook was developed as an intellectual output within the project.

During its implementation, partners collaborated on the creation and testing of **educational escape rooms** focused on topics related to peacebuilding, conflict transformation, empathy, human rights, communication, and cooperation among young people. Through international collaboration and exchange of experiences, the project explored how game-based learning and highly participative educational activities can encourage active participation and meaningful learning among youth. The escape rooms in this guide were developed by **four national teams** of 10 youngsters and 2 youth workers, **tested** in an international setting in Šabac, Serbia in March of 2026, **further refined** based on feedback by the participants of that mobility, to finally be used in **local events** in Croatia, Cyprus and Spain. This approach enabled us to create a meaningful learning resource, that is both fun and educational for both youth and youth practitioners, with an immersive experience going much deeper than traditional learning methods.

This guide was created as a practical support resource for educators, youth workers, trainers, facilitators, and organizations interested in using educational escape rooms in their work.

We hope you'll enjoy using it as much as we enjoyed the process of its creation!

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House of Inner Shadows

1 Introduction

A) Context

This specific room, "*House of Inner Shadows*," focuses on the internal aspect of peacebuilding: Emotional Intelligence. It operates on the premise that one cannot build peace with others without first understanding and managing one's own emotions and recognizing the hidden emotional needs of those closest to them.

B) Visual presentation of the room

The room is designed to metaphorically represent a family house that serves as a stand-in for the human mind. The atmosphere shifts from darkness and mystery to clarity and illumination.

Zone 1 (Entry/Stairs): Pitch black. This represents the subconscious and the fear of the unknown.

Zone 2 (1st Floor - Kitchen/Living Room): Chaotic but domestic. A table cluttered with cooking utensils and broken items represents the "mess" of daily raw emotions and conflict.

Zone 3 (2nd Floor - Hallway): A gallery-like space with portraits. It represents the facade we present to the world versus our internal reality.

Zone 4 (Attic): A reflective space containing a mirror. This represents self-realization and the final moment of clarity.

C) Educational objectives

- Identifying specific emotional triggers (passive aggression, anger) and soothing mechanisms (deep breathing, apology).
- Understanding that "broken" or difficult emotional experiences can make a person stronger and more valuable if processed correctly.
- Learning to look past the surface behaviour (anger, silence, smiling) to find the underlying need (fear, loneliness, need for affection).
- Realizing that the ultimate responsibility for one's emotional well-being lies with oneself

D) Target group profile and number

Age: 16-30

Group size recommendation: 4-6

Group profile: Young people interested in psychology, self-development, or groups seeking team building with a focus on communication and emotional bonding.

Escape room difficulty: Medium

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E) Accessibility & Adaptability

The space is arranged to allow easy and safe movement, without obstacles or narrow paths that could make participation difficult. All important elements are placed within easy reach, without requiring extra effort and tasks that were originally planned for the floor have been moved onto a table to make them more accessible. Special attention is given to clear instructions, simple use of materials, and the safety of all participants during the activity.

The escape room is designed to be accessible for people with different needs, including those with hearing impairments, visually impaired participants, and wheelchair users, so that everyone can take part equally. Tasks and instructions do not depend on sound and all-important information is provided in a visual format. All written materials are also adapted for visually impaired participants by using larger and clearer font sizes, making them easier to read.

The activity is flexible and can be adjusted based on the needs of each group. The goal is not only to provide access, but also to support active participation, so that everyone can contribute, explore, and enjoy the experience in an inclusive and equal way.

2 Step by step preparation

2.1 Scenario

WELCOME HOME. WILL YOU EVER LEAVE?

From the outside, it looks like a perfect family house. The grass is green, and the lights are warm. The owner welcomes you with a friendly smile, but you can feel that something is wrong.

Click. The door is locked. The owner looks at you and says: "The house looks perfect, but it hides a dark secret. If you want to leave, you must find out what is inside."

Your journey to the exit:

TOTAL DARKNESS: You start in the dark. You can't see anything - you have to use your other senses to move forward.

THE MESSY KITCHEN: The heart of the home is a total mess. Can you find the clues hidden in the chaos?

THE FAMILY MASKS: This family is hiding their real faces. Find out who they really are to unlock the next door.

THE ATTIC: The final room. To get out, you must stop running and face your own fears.

You have 45 minutes. Will you solve the mystery and escape, or will you stay in this "perfect" house forever?

THE CLOCK IS STARTING. ARE YOU READY?

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2.2 Objective of the game

Through the metaphor of a house (representing the human mind), players must illuminate their "shadows" (unprocessed emotions) to exit as emotionally more intelligent individuals. They must solve puzzles related to emotional regulation, empathy, and self-reflection to find the final key, which is the realization that they hold the power to save themselves.

2.3 Room Layout

Depending on the shape and size of the room you will be using as the area of the escape room, the room layout will also vary. The most important thing is keeping the flow of the room relatively the same, eg. keeping the first steps of the escape room towards the entry way and the final steps toward the back of the room. We suggest the following layout as an idea which can be adapted according to the space being used:

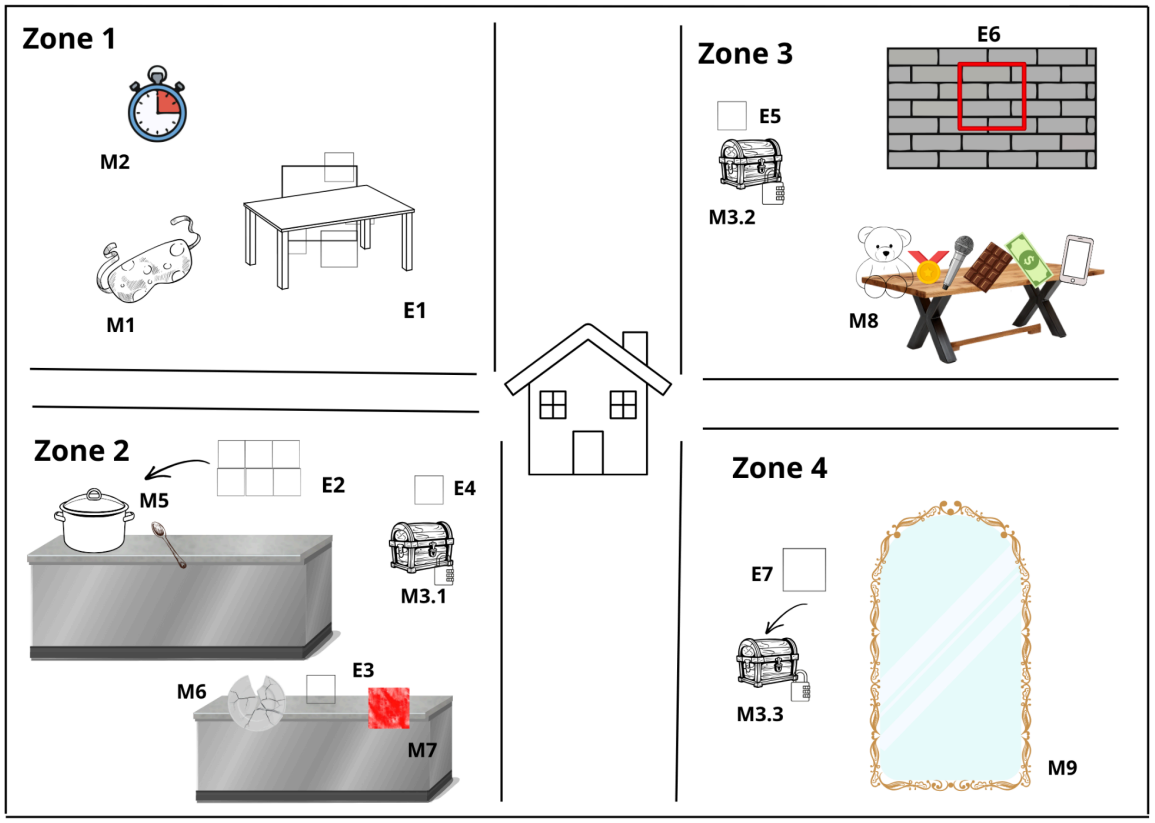
The room can be a single large space divided into "zones" or actual separate rooms if available.

Zone 1: Entrance area. Must be capable of being completely darkened (blackout).

Zone 2: A table setup representing a Kitchen/Living room.

Zone 3: A wall or section representing a Hallway with pictures of emojis.

Zone 4: A secluded corner or final station representing the Attic with a mirror.



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2.4 The Materials

General:

- M1: Blindfolds (one per player).
- M2: Timer (45 minutes).
- M3: Three locked boxes (*Labelled: "1st FLOOR", "2nd FLOOR", "ATTIC").*
- M4: 3-digit combination locks (or a way to validate codes). Lock 1 - code 421, Lock 2 - code 973, Lock 3 - code 528

Zone 2 (Kitchen):

- M5: Real cooking pot and wooden spoon.
- M6: Paper plate with a large gold "7" drawn on it, cut into 5-6 irregular puzzle pieces.
- M7: Red transparent foil.

Zone 3 (Hallway):

- M8: 6 Objects:

  Medal (Number 5 on back).
  Phone (Number 2 on back).
  Teddy Bear (Number 8 on back).
  Microphone
  Paper money (Dollars, Euros or depending on your country's currency)
  Chocolate

Zone 4 (Attic):

- M9: A Mirror.

Additional:

A mysterious ambient sound should play in the background, fitting the theme of the house. The use of mobile phones is permitted, as they are required to scan the triggers.

Timer. Timer can be displayed visibly in the room, or the GM can have it on their phone, making sure to notify the players as time passes. Time to be set for this room is 45 minutes.

2.5 How to set up the room

The following steps you will have to do before every group of participants starts their escape room journey.

First make sure you have laid out all the materials that make up the room (M1-M9) according to the room layout requirements.

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Follow the next steps to set up the room with the game elements from the *Peace puzzles Toolkit or the Unlock Peace - modules for DIY production* so it is playable:

Zone 1 Setup:

1. Ensure the room can be made pitch black.
2. Scatter the 4 pieces of the "Invitation" (E1) on the table. Make the puzzles on cardboard to make them easier to assemble.
3. Have blindfolds (M1) ready at the entrance.

Zone 2 Setup:

4. Place the pot, spoon, and crumpled ingredient papers (M5, E2) on a table.
5. Mix the pieces of the broken plate (M6) on the table. Place the "Red Glasses" puzzle
6. (E3) and the red foil (M7) on the table.
7. Lock instructions or the next clue (E4) inside the "1st FLOOR" box (Code 4-2-1).

Zone 3 Setup:

8. Put the Note (E5) in the "2nd FLOOR" box.
9. Put the printed smiley face images (E6) on the walls around the room. However, the last trigger leading to the 360-degree room should be the hardest to find—place it furthest from the desk so they have to scan everything else first."
10. Place the objects (M8) nearby on the table. Ensure the numbers on the back of the objects correspond to the correct picture code (5-2-8).
11. Lock the "2nd FLOOR" box with code 9-7-3.

Zone 4 Setup:

12. Place the mirror (M9) in the final area.
13. Place the mirror-writing note (E7) inside the "ATTIC" box. Step 14 - Lock the "ATTIC" box with code 5-2-8.

Reset: Ensure all locks are reset to their respective codes (4-2-1, 9-7-3, 5-2-8).

Steps 1 to 14 are to be repeated before every group of participants enters the room, these will be your setup and reset steps to follow.

TIPS:

- When you install the game zone: make sure you remember the location of every clue! This will allow you to follow the progress of the participants during their game and give them the right clues.

- It is recommended to recount the material at the end of the session. It is possible that players have written on some or that they have accidentally kept some of the materials in their pockets.

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3 Step by step implementation

3.1 The Game master

General Game master missions are to:

- Prepare all the game media, set up the room and then put it back in place;
- Welcome the players and immerse them in the atmosphere of their mission before the game;
- Follow the game in order to help them, give them clues or advice;
- Once the mission is over, the Game master is here to debrief with the players by going back over the highlights of the mission.

In the game space, we advise that the Game master remains a little bit away from the group in order to leave the necessary space for the players to evolve independently and perhaps be less tempted to ask for clues or judge the reactions of the Game master.

Specifics of the GM role in this ER:

The GM acts as the "Homeowner." The persona is welcoming but mysterious, slightly melancholic, implying that they have been trapped in this house of emotions for a long time. The GM guides the players from the "outside" (via voice) but starts physically present at the door.

3.2 Introductions and instructions

Before starting the game, it is the Game master's job to introduce themselves and explain their role. The Game master is here in case participants need some help or are lost in the game. Explain the scenario if they still have some questions and explain about the timer.

Ask the participants if they have already *played an escape game* and if not, explain to them the purpose and mechanisms of escape games.

GM: *"Welcome to the House of Inner Shadows. It looks perfect from the outside, doesn't it? Just like we try to look to others. But to get out, you must meet what hides inside. I will lock you in, so you have time to... think."*

The GM locks the door and turns off the lights (Blackout).

Inform the participants they have 45 minutes to complete the escape room.

Give the following instructions:

- Respect the Props and Decor: Treat all props and decor with care and respect.
- Do not use physical force, only mental. No clue is intended to be revealed by breaking elements of the room.

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- Communicate Effectively. Clear communication is key to success. Make sure to verbalize your thoughts. observations and ideas with your team members.
- Listening to each other's perspectives is crucial for solving puzzles efficiently.
- Use your resources wisely. Utilize all available resources, including clues, tools and your teammates' skill and knowledge.
- Think creatively and think outside the box to find solutions to challenges.
- Stay focused. Keep your focus on the task at hand and avoid distractions.
- Concentrate on solving puzzles and progressing through the game to achieve your ultimate goal.
- Manage your time. Time management is essential. Pace yourselves throughout the game to ensure you have enough time to solve all puzzles and complete the mission before the countdown expires.
- Stay positive and encouraging. Maintain a positive attitude and encourage your teammates. Support each other through challenges and celebrate your successes together.
- Seek help if needed. If you find yourself stuck on a particular puzzle or clue, don't hesitate to ask for hints or assistance from the Game master. They are there to help guide you and ensure you have an enjoyable experience.
- Follow safety guidelines. Be mindful of any safety guidelines provided by the Game master. Avoid running, jumping or engaging in any behaviour that could result in injury to yourself and others. No clue is hidden in a way that requires climbing furniture or moving heavy pieces of the set.
- Above all, remember to enjoy the experience! Embrace the adventure, immerse yourself in the story, and have fun working together with your team to overcome challenges and the escape room.

*TIP- It is better to give instructions outside of the play area, preferably in a quieter area where players can focus on what is being said by the Game master.

3.3 Hints and tips

During the course of the game the Game master should observe and give some hints or tips to the players. We have suggested some hints, at certain moments through the course of the play, depending on the situation, the Game master can give additional hints or tips. However, make sure you give players time to play and try to guess things, only give hints if asked or in case players are stuck.

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- Zone 1 (Darkness): If players are just crawling randomly, remind them: "Communicate. Tell each other where you are."
- Zone 2 (Kitchen): If they struggle with the pot, hint: "Only positive ingredients make a good meal." If they struggle with the red scribbles, hint: "You need a filter to see the truth through the anger."
- Zone 3 (Hallway): If they don't know which object goes where, hint: "Scan the codes to hear their inner thoughts. What does the Father need to feel better?"
- Zone 4 (Mirror): If they read the text but don't say the code word, ask: "Who are you looking at? Say it out loud."

3.4 Course of the gameplay

1. Challenge: Darkness on the Stairs
   The staircase is in total darkness (blackout).
   All players put on blindfolds before entering the room (or immediately at the entrance). The GM scatters 4 pieces of a single sheet of paper (A4) on the floor.
   Task: The GM says: "*To enter the house, you must learn to listen to each other. Find the 4 pieces of the entry ticket on the floor. You must not remove your blindfolds until I say so."*
   Players crawl and search for the papers by touch. When they find them, they must join them together (holding them in their hands), and only then can they remove the blindfolds.
   Puzzle on the cardboard: The paper is printed as an "I*nvitation*". The text reads: "*Welcome to the House of Shadows. The number of rooms is 4. The number of windows is 2. The number of exits is 1. Good luck."*
   Solution: The code for the first box (Box "1st FLOOR") is 4-2-1.

2. 1st Floor: Kitchen and Living room (Recognition)
   Players open the box and find instructions for 3 puzzles. They need to get the code X-Y-Z.
   Puzzle 1 (X): Recipe for Calmness4Story: "*In this pot, we are cooking emotions. Some ingredients will spoil the dish (escalate conflict), and some will fix it. Add up only those that calm things down*."
   Throw crumpled pieces of paper into the pot with ingredients and their "weight" written on them:
   - Passive aggression (100g)
   - Deep breathing (4g)
   - Shouting (50g)
   - Counting to ten (3g)
   - Slamming doors (20g)

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- Apology (2g)

Solution: 4 + 3 + 2 = 9.
The first number is 9.
Puzzle 2 (Y): Kintsugi Plate
Concept: Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, celebrating its cracks.
Story: "*Sometimes we crack under pressure. But we are not trash. If we put ourselves back together, we become more valuable. Assemble what is broken to see the number*."
Players must assemble the "broken plate". The gold lines (cracks) will form the number.
The second number is 7.
Puzzle 3 (Z): Red Glasses
Story: "*When you are angry, you see red. Anger hides the truth. Use the empathy filter."*
Solution: By looking through the foil, the red scribbles disappear, and the blue three becomes visible.
The third number is 3.

FINAL CODE: 9-7-3

3. 2nd Floor: "Hallway of Memories"
   Players open the "2nd FLOOR" box with code 9-7-3.
   Inside they find: Note that says: *"Behind every smile, a secret lies buried."*
   Use your phone to unmask the grinning shadows by scanning QR code.
   That QR code leads to AR. Scan the smiles to unlock the words they guard.
   These fragments will lead you to the Family - those who remain trapped in the corners of time. Seek them out to hear their stories and feel the weight of the burdens they never spoke of.
   Players must scan the smileys located throughout the room, which act as triggers. Each trigger will reveal a specific word related to emotional intelligence. One of these triggers will contain a link that leads them into a 360-degree virtual room.
   Upon entering the room, players must find three photographs: *the Father, the Mother, and the Son*. Each photo reveals a single sentence that will be crucial for the second part of the task.
   Face of the Father (Looks strict/angry): text: "*I yell because I'm afraid, I won't be able to pay the bills. I feel like a failure.*"
   Object needed: Medal (symbol of recognition/success). On the back of the medal is the number 5.
   Face of the Mother (Looks smiling/happy): Text: "*I smile all day for the kids, but at night I cry because I have no one to talk to.*"
   Object needed: Phone (symbol of communication). On the back is the number 2.
   Face of the Teenager (Wearing headphones, ignoring everyone): Text: "*I pretend I don't care, but I just want someone to hug me."*

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Object needed: Teddy bear (symbol of tenderness/affection). On the back is the number 8.
Once all three photographs have been found, they will receive further instructions: “Every picture told a story of a hidden struggle. Now, look around you and find the objects that offer comfort, recognition and a voice to those who suffer in silence. They are the keys to solving what feels unsolvable.”
Nearby on the table are 6 objects. 3 correct ones with numbers and 3 wrong ones.
Task: Players must connect the correct object with the correct person.
Medal with the father, phone with the mother and teddy bear with the son.

FINAL CODE: 5-2-8

4. 3rd Floor: "The Attic"
   Players open the last box "ATTIC" with code 528.
   Inside they find only one paper with strange text and an instruction to find the Mirror in the room.

   Hint: *THE KEY IS THE WORD YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR.*
   Write a message on a piece of paper, but backwards (mirror writing). The easiest way to do this is to write the message on thin paper with a black marker, flip the paper over, and trace what shows through. That is your "mirror text".
   The text: "*The only person who can save you is looking at you right now.*"
   Players must place the paper in front of the mirror to read the message.
   The last sentence tells them that the key is what they see in the mirror.
   They look in the mirror -> They see THEMSELVES.
   GM asks: "Who is the key to exiting the house?"
   Players must answer: "ME" (or "I").
   When they say "ME", you (GM) turn on the lights in the room (if they were dimmed) or play a victorious, cheerful song.

3.5 Debriefing phase

The Game master congratulates the players on completion of the escape room.

Elementary questions:

How do you feel?

Did you enjoy the game?

Did you feel under pressure with time?

Discussion:

A discussion led by the Game master based on the educational topic should follow. Together with participants, the GM should recap all that was important to learn from this educational escape room experience.

- How did it feel to work in the dark? Did you trust your teammates?

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- In the kitchen, why do you think "passive aggression" was a heavy ingredient, but "apology" was light? Which is harder to carry?
- Regarding the family portraits: How often do we misinterpret someone's anger as just "being mean" instead of fear or sadness?
- The final message was that "You" are the key. How does this apply to your daily life and conflict resolution?

Taking a group picture: Game master helps the players take a group picture in celebration of completion.

Participants' feedback: Game master invites the players to give any additional feedback they might have regarding the experience.

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Impressum

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