



## Strengthening Roots

### Key message

Understanding the past experiences of radicalisation teenagers and young adults is key to developing exit strategies which will meet all of their needs. Understanding the path that led them to radicalisation will help to chart their path away from these behaviours and beliefs. This exercise will use images to convey these past experiences.

**Key words:** self-reflection, motivation for radicalisation, pathways to radicalisation

### Summary

This exercise allows participants to share their past and say a little about what has formed their outlook on life. Using the power of imagery and symbols, the facilitator encourages the participants to work without words in order to convey some powerful messages about their lives so far.

Module	Group size	Group age	Duration
• Exit strategies	• small	• 12 - 15 • 16 - 19 • 20 - 24	• 1 hour

### Purpose

- For participants to share their life experience
- For participants to reflect on and share (if comfortable) their motivation for getting involved in radical type behaviour
- To provide opportunities for bonding within the group
- To focus on what groups members, have in common with the peers in their group and discover the areas of common experience that have led them to where they are today
- Identify positive and negative qualities participants feel they have developed in response to their own life situations

### Participants

This exercise would be most suited to older teenagers and young adults; non-gender specific.

### Description

**Step 1:** The facilitator introduces the exercise by describing how the symbol of a tree will represent each participant's personal life experience. Using just images and symbols this tree will capture the essence of their life so far. Each participant gets a flipchart sheet and markers.

**Step 2:** The participants are invited to start by sketching the roots which will represent their family background and the situation they were born into. Were these strong roots? Or mixed up and tangled? Are they of lasting importance and still holding them up?

The trunk will represent their upbringing and time at school. Is their trunk thin, wavy, strong or stable?

The branches are the different areas of their life, like family, work, hobbies, friends etc. Are some stronger than others? Do they balance each other?

Tell them to use the image to say something about themselves. Are there any flowers, fruit or ivy growing on it? Do they have any cut off branches? Is their tree leaning? Is there a stake to support them – family, friends, political ideals?

Participants are invited to think about:

- What are the influences that are having a big impact?
- What things were once significant but are now being phased out?
- What are your key motivations?

**Step 3:** Bring the group together to share their trees and this is used to highlight the different qualities in the group. Ask participants what they learnt about themselves and their fellow group members through this exercise? What do you have in common? what are the major differences?

**Step 4:** Invite participants to close their eyes and visualise a number of buds growing on their tree. Tell them that these buds represent their future. What kind of things would they like to be a feature in their lives as they move forward?

## Materials needed

Flipchart sheets, Markers

## Methodology

Self-reflection, Use of imagery and symbols, Large group sharing and discussion

## Advice for Trainer

Agree a few ground rules about confidentiality and let participants know that they need only share the aspects of their tree that they feel comfortable with.

## Source / Literature

Original material developed for the purpose of the YCARE project.



CC - Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

*Strengthening Roots*. Retrieved %s, from %sWednesday May 6, 2026 from <https://toolbox.ycare.eu/courses/YCARE193/>

<https://www.ycare.eu>

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein