



www.symfos-youth.eu



A Guide to the Peer Buddy System

106



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



A Guide to the Peer Buddy System

Intellectual Output n^o6



Title:	A Guide to the Peer Buddy System
Intellectual Output- IO 6	Peer Buddy System
Description	This paper describes what the Peer Buddy System is and how it works. It will support SymfoS practitioners to implement it.
Partner organization:	Associação A3S
Responsible for the preparation of this document:	Carlota Quintão
Date of submission:	15.11.2020
Language:	English

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).



Contents

Introduction	3
1. Peer Buddy System as a powerful component of the SymfoS method	6
1.1. What is the Peer Buddy System?	6
1.2. Who are the peer buddies in the context of the SymfoS method?	8
1.3. Which roles do peer buddies play in a SymfoS session?	9
1.4. Why the Peer Buddy System must be given careful consideration when implemented?	10
2. Trigger Peer Buddy System power: guidelines for practitioners	12
2.1. How to set up a Peer Buddy System?	12
2.2. preparing for a SymfoS session when using the Peer Buddy System – Practitioners’ check list	14
2.3. Preparing the peer buddies for a session – Peer buddies’ briefing	18
Next steps: from research and development to evidence-based piloting	21
3.1. Lessons and Safeguarding	21
3.2. Taking the Peer Buddy System forward	23

Introduction

This guide focuses on an important component of the SymfoS method: the Peer Buddy System (PBS). SymfoS is an intervention that uses physical objects as symbols, and can be used within a wide range of settings including therapy, counselling, team support and pedagogy.

The SymfoS method, with its origins in the pioneering work of Wilfred Scheider in the 1980s is currently in its design and development stage. From 2016 to 2018 the SymfoS method was developed in the following project - *SymfoS – Symbols for Success*. This was a European Erasmus+ strategic partnership which modified its approach to focus on vocational guidance, primarily aimed at young people. As a consequence, SymfoS has been structured into a set of critical steps and tools.

The present Erasmus+ project - [SymfoS for Youth Care project](#) (SFYC) builds on previous results to adapt and extend the use of the method to the field of youth support services and deepen its concept design and foundations.

This guide is influenced by the following contributions:

- Wilfried Schneider, “Basics for working with symbols -Symbols as interpreters. It's all there. You just have to find it. Working with symbols as a method of intervention- a tool for therapy, counselling, team support and pedagogy”- (<https://www.psychologische-symbolarbeit.de/English/>)
- Symbols for Success' outputs - mainly from the [Concept note on the Methodology for individual learning and career pathways, supported by peers and buddies](#).
- SymfoS for Youth Care, Intellectual Output n° 1 – Research paper and National Adaption plans for Implementing Symbol Work debates and findings, extended version-
- Erasmus + Partnership debates
- Learnings from PBS practice and piloting, namely in the SymfoS transnational training courses (in Nideggen, Germany, and Granada, Spain in 2019) and project demonstration and dissemination events.
- A review of the literature on peer support work

Within the SymfoS for Youth Care project the PBS Guide (intellectual output n°6) is part of a set of seven intellectual outputs (IO). IO6 has linkages with IO4 (*SFYC Blended Learning Approach*) and IO5 (*SymfoS for Youth Care Face-to-Face Training Curriculum*).

The PBS Guide aims to:

- provide an explanation of its function within the SymfoS method and how it works;
- support SymfoS practitioners to implement the PBS
- outline lessons from the practice; and
- provide materials to support the SymfoS practitioners' training.

1. Peer Buddy System as a powerful component of SymfoS method

1.1. What is the Peer Buddy System?

The valuable contribution of peers is extensively acknowledged in several fields of practice and research such as peer-education or peer-support personal therapy and health, among others. This power is sustained by the unique position of peers to enable a supportive environment based on the values of empathy, reciprocity, equality, compassion, solidarity and empowerment.

Numerous well-established settings where peer-support work operates includes volunteer grassroots self-help groups; independent peer run organizations; peer-support programmes within mainstream agencies, and peer support workers employed by mainstream services¹.

For the purpose of the SymfoS method, the PBS is a set of two or three people chosen by the client to support them through a SymfoS session or a series of sessions.

The PBS is a powerful component of SymfoS method for three major reasons.

- 1) Peers can bring a unique contribution to supporting the client with their situation and solutions to issues they may bring;
- 2) It underpins the core principles of the SymfoS method, as it contributes to the systemic approach, being client-centred, resourcecentred, the solutionoriented, and focused on an appreciative approach². By including peers within a SymfoS session there is a strong link to the client's environment and social setting. Peers, chosen by the client, provide multiple perspectives, resources, insights and solutions, as well as

¹ For further reading:

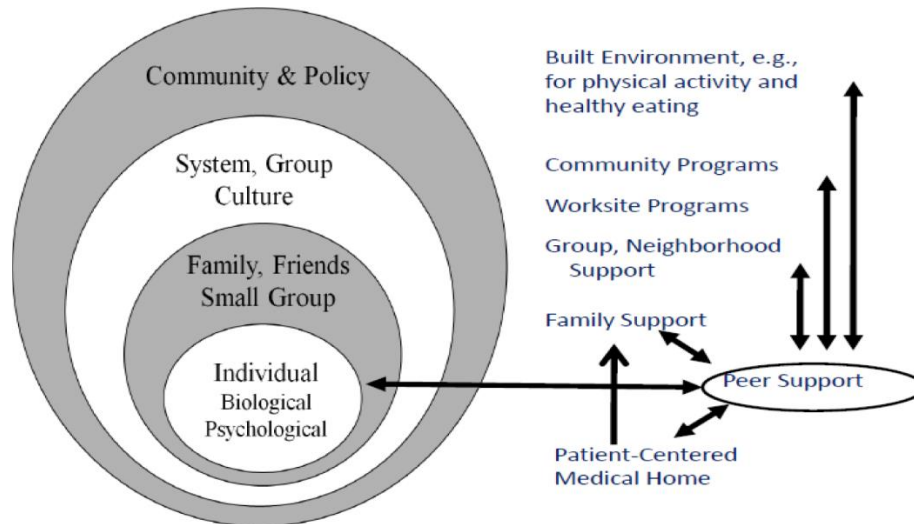
[Peer support in health and health care – A Guide To Program development and management](#), 2010, Peers for Progress around the world is a program of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.

Best Practices Identified for Peer Support Programs, 2011, Defence Centers of Excellence For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury,

https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Best_Practices_Identified_for_Peer_Support_Programs_Jan_2011.pdf

² For further reading please consult Module 2 – Underling approaches - of SymfoS for Youth Care blended learning approach, on the [SymfoS for Youth Care Learning Platform](#).

a link to multiple levels of systemic interaction as represented in the following diagrams³.



3) It provides an intrinsic and multi-faceted role within and after a SymfoS session.

There are three core steps that encompass peer buddies' active involvement:

- Asking the client factual questions following the explanation of their presentation;
- Giving feedback to the client (what they have seen and heard) on their perception of the clients' behaviour - both verbal and nonverbal communication;
- Providing interpretation on client's situation to the other peers and SymfoS practitioner, in a nondialogue context with the client (who just listens to the PBS group).

As described in IO 1 - *Research paper and National Adaption plans for Implementing Symbol Work debates and findings, UK extended version*, these steps are also present in Balint Groups - a peer-support method for medical practitioners. This method is developed in the psychoanalytic field associated with the doctor-patient relationship. *"The common denominators shared in both approaches [SymfoS and Balint] include protected space; a distinct case and issue to work on; a specialist facilitator; a peer support group; presentation without interruption; strict factual questioning*

³ [Peer support in health and health care – A Guide To Program development and management](#), 2010, Peers for Progress around the world is a program of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.

by the group; group discussion without client interruption; and client's response to group's interpretation" (<https://balint.co.uk/>)⁵.

In summary, the PBS is a set of two to three people chosen by the client to support them throughout a SymfoS session, that at the same time:

- triggers the power of peer-support;
- links the client's work on their situation with the multiple levels of their social life (family, friends, group culture, institutions and community live);

1.2. Who are the peer buddies in the SymfoS method?

Peers have a fundamental role and a strong function in life.

- In the different stages of life - infant, child, adolescent, young adult, etc.;
- In the different roles we assume during our lives e.g. as pupils, students, workers, etc.;
- In specific life-experiences e.g. maternity, in illness, in healing.

Peers provide a unique relationship and emotional connection that people from outside the same social context are unable to provide. The peers' frame of reference is unique given that:

- Peers are equal (they have parity in at least one aspect, be it the context, group, role, age, profession, etc.);
- Peers share a sense of belonging (in relation to context, group, role, profession, etc);
- Peers share the same perspective and even if they develop different perspectives, they view it from being an "insider".

These basic assumptions are the drivers of the SymfoS PBS. SymfoS and seeks to enhance and to enrich the counselling process with more perspectives and support, other than that of the client and practitioner.

There are instances which can prevent the inclusion of peers. These include:

- Difficulties with scheduling;
- The client may not have access to peers;

⁴ SymfoS for Youth Care, intellectual output n° 1 – [Research paper and National Adaption plans for Implementing Symbol Work debates and findings, extended version, pages 15-16.](#)

⁵ SymfoS for Youth Care, intellectual output n° 1 – [Research paper and National Adaption plans for Implementing Symbol Work debates and findings, extended version, pages 15-16.](#)

- The client may not want their peers to be involved; or
- The practitioner may consider the use of peers to be unsuitable.

In cases such as these, an alternative source of support can be used such as a friend, colleague, family member or significant person. Support, even if not from peers, can provide comfort, confidence, security, trust, support, perspective, and insight.

1.3. Which roles do peer buddies play in a SymfoS session?

The PBS can have a function and purpose before, during and after a SymfoS session or set of sessions:

1. **Before the session** begins, peer buddies can provide confidence, security and comfort to the client. It must be made clear to both the client and peer buddies, that the role of the PBS is that of support and not a technical or facilitative role. Peer buddies can perform their roles either in an active or passive way. By just “being there”, can be a huge adding value as the simple presence of the peers enhances the client’s feeling of being in a familiar and supportive surrounding.
2. **During the session** peer buddies perform an active role by:
 - a. asking “factual questions”, During the *Presentation and Factual questions steps*, peer buddies will observe the client’s presentation and will be invited to ask factual questions;
 - b. providing their perception of the client’s verbal and non-verbal communication and behaviour;
 - c. providing interpretation. In the *Interpretation stage*, peers join with the SymfoS practitioner to discuss the client’s topic covered during the session; and
 - d. Involvement in the *Action Planning* stage - if their involvement is agreed by the client.

Specific skills are requested from peer buddies in these steps. Those who have participated in the role of “peer buddy” often refer to the experience as being remarkable due to the level of personal learning. Being in the PBS can be very challenging particularly when trying to distinguish between perception and interpretation. As discussed in the following section, careful attention must be given to preparing the peer buddies for a session.

3. **After the session**, peer buddies can have the role of encouragement, support, and ‘being there’ for the client. Active or passive support in the follow-up process increases the probability of implementing the action plan and sustainable change.

As mentioned earlier, the facilitation of the session should never be outsourced to the peer buddies.

1.4. Why the Peer Buddy System must be given careful consideration when implemented

Specific **strengths**⁶ of the PBS are that it can:

- Provide the client with reassurance, confidence and comfort;
- Enhance the client’s awareness and provide access to multiple perspectives;
- Make communication (verbal and non-verbal) more explicit through factual questions and observation from more than one person;
- Provide access to different views within a non-confrontative and explicit discussion, which gives the client time and space to cognitively process material; and
- Provide a support network for the actions after the session.

In contrast, experience from practitioners has identified a number of **challenges** when preparing SymfoS sessions using the PBS framework;

- 1) *Client’s characteristics* - some individuals may not feel comfortable or safe disclosing life situations within a group setting⁷;
- 2) Some individuals may have difficulty recruiting peers for the PBS, or at least ones that they feel could fully support and act as help-givers.
- 3) *Peers’ characteristics*. When assembling a PBS it is important to ensure that peers are prepared to have a supportive attitude and demonstrate supportive behaviour. Often, when the SymfoS method is to be implemented within group settings, particularly with groups of young people, it is important to assess risk related to the individual and group overall. Attention should be given to whether the group

⁶ For a statement on the practice and relevance of PBS see <https://youtu.be/q5r7UgHOJ1U?t=1>.

⁷ SYC Intellectual Output n° 1: [Research Paper and Transnational Adaption Plans for Implementing Symbol Work -I O 1 - Extended UK Version](#), page 34.



members have a sufficiently cooperative and supportive attitude, or if a group is freshly-created and may need to have progressed, to the point whereby group members feel comfortable with each other.

Despite the need for risk assessment, experience has shown that these situations are uncommon and that the overwhelming pattern is one of effective collaboration and involvement by peers.



2. Triggering the power of the Peer Buddy System: guidelines for practitioners

2.1. How to set up a Peer Buddy System?

The first consideration practitioners should have in mind when using the PBS is the overall structure of the SymfoS session. It is also important to consider whether the practitioner has had previous experience of working with the specific client and peer-buddies and if the SymfoS session is part of on-going engagement with the client. This will determine whether the session is a one-off piece of work or part of an overall plan of support and intervention

There are two main settings to use a PBS:

- **One to one counselling**, where the practitioner, who has an established working relationship with the client, and suggests inviting peers into the session or set of sessions. This would be for example in the case of therapeutic intervention or individual vocational guidance.
- **Group settings**, where the SymfoS practitioner implements the PBS in a one-off or series of sessions within an established peer group. An example of this could include community or social work with groups of young people.

In the context of a *One to one* session, the SymfoS method using the PBS can be proposed to the client as a strategy to address issues and situations to be worked by the client. The practitioner can ask the client the following:

- *Who should be invited?*
- *What added value the chosen person might bring to the session?*
- *When to invite the peers and how?*

It is important to avoid creating expectations and anxiety around the choice and invitation of peers. After all, the peers are there for *support*.

In *Group settings*, peers are already present and the tasks of organising a SymfoS session could be included alongside other group activities. In this context, the practitioner will already be familiar with the characteristics of the group and can assess whether the conditions are favourable to organise a Symfos session using the PBS. It is then up to the client to freely choose which peers they want to include from the group.

12

A specific feature of group settings is that sometimes groups are larger than the advisable number of peer buddies (2 or 3) to activate in a session. Depending on group characteristics, it may be useful to divide groups if too large, or consider having observers in the session. Observers will not be involved in the session and can benefit from vicarious learning experience.

In either setting, the composition of PBS may always remain the choice of the client.

An important theme that SymfoS practitioners need to consider when supporting the client in choosing their peer buddies is that of *diversity*.

This can include diversity in terms of:

- Points of view that the peer buddy can bring;
- Relationship ties bonding them to the client;
- Contexts and experiences (similar or in contrast to the client); and
- The depth of knowledge the peer buddy has regarding the client;

It may be useful to mobilise one or more peer buddies with whom the client feels comfortable and safe, but also others who, being less intimate, may bring unexpected insights.

2.2. Preparing for a SymfoS session when using the Peer Buddy System – Practitioners’ check list

As previously stated, peer buddies may play a variety of roles *before, during* and *after* the session. To prepare a SymfoS session and optimize the power of the PBS, practitioners should plan several aspects in advance, following the sequence of the Symfos steps. For further reading on the SymfoS steps refer to Module 3 – SymfoS Method, and IO5 - Face-to-Face Training Curriculum.

1. Setting

Before the session it is wise to plan the scenario. When preparing the room or place where the session will occur, practitioners should keep in mind the organization of the space and where the peer buddies should sit.

Throughout the session, the practitioner must have full view of the client and peer buddies.

When peer buddies are selected, they should be seated in front or next to client to enable them to have a full view of the client. This will create a suitable layout for the *presentation & factual questions* and *perception* stages, where the peer buddies will be invited to have direct interaction with the client.

At the same time, during the *interpretation* step, the positioning of the peer buddies should enable them to have the opportunity to turn their back on the client, or at least to be positioned whereby eye contact and direct dialogue is avoided.

Also, before the session starts, it is important to identify where the practitioner and peer buddies will meet while the client is making their symbol work composition. This point will provide an opportunity for conversation between practitioners and peer buddies, and the place should be conducive for conversations to be held.

2. Induction

At the beginning of the session the practitioner must introduce the framework to all participants (client, peer buddies and, if it is the case, observers) to include the purpose, basic principles and general rules of the session. This needs to emphasise that those present need to adopt a supportive, respectful and confidential approach whatever role they will play.

3. *Topic Clarification and final choice and setting of peer buddies in the layout*

In some settings, especially *one to one* counselling, peer buddies are already chosen before topic clarification (client's goal/ issue or question). If this is not the case, after topic clarification, the client chooses two or three peer buddies among the participants in the group session.

When the topic is clear and the peer buddies are chosen it is time, if necessary, to reset the location of the peer buddies to places in the room, so that they can have full view of the client.

It is also the moment for the practitioner to highlight that the peers' role is as supporters and help givers. The practitioner should also emphasize that the peers adopt a cooperative and supportive attitude and that absolute confidentiality and respect for the client must be adhered to, regardless of the personal opinions of each peer buddy. They must also be informed that new instructions will be given to them in the next steps of the method regarding which point that peer buddies will be called to intervene.

At this stage it is also important to assure trust in the practitioner's role of facilitating the session and orchestrating peer buddies' tasks throughout the session. Peer buddies don't need to have special skills for their role as the practitioner will guide them through the process. Sometimes peer buddies can have a more passive role, and sometimes a more active one.

It is important, nevertheless, to clearly stress that the practitioner may sometimes have a directive role conducting the peer buddies' intervention. Thus, peer buddies should not be overly-sensitive if practitioners present as having a directive approach towards them.

4. *Client' symbol work and peer buddies briefing preparation*

While the client is alone in the room working with the symbols and preparing their presentation, the practitioner and peer buddies have approximately 10 minutes as a group that can be very useful. During this period, the practitioner can provide further guidance to peer buddies. This is a significant moment that deserves special attention. The following section is dedicated to this subject.

3. *Presentation & Factual questions*

After the client's presentation and initial supportive feedback from the practitioner, it is time to start the set of core active roles of the peer buddies in the session.

The practitioner invites the peer buddies to ask factual questions if they feel they need further clarification, namely "*What does this symbol mean*".

At this point it is often common for peer buddies to question why?: *Why did you choose this symbol? Why did you say this or that?* Such questions or requests are not allowed and should be prevented by the practitioner. Also, sometimes peer buddies tend to touch clients' symbols. This must be avoided. The practitioner must be very attentive and, if necessary, have a directive role over peer buddies.

The practitioner should delay their questions, if any, until after the peer buddies have asked theirs.

4. Perception

When all questions to the client are answered it is time to feed back to client the perceptions from peer buddies. Thus, the practitioner invites peer buddies to inform the client what they have seen or heard during the presentation. This invitation can be done by reminding all participants of the kind of questions allowed at this point: "I saw that..." or "I've heard...".

Dialogue with the client should be avoided.

Again, the practitioner should provide feedback of their perception after the intervention of all the peer buddies.

Experience shows that distinguishing *perception* from *interpretation* is commonly reported as a difficulty for the peers. Thus, in this situation, practitioners must help peers to rephrase and restrict their feedback to solely observation and not interpretation. If necessary, again, the practitioner may need to have a highly directive role. Nevertheless, it is advisable for the practitioner not to correct them every time, as may make the peers feel uncomfortable and alienated. A fluent counselling process is more important than perfect compliance with the individual steps.

Given this general difficulty, if the preparation of the setting for the session allows, practitioners can work in advance with the peer buddies using exercises from lesson 4, 5 and 6 from Module 3–

Symfos Method - of SymfoS for Youth Care blended learning approach, on the [SymfoS for Youth Care Learning Platform](#).

5. Interpretation

During this stage, it may be necessary to adjust the seated positions of the peer buddies and practitioner, in order to avoid dialogue and eye contact between the peer buddies and the client. The practitioner reminds the peer buddies that they can express themselves freely provided that they maintain a supportive attitude.

Practice has revealed that at this stage peer buddies' interpretations tend to flow naturally. One of the main challenges for the practitioner is to prevent this stage being excessively extended, allowing all peer buddies to speak. The practitioner will also contribute by reinforcing or complementing the peer buddies' ideas occasionally. The conversation must not continue indefinitely, as this tends to overwhelm the client and have counterproductive effects.

In some cases, team members may tend to focus on other issues than the situation defined by the client, for example talking about themselves or other people. In these cases, it is desirable for the practitioner to refocus the group on the purpose of stage – that of interpreting the present case situation.

The practitioner must always have a full overview of the client and give careful and discrete attention to the client's reactions. The managing of the session is very important. Sometimes it can be very helpful to ask the client if they are okay to continue, remembering that the session is for their benefit and that it is possible to have a break or even to stop, if they are not comfortable.

6. Feedback & Agreement and Action Plan

Often the goals and action plans identified could benefit from being externally supported. In these cases, the client should be asked about the relevance of this support request and whether there is someone in the room who can provide it. If so, that person should also be asked whether they can make the commitment to providing support. Support can also be looked for from outside the PBS group to include other peers or help givers.

2.3. How to prepare peer buddies in a session – Peer buddies' briefing

While the client is alone working with the symbols, it is an opportunity to brief the peer buddies with the roles they are to perform next. This should be a smooth conversation which is not intended to stress the peer buddies.

The practitioner informs the peer buddies on the steps that the session will include. The briefing can start by remembering that the group is there to help the client and that the practitioner will guide them through each step. The peer buddies' role will be to have a committed, active listening approach; to carefully observe both verbal and non-verbal communication; and above all, to have a supportive attitude.

1st step

When coming back into the room the client will present his/her representation. At this stage peer buddies should be attentive to all that is being said, and also to all that they can observe. This includes all that they can see or hear, such as body language (gestures, eyes, hands, face expressions, etc.) and tone of voice.

2nd step

After the client's presentation the peer buddies will be invited by the practitioner to ask factual questions if they feel that there is the need for further clarification. Factual questions can be one of the following:

- *"I haven't understood what you said about that symbols, do you mind repeating?"*
- *"Can you please explain this symbol again?"*
- *"What does this symbol mean?"*

3rd step

After the client's answers to the factual questions, the peer buddies will be invited by the practitioner to tell the client what they have perceived from the client during the presentation. "Perception" is what one can describe to have seen or heard, and not include any form of interpretation. Therefore, the feedback on the perception of the client's behaviour must be value-free. Being able to distinguish perception from interpretation requires practice and frequently peer buddy groups have expressed difficulty at this stage. It is advisable that the practitioner explains what can be included as a

perception, although the practitioner must skilfully do so without pressurizing the group, so that peers don't feel stressed or inhibited.

It is useful to give examples of perception as the following:

- Where one observes changes in language, body language (posture, gesture, facial expressions, hands and fingers) face color, voice, tone, narrative, rhythm of speech
- Which symbols are touched for how long, how and how often? Which symbols are not touched?
- Is there any behavior (words, symbols, etc.) that has been repeated or mentioned frequently? Are there repetitions, interruptions, breaks in speech?
- Observations can also refer to the image, the work done: For example, it can be observed that all the symbols are on the pathway, but not the lighthouse.
- In describing the observation, it can help to focus on the changes: 'at this point there was a change in your pitch of the voice...'. Movements can also be imitated instead of describing them (see also IO 5 - Face-to-Face Training Curriculum).

At this stage the only pronouncements allowed are ones that start with: "*I saw that...*" or "*I've heard...*". One doesn't see anxiety, one sees for instance: "*I saw that you rub your hands a lot*" or that "*you changed your position many times, you moved a lot*". One doesn't see shame; one can see for instance "*the face to blush*" or "*I saw that you avoid eye contact*".

Perceptions can also be "*I've heard that your voice trembled when you spoke about that subject or that symbol*".

4th step

After the peer buddies and practitioner have given their feedback to the client, the peer buddies and practitioner will have a conversation focused on their interpretation on the client's presentation. **b**At this stage it will be a free-flowing conversation, where peer buddies can express their thoughts and comments. The client will be listening to the conversation, but they will not be permitted to be a part of it. The idea is not to engage in dialogue with the client, but to think within a group about the client's situation.

In short, peer buddies must be aware of the **Golden Rules**:

- **Supportive attitude**;
- **Confidentiality** ("*what happens here stays in the room*");

- **Distinguish between perception and interpretation; and**
- **Avoid dialogue.**

Additionally, other important guidance includes:

- **Do not touch symbols**, ever. Even at the end of the session when it's time to return the symbols to the box, only the client touches the symbols. Symbols represent meaningful elements of the client's personal situation and outside interference with the symbols may be perceived by them as an intrusion or provoke hostile feelings;
- **Never ask "Why?"** If clients knew why, they wouldn't be in the session. By questioning why and focusing on the problem may reinforce negative feelings.
- **Never interrupt** the client.

These steps may seem a little frightening to some peer buddies but practitioners should emphasize that they are there to guide them and that the practitioner will repeat them again, at each step, indicating what to do. Peers do not have to worry about memorizing the steps.

Although sometimes it may be difficult to distinguish between perception and interpretation, peer buddies should not get stressed about doing so. The practitioner must emphasize that they may interrupt and have a directive role towards the peer buddies and that they need not be over-sensitive if this happens. Remember the peer buddies role is to support, just being there is already very important.

As a practitioner one should keep in mind that a fluent counselling process is more important than perfect compliance with each one of the steps.

3. Next steps: from R&D to an evidence-based approach

3.1. Lessons and Safeguarding

In the process of the SymfoS method concept design, different lessons and experiences are valuable to retain for future development of the PBS. Three settings deserve special attention:

i) *Settings where the PBS requires special risk-benefit evaluation*⁸

Specialists in youth support often identify concerns related to peer roles. For many, it is of most importance to acknowledge that young people do have the potential to display and express hurtful messages to other young people, which can compromise their ability to be tactful. An event such as this, during a session, can have a highly negative impact on the client and on further counselling work with the group. In fact, some group settings are identified as particularly sensitive to implement PBS:

- Young offenders (and prison populations). Even if, namely in the UK, current developmental work with young offenders is increasingly focusing on creative techniques and methods, such as SymfoS, to activate the PBS component requires thorough assessment. On one hand, *“those working with young offenders remarked that SymfoS could have the beneficial effect of assisting the young person to engage primarily with themselves (development of emotional intelligence) and then influence their subsequent positive engagement with society. Of particular relevance to young offenders is the propensity for low levels of literacy (Snowling et al., 2000) and high levels of dyslexia (Kirk and Reid, 2001) which the use of symbol work could address and supplement.* On the other hand, *“it was remarked by those working with young people with behavioural issues and complex needs that there is a high probability of individuals finding it very hard to trust their peers”*, making it difficult to employ the PBS.
- Groups at risk of negative/pathological behavior cross- contamination, such as substance misuse and criminal activity.

⁸ Results from *SymfoS for Youth Care*, intellectual output n° 1 [Research paper and National Adaption plans for Implementing Symbol Work debates and findings, extended version](#). Pags 31-35)

ii) *Settings where PBS require adjustment or creative adaptation*

- With groups of deaf young people, experts mention that there is the potential for them to be very blunt when sharing their opinion to others. This aspect may have a negative influence over the steps of perception and interpretation.
- With groups of young people with disabilities, peers are not often a sufficient or valid option. These cases may require help from other elements such parents, professionals.

iii) *Group settings where the SymfoS method has an ongoing implementation⁹*

Implementing SymfoS in pre-existing group settings is a probable scenario that can occur frequently.. In some SymfoS partners' experiences, two mechanisms were tried and may be developed:

- One or more “*Peer buddies - getting ready talks*” can be organized with the objective of preparing group members for the roles they are going to perform. Therefore, training sessions can be organized to develop skills such as being respectful and adopting non-judgmental communication, active listening, supportive attitude and, importantly, training to recognise the difference between perception and interpretation.
- Group contracts can also be a tool for the development of SymfoS in an ongoing basis, to assure principles such as confidentiality and mutual respect. By doing so, this can encourage participants to take responsibility for their own experience. This process should enable the young people to engage and express what they want to achieve from the process and also put boundaries and safety structures in place. A practitioner should be on hand to ensure this is appropriate and manageable.

⁹ Resultas from [Symbols for Success' Concept note on the Methodology for individual learning and career pathways, supported by peers and buddies](#)

3.2. Taking the Peer Buddy System forward

As stated previously, the SymfoS method is in a developmental stage and is being tested and piloted within the Erasmus+ partnership to prepare the method for wider application. This guide aims to contribute to the development of the PBS as a concept and to strengthen the SymfoS method and enable its widespread use.

As has been argued, the PBS is a crucial and powerful component of the SymfoS method and it can be implemented within a variety of settings and pathways.

Having given consideration to the two main settings where SymfoS is being implemented (one to one sessions and Group settings), the PBS is ready to be piloted using a systematic and extensive evidence-based research methodology. Project and partners' experiences have shown strong indicators of successful and powerful results from its use.

The last section - *3.1. Lessons and safeguarding* introduces several dimensions on how to adapt PBS to other settings and contexts, and how to further develop the potential of the PBS within group work and not solely one-to-one approaches.



Coordinator



Sozialwerk Dürener Christen, Germany

Contact: Josef Loup
j.loup@sozialwerk-dueren.de
www.sozialwerk-dueren.de

Partners



University of Gloucestershire, United Kingdom

Contact: Richard Dobbs
rdobbs@glos.ac.uk
www.glos.ac.uk



Hafelekar Unternehmensberatung Schober GmbH, Austria

Contact: Paul Schober
paul.schober@hafelekar.at
www.hafelekar.at



Asociación Caminos, Spain

Contact: Angela Pittl
office@asoccaminos.org
www.asoccaminos.org



Colegio Oficial de Ciencias Políticas y Sociología de Andalucía, Spain

Contact: Pedro Navarro Rull
secretario@colpolsoc-andalucia.org
www.colpolsoc-andalucia.org



Associação A3S, Portugal

Contact: Carlota Quintão
associacao3s@gmail.com
www.a3s.webnode.pt



Instituto Politecnico Do Porto, Portugal

Contact: Ana Luísa Martinho
anamartinho@iscap.ipp.pt
www.ipp.pt

Developer of Symbol Work

Wilfried Schneider, Germany
info@psychologische-symbolarbeit.de
psychologische-symbolarbeit.de

