

Active Development

Soft skills development through sport activities







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CONTENTS

01	Introduction	5
02	Soft skills	7
	2.1 What are soft skills	
	2.2 Soft skills vs. hard skills	
	2.3 Why soft skills are important in career and personal life	
	2.4 The most important soft skills	
	2.5 Recent psychological approaches to acquire soft skills	
03	Sport and soft skills	14
	3.1 Sport activities, movement and humour as tools in the development of soft skills	
04	Active Development cards	17
	4.1 The idea behind the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards	
	4.2 Breaking stereotypes	
	4.3 Focusing on inclusion	
	4.4 Importance of the reflection process	
05	Activity Cards guidelines	23
	5.1 Description	
	5.2 Video instructions	
06	Your feedback and ideas	29
07	Sources	30





Introduction

Unlocking the full potential of young minds is no easy feat. But what if we told you there's a way to combine physical activity with the development of soft skills? That's right, our guide is the ultimate tool for youth leaders and teachers who want to learn how to do it!

Created as part of the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT project, implemented by the innovative minds at My Future foundation from Poland, Collective Innovation from Norway and EduPlus from Portugal, this guide is packed with new learning methods that you can use with young people in your organisation or school.

Not only does it explore the link between sport and the development of soft skills, but it also emphasises the importance of the reflection process, which helps young people recognize their skills and the role they play in their daily lives and future careers.

The guide also comes with twenty GAME CARDS, which provide practical tips on how to integrate the sport activities / active movement with development of soft skills.



Soft skills

2.1 What are soft skills

Defining soft skills isn't a simple task. They're a set of non-technical abilities that help individuals thrive in their workplace, regardless of their job title, seniority level or industry. Soft skills, also known as interpersonal or transferable skills, comprise a combination of people, social and communication skills, character traits, attitudes, and mindsets, as well as social and emotional characteristics, which are sought for in all professions. Examples of soft skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and creativity.

Employers seek job candidates with soft skills because these skills are transferable across different jobs and industries, making them adaptable and flexible employees. Soft skills are especially important in customer-based jobs, as well as managerial roles that require regular human interaction. These roles require soft skills such as listening to customers and providing excellent service, motivating team members, and managing conflicts.

But even if one is not in a customerfacing role, he/she still needs to have good soft skills to work well with coworkers, managers, vendors, and others he/she interacts with at work. This is why soft skills are critical in the workplace.

According to research by the Society for Human Resource Management, nearly every job requires employees to engage with others in some way, making soft skills essential to success. Additionally, a survey by Leadership IQ found that 97% of employers consider soft skills to be either as important or more important than hard skills. The same survey found that more than half of new employees that fail within 18 months do so because they lack soft skills.

In summary, soft skills are an essential component of career success in any job or industry. They're transferable across different roles and enable individuals to thrive in the workplace, making them highly sought after by employers.

2.2 Soft skills vs. hard skills

Have you ever wondered what the difference is between hard and soft skills? It's a common confusion, but it's essential to know the distinction between them.

Hard skills are quantifiable and are typically learned through formal education, training, or professional experience. For example, to become an architect, one must know how to use drafting software and obtain a licence from the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. These are tangible, measurable skills that are specific to the industry.

On the other hand, soft skills are more difficult to measure and are often acquired through personal experiences or innate personality traits. **Soft skills are necessary to succeed in any job, regardless of the industry or position.** They include communication, creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership skills and many others.

Employers seek candidates with a combination of both hard and soft skills. While hard skills are essential to perform the job, soft skills enable employees to work effectively and collaboratively with others. In fact, a study by LinkedIn found that 57% of leaders say soft skills are more important than hard skills.

In summary, hard skills and soft skills are both crucial for success in any industry or job. While hard skills are more tangible and measurable, soft skills are equally important and enable individuals to work effectively with others.



2.3 Why soft skills are important in career and personal life

As stated earlier, soft skills are becoming increasingly important in the highly competitive job market of the 21st century. It's not just about technical skills anymore. Employers are seeking candidates who possess both hard and soft skills.

Soft skills consist of people and social skills, as well as career attributes, that define how one interacts in the workplace, handles responsibility or seeks improvement. Employers often prioritise hiring employees with the right soft skills over hard skills, as stated by Novoresume in July 2022. However, the importance of soft skills goes beyond the workplace. Social skills are needed in our daily lives, from building friendships to negotiating in the market, and adapting to new groups.

One crucial soft skill is social intelligence, which is just as important as IQ when it comes to happiness, health, and success. According to Mitch Prinstein in September 2022, empathetic people are less likely to experience anxiety, depression, and addiction later in life. They are also more likely to be hired, promoted, earn more money, and have happier marriages and better-adjusted children.

Although the importance of soft skills is often undervalued, research shows that soft skill-intensive occupations will account for two-thirds of all jobs by 2030, according to a report by Deloitte Access Economics in May 2017. This means that it's crucial to develop soft skills to succeed in the job market.

Developing soft skills can positively impact not only one's career but also personal life by improving how one interacts with others.

Strong leadership, delegation, teamwork, and communication abilities can help run projects more smoothly, deliver results that please everyone, and positively influence personal relationships.

Soft skills are important not only in the workplace but also in our personal lives. It's crucial to develop soft skills as they are becoming increasingly important in the job market, and they can positively impact one's life by improving how one interacts with others.

2.4 The most important soft skills

The importance of various soft skills in today's job market, can vary depending on the job at hand and external factors. While some positions require excellent communication skills, others demand attention to detail. However, there are a few soft skills that employers value across the board in the 21st century.

According to a recent survey conducted by Novoresume (2022), these are the top soft skills that are currently in demand:

01 Time Management

Employers want people who can use their time wisely, prioritise tasks, plan, set goals, and work efficiently. Sub-skills related to time management include stress management and organisation.

02 Communication

Communication is crucial in any job, and it involves conveying ideas and feelings effectively. Verbal and written communication, presentation skills, active listening, and constructive feedback are some of the sub-skills that fall under this category.

03 Adaptability

The ability to embrace change and adjust to different situations is critical, given the constantly evolving business world. Self-management, optimism, calmness, analysis, and self-motivation are some of the skills related to adaptability.

04 Problem-Solving

Analytically and creatively solving problems is essential, regardless of the job. Creative problem solvers are always in high demand. Sub-skills related to problem-solving include analysis, logical reasoning, observation, brainstorming, and decision-making.

05 Teamwork Skills

Collaborating with others is a crucial aspect of any job, and employers look for individuals who can communicate effectively, actively listen, and take responsibility. Conflict management, collaboration, coordination, idea exchange, and mediation are some of the skills related to teamwork.

06 Creativity

Creativity is not limited to the fields of art or design. Sub-skills from questioning to experimenting are involved in creativity, and they are essential for problemsolving, developing ideas, improving productivity, and viewing challenges from a new perspective. Imagination, mind-mapping, innovation, experimentation, and questioning are some of the examples of creative skills.

07 Leadership

Leadership involves mentoring, training, and guiding others. Employers prefer applicants who show leadership potential because they demonstrate initiative, invest themselves in helping the company grow, and can be promoted to better management positions. Management skills, authenticity, mentorship, generosity, and cultural intelligence are some of the skills related to leadership.

08 Interpersonal Skills

Strong interpersonal skills enable individuals to interact well with others, maintain relationships, and make a positive impression. Empathy, humour, networking, tolerance, and diplomacy are some of the skills related to interpersonal skills.

09 Work Ethic

Valuing work and putting in the effort to yield results demonstrate a strong work ethic. People with a good work ethic are often better employees than those without it, and hiring managers prefer candidates who demonstrate responsibility, discipline, dependability, commitment, and professionalism.

10 Attention to Detail

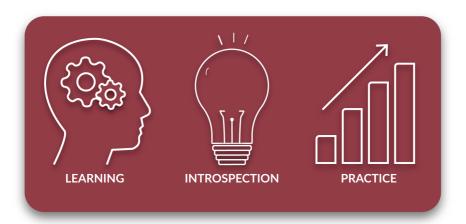
Completing tasks with thorough concern for all areas involved, no matter how small, is a skill that companies seek in candidates. Monitoring and checking work or information while organising time and resources efficiently minimises errors and makes employees more effective in their roles.

2.5 Recent psychological approaches to acquire soft skills

Developing soft skills is crucial for young people, but it can be a challenging process. Soft skills are closely related to human behaviour, and improving them requires a behavioural change.

Unfortunately, many people are resistant to new experiences or have poor social skills, making it difficult to improve soft skills. Additionally, measuring soft skills is challenging, making them even harder to teach through training programs.

However, researchers have identified three essential steps for developing soft skills: learning, introspection, and practice. These steps are particularly important for young people, who are more prone to new experiences and assimilating knowledge. By focusing on these steps, educators and youth leaders can promote the development of soft skills in their students.



To promote the development of soft skills, several principles should be followed. These principles include:

- promoting experiential learning through practice and reflection,
- promoting strong relationships between adults and youth,
- creating a supportive and enriching environment,
- developing several soft skills in combination with each other.

Teaching soft skills through lecture-type approaches is problematic, as youth has difficulty using these skills in their own lives without the opportunity to practise or experience them. Practising skills helps youth learn how to use them easily and appropriately, particularly in stressful or difficult situations. Using case studies and role-playing exercises can be particularly effective in promoting group discussion and exchange of ideas.

Youth leaders play a critical role in promoting soft skills development, as positive reinforcement, constructive feedback, and opportunities for reflection are essential for experiential learning. These relationships should be meaningful, with respect for youth's contributions and as valued contributors.

Cooperative learning and workplace-based learning through real-world practice, such as contributing to communities, can be excellent for reinforcing active development. Engaging with their own interests, such as through sports, games, and arts-based challenges, can help youth develop their skills. Internships and job training can also create a bridge between school and work.

Overall, developing soft skills requires a multifaceted approach that includes learning, introspection, and practice, as well as promoting experiential learning, developing strong relationships, and creating supportive and enriching environments. By following these principles, educators and youth leaders can promote the development of soft skills and help young people succeed in all aspects of their lives.

Sport and soft skills

3.1 Sport activities, movement and humour as tools in the development of soft skills

It is evident that physical activity and sports play a crucial role in not only maintaining physical health but also promoting mental well-being and fostering the growth of essential soft skills in young individuals. The European Commission, along with states and organisations, strongly advocate for active participation in sports and physical activities. Recent studies have revealed that engaging in physical activity and sports contributes not only to academic performance but also to cognitive abilities, personality traits, and the development of valuable soft skills.

Sports and interactive games offer an exceptional platform for young people to cultivate their soft skills within a supportive environment. Soft skills, which encompass personal attributes that enable individuals to form positive social relationships, hold significant value in the workplace. Sports serve as an effective means to help young individuals acquire these skills. Extensive research has consistently shown that sports not only foster teamwork, problem-solving skills, and stress management but also instil these values in young people's professional lives.

In every team sport, the essence of teamwork is emphasised both on and off the field. Success is amplified through the collective efforts of a cohesive team, fostering a positive attitude among players. Effective communication skills are crucial for managing relationships and navigating various situations within teams. Additionally, engaging in sport-oriented games exposes young individuals to the diversity and significance of different roles within a team, empowering them to discover their own unique contributions.



Moreover, sports and group games develop essential decision-making abilities that benefit young people not only during gameplay but also in various aspects of life. While the social and academic benefits of team sports have been well-documented, individual sports such as tennis, swimming, or martial arts can also greatly contribute to the development of soft skills.

To facilitate the development of these soft skills in an enjoyable manner, it is imperative for facilitators to design diverse and engaging activities. By incorporating inclusive design principles and utilising appropriate tools and methodologies, the quality and innovation of youth work in soft skills development can be enhanced. This guide not only supports the practical implementation of soft skills development through sports and physical movement in youth work but also provides a framework that inspires youth workers and facilitators to create their own impactful activities. By recognizing the role of sport activities, movement, and humour as powerful tools in the development of soft skills, we can unlock the full potential of young individuals in their personal and professional growth.



Active Development cards

4.1 The idea behind the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards

As mentioned, research indicates, there is a strong connection between the development of soft skills and physical activity. In response to this, a team of international youth workers have created the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards, designed for parents, youth leaders, and teachers who aim to promote the development of soft skills among young people, using physical activity and sports.

The ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards consist of 20 activity cards, offering a variety of physically demanding games and activities. These games are not only suitable for highly active youths, but also for those with limited physical abilities. The games range from familiar sports like football and obstacle courses to more interactive games, which require use of LEGO bricks or drawing.

The activities on these cards focus on developing essential soft skills, such as communication and teamwork, which have been proven to be crucial in the job market.

Let's face it, developing soft skills is no easy feat - it's a long process that requires time, patience, and practice. So, it's unrealistic to expect that a young person will become a master at communication, negotiation, or leadership after playing the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT game.

However, that's not the aim of these games. Instead, the goal is to introduce young people to the meaning and significance of these skills through enjoyable and engaging activities.

The ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards are designed to plant the seed of curiosity in young people's minds, igniting their interest in soft skills and encouraging them to pursue further development in these areas.

Through these fun games, players are given the opportunity to test and develop their soft skills in a safe and supportive environment. They can learn how to effectively communicate with their peers, collaborate on a team, and take on leadership roles - all while having fun.

So, while it's true that mastering soft skills takes time, the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT games are an excellent starting point. By participating in these activities, young people can become more aware of the importance of soft skills, and they can develop their skills further as they progress through life.

What sets the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards apart is the reflection component. Each game card includes a reflection section, where players are encouraged to reflect on their experience and discuss how they demonstrated certain soft skills during the activity. This reflective process helps to reinforce the importance of soft skills and encourages players to develop and apply these skills in their daily lives.

4.2 Breaking stereotypes

The ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards are designed to promote the development of soft skills in youth through fun and engaging activities. However, these cards can also play a crucial role in breaking stereotypes related to gender in sports and exercise.

Research has shown that stereotypes about gender roles can have a significant impact on sports participation, with individuals adjusting their own participation based on gendered expectations. For example, girls may avoid certain sports or activities because they are seen as "too masculine," while boys may be discouraged from pursuing dance or gymnastics because they are seen as "too feminine." These stereotypes can be harmful and limit the opportunities available to individuals based on their gender.

The ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards aim to challenge these stereotypes by providing a range of activities that are not gender-specific. The set of 20 activity cards includes a mix of various activities, which require different levels of physical ability.

By providing a range of activities that are not gender-specific, the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards encourage all youth to participate regardless of their gender. This approach can help break down the gender stereotypes that may be limiting participation in sports and exercise. When youth engage in these activities and develop their soft skills, they learn to appreciate the value of different perspectives and the unique contributions that each person can bring to a team. This can lead to a more inclusive and supportive environment, both on and off the field.

4.3 Focusing on inclusion and decreasing biases

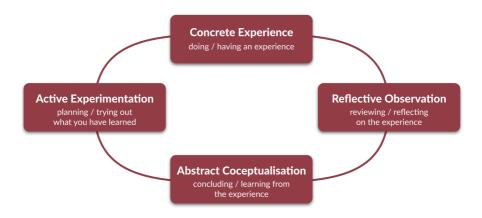
The ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards aim to create inclusive environments and diminish biases in sport and active movement. These cards are designed to be easy to implement in various locations such as sport centres, schools, and young clubs, without requiring expensive equipment. By promoting physical activities where people from diverse backgrounds and abilities can participate together, the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards encourage interaction and learning among individuals. For instance, when individuals with disabilities join a group sport activity with ablebodied individuals, it can help able-bodied individuals gain a better understanding of the challenges and strengths of individuals with disabilities. This understanding can decrease their biases towards individuals with disabilities. Therefore, extended contact, which can occur through these activities, can be a potent tool in promoting inclusion and reducing biases in sport and active movement.

4.4 Importance of the reflection process

ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT games ignite the curiosity of young individuals, inspiring them to delve into the realm of soft skills and embark on a journey of personal growth. However, it is crucial to recognize that reflection plays a vital role in this transformative process.

Each card in the game set presents thought-provoking questions that serve as catalysts for reflection, facilitating profound learning experiences. Reflection acts as a compass, allowing individuals to evaluate their progress and unravel the underlying reasons behind their actions.

In youth activities, the learning process goes beyond mere completion of tasks; it encompasses reflection on the experience itself and an assessment of personal growth. This is where the Experiential Learning Model (ELM) or Kolb's Learning Cycle comes into play. Young individuals are encouraged to reflect upon their activities, enabling them to assess their soft skills and take ownership of their own learning journey.



Reflection serves as a fundamental pillar for both personal and team development, empowering young people to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and enhance their interpersonal relationships. By reflecting upon challenges and experiences, young individuals can transform obstacles into opportunities for growth and learning.

Moreover, reflection provides youth workers and facilitators with invaluable insights into group dynamics, content, and processes. The ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards are meticulously designed to assess soft skills that are often challenging to measure. The carefully crafted questions prompt young individuals to draw connections from their experiences and provide feedback to enhance the design of future activities.

Youth leaders are encouraged to utilize the reflection questions tailored to each game, conveniently provided on the corresponding card. Examples of such questions include: "How did you negotiate with your team members to ensure everyone's happiness?" or "What steps did you take to resolve conflicts within your team during the game?" These questions can be customized to suit the specific requirements of each group, including adjusting the length of the discussion and the types of questions posed. Reflection serves as an indispensable tool for personal growth and development, and with the ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT cards, it becomes an effortless and enjoyable process for young individuals.



Activity Cards guidelines

Every card in the set is conveniently offered in both digital and printable formats. Each card features essential information, including the game's name, a detailed description of the rules, a thought-provoking reflection question, and a QR code.

The QR code provides easy access to a video showcasing an example of how the game can be implemented, serving as a valuable resource for youth leaders.

It's important to note that the provided reflection questions are merely examples. We encourage youth leaders to adapt and tailor the dialogue to suit the specific dynamics and needs of their group. This flexibility ensures that the reflection process aligns with the participants' experiences and promotes meaningful discussions.

Whether you prefer digital or printed materials, our cards offer convenience and versatility, empowering youth leaders to create engaging and reflective experiences for young people.

Scan to view a video instruction:



01 Aces at races

- teamwork
- adaptability



02 Active circle

- creativity
- communication



03 Back to back

- creativity
- communication



04 Blanket ball

- teamwork
- creativity



05 Blindfolded obstacle course

- adaptability
- communication



06 Blindfold football

- teamwork
- adaptability



07 Follow the path

- leadership
- communication



08 Funny poses

- creativity
- adaptability



09 Guide me in the dark

- leadership
- communication



10 Hanoi tower

- leadership
- teamwork

Scan to view a video instruction:



11 Hidden mistery

- adaptability
- communication



12 Hold on

- teamwork
- time management



13 Make a shape

- adaptability
- teamwork



14 Para volley

- empathy
- adaptability



15 Pro-pictionary

- teamwork
- creativity



16 River crossing

- time management
- teamwork



17 Sleigh racing

- teamwork
- creativity



18 Snake

- communication
- teamwork

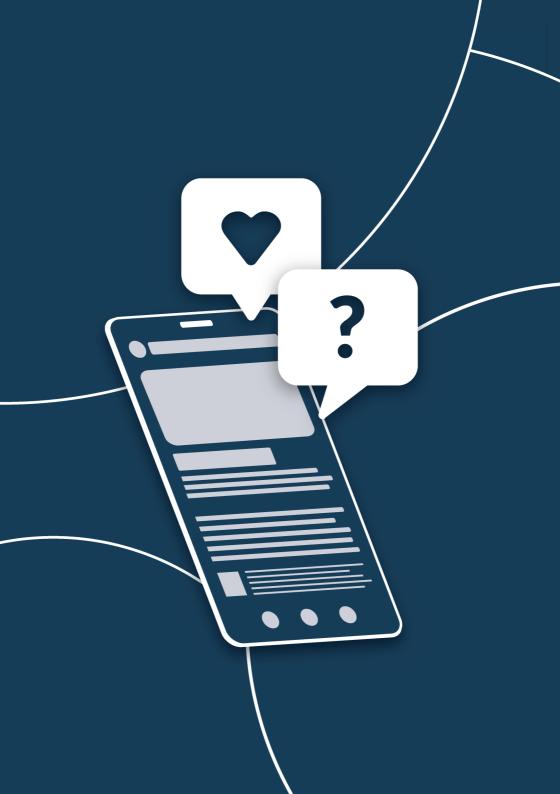


19 Submarines

- leadership
- teamwork

20 Take a position

- communication
- time management





Your feedback and ideas

The field of sport and soft skills still has untapped potential for further development. Your ideas and feedback hold great significance to us as we strive to enhance our ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT guide and cards. We value your thoughts and encourage you to share them with us.

If you have any feedback, suggestions, or comments regarding our guide or cards, we would love to hear from you! Your input will contribute to the ongoing refinement and improvement of our materials.

We eagerly await your feedback and look forward to collaborating with you on the advancement of sport and soft skills development. Together, we can make a positive impact!

Please don't hesitate to reach out to our dedicated project team. Here are the contact details:



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