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# THE *Serenity Room*

Do-It-Yourself Guide



*Thrivology translates research to practice to create practical resources youth-supporting professionals can use in the real world.*

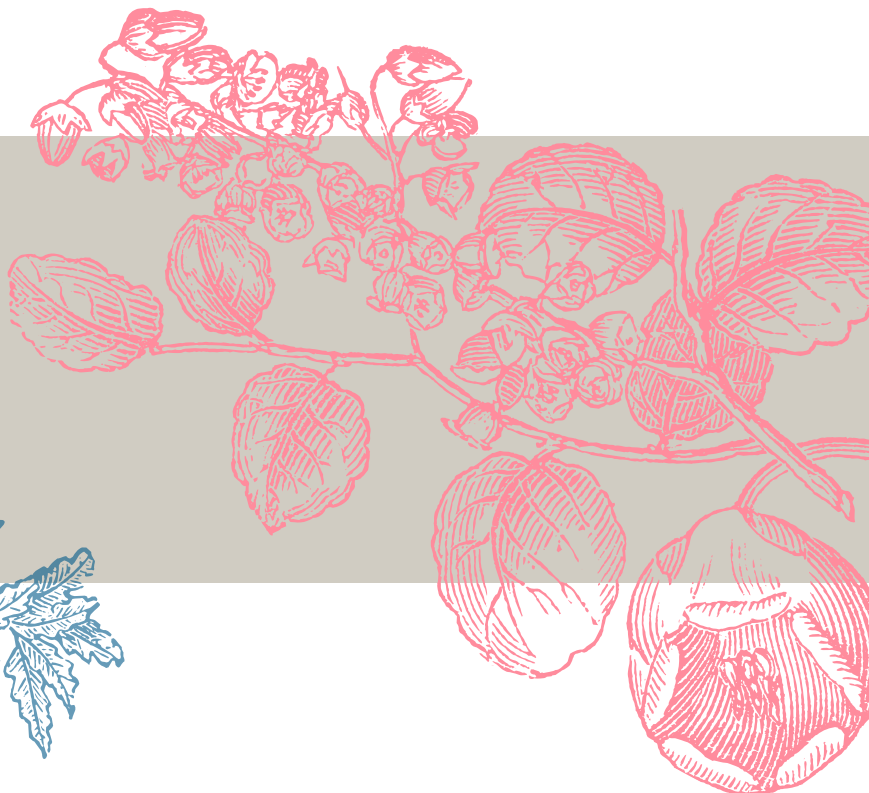
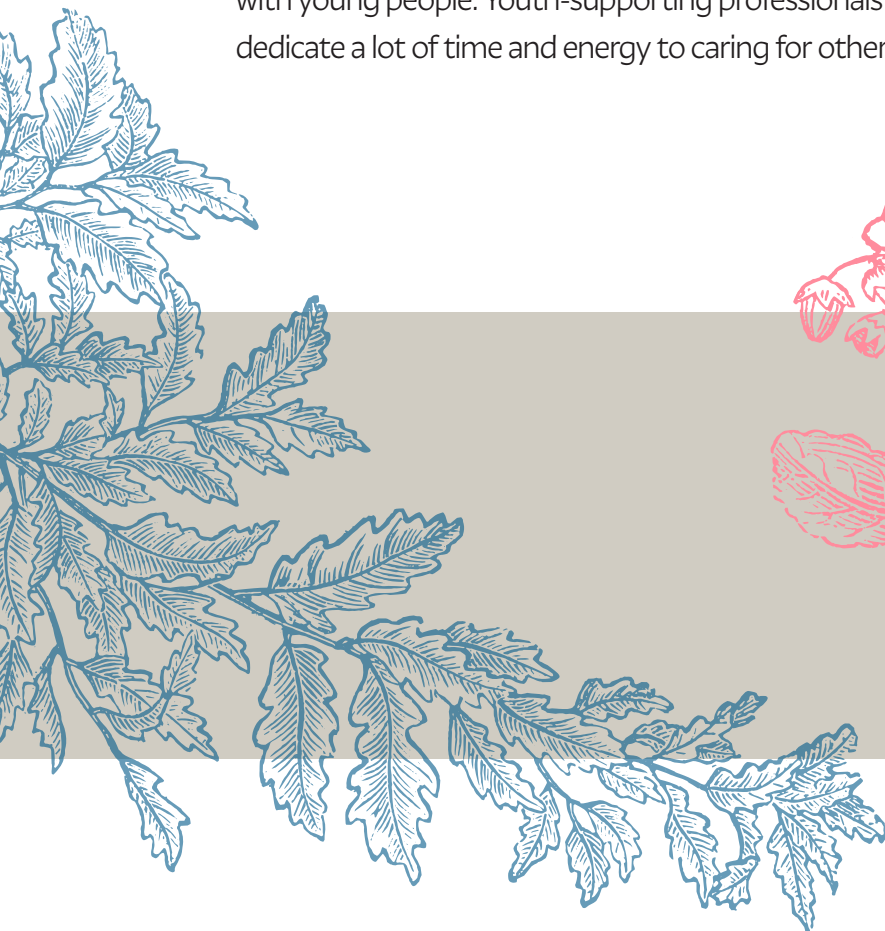
## **Background**

### **Serenity Room**

The Serenity Room is a research-backed, sensory experience for youth-supporting professionals to explore, relax, and find their inner serenity. The Serenity Room draws on the research and sensory elements of the [Serenity Kit](#), a thoughtfully curated and research-backed collection of sensory objects designed for youth-supporting professionals to promote self-care, healing, and a sense of safety in the workplace.

The Serenity Room is designed for youth-supporting professionals to nurture their well-being, so they are better prepared to foster authentic, trusting, healing-centered, and trauma-informed connections with young people. Youth-supporting professionals dedicate a lot of time and energy to caring for others. As a result, they often carry the

***Youth-supporting professionals dedicate a lot of time and energy to caring for others.***



heavy burden of the trauma they encounter in their work, along with the weight of their own lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> Amidst busy schedules and demanding responsibilities, it can be hard to prioritize healing. Compounding this, many workplaces also lack adequate support and resources for nurturing your emotional well-being, which can impede your ability to effectively provide care.<sup>2</sup>

As an installation at a meeting, event, or conference, the Serenity Room provides a space to begin this healing by engaging the five senses. Engaging with the five senses is a non-invasive, autonomous, and empowering way to support healing and trauma-informed care. Research has demonstrated the profound impact of engaging with the senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste—for healing<sup>3</sup>. Notably, numerous studies highlight the role of sensory engagement in enhancing therapeutic relationships and trust between providers and staff.<sup>4</sup>

By integrating sensory experiences into self-care practices, research has shown that we can process and regulate emotions more holistically.<sup>5</sup> Sensory-based interventions are particularly effective in trauma-informed care, as these sensory experiences help create a safe and regulated environment, fostering healing and reducing the risk of re-traumatization.<sup>6</sup> The Serenity Room installation brings this research to life, providing a space to engage in these sensory experiences through the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) and mindful movement. The installation also provides a space for youth-supporting professionals

***By integrating sensory experiences into self-care practices, research has shown that we can process and regulate emotions more holistically.***

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<sup>1</sup>Bolić, E. B. (2018). Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious traumatization in child welfare professionals in Serbia. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 13(2), 214–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2018.1502117>

<sup>2</sup>Cavanagh, N., Cockett, G., Heinrich, C., Doig, L., Fiest, K., Guichon, J. R., Page, S., Mitchell, I., & Doig, C. J. (2020). Compassion fatigue in healthcare providers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Nursing ethics*, 27(3), 639–665.

<sup>3</sup>Scanlan, J. N., & Novak, T. (2015). Sensory approaches in mental health: A scoping review. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 62(5), 277–285.

<sup>4</sup>Moore, K. (2016). Following the evidence: Sensory approaches in mental health. <https://www.sensoryconnectionprogram.com/pdf/follow-the-evidence.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2007). Teaching self-care to caregivers: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on the mental health of therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 1(2), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105>

<sup>6</sup>Moore, K. (2016). Following the evidence: Sensory approaches in mental health. <https://www.sensoryconnectionprogram.com/pdf/follow-the-evidence.pdf>



to learn more about the research behind these trauma-informed and healing-centered practices so they can carry the practices with them long after the event.

Engaging in visual observation, especially of artworks, has been found to offer a multifaceted approach to well-being by reducing stress, inspiring mindfulness, and fostering creativity.<sup>7</sup> The act of intentional visual observation encourages a moment of contemplation, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the aesthetic

experience and divert our attention from stressors. This contemplation promotes reflection, creating a mental space for present-moment awareness, with positive implications for mental well-being.<sup>8,9</sup>

Hearing nature sounds has been recognized as a potent strategy for stress recovery and coping with trauma,<sup>10</sup> as these sounds—as well as other sounds, such as white noise or music—can provide a comforting and grounding experience, offering solace and a gentle pathway towards healing.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, creating sounds or music can be a powerful avenue for stress relief and coping with trauma. The process of making music, whether through playing instruments, singing, or composing, offers us a creative outlet for expressing and processing complex emotions. The rhythmic and melodic elements of music have been shown to positively impact mood, reduce stress levels, promote mindfulness, and divert attention from distressing thoughts.<sup>12</sup>

Studies have shown that tactile interventions have a positive impact on reducing anxiety, improving comfort, and activating the parasympathetic nervous system.<sup>13</sup> When the nervous system is

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<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, J. (2022, December 10). How explorations of art, trauma-informed principles and contemplative practices can come together to support well-being and nervous system regulation. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/viewfinder-reflecting-on-museum-education/how-explorations-of-art-trauma-informed-principles-and-contemplative-practices-can-come-together-a5321ff74b3f>

<sup>8</sup> Denham, I. P. (1993). The power of the word. Positive affirmation as self-healing, reshaping or remodelling technique: A dissertation. *The Union Institute*.

<sup>9</sup> Mastandrea, S., Fagioli, S., & Biasi, V. (2019). Art and psychological well-being: Linking the brain to the aesthetic emotion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 739.

<sup>10</sup> Song, I., Baek, K., Kim, C., & Song, C. (2023). Effects of nature sounds on the attention and physiological and psychological relaxation. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 86, 127987.

<sup>11</sup> Ratcliffe, E. (2021). Sound and soundscape in restorative natural environments: A narrative literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 570563

<sup>12</sup> Garrido, S., Baker, F. A., Davidson, J. W., Moore, G., & Wasserman, S. (2015). Music and trauma: The relationship between music, personality, and coping style. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 977.

<sup>13</sup> Henricson, M., Ersson, A., Määttä, S., Segesten, K., & Berglund, A. L. (2008). The outcome of tactile touch on stress parameters in intensive care: a randomized controlled trial. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 14(4), 244-254



activated in this manner, the body experiences a relaxation response, counteracting the physiological effects of stress and anxiety. Moreover, tactile experiences can be grounding, offering a sense of stability and security.

Studies have shown that when we are exposed to pleasant scent stimuli, we can experience positive emotions and an overall improvement in mood. Aromatherapy has been shown to be effective for relaxation, stress relief, mood enhancement, and balance.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the positive impact of pleasant odors goes beyond emotional well-being to positively influence cognitive performance by promoting alertness, improving focus, and even enhancing memory retention.<sup>15</sup>

Engaging the sense of taste can provide a way for individuals to reconnect with their bodies and navigate the healing journey. Drinking tea specifically has been shown to reduce stress, promote relaxation,<sup>16</sup> and improve mood and work performance, as well as promote a sense of safety and grounding<sup>17</sup> and decrease tension and/or anxiety.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, mindful movement has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, as well as improve self-compassion.<sup>19</sup> Bite-sized exercises offer accessible ways to incorporate both mindfulness and physical movement into busy schedules.



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<sup>14</sup> Ćimović, M. (2021). Essential oils: Inhalation aromatherapy—a comprehensive review. *Journal of Agronomy, Technology and Engineering Management*, 4(2), 547-557.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, A. J. (2011). Cognitive facilitation following intentional odor exposure. *Sensors*, 11, 5469-5488.

<sup>16</sup> Steptoe, A., Gibson, E. L., Vounonvirta, R., Williams, E. D., Hamer, M., Rycroft, J. A., ... & Wardle, J. (2007). The effects of tea on psycho-physiological stress responsivity and post-stress recovery: a randomised double-blind trial. *Psychopharmacology*, 190, 81-89.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan, J., Tuckey, M., Einöther, S. J., Garczarek, U., Garrick, A., & De Bruin, E. A. (2012). Relationships between tea and other beverage consumption to work performance and mood. *Appetite*, 58(1), 339-346.

<sup>18</sup> Gil, N. (2019, December 9). The Importance of trauma-informed design. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2019/12/09/the-importance-of-trauma-informed-design/?sh=3f26f5f96785>

<sup>19</sup> Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2007). Teaching self-care to caregivers: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on the mental health of therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 1 (2), 105-115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105>

## The DIY Guide

The [Office of Population Affairs \(OPA\)](#) invited Thrivology to pilot the Serenity Room at the [OPA Teen Pregnancy Prevention \(TPP\) Grantee Conference](#) in July 2024. The immersive Serenity Room proved successful, offering a meaningful impact on youth-supporting professionals. This success inspired us to launch the Serenity Room at the [Healthy Teen Network Conference in November 2024](#) in Phoenix, Arizona.

**The Thrivology team envisioned the Serenity Room as an immersive adaptation of the Serenity Kit, focusing on creating a space that engaged all five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.**

We designed a layout featuring various stations where participants could explore sensory experiences. Elements were also included to make the space feel more serene, including electric flameless candles and sun lamps.

We created this do-it-yourself (DIY) guide for implementing the Serenity Room Installation. This resource includes everything needed to adapt the concept for conferences, meetings, or trainings. The guide features a description for event materials, preparation notes, suggestions for sensory items, detailed setup instructions, and guidance on user flow and facilitation. From planning to execution, this resource provides everything needed to bring a Serenity Room to life.

## Feedback

We're always looking for ways to improve our work as we create practical, accessible, user-friendly resources. We'd love to hear your thoughts, once you've had a chance to facilitate this activity: [www.HealthyTeenNetwork.org/Thrivology/Resources/Serenity-Room](http://www.HealthyTeenNetwork.org/Thrivology/Resources/Serenity-Room)

## Suggested Citation

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# Serenity Room

## Description

The Serenity Room is a research-backed, sensory experience designed to help youth-supporting professionals explore, relax, and find inner serenity. Drawing on the sensory elements and research behind the [Serenity Kit by Thrivology](#)—a curated collection of objects promoting self-care, healing, and safety in the workplace—the Serenity Room provides an immersive space to nurture well-being.

By engaging the five senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste), participants can experience a non-invasive, empowering approach to trauma-informed and healing-centered care. Research shows that sensory engagement enhances therapeutic relationships, fosters trust, and supports emotional regulation, making it particularly effective in creating safe environments for healing and reducing the risk of re-traumatization.



## Preparation

### Overall

Creating a Serenity Room provides a valuable opportunity to offer event attendees a calming and restorative space. To ensure the space is both effective and accessible, thoughtful preparation and attention to detail are essential. At its core, a Serenity Room should feature stations that engage each of the five senses. Based on our pilot installations and research, this guide includes recommended sensory items for each station, along with other optional additions. Enhancing the room with calming elements such as electric flameless candles, sun lamps, comfortable seating, and quiet spaces can further create a serene atmosphere. A tech-free environment also allows participants to fully immerse themselves in the experience.

### Accessibility

When planning a Serenity Room, prioritize accessibility. Select sensory items that meet the diverse needs of attendees, such as stability bases for yoga balls to ensure their safety and usability. The space should allow all participants to access and move through it independently and comfortably.

Taking a trauma-informed approach is also essential. Empower attendees to move freely and explore at their own pace without following a prescribed flow. Use clear signage and welcoming materials at sensory stations to guide participants while keeping them in control of their experience. Include allergy-compliant snacks to accommodate dietary restrictions and carefully consider how sensory experiences might impact participants. For example, choose subtle scents like lavender to minimize sensitivities and design mindful movement activities that are inclusive and non-straining. To address hygiene concerns, provide items that can be wiped down, such as yoga mats or worry stones, or taken home, like to-go cups, snacks, or lavender sachets.

### **Staffing**

Identify a staff member to greet visitors at the Serenity Room entrance. The greeter will explain the purpose of the Serenity Room and distribute Serenity Room Passports that provide information on the space. Assign other staff to replenish supplies and maintain cleanliness throughout the event to ensure the room remains welcoming and fully stocked.

### **Ordering Materials**

Order materials such as yoga mats, tea bags, and lavender sachets in advance and ensure there are enough for all attendees. If storage is limited, choose compact items. For off-site events, consider donating leftover materials to a local organization that does trauma-informed work rather than shipping materials back, saving costs and benefiting the community.

### **Space**

Choose a space that comfortably accommodates about half the expected capacity, creating a more relaxed environment. A 1,000-square-foot room works well for most events, striking a balance between intimacy and spaciousness. Select a venue with natural lighting or dimmable lights to foster calm and opt for rooms with windows to connect participants with nature. Avoid harsh fluorescent lighting, which can detract from the room's serenity. Enhance the space with features such as hot water stations for tea and a variety of seating options for added comfort. It is also recommended to find a space with art hanging on the walls for added visual engagement.



## Suggested Materials

*Disclaimer: We provide links to materials as examples of where to obtain these items. We are not sponsored by nor promoting any of these specific products, brands, or services.*

### General Materials

- Serenity Room Passports (Quantity: 1 per expected participant)
- Tables, low-top and high-top (Quantity depends on space)
- Chairs for low-top tables (Quantity depends on space; note that one table can use yoga balls for seating)
- Tablecloths for high-top and low-top tables (Quantity: 1 per table)
- Signage advertising room (e.g., welcome sign, door sign, directional signs with arrows) and tripod holders for each sign (Quantity: 1 of each, with additional directional signs as needed)
- Extension cords (Quantity: As needed)
- Electrical and painter's tape (Quantity: At least one roll of each)
- Scissors (Quantity: 1)
- Trash bin (Quantity: 2)
- Anti-bacterial wipes (Quantity: 100)
- [Flameless candles](#) (Quantity: 110-pack)



## See Stations

Recommended item:

- [Sunshine lamp/projector](#) (Quantity: 1)

Other options:

- Printed photographs
- Digital photographs (e.g., on a rotating digital frame)
- Digital art with positive affirmations (e.g., [Framed Mini Art Prints by Morgan Harper Nichols | Society6](#))
- Posters or slides with artwork
- Postcard(s) with artwork or a photograph
- Bookmark(s) with artwork or a photograph



## Hear Stations

Recommended item:

- [Portable sound machine](#) (Quantity: 1)

Other options:

- Nature sounds video and speaker (e.g., [8 Hours Relaxing Nature Sounds - River Noise and Birdsong \[YouTube.com\]](#) or a nature sounds Spotify or Apple Music playlist)
- Music playlist with personal listening device (e.g., iPod with headphones)



## Touch Stations

Recommended item:

- [Worry stones](#) (Quantity: 1 per expected participant)

Other options:

- Calm strips
- Clay, putty, or kinetic sand
- Textured breaking or grounding stickers
- Fidget toy

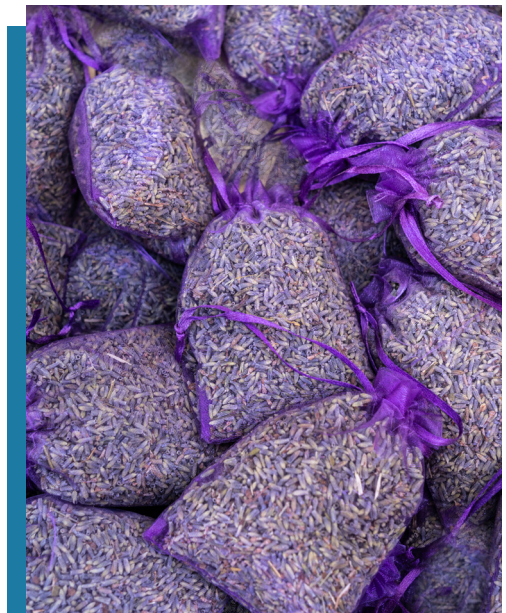
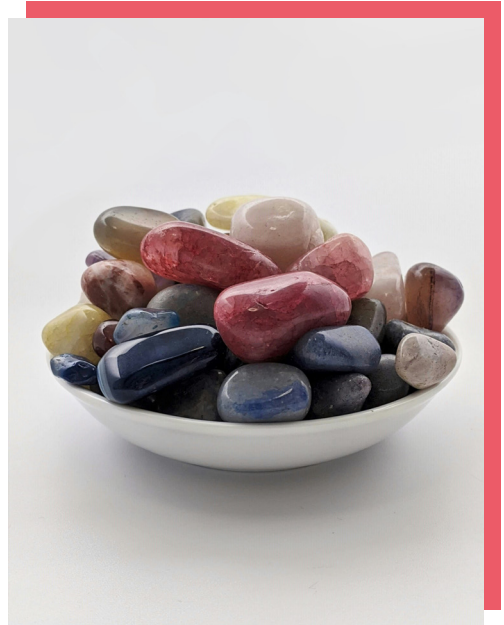
## Smell Stations

Recommended item:

- [Lavender sachets](#) (Quantity: 1 per expected participant)

Other options:

- Essential oils
- Dried herbs in sachets
- Coffee beans
- Tea leaves
- Mini candles



## Taste Stations

Recommended item:

- Tea bags (Quantity: 1 per expected participant)
- Hot water (Quantity: Enough ounces to fill to-go cups for each participant)
- To-go cups (Quantity: 1 per expected participant)
- Snacks (e.g., trail mix, fruit snacks, pretzels) (Quantity: 1 per expected participant)

Other options:

- Coffee with to-go cups
- Pastries
- Assorted candies or mints



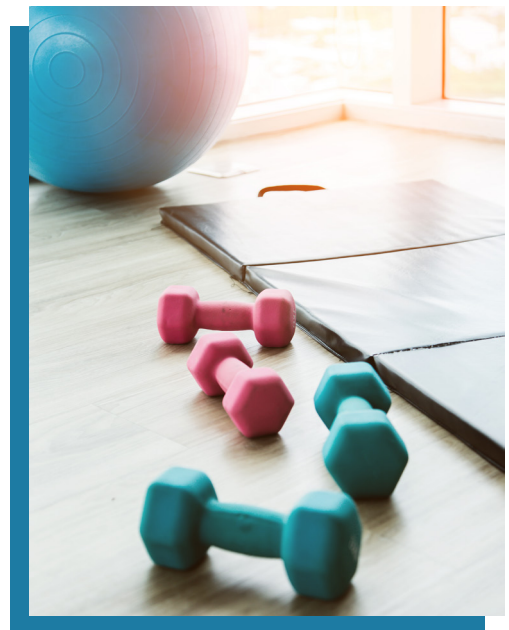
## Mindful Movement Stations

Recommended item:

- [Exercise balls with stands](#) (Quantity: 4)
- [Yoga mats](#) (Quantity: 2)

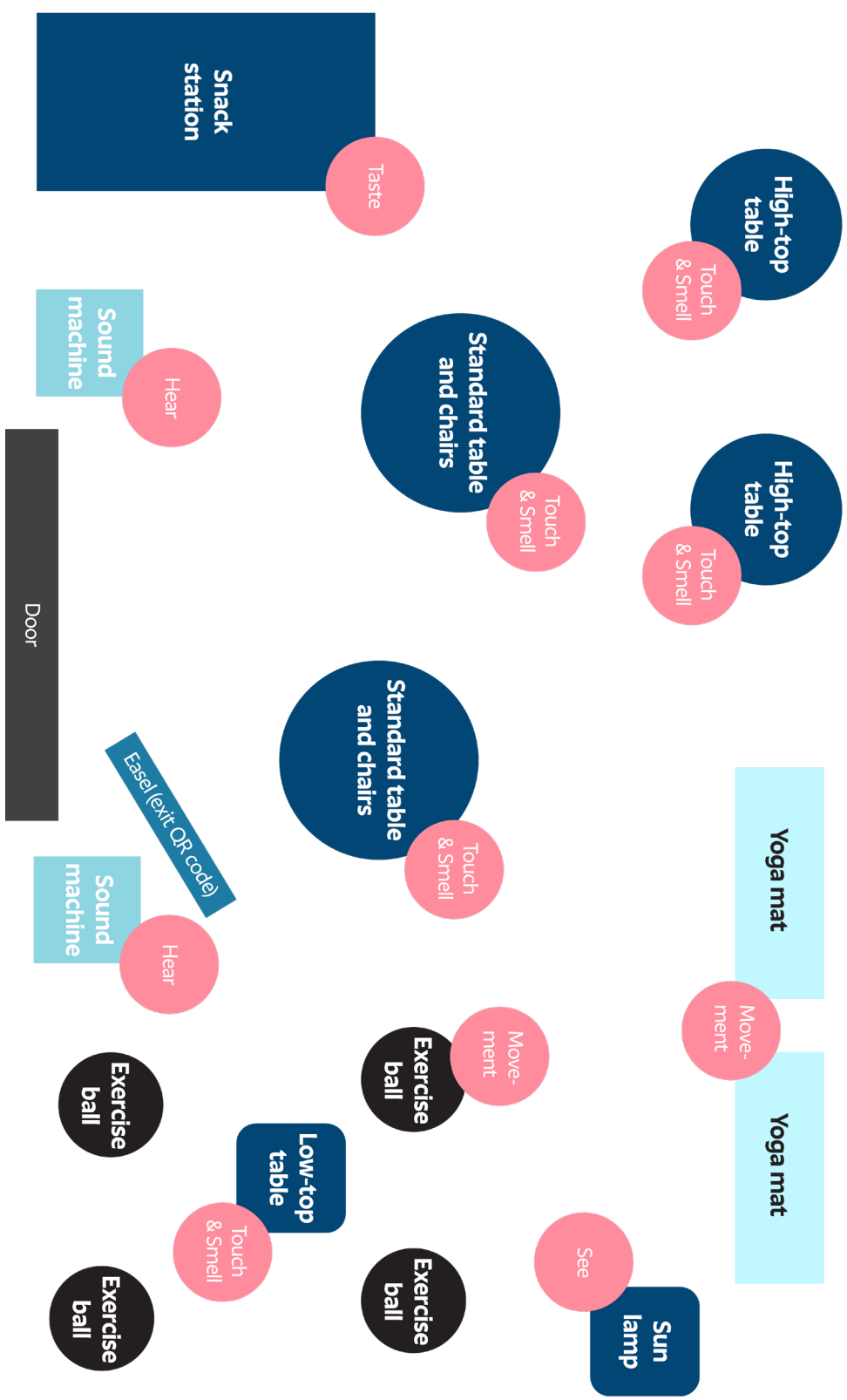
Other options:

- Exercise bands
- Foam rollers
- Massage gun
- Light dumbbells or kettlebells





Sample Set-Up





## General Set-Up

Sensory activities and objects should be arranged on tables and throughout the room to encourage exploration and engagement. Participants should be able to move freely through the space at their own pace, guided by a Serenity Room Passport introducing each activity and sensory station. Seating and movement options should be varied to accommodate diverse preferences and accessibility needs. Include standard chairs, standing tables, yoga mats, and exercise balls with stabilizers to ensure safety and usability. This flexible arrangement should allow participants to interact with the space in ways that feel most comfortable and supportive.

## Welcome Station

A welcome table should be set up at the front of the room, equipped with Serenity Room Passports that outline the research behind the Serenity Room and guide participants through the stations. The welcome table should be staffed by a team member who greets participants as they enter. The staff member should provide each participant with a Serenity Room Passport and explain how to navigate the space. They should emphasize that participants are welcome to move at their own pace, engage with the activities as they choose, and stay as long as they would like.

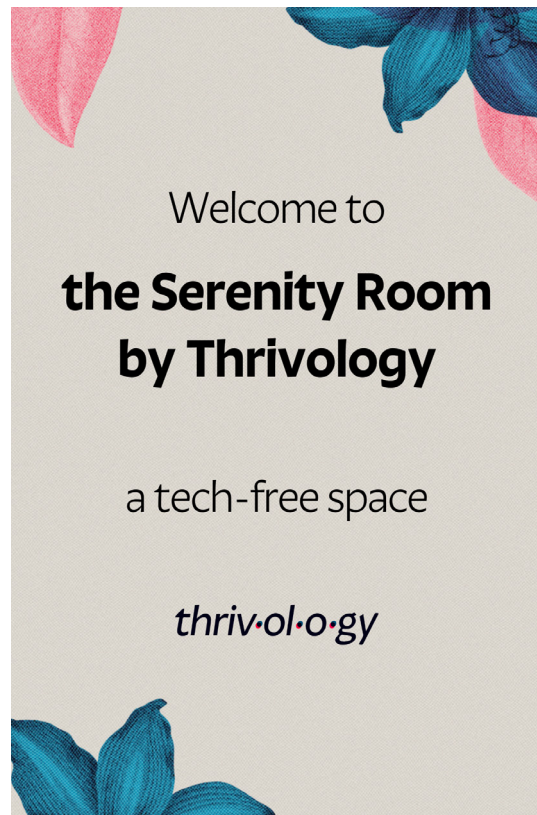
Additionally, the staff member should set clear expectations that the Serenity Room is a tech-free and quiet space, ensuring a calming and restorative environment for all. If a staff member is not available, use an inviting sign to welcome people to the space and provide instructions on how to use the Serenity Room Passport.



## Sample Signage








[Download 24 x 36 template](#)



[Download 8.5 x 11 template](#)

## General Set-Up

 <b>See Stations</b>	Artwork should be displayed around the room if not already included in the space. A sunlamp should be set up as an additional visual element, enhancing the station's aesthetics and providing a calming sensory experience.
 <b>Hear Stations</b>	Place one or two sound machines around the room, each positioned near a seating option to create an ambient noise experience. These machines should offer calming sounds, such as nature or white noise, to enhance the auditory sensory experience.
 <b>Touch and Smell Stations</b>	Place worry stones and lavender sachets on tables throughout the room to engage participants' sense of touch and smell. Include a mix of seated tables and cocktail tables to accommodate both seated and standing preferences, ensuring accessibility and comfort for all participants.
 <b>Taste Stations</b>	Set up a snack table and/or a hot tea station to engage participants' sense of taste. Ensure the snacks are allergy-compliant and consider offering a variety of options to meet dietary needs.
 <b>Mindful Movement Stations</b>	Set up yoga balls at one table as a mindful movement option, ensuring they are secured with stabilizers for safety. Arrange yoga mats in a designated area to provide additional opportunities for stretching and gentle movement.

## Closing

The Serenity Room is designed to provide a calming and mindful space where youth-supporting professionals can relax, recharge, and explore sensory interventions that promote self-care and emotional regulation. Through thoughtfully curated stations, participants have the opportunity to experience how sensory activities foster mindfulness, healing, and a sense of well-being.

While the suggested stations in this guide offer a strong foundation, organizers are encouraged to adapt and expand the Serenity Room to suit the specific needs of their event, space, and audience. Additional stations, such as those focused on arts and play or reflection (as featured in the Serenity Kit) can provide alternative mindfulness methods and enrich the overall experience. Customizing the room ensures that it aligns with the unique context and goals of each event.





The Serenity Room aims to create a serene and restorative environment while introducing sensory interventions as valuable tools for promoting well-being. By experiencing these practices, youth-supporting professionals can learn how to incorporate them into their own self-care routines and daily work. This dual purpose not only benefits participants during the event but also equips them with practical strategies to enhance their resilience and capacity to support others.



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