



A Compassion-Based Experiential Learning Curriculum

for Youth Work, Non-Formal Education and Group Facilitation

by Anastasia CHARITIDOU and Adrien CORTUN

Les Philentropes



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OLOTITES
oh my wholeness

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PART I — CONTEXT, METHODOLOGY, AND INSIGHTS

1. Introduction

Project Overview

comPASSION is sexy¹ is a collaborative educational project implemented within the framework of the Erasmus+ KA210-YOU Small-Scale Partnership programme.

The project was developed through a partnership between two organisations:

- **Les Philentropes (France)**
- **Olotites (Greece)**

Both organisations share an interest in exploring how experiential learning, artistic expression and community-based practices can support emotional awareness, wellbeing, resilience and social connection.

The project investigates how **compassion can be cultivated as a practical competence** within youth work, education and community initiatives. Through workshops, collaborative meetings and the development of educational materials, the partners explored ways to integrate compassion-based practices into participatory learning environments.

Activities were implemented in both France and Greece, combining **artistic facilitation, embodied practices and reflective dialogue**. Through this process, facilitators and participants experimented with ways of strengthening empathy, emotional awareness and supportive group dynamics.

The experiences developed during the project led to the creation of this eBook, which documents the **methodology, activities and learning insights** that emerged through the collaboration.

Partner Organisations

Les Philentropes – France – <https://www.lesphilentropes.org> [FR] or <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/home/> [EN]

Les Philentropes is a **Paris-based artistic collective** working at the intersection of **performing arts, collective creation and artistic approaches to wellbeing and social reflection**. Founded in 2019 by Adrien Cortun, the collective develops collaborative and horizontally organised projects combining theatre, writing, performance and interdisciplinary artistic formats.

Its work explores social and human themes through participatory and popular art forms, often implemented in live, documentary, street or interactive formats. The collective's conceptual identity draws on the idea of

¹ You can find all the project result on our website <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/>

transformation within disorder, linking artistic creation with reflection on social complexity, resilience and collective meaning-making.

Alongside artistic production, Les Philentropes runs an educational programme offering theatre and expression workshops that combine artistic practice with well-being and collective reflection. These initiatives aim to make artistic practice accessible to diverse audiences while fostering creativity, dialogue and personal development.

The organisation regularly implements workshops across Paris and the Île-de-France region, collaborating with municipalities, universities and social organisations. Hosting approximately **ten workshops per week in different local contexts**, the collective has developed strong experience in community outreach, participatory artistic methods and inclusive facilitation.

Les Philentropes works with **children, young people, university students and adults** in diverse urban environments, including participants supported by social services, disability services and organisations working with vulnerable groups.

Within the Erasmus+ KA210-YOU partnership “**comPASSION is sexy**”, Les Philentropes contributed its artistic methodology, facilitation experience and local outreach network in Paris, co-developing and co-facilitating a compassion-informed experiential curriculum together with the Greek partner organisation.

Olotites – Greece – www.olotites.org

Olotites (Ολότιτες) is a **non-profit organisation based in Thessaloniki, Greece**, working at the intersection of **education, arts, science and social engagement**. The organisation designs and implements experiential and non-formal learning initiatives that promote **wellbeing, emotional awareness, compassion and creative expression**, with a strong emphasis on inclusion and psychosocial empowerment.

Although based in Thessaloniki, Olotites maintains a significant part of its activities on the island of **Samos**, where it collaborates with local educational and community actors. This presence allows the organisation to engage directly with the realities of a geographically remote region and a place that has hosted diverse communities and humanitarian initiatives in recent years.

The organisation’s work develops along **three interconnected axes**.

Experiential learning and community workshops

Olotites offers inclusive seminars and experiential workshops for diverse age groups focusing on emotional awareness, resilience, embodiment and psychosocial wellbeing. These activities are implemented in educational, municipal and community settings and often involve educators, youth workers and volunteers.

European cooperation and Erasmus+ projects

The organisation participates in Erasmus+ initiatives supporting international learning and cooperation. These include youth work partnerships such as “comPASSION is sexy” and “Poetry Nest”, which focus on developing accessible educational resources and experiential learning methodologies.

Humanitarian solidarity and community support

Through initiatives such as Threads of Compassion, Olotites coordinates the collection and distribution of essential items for adults and children living in conditions of displacement and precarity on Samos, connecting local community engagement with wider networks of solidarity.

Olotites works with participants of **all ages**, with a strong intergenerational dimension. Its activities particularly involve **educators, youth workers, social workers, volunteers and community members** interested in experiential learning approaches and psychosocial empowerment.

The organisation is also connected with the **Galileo Commission and the Scientific & Medical Network**, and in 2023 hosted in Greece the international symposium *Looking Forward Towards the Origins*, contributing to interdisciplinary dialogue on holistic science and consciousness.

Vision and Mission of the Project

The **comPASSION is sexy** project emerged from a shared observation: many people today experience increasing levels of **stress, emotional isolation and social fragmentation**, while opportunities to explore emotional awareness and relational skills remain limited in educational and community settings.

The project therefore set out to explore **compassion not only as an abstract value but as a practical human capacity that can be cultivated through experience, reflection and interaction with others**.

Through experiential workshops and collaborative exchanges between partners, the project aimed to:

- support emotional awareness and empathy
- develop tools for compassionate communication and relational skills
- strengthen community connection and mutual support
- explore facilitation methods integrating **embodiment, creativity and dialogue**

By working with participants from different backgrounds—including **youth workers, educators, volunteers and community members**—the project sought to encourage practices that contribute to more **supportive and resilient communities**.

Why “comPASSION is sexy”?

The title of the project intentionally uses a **playful and provocative expression**.

It challenges the widespread perception that compassion is something passive or sentimental. Instead, the project proposes that compassion can be understood as a **dynamic human strength**—a quality that can support emotional resilience, deepen relationships and contribute to collective wellbeing.

Seen in this light, compassion becomes a quality that people often recognise as **meaningful and attractive when experienced in practice**.

2. About This eBook

This eBook documents the **workshops, methodologies and learning insights** developed during the implementation of the project.

Rather than presenting a fixed training manual, it offers a **collection of practices and experiences** that facilitators, educators and community practitioners may adapt to their own contexts.

The publication includes:

- the conceptual inspirations that informed the project
- descriptions of the workshop sessions implemented in Greece and France
- detailed descriptions of experiential activities
- reflections on facilitation processes and group dynamics
- suggestions for adapting the activities to different groups and environments

The activities presented here were developed through **practice, experimentation and collaboration** between partners, and were refined through the experiences of the participants who took part in the workshops.

The intention of this resource is to support facilitators who wish to integrate **compassion-based approaches into educational, youth work and community initiatives**.

3. How the Methodology Was Developed

The methodology presented in this curriculum emerged through a **process of experimentation, reflection and collaboration** between the two partner organisations, Les Philentropes (France) and Olotites (Greece).

Rather than starting from a fixed programme, the project developed progressively through a series of workshops implemented in **real educational and community contexts**. These workshops explored how compassion-related themes—such as emotional awareness, relational presence and supportive group dynamics—can be approached through **experiential and creative learning methods**.

Development Process

The methodology evolved through three main stages.

Initial Exploration

In the first stage of the project, each organisation designed and implemented its own workshop formats based on its existing practices and facilitation approaches.

Les Philentropes drew on its background in **performing arts and participatory theatre**, exploring artistic and expressive methods to create collective experiences related to empathy, dialogue and emotional expression.

Olotites developed workshops grounded in **experiential learning, embodiment practices and compassion-based reflection**, focusing on emotional awareness, relational presence and psychosocial empowerment.

Although the workshops differed in form and emphasis, both partners explored how **creative and participatory activities** can support wellbeing, emotional awareness and meaningful connection between participants.

Transnational Exchange and Co-Creation

A **transnational meeting between the partners** provided a key moment for exchange, reflection and consolidation of the learning that had emerged from the initial workshops.

During this meeting, facilitators shared their experiences from the workshops implemented in their respective contexts, discussed the strengths and limitations of different activities, and explored how the approaches used by each organisation could complement one another.

Through this process of dialogue and practical experimentation, the partners identified activities that created strong engagement among participants and began to **co-develop shared workshop structures** combining artistic, embodied and reflective practices.

Testing and Adaptation

In the following stage of the project, the partners initially intended to implement the same workshop sessions in both countries. In practice, however, the workshops evolved differently depending on several factors, including:

- the facilitation style and professional background of each facilitator
- the needs and expectations of different participant groups
- the cultural and social contexts in which the workshops were implemented

As a result, while the core activities remained similar, facilitators often **adapted the sequence, emphasis or framing of the exercises** in response to the specific dynamics of each group.

This experience highlighted the importance of **flexibility and facilitator judgement** when working with experiential learning processes.

For this reason, the methodology presented in this eBook does not aim to prescribe a rigid training model. Instead, it offers a **structured framework together with guidance on how activities can be adapted** according to the skills of the facilitator, the characteristics of the participants and the learning environment.

4. Compassion, Wellbeing and Mental Health

Throughout the project, the workshops addressed themes related to **compassion, emotional awareness and interpersonal connection**, which are closely linked to questions of wellbeing and mental health.

The partners approached these topics through the perspective of **non-formal education and experiential learning**, rather than through therapeutic or clinical interventions. The aim was not to provide mental health treatment, but to create participatory learning environments where participants could reflect on emotions, relationships and supportive ways of interacting with others.

In this sense, compassion was explored as a **relational and social competence** that can contribute to healthier communication, stronger group cohesion and increased emotional awareness within communities.

As part of the learning process of the project, participants were also invited to complete short questionnaires related to wellbeing and self-perception of emotional functioning. Among these tools were the **Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF)** developed by Keyes (2002; 2005), and the **Self-Compassion Scale (26 items)** developed by Kristin Neff (2003).

The questionnaires were used to support reflection on participants' experiences rather than to conduct a formal scientific study. The intention was to gather **indicative insights about participants' perceptions of wellbeing and self-compassion**, helping facilitators reflect on the potential impact of experiential learning processes.

5. How to Use This Curriculum

This curriculum presents a series of **experiential workshop sessions** developed through the collaboration between Les Philentropes (France) and Olotites (Greece). The activities were tested in different educational and community contexts and are designed to support facilitators working with groups interested in **compassion, emotional awareness and relational learning**.

The sessions presented in this eBook can be implemented either as a **complete sequence** or used individually depending on the needs of the facilitator and the characteristics of the group.

Session Structure

The curriculum is organised into a sequence of sessions that gradually guide participants through **different stages of experience and reflection**.

Each session combines:

- experiential exercises involving movement, creative expression or group interaction
- reflective moments allowing participants to observe and articulate their experience

- short theoretical inputs connecting lived experience with concepts such as compassion, emotional awareness and relational dynamics

This structure allows participants to move between **experience, reflection and conceptual understanding**, which is a central principle in experiential learning.

Flexibility of Activities

Although the sessions are presented in a specific sequence, facilitators are encouraged to approach the curriculum as a **flexible framework rather than a fixed script**.

Activities may be adapted depending on:

- group size
- participants' age and background
- available time
- the facilitation style and experience of the facilitator

In some contexts facilitators may choose to implement only **selected activities from a session**, while in others the full sequence may be used.

Duration Options

The sessions described in this curriculum were originally implemented as **extended workshops** allowing time for experiential activities and reflection.

However, facilitators may adapt the duration according to their context. Possible formats include:

- a full workshop cycle implemented across several meetings
- individual sessions used within a training programme
- shorter workshops where selected activities are implemented

When adapting the duration, it is recommended to maintain a balance between **experiential activities and reflective discussion**, as both contribute to the learning process.

Adaptation Advice

Experiential activities can evoke **personal memories, emotions or reflections**. Facilitators therefore play an important role in creating an environment that is **respectful, attentive and supportive**.

Before implementing the activities, facilitators are encouraged to consider:

- the group's familiarity with experiential learning methods
- the cultural and social context of participants
- the potential emotional sensitivity of certain topics

Facilitators should remain attentive to group dynamics and be ready to **adjust the pace or structure of activities when necessary**.

The intention of this curriculum is not to prescribe a rigid programme, but to offer a set of practices that can inspire facilitators to create **compassionate and participatory learning spaces**.

6. Theoretical Foundations²

The workshops presented in this curriculum were developed within the context of **non-formal education and experiential learning**. The programme combines **interactive group processes, arts-informed facilitation and theatre-based practices** to explore themes of compassion, emotional awareness and relational learning.

Many of the activities used in the workshops draw from traditions commonly found in **experiential training, theatre pedagogy and group facilitation**, such as movement exercises, symbolic expression, role-based exploration, storytelling and collective reflection. These approaches encourage participants to learn not only through discussion but also through **direct experience, interaction and creative expression**.

In this sense, the workshops aim to create participatory learning environments where participants can reflect on emotions, relationships and personal experiences through a combination of **embodied practices, dialogue and creative expression**.

The project integrates experiential facilitation methods with insights drawn from several psychological and educational perspectives. These influences informed both the **design of the activities** and the **facilitation approach** used during the sessions.

The perspectives referenced below served as **conceptual inspirations** for the development of the workshops. These perspectives do not represent a unified psychological model but rather a set of conceptual inspirations that informed the design of experiential learning activities.

This curriculum is not intended as psychotherapy and does not aim to diagnose or treat mental health conditions. The frameworks presented here are adapted for non-formal education, experiential learning and community-based facilitation. They are used as reflective lenses to support emotional awareness, self-compassion, relational learning and group processes.

² You can also hear us there : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfhD5RVIMd4>

Compassion and Self-Compassion

A central conceptual reference for the project is contemporary research on **compassion and self-compassion**.

In compassion research, compassion is often defined as the ability to **recognise suffering in oneself or others and to respond with the intention to alleviate or transform it**.

The work of **Paul Gilbert** on compassion and emotional regulation highlights how compassion can help balance different affective systems that influence human behaviour. Gilbert describes three main emotional regulation systems:

- **Threat and protection system**, associated with detecting danger and activating emotions such as fear, anger or anxiety
- **Drive and achievement system**, which motivates individuals to pursue goals and rewards
- **Soothing and affiliation system**, which supports feelings of safety, connection and emotional regulation

Many contemporary environments strongly activate the threat and drive systems. Compassion-based practices can help strengthen the **soothing and affiliative system**, supporting emotional balance and relational connection.

The project also draws on the concept of **self-compassion**, developed by **Kristin Neff (2003)**. Self-compassion refers to the ability to respond to one's own difficulties with care and understanding rather than self-criticism.

Neff describes self-compassion through three core components:

- **Self-kindness** instead of self-judgment
- **Common humanity**, recognising that imperfection is part of the shared human experience
- **Mindfulness**, observing emotions with balance and awareness

To support reflection on these themes, the project used the **Self-Compassion Scale (26 items)** developed by Kristin Neff as part of the exploratory evaluation process.

Wellbeing and Positive Psychology

The project is also informed by perspectives from **positive psychology**, which explores the factors that contribute to human flourishing, resilience and psychological wellbeing.

Research by **Barbara Fredrickson** on positive emotions highlights how experiences such as joy, curiosity, gratitude and connection can broaden attention and help build psychological and social resources over time.

To reflect on participants' experiences of wellbeing during the workshops, the project used the **Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF)** developed by **Corey Keyes (2002; 2005)**.

Keyes' model conceptualises mental wellbeing through three interconnected dimensions:

- **Emotional wellbeing**, referring to positive feelings and life satisfaction
- **Psychological wellbeing**, including personal growth, autonomy and a sense of purpose
- **Social wellbeing**, related to belonging, participation and contribution within a community

Within the project, the questionnaire was used as a **reflective evaluation tool**, helping facilitators and participants observe how experiential group processes may influence perceptions of wellbeing, emotional awareness and relational connection.

The use of this instrument was intended to support learning and reflection rather than to conduct a formal scientific study.

Emotional Awareness

Several models of emotion informed activities focused on recognising and expressing emotional experiences.

Research by **Paul Ekman** identified six primary emotions that appear across cultures: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust.

The **Wheel of Emotions**, developed by **Robert Plutchik**, provides a visual model showing how emotions relate to one another and how more complex emotional states can emerge from combinations of primary emotions.

These models helped facilitators introduce conversations about emotions in ways that support **recognition, reflection and emotional literacy**.

Contemporary neuroscience researchers such as Antonio Damasio have also highlighted the close relationship between bodily states, emotions and meaning-making processes.

Relational Dynamics and Communication

Understanding interpersonal dynamics was another important element of the workshops.

The **Drama Triangle**, introduced by **Stephen Karpman**, describes recurring relational patterns in which individuals may shift between the roles of victim, rescuer and persecutor. Reflecting on these patterns can help participants recognise common dynamics that appear in conflicts and relationships.

Elements from **Nonviolent Communication**, developed by **Marshall Rosenberg**, also influenced facilitation practices. This approach emphasises identifying feelings and needs while cultivating empathy and respectful dialogue.

Together, these perspectives supported exercises related to **communication, empathy and relational awareness**.

Inner Dialogue and Archetypal Perspectives

Some workshop activities invite participants to reflect on different **inner voices or inner figures** that may appear in challenging situations.

This approach resonates with ideas from **Carl Jung's work on archetypes** and with contemporary interpretations of the **inner child**, such as those presented in the work of **Marie-France Ballet de Coquereaumont and Emmanuel Ballet de Coquereaumont**.

Accessible reflections on Jungian themes, such as those explored in *Jung, un voyage vers soi* by **Frédéric Lenoir**, also inspired some narrative and symbolic exercises used during the workshops.

These references are used as **reflective metaphors**, helping participants explore personal narratives and inner experiences.

Within the workshops, these perspectives are used primarily as symbolic and reflective tools rather than as diagnostic or clinical models.

Experiential Awareness and Felt Sense

The workshops also draw inspiration from **Focusing**, a method developed by **Eugene Gendlin**.

Focusing emphasises attention to the **“felt sense”**, a subtle bodily awareness that can help individuals access emotional insight and meaning.

Several activities invite participants to pause, sense their bodily experience and allow emotions or reflections to emerge gradually. These practices support **embodied self-awareness within a group learning environment**.

Mindfulness, Embodiment and Trauma Sensitivity

Many exercises incorporate elements of **mindfulness and embodied awareness**, encouraging participants to observe breathing, bodily sensations and emotional states with curiosity and attention.

These practices are influenced by broader mindfulness traditions as well as contemporary **trauma-informed perspectives**, including discussions of trauma sensitivity in the work of **Bessel van der Kolk** and related trauma-aware educational models.

Within the project, these ideas function primarily as **facilitation principles**, encouraging a respectful pace, participant autonomy and attention to emotional safety.

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt exercises according to the needs, boundaries and emotional readiness of each group.

Arts-Based and Theatre-Inspired Facilitation

Finally, the methodology of the workshops is strongly influenced by **arts-based learning and theatre practices**, particularly those used by Les Philentropes in participatory artistic contexts.

Creative expression through **movement, storytelling, improvisation and symbolic representation** allows participants to explore emotional and relational themes in ways that go beyond purely verbal discussion.

These artistic methods support **experiential learning processes**, where understanding emerges through participation, reflection and shared experience.

A Practice-Based Integration

The perspectives described above do not function as a single unified theoretical model. Instead, they represent **sources of inspiration** that informed the development and facilitation of the workshops.

The curriculum presented in this eBook emerged through a **practice-based development process**, where activities were designed, implemented, observed and gradually refined through experience with different participant groups.

Facilitators drew selectively from concepts related to compassion, emotional awareness, relational dynamics and experiential learning, integrating these ideas into **interactive group exercises, reflective practices and arts-informed activities**.

Rather than attempting to apply each theoretical framework systematically, the workshops use these perspectives as **conceptual lenses** that help facilitators interpret and guide participants' experiences.

This approach reflects the nature of **non-formal education**, where learning often emerges through a combination of **experience, reflection, dialogue and creative exploration**.

The curriculum therefore offers a **flexible structure of activities** that facilitators can adapt to their own contexts while remaining attentive to the underlying themes of compassion, emotional awareness, wellbeing and relational learning.

7. Digital Resources

Alongside the workshop curriculum presented in this eBook, the **comPASSION is sexy** project produced a range of digital resources designed to extend the reach of the project and support facilitators, educators and community practitioners interested in compassion-based approaches.

These materials complement the workshop activities by offering additional explanations, reflections and practical demonstrations related to the themes explored during the project, including compassion, emotional awareness, wellbeing and relational learning.

The digital materials produced during the project include:

- **Our Articles³ :**
 - **13 website articles** presenting reflections, theoretical insights and descriptions of practices related to compassion, emotional awareness and wellbeing.
 - **2 scientific articles** developed in connection with the evaluation and reflection process of the project.
- **5 podcast episodes⁴** (3 in French and 2 in Greek) discussing themes related to compassion, experiential learning and personal development.
- **Our videos⁵ :**
 - **18 short TikTok videos in French**, produced mainly by Les Philentropes, presenting ideas and practices in a short and accessible format.
 - **4 longer “how-to” videos and guided practices recorded in Greek**, presenting selected exercises from the workshops and offering facilitation guidance.
 - **6 interview and discussion videos in English** exploring themes related to compassion, emotional awareness and experiential learning.
 - **19 short video extracts from workshop practices⁶**, documenting selected activities implemented during the project. Depending on the context in which they were recorded, these videos may appear in French, Greek or English.

Together, these resources provide multiple entry points for people who wish to explore the themes of the project beyond the workshop setting and support facilitators who would like to integrate similar practices into their own work.

The digital materials were produced and published across the partners' platforms according to language. **French articles and podcast episodes are published through “Sous le tapis,” the science communication blog and podcast developed by Les Philentropes. Greek materials, including articles and instructional videos, are published through the Olotites website. English versions and translations are available through the official Les Philentropes website**, allowing broader international access to the project's resources.

³ Available here : <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-articles/>

⁴ Available here : <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-podcast/>

⁵ Available here : <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-videos/>

⁶ Presented in the page as “Teaser videos” or “Resource videos”

Accessing the Resources

To ensure long-term accessibility of the project's results, the digital materials are hosted on the **online platforms of the partner organisations**.

The **Les Philentropes website**, as the coordinating organisation of the project, functions as the main online hub where the majority of the resources are published and maintained over time. Additional materials are also available through the **Olotites website**, supporting wider dissemination of the project's outcomes.

Les Philentropes – France

Website

<https://www.lesphilentropes.org> [FR] or <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/home/> [EN]

Sous le tapis – science communication blog & podcast on mental health

<https://www.sousletapis.fr>

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@LesPhilentropes>

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/lesphiloux/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/LesPhilentropes/>

TikTok

https://www.tiktok.com/@les_philoux

Olotites – Greece

Website

www.olotites.org

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@OLOTITESNGO>

Instagram

https://www.instagram.com/olotites_ohmywholeness/

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/olotites>

Through these platforms, readers can access the videos, podcasts, articles and other materials developed during the project. The partners encourage educators, facilitators and organisations to explore these resources and integrate them into their own educational, community and youth work initiatives.

8. Research and Evaluation

Throughout the implementation of the project, the workshops gradually evolved not only as educational activities, but also as spaces of observation, reflection and ongoing methodological experimentation.

As facilitators adapted activities across different groups and contexts, new questions emerged regarding participation, emotional processes, relational dynamics and the role of experiential learning within wellbeing-oriented educational environments.

Alongside the practical implementation of the workshops, the project therefore included an exploratory evaluation process intended to support reflection on the methodology and to better understand how participants experienced different dimensions of self-compassion, wellbeing and group interaction.

Rather than functioning as a separate scientific layer disconnected from practice, the evaluation process developed in dialogue with the workshops themselves, contributing to ongoing adaptation, facilitation reflection and future methodological development.

Evaluation Process

The workshops were implemented across multilingual and multicultural contexts in Greece and France between 2025 and 2026. Participants included youth workers, facilitators, educators, NGO staff, volunteers and adults interested in experiential learning and wellbeing-oriented practices.

As part of the project's reflective process, participants were invited to complete voluntary questionnaires before and after the workshops. The evaluation combined quantitative questionnaires with facilitator observations, reflective discussions and qualitative feedback emerging throughout the implementation process.

The project used two internationally recognised self-report tools:

- the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS-26) developed by Kristin Neff
- the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF) developed by Corey Keyes

These tools were used as reflective and exploratory evaluation instruments within a non-formal educational context rather than as diagnostic or clinical tools.

The evaluation process also contributed to the development of two exploratory research papers connected to the project:

- a feasibility and pre–post evaluation paper examining implementation and dimensional patterns of change
- a baseline analysis paper exploring relationships between self-compassion and wellbeing dimensions within the multilingual participant sample

What Emerged Through the Evaluation

The evaluation process suggested several meaningful tendencies across the different workshop implementations.

Many participants reported increased emotional awareness, stronger self-reflection and greater awareness of the way they relate to themselves and others. Facilitators also observed that embodied, symbolic and

arts-based activities often created forms of participation extending beyond verbal discussion alone, allowing participants to engage through movement, imagination, metaphor and shared experience.

Across the evaluation process, changes appeared especially connected to dimensions related to psychological and social wellbeing, including relational awareness, participation, group connection and reflective self-understanding.

The exploratory analyses also suggested that self-compassion may relate more strongly to deeper psychological and relational dimensions of wellbeing than to short-term emotional mood alone. In particular, dimensions connected to self-kindness, self-judgement, over-identification and isolation appeared closely linked to broader experiences of psychological wellbeing and social connection.

At the same time, the evaluation highlighted that not all dimensions appeared to shift equally. Experiences related to emotional mood and isolation seemed more resistant to short-term change within a brief workshop format. This suggested that some emotional processes may require longer-term continuity, repetition or deeper support structures beyond a short educational intervention.

The evaluation also reinforced the importance of context within experiential learning processes. Group composition, language diversity, facilitation style, workshop rhythm and participant readiness all appeared to influence how activities were experienced and integrated.

What We Learned Through the Research Process

One of the most important learnings of the project was that experiential and compassion-based educational processes can be explored through research without reducing them entirely to measurable outcomes.

The research process highlighted both the possibilities and limitations of evaluating relational and embodied learning environments. While questionnaires and statistical observations can offer useful insights into patterns and tendencies, many important aspects of the workshops remained difficult to fully quantify, including group atmosphere, symbolic meaning-making, emotional resonance and interpersonal dynamics.

The research papers also reinforced several important methodological observations:

- experiential methodologies require flexibility and contextual adaptation rather than rigid standardisation
- multilingual and multicultural implementation creates both richness and methodological complexity
- embodied and arts-based practices may support participation differently from purely discussion-based educational approaches
- psychological and relational dimensions of wellbeing may respond differently within short-term interventions
- group-based compassion work appears closely connected to relational safety, participation and shared experience

The evaluation additionally highlighted the importance of methodological humility. The project was implemented in real educational and community environments rather than controlled laboratory conditions. Participation was voluntary and self-selected, workshop structures varied between contexts, and levels of continuity differed significantly between participant groups and countries.

Rather than producing definitive conclusions, the research process functioned as a way of deepening reflection on the relationship between compassion, experiential learning, embodiment and wellbeing within non-formal education contexts.

Ultimately, the dialogue between practice and research became one of the most valuable dimensions of the project itself.

9. Next Steps and Sustainability

One of the most significant observations emerging from the project was that many activities gradually began extending beyond the original workshop structure in which they were first implemented.

As facilitators experimented with the sessions in different educational and community contexts, several exercises started functioning not only as parts of a complete curriculum, but also as adaptable standalone practices integrated into other workshops, trainings and group processes.

This experience highlighted an important characteristic of experiential and non-formal learning methodologies: rather than remaining fixed programmes, they often continue evolving through adaptation, reuse, facilitation experience and collaboration between practitioners.

The sustainability of the project therefore lies not only in preserving a specific curriculum structure, but also in the continued circulation, transformation and contextual adaptation of the practices developed through the project.

Adaptation and Continued Use

Throughout and after the implementation process, facilitators from both organisations began integrating selected exercises and approaches into their wider professional and educational work.

Some activities were adapted as short standalone interventions within:

- youth work activities
- educator trainings
- psychosocial and wellbeing-oriented workshops
- inclusion and community projects
- arts-based facilitation contexts
- reflective group processes

In other cases, facilitators reused complete workshop sequences or adapted entire sessions according to the needs of specific participant groups and learning environments.

This adaptability became one of the central strengths of the methodology. Rather than functioning as a closed programme, the workshops gradually developed into a flexible set of practices that can be modified according to context, duration, facilitation style and participant needs.

The implementation process also raised new questions regarding the possibility of using selected sessions or activities as more independent and modular interventions while still maintaining coherence with the broader themes of compassion, emotional awareness and relational learning.

Learning Through Collaboration and Networks

Another important dimension of the project's sustainability emerged through collaboration and exchange between organisations, facilitators and community initiatives.

The methodologies and practices developed during the project continue to circulate through workshops, trainings, collaborations and informal professional networks connected to experiential learning, youth work, embodiment and psychosocial support.

Through this process, elements of the project are gradually reaching new contexts and participant groups beyond the original partnership itself. In many cases, this continuation takes place not through formal replication, but through adaptation, reinterpretation and peer-to-peer exchange between practitioners.

The project therefore contributed not only to the creation of educational materials, but also to the strengthening of relationships between people and organisations interested in compassion-based, experiential and participatory educational approaches.

Future Directions

Future development of the project may include:

- further adaptation of activities for different educational and community settings
- expanded collaboration between facilitators and organisations
- additional multilingual resources and educational materials
- future Erasmus+ partnerships and international cooperation
- deeper exploration of embodiment and arts-based facilitation within youth work
- more developed evaluation processes and comparative research designs

The project also highlighted the need for future research approaches capable of remaining both methodologically rigorous and compatible with the relational, participatory and human dimensions of experiential learning.

Closing Reflection

Rather than presenting a finished method or a fixed intervention model, comPASSION is sexy opened an ongoing process of experimentation, adaptation and shared learning.

The workshops, practices and reflections developed through the project continue to evolve through the people, groups and organisations that engage with them in different contexts. In this sense, the sustainability of the project lies not only in the preservation of materials, but in the continued creation of spaces where compassion, participation, creativity and relational learning can keep being explored collectively.

PART II — PRACTICAL WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Introduction to the Workshop Sessions

Before exploring the exercises and activities in detail, it is important to clarify the educational philosophy, facilitation approach and flexibility of the programme.

The following workshop sessions were developed within the Erasmus+ project *comPASSION is sexy* through an ongoing process of facilitation, experimentation, reflection and adaptation across different groups and contexts in Greece and France.

Rather than functioning as fixed protocols to be reproduced mechanically, the workshops are intended as flexible experiential frameworks that facilitators can adapt according to the needs, sensitivities, capacities and realities of each group.

The curriculum combines elements of:

- experiential learning
- embodiment and movement
- emotional literacy
- symbolic and artistic expression
- reflective dialogue
- relational and group-based learning
- compassion and self-compassion approaches

The activities invite participants to explore emotions, relationships, self-perception and group processes through lived experience rather than through purely theoretical instruction.

Although each session has its own thematic focus, the workshops are interconnected and gradually build upon one another through recurring practices of reflection, movement, creativity, emotional awareness and relational exploration.

How to Read the Programme

Overflow Version

Each session begins with a shorter “overflow version” presenting the overall structure and rhythm of the workshop.

This section is intended to help facilitators quickly understand the progression and general objectives of the session before moving into the detailed activity descriptions.

Structure of the Activities

The activities are presented in a practical and adaptable format including:

- duration
- goals
- materials
- facilitation process
- facilitator notes
- optional reflection questions

Not all sections need to be followed mechanically. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the rhythm, duration, language and emotional depth of the activities according to:

- the needs and age of the group
- cultural and linguistic context
- accessibility considerations
- emotional readiness
- available time and space
- facilitator experience and style

If a particular exercise or sequence does not feel coherent or appropriate for a specific group, facilitators are encouraged to modify, simplify or replace it.

Theory Sections

Each session concludes with a short theoretical section intended primarily as a resource for facilitators.

These sections do not aim to provide definitive explanations or fixed interpretations of human experience. Instead, they offer conceptual frameworks, theoretical inspirations and reflective perspectives connected to the activities explored during the session.

Facilitators are strongly encouraged to familiarise themselves with these theoretical foundations before implementation. Understanding the intentions, emotional dynamics and pedagogical logic behind the exercises helps facilitators adapt the workshop more safely, coherently and responsibly.

The theoretical references included throughout the curriculum should therefore be understood as supportive lenses and influences rather than as a single unified theoretical model.

Facilitation Considerations

Time Management

The sessions presented in this eBook are intentionally flexible and may vary significantly in duration depending on:

- group size
- depth of discussion
- artistic process duration
- breaks
- emotional pacing
- optional reflection moments

Estimated durations should therefore be understood as approximations rather than strict prescriptions.

Facilitators are encouraged to prioritise depth and group process rather than attempting to complete every activity exactly as written.

Throughout the curriculum, some activities or reflections may be shortened, expanded or skipped depending on the realities of the group.

Reflection Questions

Reflection questions do not need to be asked after every activity.

Depending on the rhythm and energy of the group, facilitators may choose to:

- invite short reflections immediately after an exercise
- group reflections together after multiple activities
- replace verbal reflection with silence, movement or journaling
- skip reflection questions entirely when the process already feels complete

Energy and Group Rhythm⁷

Facilitators are encouraged to remain attentive to the emotional and physical rhythm of the group.

Some groups may need more grounding, silence and slower pacing, while others may benefit from playful movement, energisers and dynamic interaction.

The goal is not constant calmness or constant intensity, but a balanced rhythm between **activation**, **expression**, **regulation** and **integration**.

⁷ You can find some group exercises there to help you regulate the dynamic of the group :
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zChdl0C9Zhc>

Emotional Safety and Sensitivity

The workshops include emotional, embodied and relational exploration.

Facilitators should therefore remain attentive to:

- participant vulnerability
- emotional intensity
- group sensitivity
- power dynamics
- accessibility needs
- trauma-related responses

Participants should always retain agency regarding:

- the level of personal sharing
- physical participation
- emotional depth
- modification or refusal of activities

The workshop is educational and experiential in nature and should not be presented as psychotherapy or clinical treatment.

Confidentiality and Respect

Participants are invited to respect confidentiality and avoid sharing identifiable personal experiences shared by others outside the workshop.

Facilitators are also encouraged to establish clear agreements regarding:

- respectful communication
- non-judgement
- listening without fixing or analysing
- consent around touch and interaction
- phone and recording boundaries

Adaptation and Accessibility Guidelines

The sessions presented in this curriculum are intentionally flexible and may be adapted according to:

- age group
- emotional readiness
- cultural and linguistic context
- accessibility considerations
- mobility and disability inclusion
- previous group experience
- available time and space

- facilitator experience and style

Facilitators may:

- shorten or expand artistic processes
- simplify language and instructions
- replace verbal reflection with movement, drawing or journaling
- adapt activities for seated participation
- reduce emotional intensity when needed
- increase playful elements for younger groups
- focus more strongly on communication and reflection in professional groups
- modify pair or group configurations
- allow observation instead of active participation

Not every activity will feel appropriate or accessible for every group.

Facilitators are therefore encouraged to adapt, simplify, replace or skip exercises when necessary in order to maintain coherence, accessibility and emotional safety within the group.

Participation should remain voluntary throughout the workshop process, and participants should always retain agency regarding:

- personal sharing
- physical participation
- emotional depth
- movement and touch
- verbal or non-verbal engagement

Whenever possible, facilitators are encouraged to offer multiple forms of participation so that participants with different communication styles, comfort levels and physical capacities can engage meaningfully with the activities.

Disclaimer

This curriculum is shared as an educational and experiential resource.

Facilitators are responsible for adapting activities according to the needs, vulnerabilities, cultural realities and capacities of their participant groups.

The authors do not propose the workshop as a substitute for psychotherapy, psychiatric care or crisis intervention.

Facilitators are encouraged to work within the limits of their own competence, training and emotional capacity.

I. Session 1 — Emotions: Our Relationship With Emotions

Overall Goal

To explore our relationship with emotions through movement, social interaction, creative symbolisation and reflection — and to connect these experiences with body-based emotional awareness and the foundations of self-compassion.

Exploring emotions is important because compassion becomes more concrete when people can recognise emotional experience in themselves and others, notice how emotions appear in the body, and understand how emotions influence relationships, behaviour and self-perception.

Estimated Duration

Approximately 3–5 hours depending on:

- group size
 - breaks
 - depth of sharing
 - artistic process duration
 - optional reflection and theory moments
 - adaptation choices made by the facilitator
-

Materials for Session 1

- sticky notes or emotion labels
 - pens and paper
 - large body outline (paper, fabric or canvas)
 - tape or blu tack
 - markers and colouring materials
 - optional clay or recycled materials
 - optional printed emotion wheel
 - optional music speaker
 - chairs and/or mats
-

I.0 Structure (Overflow Version)

Welcome, Frame & Opening Circle
Emotion Journey Through Movement
Emotions in the Social Body
Individual Writing – Note to the Self
River of Doubt & Emotional Perspectives
Meeting an Emotion & Gallery of Emotions
Closing Ritual – Pass the Offering / Permission
Theoretical Notes for Facilitators — Session 1

I.1. Welcome, Frame & Opening Circle (15–20 min)

Activity Type

Framing / Group cohesion / Safety-building

Materials

None

Goal

- Create a safe and grounded beginning where participants understand the frame of the workshop.
 - Establish shared agreements and clarify expectations.
 - Offer a gentle way for participants to arrive and connect without pressure or exposure.
-

I.1.A. Welcome & Introduction (2–3 min)

Facilitators briefly introduce themselves and the project.

Before we begin, it feels important to name something clearly:

We do not exist outside of systems, circumstances or collective realities. Wellbeing is not an individual project based only on personal effort. Many aspects of life — safety, housing, legal status, workload, access to resources, relationships and past experiences — influence us in ways that are often larger than any one person.

This workshop does not aim to deny those realities or suggest that each person is solely responsible for their life circumstances. It does not ask anyone to “fix themselves” inside an unfair system.

What we do here aims to be complementary, not corrective.

We acknowledge that some conditions are bigger than any one of us and that no amount of self-care can erase structural difficulties. At the same time, within these realities, we may still have moments of choice and

agency: how we respond, how we recognise what happens inside us, how we relate to one another, and how we care for our inner world when the outer world is demanding.

This workshop focuses on that space.

Our aim is to explore supportive practices, emotional awareness and compassion so that we can navigate our inner landscape with a little more clarity, steadiness and connection — whatever our circumstances may be.

Short transition into the session:

“We’ll explore emotions through movement, creativity, reflection and conversation in a way that is experiential, accessible and supportive.”

Facilitator Note:

This introduction may be shortened, simplified or adapted depending on the context, available time and participant profile.

I.1.B. Setting the Frame and Agreements⁸ (5 min)

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the agreements according to the context, duration, participant group and workshop goals.

The facilitator explains the agreements that support the space:

1. This is not therapy.

We work with awareness, embodiment, creativity and reflection — not psychotherapy.

Participants keep their agency and decide how deeply they wish to engage.

2. Respect and non-violence.

Verbal, emotional or physical aggression is not acceptable within the workshop space.

We care for the space and for each other.

3. Sovereignty and first-person speech.

Participants are encouraged to remain attentive to their own needs, limits and boundaries throughout the process.

Some activities may include physical proximity or interaction. Everyone chooses what feels appropriate for them. Saying “no,” modifying an exercise or stepping back from an activity is respected.

We speak from personal experience using “I” language rather than generalising or speaking for others.

We are here to explore our own experiences, perspectives and emotional realities — not to correct, diagnose or morally judge one another.

⁸ You can read our first article, “From Safe to Brave,” on our website to dive deeper into the group framework : <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-articles/>

4. Listening guidelines.

In pair or group exercises, listening means:

- no interrupting
- no fixing
- no rescuing
- no analysing
- no rushing to solutions

Presence is often enough.

5. Confidentiality and anonymity.

Participants are invited to respect confidentiality and avoid sharing identifiable personal experiences shared by others outside the workshop.

6. Collective responsibility for the space.

The goal is not perfection or constant comfort.

Participants are encouraged to communicate needs, limits and accessibility requirements when possible, while also remaining attentive to the shared group space.

7. Emotions are welcome.

All emotions have a place within the workshop.

If someone becomes emotional, participants are encouraged first to notice their own internal reactions before rushing to comfort, fix or stop the emotional expression.

Sometimes supportive presence, silence or simple witnessing can already be meaningful.

8. Phones and recording.

Phones are kept on silent and away unless there is a clear need communicated to the group beforehand.

Participants are not allowed to record or photograph others during the workshop without explicit consent.

9. Trauma-Informed Reminder

Participants may encounter emotions, memories or unexpected internal reactions during the workshop.

“If you choose to work with a personal situation later today, try to choose something that feels real but manageable — not emotionally overwhelming. You are always free to pause, observe, modify or step back from an activity.”

I.1.C. Opening Circle (5–10 min)

Sharing is always optional. “I pass” is welcome without explanation.

Encourage participants to keep sharing brief.

For larger groups, facilitators may divide participants into smaller circles.

Option 1 — Name + Inner Weather

Participants share:

- their name
- a word or short phrase describing how they arrive today

Option 2 — Name + Meaningful Moment

Participants briefly share:

- their name
- a small moment from the past week that felt meaningful, beautiful or alive

The moment does not need to be profound or personal.

Option 3 — Name + Intention

Participants share:

- their name
- one small intention for the workshop
(for example: curiosity, slowing down, courage, listening, openness)

Option 4 — Dixit Card + Name + Intention⁹

Participants choose a Dixit card and briefly describe:

- what they notice in the image
 - what it evokes for them
 - how it connects with their current emotional state or intention for the workshop
-

⁹ There is an example of a card pulling (but there not as introduction but more at half session timing) :
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMDO7ow0Axw>

I.2. Emotion Journey Through Movement (8–12 min)

Activity Type

Embodied exploration / Social warm-up / Group cohesion

Materials

- Open space
- Optional soft background music

Goal

- Explore emotions through movement, posture and rhythm.
 - Experience emotions as embodied and relational states.
 - Build gentle group connection through playful interaction.
 - Observe how emotions influence presence, perception and communication.
-

I.2.A. Emotion in My Own Body (1–2 min)

“Begin walking through the space. Find your rhythm. Use the whole room.”

Offer different prompts one by one, allowing participants time to explore each emotional atmosphere physically:

- “Walk as if you’re carrying a quiet excitement inside your ribs.”
- “Walk as if you have a tiny secret in your pocket.”
- “Walk as if curiosity is pulling you gently forward.”
- “Walk as if a tiny excitement is bouncing in your chest.”
- “Walk as if you’re a bit shy but still want to be part of the group.”
- “Walk as if you’re trying to hide a smile.”
- “Walk as if you are carrying something sacred and delicate in your hands.”
- “Walk as if you suspect everyone might be a secret agent.”
- “Walk as if you’re very proud of an imaginary item you carry in your pockets.”

“Stay inside your own space. Notice how the emotional atmosphere shapes your body.”

Facilitator Note:

The goal is not theatrical performance or psychological realism.

The exercise invites participants to notice how emotional states may influence:

- posture
- rhythm
- gaze
- muscular tone
- relational presence

The prompts should remain light, imaginative and accessible rather than emotionally overwhelming.

I.2.B. Emotion Toward Others (2–3 min)

“Keep walking. Now let the emotional atmosphere influence how you look at others.”

Prompts:

- “Meet someone’s eyes for a second... then continue.”
- “Let the emotion colour the way you see people — curious, shy, delighted, suspicious, hopeful...”
- “Notice what changes in your interactions. Nothing to fix or perform.”

Facilitator Note:

This phase introduces emotions as relational experiences rather than purely internal states.

Participants begin observing:

- emotional projection
 - interpersonal resonance
 - body-based communication
 - emotional interpretation
-

I.2.C. Showing the Emotion in Your Hands (2 min)

“Imagine the emotion now sits in your palms — as an object with colour, texture or temperature.”

Prompts:

- “Reveal it as if it is something precious.”
- “Reveal it as if it is something mysterious.”
- “Reveal it as if it is fragile, glowing or slightly dangerous.”

“When someone shows you their hands, simply react with your body or expression. No words.”

I.2.D. Searching for Resonance (Optional – 1 min)

“Move through the space and look for hands that feel similar to yours — in energy, texture, movement or atmosphere.”

“When you find a resonance, pause beside the person for a moment... then continue moving.”

Facilitator Note:

The goal is not to identify a “correct” emotional meaning.

The exercise explores:

- emotional resonance
- symbolic interpretation
- projection
- non-verbal connection

I.2.E. Introducing Yourself Through the Emotion (2–3 min)

“Now, when you meet someone, stop for a few seconds and introduce yourself — with your name shaped by the emotion.”

Options:

- soft
- shaky
- proud
- stretched
- trembling
- playful

“You can also introduce yourself with a sound instead of your name, if that feels easier or more expressive.”

Participants:

- walk
- meet someone
- pause
- exchange names or sounds
- continue moving

Facilitator Note:

This phase supports light group cohesion without requiring personal disclosure.

It also helps participants notice how emotional tone may influence:

- communication
 - voice
 - social presence
 - interpersonal perception
-

I.2.F. Emotion and Body State (2–3 min)

The facilitator introduces body-based instructions without naming emotions directly.

Examples:

- heavy body, lowered gaze, slower breath
- contracted fists, strong direction, energetic walk
- expanded chest, lighter steps, upward gaze

Participants observe how body organisation influences emotional experience.

Facilitator Note:

This exercise explores how emotions are often experienced through bodily sensations, posture and nervous-system activation.

The goal is not scientific demonstration, but experiential observation.

I.2.G. Closing the Journey (30 sec)

“Return slowly to your regular walk.

Notice what remains — a movement, a sensation, a breath, an emotion.”

Invite one collective breath.

I.2.H. Optional Reflection Questions (1–2 min)

- Which emotional state felt easiest to embody?
- Which one felt less accessible?
- What changed in the way you interacted with others?
- What surprised you about non-verbal communication?

Reflection may happen verbally, silently or through movement.

Transition to the Next Activity:

“This exercise explored emotions not only as thoughts, but as embodied and relational experiences.

In the next activity, we continue exploring how emotions are interpreted, mirrored and socially communicated within groups.”

I.3. Emotions in the Social Body – Emotion Labels & The Puzzle of Emotions

(Total: ~30–40 min depending on group size)

This sequence explores how emotions live not only inside us, but also in the social field — how they are mirrored, embodied, recognised and reintegrated into a shared human “body.”

I.3.1. Emotion Labels (12–18 min)

Activity Type

Social interaction / Embodied empathy / Emotional literacy

Timing

12–18 min (group-size dependent)

Materials

- Sticky notes or labels with emotions
- Tape or blue tack

Goal

- To experience how emotions are perceived before we consciously name them.
 - To explore how emotions are mirrored and recognised through body language.
 - To warm up group interaction through playful, non-verbal engagement.
-

Instructions (Facilitator Script)

I.3.1.A. Setting Up (1 min)

Give each participant a label with an emotion written on it.

They do not read it — it goes directly on their forehead or shirt.

“Everyone can see your emotion except you. Don’t try to guess yet — let the group show you.”

I.3.1.B. Social Reactions (No Words) (1–2 min)

Participants walk around the space.

“When you meet someone, take a moment to react physically to their emotion — through a gesture, posture or facial expression. No words.”

Participants also notice how others react to them. This gives the first clues.

I.3.1.C. Embody the Other's Emotion (2–3 min)

Participants continue walking.

“When you see an emotion on someone else, embody it fully. Show how this emotion moves your body.”

Encourage playfulness and exaggeration.

I.3.1.D. Group Yourself With Similar Emotions (1–2 min)

Invite participants to move into mini-groups according to perceived similarity.

“Find the people whose labels feel related to yours. You don't know your emotion yet — just trust the reactions you received.”

This deepens social mirroring and emotional categorisation.

I.3.1.E. Guessing the Emotion

Bring everyone back into a big circle.

Step 1 — Demonstration Round (for all groups) (1 min)

Two volunteers come to the centre.

Person B embodies/reacts → Person A guesses.
Then switch roles.

Very short — just a model.

Step 2 — Main Guessing Round (4–5 min)

Large groups (12+ participants)

After the demo, participants turn to their partner and guess simultaneously.

“Work with the person next to you. One guesses while the other embodies; then switch.”

The facilitator circulates to support.

Small groups (up to ~12 participants)

After the demo, pairs come to the centre one by one.

This creates a shared witnessing moment and strengthens group bonding.

Facilitator Note:

Avoid turning the activity into a “correct answer” game.

The goal is not accuracy, but awareness of:

- interpretation
- projection
- ambiguity
- emotional communication
- diversity of emotional expression

Different people may embody or perceive the same emotion differently.

I.3.1.F. Reflection Prompts (optional, 1–2 min)

- What helped you recognise emotions — reactions or embodiment?
 - How did you feel when others reacted to you?
-

I.3.2. The Puzzle of Emotions (7–10 min)

Activity Type

Collective ritual / Symbolic integration

Timing

7–10 min

Materials

- Large body outline (paper, fabric or canvas)
- Tape or markers

Goal

- To integrate all emotions into one shared “body.”
 - To give each emotion a place rather than ranking or excluding it.
 - To build collective awareness of emotional diversity.
-

Instructions (Facilitator Script)

I.3.2.A. Placement — Create the Puzzle (1–2 min)

“Take a moment to look at the emotion you discovered.

Notice it, feel it and let your body remember how it lives in you.”

Participants walk one by one to the large body outline and place their emotion label where they typically feel it (chest, stomach, shoulders, head, etc.).

“Place your emotion in the part of the body where you usually feel it — with honesty, not performance.”

When finished, the group observes the full “body of emotions.”

I.3.2.B. Individual Reflection in a Group Setting (1 min)

Once all participants have placed their emotion label on the collective body outline, invite the whole group to stand around it and observe in silence for a moment.

Facilitator Script:

“Take a moment to look at this body filled with emotions.

This is our shared emotional landscape.

What do you notice?”

I.3.2.C. Prompts for Group Discussion / Integration (3–6 min)

Choose 2–3 prompts depending on the group dynamics and available time.

Open Question:

“Observing this common body, this common emotional landscape — what do you feel?”

Optional Prompts:

- What surprised you about where people placed certain emotions?
- Which placements felt familiar or similar to your own experience?
- Did any emotion appear in a place you never thought about before?
- What patterns do you see — clusters, contrasts, absences?
- What do you notice about your own emotional “mapping” compared to the group?
- What does it feel like to see all emotions — pleasant and unpleasant — belonging in one body?

Facilitator Note:

This group dialogue:

- normalises emotional diversity (there is no “right place” to feel an emotion)
 - reveals how emotional learning is often social and cultural
 - reinforces the idea that emotions are embodied rather than purely abstract
 - supports group connection through shared recognition
 - prepares participants for later emotional reflection and theory integration
-

I.3.2.D. Optional Final Question to Connect to the Next Phase

“Can you remember a moment when an emotion appeared before you had time to think?

How did your body notice it?”

This can lead naturally into the next phase of emotional exploration and reflection.

I.4. Individual Writing – Note to the Self (7–10 min)

Activity Type

Personal reflection / Journaling

Timing

7–10 min (depending on group size and pace)

Materials

- Paper sheet or personal journal
- Pen or coloured pens

Goal

- To give participants private space to process their emotional experience so far.
 - To normalise the full spectrum of emotional responses — pleasant, unpleasant, surprising or confusing.
 - To support embodied integration before moving into deeper reflection and discussion.
 - To strengthen awareness of emotional and bodily experience.
-

I.4.A. Framing (Trauma-Informed + Sovereignty) (1–2 min)

Facilitator Script:

“We’ve moved, interacted and explored emotions in different ways.

Now you’ll have a few minutes to write just for yourself.

This is private — you will not be asked to share unless you choose to.

You can write in any language, use single words, sentences, drawings or symbols — whatever helps you connect with what feels true for you.”

“You are free to include both what felt good and what felt difficult, confusing or unpleasant.

There is no expectation to perform insight or positivity. The full spectrum is welcome.”

Remind participants that they may:

- stop writing at any point
- look around the room
- pause quietly
- or simply rest with the pen in their hand if something feels emotionally intense

Participants keep full agency throughout the activity.

I.4.B. Writing Prompts (Choose 2–4 Depending on Flow) (3 min)

Participants may respond to any of the following:

- What emotions did I meet today?
- How did my body react to these emotions?
- What surprised me or felt unfamiliar?
- What do I want to remember from this experience?
- What do I prefer not to remember?
- Was there something I noticed today that I had not been aware of before?

Facilitator Note:

Emphasise that there is no “right answer.”

This writing is not meant to produce insight or polished reflection, but to capture an honest snapshot of the participant’s present experience.

I.4.C. Closing the Writing (1 min)

Facilitator Script:

“Take a moment to finish your last sentence or word.

Fold the paper and keep it with you.

You may want to revisit it later today, or you may decide it stays private.

Thank yourself for showing up honestly on the page.”

No sharing is required.

Participants may choose later whether they want to revisit or share parts of the writing.

I.4.D. Facilitator Perspective – Why This Writing Matters (1–2 min)

Facilitator Note:

This journaling step:

- supports grounding after social and embodied activity
- helps participants differentiate internal experience from group dynamics
- validates and integrates difficult emotions instead of bypassing them
- prepares the group for the River of Doubt & Emotional Perspectives activity
- strengthens agency and self-awareness

This reflection may remain internal to the facilitator and does not need to be explained fully to participants.

I.5. River of Doubt & Emotional Perspectives (25–30 min)

Activity Type

Movement-based reflection / Perspective-sharing / Group dialogue

Timing

25–30 min (depending on group size and pace)

Materials

- Large room
- Printed Wheels of Emotions (optional)

Goal

- To explore personal and cultural beliefs about emotions.
 - To create space for nuance, difference and emotional complexity.
 - To help participants recognise how emotional beliefs are shaped socially, culturally and relationally.
 - To encourage curiosity and perspective-sharing without seeking consensus.
 - To prepare participants for deeper emotional reflection and later theoretical integration.
-

I.5.A. River of Doubt – Personal Positioning (7–10 min)

Activity Type

Movement-based reflection / Self-awareness

Goal

- To help participants recognise their own emotional beliefs.
- To allow complexity rather than simple “yes/no” positioning.
- To warm up the group for deeper emotional conversation.

Set-Up

Create a physical line in the room:

YES ————— MAYBE ————— NO

Explain:

“This is not a test. It’s a way to notice your position on different statements.

You can move at any time if something shifts.”

Process

- Read one statement.
 - Participants choose their place on the line.
 - Invite 1–2 optional sharings:
“If you’d like, tell us why you’re standing where you are.”
 - Validate movement and flexibility:
“If someone’s comment makes you reconsider, feel free to move.”
-

Statements (Choose 3–4)

- Am I interested in emotions?
- Am I an emotional person?
- Do I feel carried away by my emotions?
- Do I have difficulty regulating my emotions?
- Do I struggle with my emotions in relation to others?

Facilitator Note:

- Keep sharing short to maintain rhythm.
 - This is not a debate yet — it is personal positioning.
 - Affirm diversity of experience without trying to move participants toward agreement.
-

I.5.B. Debate Statements – Collective Exploration (10–15 min)

Activity Type

Guided debate / Perspective-sharing

Goal

- To expose different cultural narratives about emotions.
- To practise speaking from personal experience.
- To understand how differently people interpret the same statement.
- To create space for emotional nuance and complexity.

Debate Statements (Choose 2–3)

- Emotions are dangerous.
 - Emotions are important when making life decisions.
 - We must control our emotions so they do not disturb us.
 - Logic is a better ally than emotions.
 - Emotions get in the way of functioning. (*optional*)
-

How the Debate Works

Participants place themselves on the YES / MAYBE / NO line again.

Invite voluntary sharing:

“If you want, share why you’re standing there.”

Encourage nuance:

“Maybe you agree with part of the sentence, but not fully — you can stand anywhere.”

Point out misunderstandings gently when useful:

“Sometimes two people disagree only because they interpret the word differently.”

“I hear that you both value emotional stability, but you interpret the word ‘control’ differently.”

Invite flexibility and movement:

“If something you hear shifts your understanding, you may change position.”

Reinforce “I” language:

“Speak from your experience. No correcting, no convincing.”

Facilitator Note:

The facilitator tone should remain:

- curious
- steady
- non-judgemental

The goal is not consensus.

The activity explores complexity, interpretation and emotional diversity rather than “correct positions.”

Participants may appear to disagree while actually sharing similar underlying needs, fears or values.

“We are not seeking consensus — we are expanding the map.”

I.5.C. Reflection Questions (2–5 min)

Choose 1–3 questions depending on group energy and timing.

- What did you notice about the diversity of emotional perspectives in the group?
- Did you hear something that surprised or challenged you?
- Did your position shift at any point? Why?
- What makes conversations about emotions difficult in everyday life?
- How do culture, upbringing or relationships shape emotional beliefs?

Facilitator Note:

The goal is not to resolve disagreement, but to increase awareness of how emotional beliefs are shaped socially, culturally and relationally.

This conversation also prepares participants for later theory and self-compassion work by normalising emotional diversity and ambiguity.

Transition to the Next Activity:

“So far, we explored emotions through movement, social interaction and collective perspectives.

We will now shift toward a more structured reflection on emotions, emotional awareness and self-compassion.”

I.6. Meeting an Emotion & Gallery of Emotions (60–75 min)¹⁰

Activity Type

Somatic awareness → Creative processing → Relational reflection → Group ritual

Timing

60–75 min (depending on group size)

Materials

- Mats or chairs
- Optional soft background music
- Paper and colours
- Clay, natural elements or recycled materials
- Tape or materials for displaying artworks

¹⁰ You can also see this exercise there : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpg4RW4xohs>
Or an other version here : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M35d1Cm1SQ0>

Goal

- To guide participants into meeting one emotion through body awareness, imagination, symbolic creation and relational witnessing.
 - To support emotional awareness without forcing disclosure or interpretation.
 - To externalise emotional experience through creative expression.
 - To transform individual emotional experience into shared group art and collective witnessing.
 - To strengthen emotional literacy, embodiment and self-awareness through experiential exploration.
-

I.6.A. Body Scan — The Body as Gateway to Emotion (7–10 min)

Activity Type

Guided somatic meditation

Goal

- To build embodied awareness before emotional exploration.
- To help participants notice sensory and bodily experience without needing to change it.
- To create grounding and internal safety before meeting an emotion.

Materials

- Mats or chairs
 - Optional soft background music
-

Facilitator Script

“Find a position that feels supportive for your body — lying down, sitting on the floor or sitting on a chair with your feet grounded.

You may close your eyes or soften your gaze. Nothing to achieve, nothing to fix — just notice.”

“Begin by bringing awareness to the top of your head... forehead... eyes... jaw.

Notice sensations: warmth, coolness, pressure, tightness, ease — or nothing at all. All sensations are valid.”

“Let your attention move down to your neck and shoulders.

Notice if they are holding anything today — effort, alertness, tiredness.

No need to change anything.”

“Move awareness down your arms, elbows, wrists, fingertips... noticing weight, temperature or subtle vibrations.”

“Feel your breathing in the chest and upper back.

Notice the movement — natural, without forcing.”

“Bring awareness to your stomach area.

Rising and falling. Softness or tension. Just observing.”

“Scan the hips... thighs... knees... calves... ankles... feet... toes.

Let your attention slowly travel through each area.”

“Now imagine your whole body as one field of sensation.

One breath, one space.”

“You can stay with this sensation for a couple of breaths.”

Facilitator Note:

The intention here is awareness rather than deep relaxation.

Participants are invited to observe bodily sensations without trying to calm, fix or regulate themselves.

I.6.B. Visualisation — Meeting One Emotion (8–10 min)

Activity Type

Guided imagery / Somatic reflection

Goal

- To help participants encounter one emotion safely and curiously.
 - To strengthen emotional awareness through imagery and bodily sensation.
 - To encourage relationship with the emotion rather than avoidance or suppression.
-

Facilitator Script

“Now that the body is awake and present, I invite you to meet one emotion today.

Not the most overwhelming one — something real, but manageable. Around a 4 or 5 out of 10 in intensity.”

“Let an emotion come — naturally, without forcing.

It might be something familiar... something subtle... or something waiting to be seen.”

“Where do you feel this emotion most clearly in your body?

Chest, stomach, throat, hands, face, back...

What is the sensation like?”

“If this emotion had a colour, what colour would it be?

If it had a texture — smooth, rough, heavy, spiky, warm — what would it be?

Is it still or moving? Expanding or contracting?”

“Imagine sitting next to this emotion — as if it is a guest in your inner home.

You do not need to change it or solve it.

Just be with it.

As if you are saying: ‘I see you. You can be here.’”

“Let the image soften.

Feel your body on the floor or chair again.

Take a breath.

And when you are ready, gently open your eyes.”

Facilitator Note:

Encourage participants to choose an emotion that feels emotionally manageable rather than overwhelming.

Participants remain free to pause, observe, modify or disengage from the exercise at any time.

I.6.C. Creative Symbolisation — Giving Form to the Emotion (15–20 min)¹¹

Activity Type

Artistic externalisation

Goal

- To transform emotional experience into symbolic form.
- To support non-verbal emotional expression.
- To deepen the relationship between body sensation, imagination and symbolic creation.

Materials

- Paper
 - Colours
 - Clay
 - Natural or recycled materials
-

Instructions (Facilitator Script)

“Choose the materials that call you.

Let your hands follow the emotion — shape it, draw it, assemble it.

¹¹ You can find an exemple of this exercise there : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoYxb0ui_EU

It does not need to be beautiful or recognisable.”

Remind participants:

“This is not an art class. This is your emotion speaking through form.”

Facilitator Note:

The goal is relationship with the emotion, not artistic performance or interpretation.

Participants may create:

- abstract forms
- symbolic images
- realistic representations
- fragmented pieces
- humorous or fictional expressions

All forms are welcome.

I.6.D. Individual Micro-Reflection (5–7 min)

Activity Type

Private reflection / Journaling

Reflection Prompts

- How did my body feel during the encounter and creation?
- Did the emotion become clearer, stronger, softer or farther away?
- What happened in my body?

“Place your creation in front of you.

Observe how you feel.

Place it nearer, farther away, beside you or slightly behind you.

What distance feels right between you and this emotion now?”

- Is there a message this emotion wants to give me?
-

I.6.E. Dialogue in Pairs — Witnessing the Emotion (10–12 min)

Activity Type

Relational reflection

Instructions

“Find a partner.

Place your creation between you — as a third presence in the conversation.”

Participants are invited to share openly from their experience.

If helpful, they may use the prompts below.

Encourage participants to notice what happens both while speaking and while listening.

Each partner takes a turn (approximately 5–6 min each).

Reflection Prompts

- What is this emotion like for me?
- What do I understand about it now?
- What surprised me?
- What do I need in relation to it?

Listener Role:

“You witness. No analysing, no advice. Your presence is enough.”

Then switch roles.

I.6.F. Gallery of Emotions — Placement & Grand Opening (20–30 min)

Activity Type

Spatial ritual / Performative sharing

Step 1— Placement in the Space (3–5 min)

Participants prepare the gallery by choosing where and how their emotion wants to exist in the room.

Facilitator Instructions:

“Take your creation and place it somewhere in the space — anywhere it feels right.

It can be on the wall, on the floor, in a corner, up high, grouped with others or standing alone.

Let the emotion guide the placement.”

Facilitator Note:

Placement itself can become symbolic.

Distance, height, grouping and isolation may all communicate emotional meaning.

No explanation is required yet.

Step 2 — Group Leaves the Room (Optional but Powerful Transition)

“We step outside to mark a transition — when we return, the room becomes a gallery.”

Facilitator Introduction (optional theatrical framing):

“Good evening, everyone. Welcome.

Please allow me a moment to ensure that we are all present and accounted for... Perfect.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to *The Gallery of Emotions*.

Tonight, you will witness how different inner experiences have been transformed into visible forms — symbols, textures, objects, images and emotional landscapes.

As you move through the space, we invite you to explore slowly, openly and curiously.

Some artists may present their work quietly and reflectively.

Others may choose movement, performance, storytelling or fiction.

Each presentation is valid.

You are invited not to judge whether something is ‘real’ or ‘imagined,’ but to meet it as an emotional truth expressed through art.

Please, let the gallery open.”

Facilitator Note:

This theatrical framing is optional and may be simplified, shortened or adapted according to the group, context and facilitation style.

The intention is to create a ritual transition from ordinary workshop space into symbolic and imaginative space.

Step 3 — Silent Viewing (5–7 min)

The group re-enters as if entering an art gallery.

Facilitator Script:

“As visitors, move silently through the space.

Take time to look closely and slowly.

Notice textures, shapes, distance and emotional atmosphere — without judgement.”

This phase strengthens presence and collective witnessing.

Step 4 — Guided Tour & Presentations (10–15 min)

Move together through the gallery, stopping at each artwork.

Instructions to Participants:

“When we arrive at your piece, you are invited to present it in any way you choose.”

Participants may:

- describe it plainly
- tell a story
- move or gesture
- speak from the emotion
- present something symbolic, fictional or abstract
- remain mostly silent

Facilitator Reminder:

“You are free to choose how much or how little you reveal.

Your presentation may be fully personal, fictional, symbolic or somewhere in between.”

This supports emotional safety and participant agency.

For smaller groups, facilitators may also invite open discussion:

- “What do you notice in this artwork?”
 - “How do you feel in front of it?”
 - “Do you have questions about the creative process?”
-

Step 5 — Closing the Gallery (3–5 min)

After the final presentation:

“Walk once more through the gallery in silence.

Notice what stays with you — an image, a colour, a movement or a feeling.”

Close with one collective gesture:

- applause
- a shared breath
- a moment of silence
- or a simple closing circle

Final Micro-Reflection Round

“One word or one image I take with me from this gallery is...”

I.6.F. Reflection Questions

Choose a few questions depending on timing and group energy.

- What was it like to meet one emotion so directly?
- How did the creative process influence your understanding of the emotion?
- What shifted during the partner dialogue?
- How did it feel to witness others' emotional worlds in the gallery?
- What did this sequence teach you about your relationship with emotions?

I.7. Closing Ritual – Pass the Offering / Permission (10–15 min)

Activity Type

Closing circle / Collective reflection

Timing

10–15 min (depending on group size and available time)

Group Format

Whole circle or smaller circles depending on group size

Goal

- To close the session with presence and mutual recognition.
- To transform personal insight — even something small — into a shared “permission” the group can also receive.
- To finish with emotional grounding rather than cognitive overload.
- To support a culture of care, agency and self-compassion.

This ritual may also stand alone without the preceding theoretical input.

I.7.A. Setting the Tone (1–2 min)

Facilitator Script:

“Let’s come into a circle.

We spent the day meeting emotions — in our body, in movement, in images and in each other.

Before we close, we’ll take a moment to acknowledge something we want for ourselves, and gently offer it as a permission to the group as well.”

A short pause.

“This is not about saying something deep or impressive.

It is simply about noticing what you may need right now — rest, courage, space, softness, clearer boundaries, breath — and naming it.”

Group Agreements for the Ritual

- No reactions, interruptions or comforting gestures during the sharing.
- Everyone listens fully.
- After the round ends, the facilitator may invite one collective breath or gesture, but not individual commentary.
- Participants are always free to pass without explanation.

This helps the ritual remain spacious, grounded and non-performative.

I.7.B. What to Say — The Template (5–6 min)

A short and simple sentence is enough.

Participants may use phrases such as:

- “What I want for myself right now is... and I offer this as permission for you too.”
 - “A permission I need today is... and I hope it supports you as well.”
 - “I realise I need... and by naming it, I give you this permission too.”
-

Example Offerings

- “I want permission to rest even when I haven’t finished everything.”
- “I want permission to say no without explaining.”
- “I want permission to feel what I feel, without rushing to change it.”
- “I want permission to take things slowly.”
- “I want permission to be imperfect.”

Participants may also choose softer language such as:

- “I wish...”
- “I hope...”
- “I need...”

Facilitator Note:

For large groups, it may help to:

- keep a clear speaking order
- invite shorter responses
- encourage one sentence per participant

Smaller groups may allow more spontaneity and spaciousness.

I.7.C. Closing the Ritual (2 min)

Facilitator Script:

“Take one breath together — in... and out.

Notice what you offered and what you received.

You can carry whatever felt useful with you, and leave behind whatever is not.”

Optional Collective Gestures

- placing a hand on the heart
 - a bow of the head
 - a shared breath
 - a brief silence
-

I.7.D. Reflection Questions (Optional) (2 min)

- What was it like to name a permission out loud?
- Did someone else’s offering resonate with you?
- What permission would you like to remember when leaving today?

Theory & Facilitation Notes — Session 1

This section offers theoretical references and facilitation perspectives connected to Session 1¹².

The aim is not to turn the workshop into a lecture, but to support facilitators in understanding:

- the educational rationale behind the activities,
- the emotional and relational processes involved,
- and the broader frameworks that inform the session design.

Facilitators are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this material before implementation and to adapt the depth of theory according to the group, context and available time.

The workshop itself should remain primarily experiential.

¹² You can explore further by reading our article 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 on our website
<https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-articles/>

I.T.1. Emotions, Embodiment & Emotional Awareness

I.T.1.A. What Is an Emotion?

There is no single universally accepted definition of emotion across psychology, neuroscience and philosophy. However, many contemporary approaches describe emotions as psycho-physical processes involving:

- bodily activation,
- perception,
- interpretation,
- meaning-making,
- and relational or behavioural tendencies.

Emotions are not experienced only as thoughts. They also involve:

- bodily sensations,
- impulses,
- movement,
- posture,
- breathing,
- facial expression,
- attention,
- and interpersonal interaction.

For this reason, Session 1 approaches emotions experientially and somatically rather than only cognitively.

I.T.1.B. Three Characteristics of Emotions

Many emotional theories describe emotions as processes that are:

Automatic

Emotions often arise before conscious choice or deliberate reasoning.

A person may feel tension, fear, irritation or attraction before fully understanding why.

Psycho-Physical

Emotions involve both mind and body.

They may appear through:

- thoughts,
- sensations,
- posture,
- breathing,
- physiological activation,

- impulses,
- and relational responses.

This is why body-based exploration can support emotional awareness.

Adaptive

Emotions evolved partly as responses that help humans:

- survive,
- orient,
- connect,
- protect themselves,
- and respond to changing environments.

Different emotional reactions may become more or less helpful depending on:

- context,
- regulation,
- flexibility,
- and relational awareness.

The workshop therefore approaches emotions neither as enemies nor as unquestionable truths, but as experiences that can offer information, protection, connection or challenge.

I.T.1.C. The Body as Gateway

Several somatic and experiential approaches suggest that bodily awareness can support emotional awareness.

Eugene Gendlin's concept of the *felt sense* describes a bodily knowing that often appears before clear language or interpretation.

Similarly, body-oriented and trauma-informed approaches highlight how emotional experiences may continue to influence:

- muscular tension,
- activation states,
- breathing patterns,
- posture,
- and relational behaviour.

Contemporary neuroscience researchers such as Antonio Damasio have also highlighted the close relationship between bodily states, emotions and meaning-making processes.

In this session, body awareness is used:

- not as diagnosis,
- not as therapy,
- but as a gentle entry point into emotional recognition.

The goal is awareness rather than catharsis.

I.T.1.D. Emotional Diversity & Regulation

Participants often arrive with very different beliefs about emotions.

Some may have learned that emotions are:

- dangerous,
- irrational,
- shameful,
- weak,
- or disruptive.

Others may strongly identify with emotional expression.

The session therefore avoids presenting emotions as:

- “good” or “bad,”
- problems to eliminate,
- or truths that must always be followed unquestioningly.

Instead, emotions are approached as experiences that can:

- inform,
 - overwhelm,
 - protect,
 - distort,
 - connect,
 - or guide,
- depending on context and regulation.

The aim is not emotional suppression, nor emotional impulsivity, but greater awareness and relationship with emotional experience.

I.T.2. Models of Emotion

I.T.2.A. Ekman's Primary Emotions

Psychologist Paul Ekman proposed that some emotional expressions may be recognised across cultures.

His early work focused on six primary emotions:

- joy
- sadness
- anger
- fear
- disgust
- surprise

These categories are not absolute or universally agreed upon, but they remain influential in emotional literacy and emotion research.

The Emotion Labels activity loosely draws from the idea that emotions may be communicated and recognised through:

- facial expression,
 - body posture,
 - rhythm,
 - gesture,
 - and non-verbal interaction.
-

I.T.2.B. Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

Robert Plutchik proposed a model in which emotions:

- vary in intensity,
- exist in oppositional pairs,
- and combine into more complex emotional states.

Examples include:

- annoyance → anger → rage
- serenity → joy → ecstasy

The model also suggests emotional blends, such as:

- joy + trust = love
- fear + surprise = alarm

The Wheel of Emotions can help participants understand that emotions are rarely simple or isolated.

This framework connects especially well with:

- emotional mapping,
 - symbolic expression,
 - and the Gallery of Emotions.
-

I.T.2.C. Positive Emotions & Resilience (Barbara Fredrickson)

Barbara Fredrickson's *broaden-and-build* theory suggests that positive emotions may help expand:

- cognitive flexibility,
- creativity,
- openness,
- social connection,
- and resilience.

Positive emotions are not presented here as mandatory positivity or emotional denial.

Rather, they are understood as experiences that may support:

- recovery,
- connection,
- exploration,
- and emotional flexibility.

Examples include:

- gratitude
 - hope
 - inspiration
 - amusement
 - tenderness
 - love
-

I.T.3. Self-Compassion Theory¹³

I.T.3.A. What Is Compassion?

Compassion is commonly described as:

- recognising suffering,
- being emotionally moved by it,
- and responding with care and supportive intention.

Compassion is not:

- pity,
- passivity,
- indulgence,
- or avoidance of responsibility.

It may involve:

- tenderness,
 - courage,
 - honesty,
 - protection,
 - accountability,
 - and relational care.
-

I.T.3.B. What Is Self-Compassion?

Kristin Neff's framework describes self-compassion through three interconnected components:

1. Mindfulness

Recognising pain or difficulty without suppression, exaggeration or over-identification.

2. Self-Kindness

Responding to oneself with warmth and support rather than harsh self-attack.

3. Common Humanity

Recognising that struggle, imperfection and vulnerability are part of shared human experience.

Self-compassion is not:

- self-pity,
- narcissism,

¹³ You can by reading our article 13 "Burnout, Compassion, Enthusiasm" on our website :
<https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-articles/>

- avoidance,
- or “letting ourselves off the hook.”

It is a different way of relating to inner experience.

I.T.3.C. Common Obstacles

Participants often recognise three recurring patterns:

Over-Identification

Becoming completely absorbed in the emotional experience.

Self-Judgment

Responding to pain with shame, criticism or attack.

Isolation

Believing:

- “Only I feel this way.”
- “Something is wrong with me.”

The activities in Session 1 are designed partly to soften these patterns through:

- embodiment,
 - shared witnessing,
 - play,
 - symbolic expression,
 - and collective reflection.
-

I.T.3.D. Gilbert’s Three-System Model

Paul Gilbert’s Compassion Focused Therapy proposes three broad emotional regulation systems.

Threat System

Associated with:

- fear,
- anxiety,
- shame,
- anger,
- hypervigilance,
- and survival responses.

This system helps detect danger and mobilise protection.

Drive System

Associated with:

- achievement,
- motivation,
- performance,
- stimulation,
- ambition,
- and reward-seeking.

This system helps humans pursue goals and resources.

Soothing / Safeness System

Associated with:

- rest,
- connection,
- care,
- emotional regulation,
- safety,
- compassion,
- and co-regulation.

Many contemporary environments strongly stimulate:

- threat,
 - and drive systems,
- while the soothing system may remain under-supported.

Compassion practices may help strengthen experiences of:

- emotional safeness,
- regulation,
- grounding,
- and supportive inner relating.

Many Session 1 activities — especially grounding, witnessing, pair dialogue and the closing ritual — are partly designed to support this system.

Within this framework, compassion is understood not as passivity or avoidance, but as an active orientation toward suffering that may involve courage, accountability, emotional regulation and relational care.

I.T.3.E. Wellbeing Beyond Symptom Reduction (Corey Keyes)

Corey Keyes' model of mental health emphasises that wellbeing is not simply the absence of psychological distress.

His framework includes:

- emotional wellbeing,
- psychological wellbeing,
- and social wellbeing.

This perspective aligns with the workshop's broader approach, which focuses not only on reducing distress, but also on:

- connection,
- meaning,
- emotional awareness,
- relational support,
- participation,
- and personal agency.

This framework also informed the evaluation approach of the *comPASSION is sexy* project through the use of the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF).

I.T.4. Connecting Theory to Session 1 Activities

I.T.4.A. Mindfulness & Embodied Awareness

Related activities:

- Body Scan
- Emotion Journey Through Movement
- Visualisation — Meeting One Emotion

These activities support noticing emotional and bodily experience without immediately trying to control or analyse it.

I.T.4.B. Emotional Externalisation

Related activities:

- Creative Symbolisation
- Gallery of Emotions
- Puzzle of Emotions

Externalising emotions through image, movement or symbolic form may help participants:

- observe emotional experience with greater distance,
 - reduce over-identification,
 - and access non-verbal understanding.
-

I.T.4.C. Projection & Social Interpretation

Related activities:

- Emotion Labels
- River of Doubt
- Debate Statements

These activities explore how emotions are:

- interpreted socially,
- projected onto others,
- culturally shaped,
- and relationally negotiated.

Different participants may interpret the same emotional expression in very different ways.

I.T.4.D. Common Humanity & Shared Emotional Experience

Related activities:

- Puzzle of Emotions
- Pair Dialogue
- Closing Ritual

These activities reinforce the idea that emotional struggle and emotional diversity are part of shared human experience rather than personal failure.

I.T.5. Facilitation Considerations

I.T.5.A. Trauma-Informed Practice

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- offer choice and flexibility,
- avoid emotional coercion,
- normalise passing or modifying activities,
- and prioritise participant agency.

Participants should never feel forced to:

- disclose personal experiences,
- explain emotions,
- or remain in an exercise that feels overwhelming.

The workshop is educational and experiential, not therapeutic.

I.T.5.B. Non-Pathologising Facilitation

Facilitators should avoid:

- diagnosing,
- analysing participants psychologically,
- or framing emotional responses as “wrong.”

Emotional experiences may be:

- contradictory,
- confusing,
- ambivalent,
- culturally shaped,
- or difficult to verbalise.

This complexity is welcome.

I.T.5.C. Relational Facilitation

Many activities in Session 1 rely on:

- witnessing rather than fixing,
- listening rather than correcting,
- and curiosity rather than certainty.

The facilitator's role is not to produce emotional breakthroughs, but to support:

- presence,
 - safety,
 - exploration,
 - and relational awareness.
-

I.T.5.D. Adapting the Session

The session may be adapted according to:

- age group,
- language accessibility,
- emotional readiness,
- mobility needs,
- neurodiversity,
- cultural context,
- and available time.

Adaptation should preserve:

- participant agency,
- emotional safety,
- and experiential integrity,
rather than rigidly preserving form.

Facilitators are encouraged to continuously observe the emotional readiness, participation level and boundaries of the group, adapting pacing and depth when needed.

II. Session 2 — Systems: External and Internal Roles

Overall Goal

To explore how we move within systems — families, communities, professional environments and our inner world of “parts.”

Through embodied play, reflection, storytelling and symbolic exploration, participants recognise systemic roles (Drama Triangle, Loyal Soldier, Inner Critic, Inner Child) and connect these with compassion-based ways of relating to themselves and others.

The goal is not to help people simply endure systems that lack humanity, meaning or care, but to strengthen the capacity to recognise systemic patterns, respond consciously, create change where possible, and step away when necessary.

Estimated Duration

Approximately 3–3.5 hours depending on:

- group size
 - depth of sharing
 - movement pace
 - sculpting and reflection duration
 - optional theory moments
 - adaptation choices made by the facilitator
-

Materials for Session 2

- chairs
- balloons
- needle or pin (used only by facilitator if included)
- soft balls or objects for systems energisers
- paper and pens
- optional printed Drama Triangle diagram
- optional music speaker
- mats or comfortable seating
- optional objects/materials for symbolic work

II.0 Structure (Overflow Version)

Check-In – “The Weather Inside Me”

Reflection on Previous Session

Systems Energizers – Balls, Chairs, Triangles & Balloon–Needle

Systems & Drama Triangle

Partner & Group Conversations

The Story of the Loyal Soldier – Sculpting Ritual

Closing Circle – Name, Feeling, Insight

Theoretical Notes for Facilitators — Session 2

II.1. Check-In – “How Is the Weather Inside Me Right Now?” (8–10 min)

Activity Type

Grounding / Group check-in / Ritual

Timing

8–10 min

Materials

None

(optional: a talking piece to pass around in the circle)

Goal

- To create presence and connection at the start of the session.
 - To ground participants in their body and emotions before moving into group work.
 - To encourage simple, metaphorical self-expression through the image of “inner weather.”
-

1. Settling the Group

Create a circle with all participants.

Facilitator Script:

“Let’s begin by arriving together.

If you feel comfortable, close your eyes or soften your gaze, let your feet touch the ground if possible, and take three or four slow breaths.”

“Bring your attention gently to your body.

Notice any sensations, feelings or energy present right now.”

2. Framing the Check-In

Facilitator Script:

“Imagine that your inner state right now is like weather or a landscape.

What kind of weather is inside you today?

Sunny, cloudy, stormy, foggy, changing skies, snowy mountain, windy sea, night sky full of stars...

There is no right or wrong answer.”

3. Sharing

Facilitator Script:

“When you’re ready, slowly open your eyes.

Take a moment to notice the group again.”

“Share one or two words that describe the ‘weather inside you’ right now.”

Go around the circle, giving each participant space to speak briefly.

Acknowledge and thank participants for sharing without interpreting or commenting extensively.

Facilitator Note — Why Begin With the Body?

Beginning with bodily awareness can help participants:

- arrive more fully in the present moment,
- notice emotional states before analysing them,
- recognise tension, activation or emotional needs,
- and develop greater awareness of their internal state.

It may also help facilitators sense:

- the group’s energy,
 - pacing needs,
 - emotional readiness,
 - and the level of activation or openness in the room.
-

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- How did it feel to describe your inner state through weather rather than direct emotional language?
- Did hearing others’ “weather reports” affect your awareness of the group atmosphere?

II.2. Reflections About the Previous Session (10–15 min)

Activity Type

Group reflection / Transition ritual

Timing

10–15 min

Materials

None

(optional: paper and pens for brief personal notes before sharing)

Goal

- To create continuity between sessions by giving space to recall and integrate previous experiences.
 - To allow participants to voice insights, difficulties or questions emerging from the previous session.
 - To strengthen the learning arc by connecting previous experiences with the new session.
-

II.2.A. Silent Reflection (1–2 min)

Facilitator Script:

“Take a moment to recall the previous session.

Was there an experience, a thought, a feeling or an image that stayed with you?”

II.2.B. Sharing (8–12 min)

Facilitator Script:

“Please share one thing you noticed.

It can be:

- something you remembered,
- something that stayed with you,
- something you reflected on afterward,
- or even something you found difficult, surprising or unclear.”

Participants may share in circle order or through popcorn sharing depending on the group dynamic.

II.2.C. Transition

Facilitator Script:

“Thank you for sharing.

Let’s carry these threads forward as we enter today’s session.”

Facilitator Note

Keep this check-in relatively short.

The goal is:

- continuity,
- integration,
- and reconnection with the previous experience,
not deep processing of every emotional response.

Encourage participants to speak briefly so everyone has space to contribute.

For groups meeting across multiple weeks, facilitators may invite participants to reflect on how the previous session influenced their daily life, relationships or self-awareness between meetings.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- Did anything from the previous session stay with you afterward?
- Was there a moment you continued thinking about after the session ended?
- What do you hope to carry forward into today's session?

II.3. Systems Energizers – Balls, Turning Chairs, Triangles & Balloon–Needle (20–40 min)

Activity Type

Energizers / Group-building / Embodied systems exploration

Timing

20–40 min depending on:

- number of activities chosen,
- group energy,
- and depth of reflection.

Most exercises last approximately 3–15 minutes.

Materials

- Spacious room for movement
- Soft balls or juggling balls
- Chairs (one per participant)
- Balloons
- Needles or pins (optional and used carefully)

Goal

- To increase presence, attention and group connection.
- To explore how systems function through embodied experience.
- To observe how individual actions influence collective dynamics.
- To introduce themes of interdependence, roles, adaptation and systemic movement.

Facilitator Note:

The facilitator may choose 2–4 activities depending on:

- energy level,
- group needs,
- timing,
- and the emotional intensity of the session.

The goal is not competition or performance, but embodied observation of group and system dynamics.

II.3.A. Balls Game (5–15 min)

Goal

- To increase presence and attention.
- To strengthen coordination and collective awareness.
- To experience how systems adapt and reorganise through movement.

Materials

Soft balls or juggling balls

Instructions

Create a circle with all participants.

Begin by passing one ball in one direction.

For example:

everyone passes the ball to the person on their right.

Facilitator Script:

“Create eye contact with the person next to you.

Pass the ball with attention.”

Begin slowly and increase difficulty gradually as concentration develops.

Allow participants time to:

- adapt to the rhythm,
- understand the pattern,
- and coordinate collectively.

Once the group becomes comfortable, gradually add more balls into the circle.

While the balls continue moving:

Facilitator Script:

“Now notice carefully:
from whom are you receiving the ball,
and to whom are you sending it.”

Once participants become familiar with the pattern:

Facilitator Script:

“Now we’ll continue the same order — but begin walking slowly through the space.”

Participants continue passing while moving freely in the room.

Difficulty may gradually increase through:

- faster walking,
 - more balls,
 - changing pace,
 - or reduced verbal coordination.
-

II.3.B. Turning Chairs (10 min)

Goal

- To explore collective coordination and group dynamics.
- To experience adaptation, anticipation and systemic movement.
- To observe how one action affects the whole group.

Materials

One chair per participant plus one additional empty chair

Instructions

Each participant takes a chair and sits in a circle or open formation.

Place one empty chair somewhere in the space.

Facilitator Script:

“The game is simple:
your collective goal is to stop me from sitting on the empty chair.”

“There are only a few rules:

- you may not touch me,
- you may not move the chairs,
- the only thing you can do is sit in the empty chair before I reach it.”

“If you stand up and lose contact with your chair, you must continue moving toward another chair.
You cannot return to the previous one.”

The facilitator begins slowly approaching the empty chair from different directions.

Participants quickly reorganise themselves to prevent the facilitator from sitting.

As the group improves, the facilitator may:

- move faster,
 - change direction,
 - or create more pressure on the system.
-

II.3.C. Equilateral Triangles (3–5 min)

Goal

- To explore interdependence and instability inside systems.
 - To experience how one movement influences the whole group.
 - To observe collective adaptation physically.
-

Instructions

Participants walk freely through the space.

Facilitator Script:

“Secretly choose two other people.”

“When I clap my hands, your goal is to form an equilateral triangle with those two people: same approximate distance between all three.”

After the clap, participants continuously reposition themselves.

The system often becomes unstable because everyone is simultaneously adapting to everyone else.

After some time, the facilitator claps again and the group freezes.

Participants may reveal:

- who they chose,
- what was easy,
- what was difficult,
- and what they noticed about the system.

If the system stabilises, the facilitator may move one participant slightly and invite the group to observe how the entire system reorganises.

II.3.D. Loving Trios (3–5 min)

Goal

- To explore attraction, avoidance and relational movement inside systems.
 - To observe how emotional dynamics influence collective behaviour.
-

Instructions

Participants move freely in the space.

Facilitator Script:

“Secretly choose:

- one person you will move away from,
- and one person you will move toward.”

“When I clap my hands:

move away from the first person,
and move toward the second person.”

The movement creates constantly shifting relational patterns across the group.

After freezing, invite brief observations about:

- emotional reactions,
 - confusion,
 - attraction,
 - avoidance,
 - and group dynamics.
-

II.3.E. Space System (3–5 min)

Goal

- To increase energy and movement awareness.
 - To experience how individual actions influence collective spatial organisation.
-

Instructions

Participants move freely through the space.

Facilitator Script:

“Choose one person silently.

When I say start, run seven circles clockwise around them.

When you finish, sit on the floor exactly where you are.”

The activity creates moving patterns and shifting spatial systems throughout the room.

Afterward, invite quick observations about:

- movement,
 - confusion,
 - orientation,
 - and adaptation.
-

II.3.F. Balloon & Needle (10–15 min)

Goal

- To explore authority, tension, responsibility and ambiguity inside systems.
- To reflect on agency, obedience, protection and collective meaning-making.
- To observe emotional and bodily reactions under uncertainty.

Materials

Balloons and needles or pins

Instructions

Place the group in a circle.

Distribute:

- one balloon,
- then one needle,
- then one balloon,
- then one needle,
around the circle.

Allow some silence and tension to emerge naturally during the distribution.

Facilitator Script:

“I will give the instructions only once.

There are only two rules:

- do not hurt yourself or anyone else,
- and the balloons should not explode.”

Then allow the group to respond freely.

Participants often begin negotiating:

- authority,
- cooperation,
- responsibility,
- fear,
- resistance,
- and interpretation of the rules.

Facilitator Note:

Participants may choose not to use the needle physically and may step out of the activity at any moment.

The exercise is not about tricking participants, but about observing:

- tension,
 - internalised rules,
 - authority,
 - ambiguity,
 - and systemic reactions.
-

II.3.G. Reflection Questions

Choose a few questions depending on timing and group energy.

- How did you feel during these activities?
- How did you feel inside the group?
- What did you notice about group or system dynamics?
- Did any exercise remind you of systems or situations from everyday life?
- How did the group react when uncertainty or pressure appeared?
- Did you notice moments of cooperation, leadership, confusion or resistance?

II.4. Systems & Drama Triangle – Embodied Introduction (25–35 min)

Activity Type

Embodied exploration / Systems awareness / Group analysis

Timing

25–35 min

Materials

- Open space with a clear “stage” and “audience” area
- Optional paperboard or whiteboard
- Optional markers

Goal

- To introduce systemic thinking through embodied experience.
 - To help participants recognise how relational roles can appear inside systems.
 - To explore the Drama Triangle through posture, feeling, observation and group reflection.
 - To prepare participants for deeper personal reflection in pairs.
-

II.4.A. Short Framing – From Systems to Roles (5 min)

Facilitator Script:

“In the previous activities, we explored how one movement can affect a whole group.

This also happens in human systems — families, friendships, teams, workplaces, communities.

A system is a group of elements or people that influence each other.

Sometimes systems support life, care and meaning.

Sometimes systems become rigid, exhausting or alienating.

The aim here is not to help people endure unhealthy systems, but to become more aware of how systems work, what roles we may take inside them, and how we might respond with more clarity, choice and compassion.”

“Now we will explore one relational pattern through the body.”

Facilitator Note:

Keep this framing short. The full theory of systems and the Drama Triangle belongs in the theoretical notes after the session.

II.4.B. Statues of the Drama Triangle (10–15 min)

Activity Type

Embodied role exploration / Group observation

Timing

10–15 min

Materials

Open space

Goal

- To make the Drama Triangle more concrete and accessible.
- To explore the roles of Victim, Rescuer and Persecutor through the body.
- To notice how roles feel from the inside and how they affect the whole system.

Facilitator Script:

"I would like three volunteers for the next exercise.

You will create one shared sculpture with three different characters interacting with each other."

"One of you will create a statue of the Victim.

One of you will create a statue of the Rescuer.

One of you will create a statue of the Persecutor."

"Take a few moments to find the posture, direction, distance and expression of your role.

You do not need to act or exaggerate. Let the body show something about the role."

Once the sculpture is formed:

"Stay there for a moment. Do not move yet.

The rest of the group will walk around and observe the system."

Invite the observing group to notice:

- distance between roles
- gaze
- power
- tension
- dependence
- direction of attention
- who seems active or passive
- who seems trapped or responsible

Then ask each person in the sculpture:

"How do you feel in this position?"

"What are you thinking?"

"What do you want to do?"

"What does your body want?"

Facilitator Note:

This is not about labelling participants personally as Victim, Rescuer or Persecutor.

The roles are explored as relational positions inside a system.

Avoid moralising the roles. Each role usually carries a hidden need, fear or strategy.

II.4.C. Collective Observation and Meaning-Making (10–15 min)

Facilitator Script:

“Let’s look at this as a system.

What do you notice?

What keeps the system in place?

What does each role seem to gain?

What might each role lose?

What would need to change for the system to become less rigid?”

You may write brief notes on a board using three columns:

- Role
- What this role may protect or gain
- What this role may lose or cost

Possible guiding questions:

- What does the Victim position make possible?
- What does it make difficult?
- What does the Rescuer gain by helping?
- What does the Rescuer lose?
- What does the Persecutor try to control or protect?
- What is the cost of that position?
- What happens to the whole system if one role changes?

Facilitator Note:

Keep the analysis experiential and accessible.

Do not turn this into a long theory lecture.

The aim is to let the group discover some of the logic of the Drama Triangle through observation.

The fuller explanation of the Drama Triangle and alternative roles will be included in the theoretical notes after the session.

II.4.D. Short Reflection Questions

- Do I recognise this dynamic in any system I know?
- Do I recognise myself, now or in the past, in one of these roles?
- What happens when a role becomes confused with identity?
- What might help someone step out of a rigid role?

Transition to the Next Activity:

“We have now explored systems and roles from the outside, through the body and through group observation.

Next, we will take time to reflect more personally on the systems we belong to and the roles we may know from the inside.”

II.5. Partner & Group Conversations (35–60 min)

Activity Type

Pair dialogue / Reflection / Theory integration

Timing

35–60 min depending on:

- number of questions chosen,
- depth of sharing,
- and available time.

Materials

- Quiet space for pair conversations
- Paper and pens (optional)

Goal

- To help participants personally connect with the systemic themes explored in the session.
- To deepen awareness of recurring relational roles and patterns.
- To create space for listening, witnessing and shared reflection.
- To support integration of the experiential activities through dialogue and personal meaning-making.

Facilitator Note:

Participants are not expected to analyse themselves “correctly.”

The purpose is exploration, curiosity and awareness — not diagnosis or forced disclosure.

Facilitators may choose fewer questions depending on:

- group energy,
- emotional intensity,
- and available time.

Introduction**Facilitator Script:**

“We’ve explored systems physically, relationally and symbolically.

Now we'll take some time to reflect more personally on:

- the systems we belong to,
- the roles we often take,
- and how these patterns may affect our emotions, relationships and behaviour.”

“You are invited to approach these questions with curiosity rather than self-judgment.”

Pair Sharing Structure

For most questions, participants may use the following structure:

- 2–3 minutes individual reflection or writing
- 3 minutes speaking for one partner
- 3 minutes speaking for the other partner

Participants are encouraged to:

- listen without interrupting,
 - avoid analysing or advising,
 - and focus on witnessing each other's experience.
-

Reflection Questions

Facilitators may choose 2–5 questions depending on timing and group readiness.

1. What did today's exploration of systems evoke in me?

- What emotions, memories or thoughts appeared?
 - Did any activity feel particularly familiar, uncomfortable or revealing?
-

2. What roles do I tend to take inside systems?

Facilitator Script:

“There are many possible roles:

the helper,

the responsible one,

the peacemaker,

the leader,

the good student,

the rebel,

the invisible one,

the strong one,

the perfectionist,
the caretaker...”

“Notice what roles often appear for you inside groups, relationships or systems.”

Participants reflect individually before sharing in pairs.

3. Exploring One System More Deeply

Participants choose one system from their life:

- family,
 - friendship,
 - workplace,
 - relationship,
 - educational setting,
 - community,
 - or another meaningful group.
-

Step 1 – Individual Reflection (3 min)

Participants write briefly about:

- the structure of the system,
 - recurring dynamics,
 - roles,
 - tensions,
 - spoken or unspoken rules,
 - and emotional atmosphere.
-

Step 2 – Sharing (3 min)

One partner speaks while the other listens silently.

Step 3 – Reflective Listening (2 min)

The listener briefly reflects back:

- what they understood,
- what stood out,
- or what themes they heard.

No interpretation, advice or judgment.

Step 4 – Clarification (2 min)

The first speaker may:

- clarify,
- adjust,
- or add anything that feels important.

Then partners switch roles.

4. What happens to me inside unhealthy or unbalanced systems?

- How do these systems affect my emotions or behaviour?
 - What happens in my body?
 - Do I become quieter, controlling, over-responsible, avoidant, hyper-alert, disconnected...?
-

5. What strategies do I use to cope inside systems?

Facilitator Script:

“Sometimes the roles or strategies we develop originally helped us survive, adapt or belong somewhere.”

Participants reflect on:

- coping mechanisms,
 - protective roles,
 - emotional strategies,
 - or behaviours they use to maintain stability, connection or safety.
-

Facilitator Note

This activity may bring emotional recognition, vulnerability or insight.

Facilitators should:

- avoid over-interpreting participants' experiences,
- avoid pushing disclosure,
- and maintain a non-pathologising tone.

The goal is not to decide whether someone's role is “right” or “wrong,” but to increase awareness of recurring patterns and relational dynamics.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- How did you feel during the interaction?
- Did you feel listened to?

- Was it easier to speak or to listen?
- Did any role or pattern become clearer for you?
- Did this conversation change how you understand systems or relationships?

II.6. The Loyal Soldier – Recognising and Transforming Protective Parts (60–70 min)

Activity Type

Storytelling → Reflection → Embodied exploration → Writing → Integration

Timing

60–70 min depending on:

- group size,
- storytelling duration,
- depth of reflection,
- and sharing time.

Materials

- Flipchart or board
- Markers
- Open space for movement
- Paper or notebooks
- Pens

Goal

- To explore how protective psychological strategies may continue operating long after the original situation has changed.
 - To recognise inner protective parts such as the Inner Critic, the Perfectionist, the Controller or the Over-Responsible Self.
 - To explore how these patterns appear emotionally, relationally and physically.
 - To approach protective strategies with curiosity and compassion rather than judgement.
 - To support reflection, integration and self-awareness through storytelling, embodiment and writing.
-

II.6.1. Story and Embodied Exploration – Meeting the Loyal Soldier (40–45 min)

Activity Type

Storytelling / Reflection / Embodied exploration / Partner sculpting

Timing

40–45 min

Materials

- Flipchart or board
- Markers
- Open space for movement

Goal

- To introduce the idea of inner systems or protective inner parts.
 - To recognise protective strategies such as the Inner Critic, the Perfectionist or the Strong One.
 - To explore how these patterns appear emotionally, relationally and physically.
 - To approach protective strategies with curiosity and compassion rather than judgement.
-

II.6.1.A. Introduction – The Inner System

Facilitator Script:

“Many psychological and developmental approaches suggest that our inner life is not made of one single voice, but of different parts, tendencies or roles.

These are not separate personalities. They are patterns of emotion, thought and behaviour that often developed as ways to adapt, survive or protect ourselves.”

“In everyday life, we may notice:

- one part wanting to speak,
- another part feeling afraid,
- another becoming critical,
- another trying to stay strong or in control.”

“Today we will explore these protective strategies with curiosity rather than judgement.”

Facilitator Note:

The full theoretical background on:

- inner parts,
- Internal Family Systems (IFS),
- Inner Critic,
- adaptive strategies,
- and self-compassion

is included in the theoretical notes at the end of Session 2.

Keep the introduction experiential and accessible rather than overly theoretical.

II.6.1.B. Story Trigger – The Loyal Soldier

The facilitator tells the story of Hiroo Onoda, a Japanese soldier who continued fighting in the jungle for nearly 30 years after World War II had ended because he never received the order to stop.

The story is used here as a metaphor for protective psychological strategies that continue operating even after the original danger or context has changed.

The facilitator may adapt or shorten the story depending on:

- available time,
- age group,
- emotional readiness,
- and cultural context.

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of the story is not to glorify war or violence, but to explore:

- loyalty,
- adaptation,
- survival strategies,
- identity,
- and difficulty letting go of old protective roles.

When working with groups affected by war, displacement or trauma, facilitators should introduce the story carefully and remain attentive to participants' emotional responses.

Story:

Hiroo Onoda was born in 1922 in the Wakayama prefecture of Japan. At a young age he worked in China, and in 1942 he enlisted in the Japanese Army. He was 20 years old when he was sent to the Nakano School in Tokyo for training in secret missions, guerrilla warfare and survival.

In December 1944, as the Second World War was nearing its end, Onoda was sent to the small island of Lubang in the Philippines. His mission was to sabotage the port and the airport, conduct guerrilla warfare, and — as his superiors emphasised — never surrender and never commit suicide, because Japan would return.

When the Americans occupied Lubang in early 1945, Onoda and three of his comrades — Yuichi Akatsu, Shoichi Shimada and Kinshichi Kozuka — hid in the forest and continued the war.

But the war ended in August 1945. Japan surrendered, but Onoda and his comrades did not believe it. When leaflets announcing the surrender were found, they considered them enemy propaganda. Over the following years, leaflets were dropped again and again: with family photographs, letters from relatives, even voices through loudspeakers. Still, Onoda and his men were convinced it was a trick by the enemy.

Gradually, the group dissolved:

Akatsu left the forest in 1949 and surrendered to Filipino forces.

Shimada was killed in 1954 in an exchange of fire with locals.

Kozuka was killed in 1972 by the island's police, when he and Onoda attempted to destroy rice stores, believing they were still carrying out sabotage.

Thus, Onoda remained alone. For nearly three decades he survived in the jungle, eating coconuts, bananas, meat from animals he hunted, and sometimes rice he took from villagers. From time to time he attacked fields, and the island's inhabitants feared him. It is estimated that during those years he killed around 30 people and injured others, though he never accepted this as a crime — he believed they were military operations.

In 1974, a young Japanese traveller, Norio Suzuki, decided to search for “Lieutenant Onoda, a panda bear, and the Yeti,” as he joked. He found him in the jungle. Onoda refused to surrender and said that only his commanding officer could give him such an order.

The Japanese government located his former commander, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi, who had since retired and was working as a bookseller. They sent him to Lubang, wearing his old uniform, and he gave Onoda the order: “The war is over. You have fulfilled your mission. You may stop.”

On 9 March 1974, Onoda handed over his rifle, his sword, grenades, about 500 rounds of ammunition, and the knife his mother had given him in 1944 to commit suicide if captured.

The President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, granted him full pardon and allowed him to return to Japan. He was received as a hero, but he felt like a stranger. Japan had changed: the streets were full of cars, values had shifted, the society no longer resembled the Japan he once knew.

He stayed in Japan for a short time, but didn't feel he belonged there. So in 1975 he moved to Brazil, where he lived in a Japanese community and worked on a cattle farm. There he found a quieter rhythm of life, close to the land.

In 1984 he returned to Japan and founded the Onoda Shizen Juku (Onoda Nature School), to teach young people how to live with nature, with resilience and respect. He didn't want to train soldiers; he wanted children to learn discipline, but also to love the earth.

In 1996 he visited Lubang again and donated 10,000 dollars to a local school, showing that he wished to leave old wounds behind.

Hiroo Onoda died in 2014 at the age of 91.

Perhaps the most striking part of Onoda's story is not only that he stayed 29 years in the jungle but how he was treated when he returned.

The President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, granted him full pardon for all the actions of those years. Although civilians had been killed in his attacks, it was considered that he had not acted with criminal intent, but as a soldier faithfully carrying out the orders he had been given.

In Japan, Onoda was not treated as a murderer; rather, he was received as a hero. For many Japanese at the time, he was a living symbol of the soldier who never gave up. In a society that had changed radically after the war, his figure offered something stable — a narrative of honour and devotion.

The Japanese government even gave him a significant sum of money, equivalent to about 30 years of salary and service allowances — as if he had actually continued to serve the Emperor all those years. He did not consider it a gift for personal use; it is said that he returned much of it or offered it for other causes.

However, reactions in Japanese society were not entirely unified.

While many people admired Onoda's loyalty and endurance, others — especially among younger generations — viewed the story more critically.

Some questioned the human cost of his actions and saw his continued obedience as a tragic example of how a person can remain trapped inside an outdated system, identity or mission long after reality has changed.

And here lies the paradox: a man who lived decades in a war that no longer existed, who caused fear and death, was not stigmatised — he was honoured. Because what was recognised was not his actions, but his absolute loyalty to an order, even when that order had long lost its meaning.

Facilitator Reflection:

"Sometimes we also carry 'loyal soldiers' inside us: parts that once protected us, helped us survive, kept us strong, silent, productive, perfect, careful, or emotionally defended. But sometimes these strategies continue operating long after the original danger has passed.

Here is where the story meets our own context: the "Loyal Soldier" within us — the part that was once protective — does not need blame. It needs recognition and gratitude for its service. Only then can it retire or find a new, more creative role.

II.6.1.C. Exploring Protective Parts Together¹⁴

Invite participants into collective reflection.

Facilitator Script:

"If our inner world sometimes functions like a system of different voices or roles, what kinds of parts do you recognise in yourself or in people around you?"

Write responses on the flipchart.

Common examples may include:

- Inner Critic
- Perfectionist
- People-Pleaser
- Controller
- Over-Responsible One
- Avoider
- The Strong One
- Caretaker

Then deepen the exploration.

Facilitator Script:

"What phrases do these parts often say?"

Write examples such as:

- "You must not fail."

¹⁴ There is an example of the exercise : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kL5vslUSN8s>

- “Be strong.”
- “Don’t disappoint people.”
- “Keep going.”
- “Don’t show weakness.”

Then ask:

“What might these parts be trying to protect us from?”

Participants may mention:

- rejection,
- shame,
- abandonment,
- failure,
- conflict,
- loneliness,
- or vulnerability.

Facilitator Synthesis:

“So even when these parts feel harsh or exhausting, they often developed with the intention to protect something vulnerable.”

II.6.1.C. Embodying the Loyal Soldier – Sculpting and Transformation

Invite participants to choose **one protective part** that resonates with them.

Facilitator Script:

“It does not have to be the most intense one. Choose something that feels safe enough to explore today.”

Participants work in pairs.

One partner becomes the **sculptor**, the other the **statue**.

Step 1 — Sculpting the Loyal Soldier

The sculptor gently shapes the partner’s posture to represent the Loyal Soldier.

They may adjust:

- shoulders
- head
- arms
- body tension
- direction of gaze,
- or overall posture.

Consent and gentle touch are emphasised throughout the process.

Once the sculpture is formed, the statue repeats a phrase representing the voice of the Soldier.

Examples:

- “You must keep going.”
- “Don’t fail.”
- “Be strong.”
- “Don’t stop.”

The phrase may be repeated two or three times.

Step 2 — Acknowledgement & Transformation

The sculptor steps back and observes the statue.

Participants say to the sculpture:

“Thank you for your service.
You helped me survive.”

If participants feel ready, they may continue with phrases such as:

“The war is over.
You may rest.”

“You do not need to fight all the time anymore.”

Participants may then reshape the statue into a posture expressing:

- rest,
- safety,
- openness,
- softness,
- grounding,
- or connection.

The transformed statue repeats a new phrase such as:

- “You are safe now.”
- “You may rest.”
- “You do not have to carry everything alone.”
- “You can soften.”

Participants then switch roles.

II.6.2. Writing and Integration – The Story of My Loyal Soldier (20–25 min)

Activity Type

Reflective writing / Personal integration

Timing

20–25 min

Materials

- Paper or notebooks
- Pens

Goal

- To integrate the embodied experience through reflection.
 - To recognise both the strengths and costs of protective strategies.
 - To cultivate self-compassion toward these inner parts.
-

Transition Into Writing

Participants take a moment to remember the Loyal Soldier they embodied or sculpted.

Facilitator Script:

“Notice the posture, the voice and the phrases that appeared.”

“When you are ready, begin writing.”

Writing Prompts

Participants may explore questions such as:

- What phrases does my Loyal Soldier use?
 - When might this part have appeared in my life?
 - What did it help me survive?
 - What strengths did it develop in me?
 - What has been the cost of its service?
 - What message does my Loyal Soldier want me to hear today?
 - What would I like to say to it in return?
-

Optional Sharing and Closing Reflection

Participants may share one sentence or insight with a partner or with the group.

Facilitator Script:

“Protective parts are not enemies.

They are strategies that once helped us survive.

When we recognise them with curiosity and compassion, we create the possibility for these strategies to evolve into something more flexible and supportive.”

Facilitation & Adaptation Notes

Because this sequence includes:

- war-related storytelling,
- embodiment,
- protective psychological strategies,
- and symbolic transformation,

facilitators are encouraged to adapt the process carefully according to:

- age,
- emotional readiness,
- language accessibility,
- mobility,
- cultural context,
- and lived experience.

The exercise should remain invitational rather than emotionally coercive.

When working with refugee or migration contexts, facilitators should frame the story clearly as a metaphor about psychological protection and survival strategies rather than as a glorification of war.

Participants may respond through:

- gesture,
- drawing,
- symbolic forms,
- movement,
- or short verbal responses,
rather than extended verbal processing.

With younger participants, the Loyal Soldier may be reframed more accessibly as:

- a “protective character,”
- “survival mode,”
- or a part that forgot the danger has passed.

In professional or adult-learning contexts, facilitators may connect the metaphor with:

- burnout,
- over-responsibility,
- perfectionism,
- hyper-productivity,
- emotional suppression,

- or chronic caretaking patterns.

For participants with disabilities or limited mobility, the sculpting process may be adapted through:

- seated work,
- upper-body posture,
- hand gestures,
- facial expression,
- drawing,
- symbolic objects,
- or verbal imagery.

Participants should always remain free to:

- modify movement,
- avoid touch,
- observe instead of embodying,
- or step out of the activity if needed.

II.7. Closing the Session – Name, Feeling & Sharing the Experience (10–15 min)

Activity Type

Closing ritual / Group reflection

Timing

10–15 min depending on group size

Materials

None

(optional: talking piece, candle or small object to pass around)

Goal

- To create a sense of closure and completeness for the session.
 - To allow participants to express how they leave the workshop in a simple and contained way.
 - To reinforce group connection and mutual respect.
 - To support grounding and transition before leaving the shared space.
-

Instructions

“Before we finish for today, let’s take a few moments to close together.

Each of us will have the opportunity to briefly share how we are leaving this session.”

Invite participants to sit comfortably and place their feet on the ground if possible.

Take three slow breaths together as a group.

“Notice your body.

Notice your energy.

Notice what you carry with you from today.”

Go around the circle one by one.

Participants may share:

- their name,
- one word,
- one feeling,
- one image,
- or one short phrase describing how they leave the session.

Participants may also choose to pass.

Optional variation:

a talking piece (stone, feather or object) may move around the circle, giving each person space to speak.

Optional deeper closure:

“If you wish, you may also share one small insight, image or moment from today that you would like to carry forward.”

After the sharing round, invite participants to briefly look around the circle.

“Thank you for showing up today with presence, honesty and courage.

Thank you also for witnessing one another.”

Optional closing gestures may include:

- a shared breath,
- a collective clap,
- placing a hand on the heart,
- or a brief moment of silence.

“This session is now complete.

Carry with you what feels useful,
and leave behind what no longer serves you.

We continue the journey together next time.”

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What is one thing I am taking with me from today’s session?
- What is one thing I may want to let go of?
- What stayed with me most strongly from today’s experience?

Theory & Facilitation Notes – Session 2

These theoretical notes are intended as background support for facilitators.

Facilitators are not expected to present all concepts directly to participants. The aim is not to transform the workshop into a psychology lecture, but to help facilitators understand the deeper logic behind the experiential activities and hold the process with greater clarity, coherence and sensitivity.

Depending on:

- group needs,
- time,
- age,
- emotional readiness,
- and educational context,

facilitators may choose to introduce small parts of this material in simple and accessible ways throughout the session.

II.T.1. Systems Thinking & Human Relationships

II.T.1.A. What Is a System?

A system is a group of interconnected elements that influence one another.

Human beings constantly participate in systems such as:

- families,
- friendships,
- schools,
- workplaces,
- communities,
- social groups,
- and cultural structures.

In systems thinking, behaviour is not understood only as an individual characteristic, but also as something shaped by:

- relationships,
- environments,
- repeated interactions,
- expectations,
- and roles.

One movement inside a system can influence the whole structure.

This is why many systemic approaches focus not only on individuals, but also on:

- patterns,
 - communication,
 - boundaries,
 - adaptation,
 - and relational dynamics.
-

II.T.1.B. Systems, Stability & Adaptation

Systems often seek stability or balance. However, stability does not necessarily mean wellbeing, justice or emotional health.

Some systems maintain themselves through:

- silence,
- over-functioning,
- emotional suppression,
- rigid roles,
- conflict avoidance,
- or unequal responsibility.

People may unconsciously adapt to these systems in ways that help them survive, belong or maintain connection.

The activities in Session 2 invite participants to observe these dynamics through:

- movement,
 - embodied interaction,
 - spatial relationships,
 - tension,
 - and group coordination.
-

II.T.2. The Drama Triangle

II.T.2.A. Relational Roles Inside Systems

The Drama Triangle was developed by Stephen Karpman within Transactional Analysis.

It describes a relational dynamic in which people may unconsciously move between three roles:

- Victim,
- Rescuer,
- and Persecutor.

These are not fixed identities or personality types. They are relational positions that may appear temporarily inside systems.

II.T.2.B. The Victim

The Victim position may involve:

- helplessness,
- dependency,
- powerlessness,
- avoidance of responsibility,
- or feeling trapped.

At the same time, this role may protect the person from:

- overwhelm,
 - uncertainty,
 - fear,
 - or perceived failure.
-

II.T.2.C. The Rescuer

The Rescuer attempts to help, fix or save others.

Although this role may appear caring, it can sometimes involve:

- over-responsibility,
 - difficulty setting boundaries,
 - avoidance of one's own needs,
 - or maintaining dependency inside the system.
-

II.T.2.D. The Persecutor

The Persecutor attempts to control, criticise, dominate or impose order.

Underneath this role there may also exist:

- fear,
 - vulnerability,
 - frustration,
 - or a need for safety and control.
-

II.T.2.E. Movement Between Roles

People may move rapidly between these positions.

For example:

- a Rescuer may become resentful and shift into Persecutor,
- a Victim may become critical,
- a Persecutor may later experience helplessness.

The aim of exploring the Drama Triangle is not to label participants, but to increase awareness of recurring relational dynamics and their emotional costs.

II.T.3. Inner Systems & Protective Parts

II.T.3.A. Inner Multiplicity

Many psychological and developmental approaches suggest that human experience is not entirely unified, but contains multiple inner tendencies, voices or “parts.”

These parts are not separate personalities. They are patterns of:

- emotion,
- behaviour,
- beliefs,
- bodily reactions,
- and protective strategies.

Different approaches describe this inner multiplicity in different ways.

II.T.3.B. Internal Family Systems (IFS)

Internal Family Systems (IFS), developed by Richard Schwartz, describes the psyche as an internal system of interacting parts.

Some parts attempt to:

- protect,
- control,
- avoid pain,
- manage vulnerability,
- or maintain safety.

Examples may include:

- the Inner Critic,
- the Perfectionist,
- the Caretaker,
- the Pleaser,

- the Controller,
- or the Avoider.

IFS proposes that even difficult or critical parts usually developed with a protective intention.

Within this workshop, these ideas are used as reflective and experiential frameworks rather than as clinical or diagnostic tools.

II.T.3.C. Adaptive Strategies

Many psychological approaches recognise that human beings develop adaptive strategies in response to:

- attachment experiences,
- family dynamics,
- emotional insecurity,
- social pressure,
- trauma,
- or survival needs.

Strategies that once protected a person may later become rigid or exhausting.

For example:

- perfectionism may emerge to avoid criticism,
- emotional suppression may develop to maintain safety,
- hyper-independence may appear after disappointment or instability.

The workshop invites participants to approach these strategies with curiosity rather than shame.

II.T.4. The Inner Critic & Self-Protection

II.T.4.A. The Inner Critic

One of the most familiar protective parts is the Inner Critic.

The Inner Critic often appears as:

- pressure,
- self-judgment,
- harsh evaluation,
- perfectionism,
- or fear of failure.

Typical inner messages may include:

- “You are not good enough.”
- “Do better.”

- “Don’t fail.”
- “People will judge you.”
- “You must stay strong.”

Although painful, many approaches understand the Inner Critic as an attempt to:

- prevent rejection,
- maintain belonging,
- avoid shame,
- or protect the person from vulnerability.

In this sense, the critic may be understood not only as an enemy, but also as a protective strategy that has become overly rigid or exhausting.

II.T.4.B. Protective Parts & Emotional Survival

Protective parts often develop intelligently in response to real experiences.

They may help individuals:

- cope,
- survive,
- perform,
- avoid pain,
- maintain connection,
- or function inside difficult systems.

However, over time these strategies may:

- lose flexibility,
 - continue automatically,
 - and create exhaustion, emotional disconnection or relational difficulties.
-

II.T.5. The Loyal Soldier as Metaphor

II.T.5.A. Hiroo Onoda & Psychological Metaphor

The story of Hiroo Onoda functions in this workshop as a metaphor for protective psychological strategies that continue operating long after the original danger has passed.

In the workshop, this story is not treated as a psychological diagnosis, but as a symbolic narrative that participants may interpret through their own experiences, relationships and coping patterns. The “Loyal Soldier” may symbolise:

- chronic hyper-vigilance,
- perfectionism,
- emotional armour,
- over-responsibility,
- compulsive productivity,
- suppression of vulnerability,
- or difficulty resting.

The metaphor allows participants to recognise these strategies with:

- dignity,
 - complexity,
 - and compassion,
rather than simple self-condemnation.
-

II.T.5.B. Ambiguity, Loyalty & Harm

The story also raises questions about:

- loyalty,
- identity,
- obedience,
- adaptation,
- systems,
- and difficulty letting go of old roles.

Importantly, the social response to Onoda’s return was divided:

while some people viewed him as a symbol of discipline and devotion, others — particularly among younger generations — saw his story more critically, questioning the human cost of blind loyalty and prolonged obedience to a system disconnected from reality.

This ambiguity reflects the complexity of many protective strategies:
they may simultaneously contain:

- intelligence,
 - suffering,
 - strength,
 - and harm.
-

II.T.6. Self-Compassion & Protective Strategies

II.T.6.A. Self-Compassion

Self-compassion research, especially the work of Kristin Neff and Paul Gilbert, offers an alternative way of relating to difficult inner experiences.

Rather than:

- attacking,
- suppressing,
- or becoming fused with protective parts,

self-compassion encourages:

- awareness,
- kindness,
- emotional balance,
- and understanding.

Kristin Neff describes three central elements of self-compassion:

- mindfulness,
 - self-kindness,
 - and common humanity.
-

II.T.6.B. Emotional Regulation Systems

Paul Gilbert's Compassion Focused Therapy also describes different emotional regulation systems, including:

- threat and protection,
- drive and achievement,
- and soothing and connection.

Many people become over-identified with:

- threat,
- hyper-productivity,
- achievement,
- or emotional control,

while struggling to access:

- rest,
 - softness,
 - safety,
 - or emotional soothing.
-

II.T.6.C. Compassionate Awareness

The activities in Session 2 invite participants to recognise how some protective strategies may once have been necessary, while also exploring the possibility of:

- greater flexibility,
- conscious choice,
- emotional awareness,
- and compassion toward themselves and others.

The experiential activities in Session 2 — particularly movement-based system exercises, role exploration, symbolic reflection and the Loyal Soldier metaphor — are designed to help participants observe relational patterns not only intellectually, but also through embodied interaction, emotional awareness and group experience.

III. Session 3 — Self-Esteem, Self-Compassion & Safe Space¹⁵

Overall Goal

To explore self-esteem and self-compassion through embodied awareness, relational exercises, reflective writing and symbolic creation — culminating in the cultivation of an inner and outer sense of “safe space” as a foundation for resilience, self-awareness and personal growth.

Estimated Duration

Approximately 4.5–5 hours depending on:

- group size,
 - depth of sharing,
 - artistic process duration,
 - chosen writing version,
 - breaks,
 - emotional processing needs,
 - and adaptation choices made by the facilitator.
-

Materials for Session

- chairs and/or mats
 - paper or journals
 - pens and coloured markers
 - symbolic, natural or recycled materials
 - small bottles, jars or containers (for Safe Place Bottle)
 - optional calming music
 - tape or display materials
 - optional judgement box/container
-

¹⁵ You can explore further by reading our first article “From Safe to Brave” on our website
<https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-articles/>

III.0. Structure (Overflow Version)

Settling Into Space

Letting Others Take Care of You

Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem & Self-Compassion

Reflective Writing & Sharing

Safe Space – Visualization, Symbolisation & Reflection

Box of Judgement

Overcoming Obstacles – Embodied Challenge & Integration

Optional Energizers

Theoretical Notes for Facilitators — Session 3

III.1. Settling Into the Space (12–15 min)¹⁶

Activity Type

Embodied awareness / Grounding / Self-compassion practice

Timing

12–15 min

Materials

None

Goal

- To invite participants into a state of embodied awareness, personal agency and gentle self-compassion.
- To encourage small acts of listening and adjustment as practices of self-kindness.
- To reconnect with themes of embodiment, emotional awareness and self-compassion through bodily experience.

Instructions

Begin without much explanation, allowing participants to experience the process directly.

¹⁶ There is some exercises to embodies the self-esteem theory and concept :
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRKNlq0hfD8>

Facilitator Script:

“Before answering anything — and before trying to change anything — I invite you to pause.

Listen inwards.

Take a moment to notice.

There is no need to speak. Just reflect silently inside yourself.”

Offer the following prompts slowly, leaving space and silence between each one.

“Why did you sit where you sat?”

“Are you physically comfortable right now?”

“Can you make a very small shift — just a few centimetres — to feel slightly more comfortable?”

Pause.

“That may have been your first act of self-compassion today.”

“How would you like your body to feel in this space?”

“Why did you sit next to the person you chose?”

“If you could change one small thing to feel a little more at ease — what would it be?

You may make that change now.”

“If you could change one more thing — big or small — to feel even better in this space, what would that be?”

“Now imagine you could make a bigger change.

If your body could choose any place in this room to be, where would that be?

Would you like to try sitting there now?

Go ahead and experiment.”

“You may also notice other needs appearing right now.

Perhaps your body wants:

water,

food,

movement,

silence,

rest,

space,

sound,

or a different position.”

“Often in group spaces we try to take care of ourselves without interrupting the process around us.

But for a moment, imagine you could focus only on your own need.

What would your body genuinely ask for right now?"

Pause.

"If possible, allow yourself to respond to that need in a simple and respectful way."

Allow a few moments for participants to respond freely within the space.

Close slowly:

"Now pause again for a moment.

Notice what changed when you gave yourself permission to listen."

"Notice whether your body asks for stillness, movement, grounding or rest."

"How can you respond to your own needs while also remaining aware of the shared space around you?"

Pause.

"Do that now."

Invite one collective breath before continuing.

Facilitator Note

This activity introduces self-compassion experientially rather than conceptually.

The focus is not comfort alone, but:

- awareness
- bodily listening
- agency
- permission to respond consciously to personal needs

The exercise also supports grounding, regulation and transition into deeper relational work later in the session.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What did you notice when you gave yourself permission to adjust for comfort?
- Did you experience a difference between remaining in place and moving?
- What happened when you focused more directly on your own needs?
- How does this relate to self-compassion or self-awareness in everyday life?

III.2. Letting Others Take Care of You (20–25 min)

Activity Type

Relational awareness / Consent / Receiving care / Group support

Timing

20–25 min depending on:

- group size,
- chosen forms of interaction,
- and depth of sharing.

Materials

None

(optional: calming background music)

Goal

- To connect participants with their personal needs and practise expressing them clearly.
 - To explore what it feels like to receive care from others.
 - To strengthen awareness around consent, boundaries and communication.
 - To explore the relationship between self-compassion, self-esteem and relational support.
 - To support the recognition that personal needs, limits and desires deserve attention, care and respect.
-

Instructions

Invite participants into groups of 4–5 people.

Each participant will briefly take turns being the receiver while the others respond to the request if they freely choose to.

In some cases, the group may support one participant together through collective care or touch-based support.

For example, one participant may choose to sit or lie down while different group members offer forms of care such as:

- recognising what we need,
- a hand on the shoulder
- a gentle head massage
- massage on the hands or feet
- supportive touch on the back
- breathing together
- or simply quiet presence nearby

Encourage participants to communicate clearly about:

- where they would like touch
- what kind of touch feels supportive
- and what boundaries they wish to keep

“Now we will explore a short exercise about receiving care, support and attention from others.

The focus is not only touch.

It is also about:

recognising needs,
communicating clearly,
listening to boundaries,
and respecting the boundaries of others.”

“Remember:

you may always say yes,
no,
or suggest an alternative.”

“Consent helps create safety, trust and mutual respect.”

“The exercise is also connected to self-esteem: recognising that our needs matter, that we are allowed to ask, and that receiving care does not make us weak or selfish.”

Step 1 — Identifying a Need

Invite the receiving participant to pause and reflect:

“What would genuinely help you feel:

- more supported,
- calmer,
- connected,
- comforted,
- energised,
- or safe
right now?”

Encourage simple and concrete requests.

Examples may include:

- “Please place a hand on my shoulder.”
- “Can we breathe together for a few moments?”
- “Please hold my hand.”
- “Can we stay in silence together?”
- “Please give me a gentle shoulder massage.”
- “Can someone stroke my hair?”
- “Can we do a small dance or movement together?”
- “Can I receive a hug?”
- “Can we do a small movement together?”

Step 2 — Checking Consent

Before responding, participants pause and check internally whether they feel comfortable with the request.

Facilitator Script:

“Before doing anything, pause and ask yourself:

‘Am I genuinely comfortable offering this?’”

“If yes, you may proceed.

If not, you may say:

‘I’d prefer not to do that, but I can offer something else.’”

Examples:

- “I don’t feel comfortable with touch, but I can sit beside you.”
 - “I prefer not to hug, but we can breathe together.”
 - “I can offer a hand on the shoulder instead.”
-

Step 3 — Receiving Care

Allow a few moments for the interaction to happen slowly and with attention.

Invite participants to notice:

- bodily sensations,
- emotions,
- ease,
- discomfort,
- resistance,
- gratitude,
- or vulnerability.

After several minutes, invite groups to switch roles.

Closing

Facilitator Script:

“Take a breath together.

Notice what it felt like:

- to ask,
- to negotiate,
- to receive,
- and to respect both your own boundaries and the boundaries of others.”

“Sometimes self-compassion also includes allowing ourselves to receive support.”

Facilitator & Adaptation Notes

This activity should remain invitational rather than emotionally pressured.

Participants should always feel free to:

- pass,
- modify requests,
- avoid touch,
- or participate through symbolic or non-physical forms of care.

The activity may evoke vulnerability or discomfort around care, touch, support or emotional closeness.

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- model clear consent language,
- avoid pressuring participants toward physical touch,
- and normalise different comfort levels.

Activities may be adapted according to:

- cultural norms around touch,
- gender dynamics,
- religious considerations,
- accessibility needs
- personal boundaries.
- and participants' emotional readiness

Care interactions may also include:

- gestures,
- eye contact,
- verbal affirmation,
- breathing together,
- symbolic actions,
- seated interaction,
- or creative alternatives to touch.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- How did it feel to express a personal need directly?
- Was it easier to give care or to receive it?
- What did you notice about consent and boundaries?
- Did your experience change when both sides freely agreed?
- What forms of care feel most supportive or accessible to you?

III.3. Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem & Self-Compassion (15–20 min)

Activity Type

Experiential theory bridge / Group reflection

Timing

15–20 min depending on:

- group size,
- level of discussion,
- and participant sharing.

Materials

None

(optional: flipchart or board for keywords)

Goal

- To introduce the distinction between self-confidence, self-esteem and self-compassion.
 - To connect these concepts with participants' embodied experiences in the previous activities.
 - To explore self-compassion as a stabilising inner attitude that supports both confidence and self-worth.
-

Instructions

Begin by briefly connecting the activity to the previous exercises.

Facilitator Script:

"Before moving forward, let's pause for a moment and connect what we have already experienced today with a few ideas from psychology."

"In the first exercise, you listened to your body and made small adjustments to feel more comfortable.

In the second exercise, you practised expressing needs, negotiating consent and receiving support from others."

"These simple experiences already touch three important psychological concepts:

- self-confidence,
- self-esteem,
- and self-compassion."

"Although these words are often used interchangeably, they describe different aspects of our relationship with ourselves."

Self-Confidence

"Self-confidence is mainly connected with action and ability.

It relates to the sense:

'I can do this.'

‘I can act.’

‘I can respond to challenges.’

Confidence often grows through:

- practice,
 - learning,
 - experience,
 - and experimentation.”
-

Self-Esteem

“Self-esteem relates more to how we evaluate our own worth as a person.

Questions connected to self-esteem may include:

- ‘Do I feel valuable?’
- ‘Do I feel worthy of care and respect?’
- ‘Do my needs matter?’”

“Self-esteem is influenced not only by our achievements, but also by:

- relationships,
 - social messages,
 - family dynamics,
 - culture,
 - and life experiences.”
-

Self-Compassion

“Self-compassion concerns how we relate to ourselves when we experience:

- difficulty,
- imperfection,
- failure,
- pain,
- or vulnerability.”

“Instead of responding only with harsh self-criticism, self-compassion invites a more understanding and caring relationship with ourselves.”

“It reminds us that struggle and imperfection are part of being human.”

Linking the Three

“In a simplified way:

Self-confidence asks:

‘Can I do it?’

Self-esteem asks:

‘Am I worthy?’

Self-compassion responds:

‘Even when things are difficult, I am still worthy of care.’”

Connecting Again With Experience

Invite participants to reconnect the concepts with the earlier activities.

Facilitator Script:

“When you adjusted your place in the room earlier to feel more comfortable, you practised listening to your body and responding with care.

That can already be understood as a small act of self-compassion.”

“When you expressed a need clearly in the previous exercise, you acknowledged that your needs matter.

That touches self-esteem.”

“And when you communicated a request or negotiated a boundary, you also practised self-confidence: the belief that you can act, communicate and respond.”

“These qualities constantly interact in everyday life.”

Group Reflection

Invite short reflections either:

- in pairs,
- small groups,
- or in the full circle.

Possible prompts:

- “When do you usually feel most confident?”
- “What situations tend to affect your self-esteem?”
- “How do you usually speak to yourself when something goes wrong?”
- “What might change if self-compassion became a stronger habit in everyday life?”

Encourage short reflections rather than long explanations.

Closing

Facilitator Script:

“Self-confidence, self-esteem and self-compassion are not fixed traits.

They develop through experience, relationships and practice.”

“The exercises we are doing today are small ways of exploring how we relate to ourselves:
through the body,
through relationships,
and through awareness.”

Facilitator Note

The purpose of this activity is not to deliver a complete psychological lecture, but to create a simple conceptual bridge between:

- embodied experience,
- relational interaction,
- and reflective self-awareness.

More detailed theoretical references are included in the Theory & Facilitation Notes section at the end of Session 3.

III.4. Reflective Writing & Sharing – Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem, and Self-Care

Type of Activity

Reflective writing / Small-group sharing

Timing

20–45 minutes depending on:

- chosen version,
- group size,
- depth of reflection,
- and sharing duration.

Version A:

- Writing – 10 minutes
- Sharing in triads – 10 minutes

Version B:

- Writing – 12–15 minutes
- Sharing & reflection – 10–15 minutes

Materials

- Paper or notebooks
- Pens

Goal

- To invite participants to connect the concepts of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-compassion with their personal experience.
- To deepen awareness of how participants relate to themselves, their needs, and their life direction.
- To create a space for reflection and witnessing through small-group sharing.

Version A – Short Reflective Writing (Recommended)

This shorter version works well when the session flow needs to remain dynamic or when the group is early in its trust-building process.

Writing Reflection

Facilitator Script:

“We will now take a few minutes for personal reflection.

This writing is only for you. You will not need to share anything you do not want to.”

“Write freely. Short phrases or key words are enough.”

Invite participants to reflect on the following questions:

- Do I feel capable of doing what is needed in my life right now?
- How do I experience the way other people treat me?
- Do I feel capable of taking care of myself?
- Do I give my own needs and well-being real priority?
- How close do I feel I have come to building a life that responds to my needs?
- What obstacles make this more difficult?
- What gives my life meaning today?

Allow approximately 10 minutes of quiet writing.

Sharing in Triads

Participants form groups of three.

Facilitator Script:

“In your small groups, you may share anything that feels comfortable — a sentence, a thought, or simply the general feeling that came up during writing.”

Suggested structure:

Each participant speaks for about 3 minutes, while the others listen without interrupting.

Possible prompt:

“What stayed with you most strongly from your reflection?”

Version B – Extended Reflective Exploration (Optional)

This extended version deepens the exploration of self-esteem and invites participants to reflect on broader questions about worth, agency, relationships, and meaning.

It can be used when the facilitator feels the group is ready for deeper reflection and when there is sufficient time in the session.

Facilitator Note

Some questions touch sensitive existential themes such as life direction or mortality. The facilitator may choose to adapt or omit these questions depending on the group’s cultural context, emotional readiness, and group dynamics.

Writing Exploration

Facilitator Script:

“Now we will take some time for deeper personal reflection.”

“This writing is private and will not be collected. You will only share what you feel comfortable sharing later.”

“You will have a few minutes for each theme. Write freely, without censoring or editing.”

Prompt 1 – Self-Perception

- How do I see myself right now?
 - Do I feel capable of taking care of myself?
 - Do I feel that I also prioritise my own needs?
 - What gives my life meaning today?
-

Prompt 2 – Life Positioning

- Do I feel capable of doing what is needed in my life?
 - How close do I feel I have come to building my life according to my needs?
 - What obstacles are present?
-

Prompt 3 – Relationships and Care

- How do I feel that other people treat me?
 - Do I experience care and respect in my relationships?
-

Optional Prompt – Mortality Reflection

This prompt is optional and should be used with discretion.

“I am going to die one day.

How do I relate to this idea?

How do I imagine it?

Allow yourself to write honestly, whatever comes.”

Allow approximately 12–15 minutes for writing and reflection.

Pair Reflection Using the 2-2-2 Format

Participants form pairs (or trios if needed).

Facilitator Script:

“Now we will reflect together using a simple structure called the 2-2-2 format.”

First, take 2 minutes to write your thoughts after the reflection.

Then:

- 2 minutes for the first person to share
- 2 minutes for the second person to share

If working in trios, each participant will have about 2 minutes to share while the others listen.

Suggested prompts for sharing:

- What stood out most strongly during your reflection?
- What did these questions evoke in you?

Facilitator Reminder:

“The purpose here is not to analyse or solve these questions, but simply to listen and witness each other’s reflections.”

Optional Closing Reflection

The facilitator may invite the whole group to briefly reflect on a few broader questions:

“Do you feel capable of doing what is necessary in your life right now?”

“Do you feel capable of taking care of yourself?”

“Do you feel that you are building your life according to your needs?”

“These are big questions. They are not meant to be fully answered today.”

“They simply help us explore different dimensions of self-esteem — our sense of worth, our ability to care for ourselves, and the meaning we give to our lives.”

Closing

Facilitator Script:

“Take a moment to thank your partner for listening.”

“Self-esteem is not something fixed. It evolves through our experiences, relationships, and the way we relate to ourselves.”

“Self-compassion can provide the ground that allows self-esteem to grow in a more stable and supportive way.”

III.5. Safe Space – Meditation, Symbolisation, and Sharing

Type of Activity

Guided meditation / Creative expression / Reflection

Timing

45–60 minutes total

- Meditation: 20–25 min
- Bottle creation: 20–25 min
- Reflection/walk/sharing: 5–10 min

Materials

- Comfortable seating or mats
- Soft instrumental music (optional)
- Chime or bell for transitions
- Small glass vials with caps (1ml or similar)
- Dried herbs, spices, flower petals, seeds
- Small pebbles, semi-precious stones, fabric scraps
- Tiny pieces of paper and pens (for words, intentions, or symbols)
- Natural items (sticks, soil, leaves — optional)
- Colored powders or glitter (optional)
- Essential oils (optional)
- Twine, cord, or string (optional, to wear the bottle)

Goal

- To cultivate an inner sense of safety through breath, body awareness, and imagination.
- To externalise this experience into a personal symbolic object (Safe Place Bottle).
- To anchor the felt sense of safety in a creative, tangible way and integrate it through embodied reflection.

III.5.A. Safe Place in the Body – Guided Meditation / Visualisation / Guided Imagery¹⁷

Facilitator Script (CFT-inspired):

“Let’s begin by finding a comfortable position. You may sit upright with your feet on the ground, or lie down if that feels better. Allow your shoulders to soften, and let your hands rest where they feel most natural.”

“If you feel safe, gently close your eyes. If not, keep a soft gaze on the floor or a point in front of you.”

¹⁷ You can find a guided Relaxation and embodied awareness there : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpUbAoySUQw>

You can see this exercise of safe space there : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMAVgEeqjW4>
or an other version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEXdr840v78>

Breath Awareness

“Take a slow, deep breath in... and exhale fully. Let yourself arrive in this moment.

Notice the air entering your nose... and leaving your mouth.

Each breath is a reminder: you are here, now.”

Inviting Softness

“With every exhale, imagine your body releasing just a little tension.

Let your jaw soften. Your shoulders drop. Your hands relax.

No need to force anything — just invite a little more ease.”

Shifting to Visualisation

“Now, I invite you to allow an image to arise — of a place where you feel completely safe and at ease.”

“This can be a real place you know... or a place from your imagination. It can be outdoors in nature, or indoors somewhere cosy. There is no right or wrong. Just a place that feels good for your body.”

Guided Imagery

“Notice what this place looks like. What colours do you see? Greens, blues, warm yellows, soft greys?”

“Notice textures around you — moss underfoot, smooth stones, soft fabric, wooden floors.”

“Notice sounds — birdsong, waves, wind, fire crackling, or maybe just silence.”

“Notice the air — is it warm and sunlit? Cool like an evening breeze? Still and calm?”

“Perhaps there is a scent — fresh grass, sea salt, pine trees, lavender, or your favourite tea.”

“If this place had a taste, what would it be? Sweet fruit? Warm bread? Honey? Something that nourishes you?”

Settling In

“Allow yourself to arrive more fully in this place. Notice what changes in your body as you imagine being here.

Perhaps something softens, slows down, or feels more grounded.”

“You may choose to sit, lie down or simply remain present in this imagined space. There is no right way to experience it.”

“If this place feels supportive, allow yourself to stay with that feeling for a few moments.”

Anchoring

“Take a slow breath and notice whether there is a word, image or sensation that captures something about this place for you.

You may choose to remember it quietly to yourself.”

Closing

“Now, slowly let go of the image. Bring your awareness back to the present.

Notice the floor under your feet, or the chair supporting you. Wiggle your fingers and toes.

When you’re ready, gently open your eyes.

Bring with you the feeling of your safe place — it is now part of you.”

III.5.B. Anchoring the Safe Place – Bottle Creation¹⁸

Facilitator Script

Transition from Meditation

“Now, we’re going to give that inner experience a physical form — something small you can hold in your hand, a reminder that this safe place lives within you.”

Invitation to Create

“You’ll each make a tiny bottle — a symbolic anchor. You can fill it with colours, textures, scents, words, or small objects.

There is no right or wrong way. Choose whatever feels true for you.”

“Your bottle can be very simple, or layered and detailed.

You don’t have to explain it to anyone. It is for you — to remind you of the feeling of safety and care.”

¹⁸ You can see an exemple of it in video there : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoYxb0ui_EU

Guided Suggestions

“You might write one word on the small paper — like peace, warmth, ocean, rest — and place it inside.”

“You might choose a scent, like lavender or cinnamon, to bring comfort whenever you smell it.”

“You might add a stone, a seed, a flower petal — something natural and grounding.”

“Or simply let your hands choose materials without overthinking. You may simply notice which materials, colours or textures feel meaningful or supportive to you.” .”

Allow approximately 15–20 minutes for quiet creation, with optional calming music.

Closing Reflection

“When you feel your bottle is complete, hold it in your hands for a moment.

Notice what it feels like to have this small symbol of safety that you created yourself.”

“Remember: the bottle is not the safe place itself.

It is simply a personal reminder connected to the feeling, memory or experience you explored during the exercise.”

III.5.C. Reflection & Sharing

Facilitator Script

Transition

“You’ve each created a bottle that represents your inner safe place — a reminder of the calm and strength you carry inside.

Now let’s take a few minutes to connect with what we’ve made, and let it settle into us more fully.”

Option A – Small Groups / Circle Reflection

“Since we are a smaller group, let’s stay seated in the circle.

Hold your bottle gently, and take a quiet moment to notice what it represents for you.

If you wish, you may hold your bottle up and let the group witness it.”

Option B – Larger Groups / Silent Walk

“In a larger group, it may help to move slowly around the room so everyone has a chance to see the bottles.

I invite you to walk calmly and in silence, holding your bottle in your hand.

Take in the creations of others as you pass by.

Let this become a gentle gallery walk of our inner safe places.”

Sharing Invitation

“If you wish, you may show your bottle openly or share a word it represents.

You are also welcome to keep it private. There is no pressure to share.”

Closure

“Take one last look at your bottle.

Remember — the object is only a reminder.

The safe place itself is within you, and you can return there whenever you need.”

Facilitator Note

This activity may evoke:

- calm,
- grief,
- longing,
- nostalgia,
- tenderness,
- or emotional vulnerability.

Some participants may struggle to imagine or access a sense of safety, particularly if they have experienced:

- trauma,
- displacement,
- chronic stress,
- or emotional neglect.

Facilitators should avoid forcing visualisation or emotional disclosure.

Participants may instead focus on:

- a neutral place,
- a sensory detail,
- a colour,

- a texture,
- or a simple bodily sensation connected to comfort or grounding.

The symbolic object is used as a personal reminder connected to sensory experience, memory and emotional grounding rather than as a therapeutic or “magical” object.

When working in intercultural or refugee contexts, facilitators should remain sensitive to the possibility that the idea of “home” or “safe place” may evoke mixed emotions or loss.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What did it feel like to create a tangible anchor for your inner safe place?
 - How does this object connect with the feeling of safety in your body?
 - In what moments of daily life might you want to return to this safe place?
-

III.6. Box of Judgement

Type of Activity

Writing / Embodied exploration / Symbolic release / Group reflection

Timing

15–20 minutes

Materials

- Papers or slips
- Pens
- A medium-sized box with a lid or cover

Goal

- To bring awareness to the weight of internal and external judgments.
 - To explore how judgments affect the body, emotions, and relational presence.
 - To create symbolic distance from self-critical and judgmental narratives through embodied exploration and group reflection.
-

III.6.A. Writing Self-Judgments

Facilitator Script:

“Take a few slips of paper.

Write down some of the judgments you hear in your own mind — judgments about yourself that feel harsh, critical, or painful.

There is no need to overthink or explain them. Simply write what comes.”

“When you finish, fold the papers and place them into the box.”

Allow approximately 3–4 minutes.

III.6.B. Writing Judgments Toward Others

Facilitator Script:

“Now write down a few judgments you have heard or thought about other people — words or labels that carry criticism, rejection, or distance.”

“These may be judgments you have heard from society, family, school, work, or within yourself.”

“When you finish, place these papers in the box as well.”

Allow approximately 2–3 minutes.

III.6.C. Embodying Self-Judgment

Facilitator Script:

“Now, take one paper from the box at random.

Open it and read the judgment silently.”

“As you move through the space, allow your body to show what it feels like to carry this judgment as if it were true.”

“Notice:

- your posture,
- your breathing,
- your movements,
- and your emotional state.”

After a short time:

“Now exchange papers with another participant and repeat the exercise with a different judgment.

Notice whether your body reacts differently each time.”

Allow approximately 3–4 minutes.

III.6.D. Embodying Judgment Toward Others

Facilitator Script:

“Take another paper and silently read the judgment.”

“This time, notice what it feels like to carry this judgment toward another person.

How does it affect:

- your body,
- your breath,
- your way of looking at others,
- or your presence in the space?”

“You may continue exchanging papers with others as you move.”

“Stay curious about the experience rather than trying to analyse it.”

Allow approximately 2–3 minutes.

III.6.E. Symbolic Closure

Facilitator Script:

“Now, return the paper you are holding back into the box.”

“As you place it inside, imagine you are placing the judgment outside of yourself.”

“You may silently say:

‘This judgment is not my whole truth.
I do not need to carry it all the time.’”

Invite participants to close the box together.

Facilitator Script:

“Together, let’s close the box.

The judgments can stay here for now, instead of living inside us.”

Allow approximately 2–3 minutes.

III.6.F. Reflection & Sharing

Facilitator Script:

“Take a moment to notice what remains in your body after the exercise.”

“If you wish, you may briefly share:

- what it felt like to embody these judgments,

- whether some felt familiar,
- or whether something shifted when you placed them back into the box.”

Participants may share:

- in pairs,
 - small groups,
 - or briefly in the full circle.
-

Facilitator Note

This activity explores the embodied and relational impact of judgment rather than attempting to eliminate judgment entirely.

Some participants may recognise:

- familiar internal critical voices,
- social stigma,
- shame,
- rejection,
- or painful past experiences.

Facilitators should:

- avoid forcing disclosure,
- avoid interpreting participants’ responses,
- and maintain a non-judgmental atmosphere throughout the activity.

The exercise works symbolically:

participants are invited to create temporary distance from judgments rather than deny their existence.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- or groups with literacy or language barriers,

participants may use:

- symbols,
- drawings,
- gestures,
- or simplified words instead of written sentences.

If time or emotional capacity is limited, facilitators may choose to focus only on:

- self-judgments,
 - embodiment,
 - and symbolic release.
-

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What did you notice in your body when carrying a judgment about yourself?
- How did it feel different to embody a judgment toward others?
- Did something shift when you returned the judgments to the box?
- What might it mean to create more distance from these judgments in daily life?

III.7. Overcoming Obstacles

Activity Type

Individual reflection / Expressive writing / Embodied activation / Group exercise / Reflection

Timing

Approximately 40–50 minutes total depending on:

- group size,
- level of embodiment,
- and sharing duration.
- Writing reflection: 5–7 min
- Activation: 7–8 min
- Facing the challenge: 15–20 min
- Integration & reflection: 5–10 min

Materials

- Paper or journal
- Pens

Goal

- To create space for honest self-reflection.
- To face personal and existential questions in a contained and time-bound way.
- To clarify one's own needs, dreams, and current life position.
- To awaken inner strength and physical aliveness through breath, voice, and movement.
- To symbolically explore internal and external obstacles such as self-judgements, social pressures, and limiting beliefs.
- To practise transforming struggle into movement and action.
- To integrate the experience through grounding and reflection.

1. Writing Reflection

Facilitator Script:

“Before moving into the embodied part of the exercise, take a few moments to reflect honestly with yourself.”

Invite participants to write briefly about the following questions:

- What small or big dreams or goals do I have?

- Where am I today in relation to them?
- What obstacles — personal, social, collective, emotional, or practical — are keeping me away from them?

Allow approximately 5–7 minutes for writing.

2. Activation

Purpose:

To awaken energy, voice, physical presence, and emotional readiness before engaging with resistance and challenge.

Facilitator Script:

“Let’s wake up our strength and aliveness before we face our obstacles.”

Breath–Movement Flow

Invite participants to:

- inhale and lift the arms overhead,
- then exhale strongly while lowering the arms with force, as if cutting through the air.

Repeat approximately 5–7 times, gradually increasing energy and intensity.

Jumping Activation

Invite participants to:

- bounce or jump lightly,
- keeping shoulders and arms relaxed.

Possible variations:

- silent jumps,
 - exhaling with a strong “Ha!”,
 - shaking off obstacles through movement.
-

Free Flow Movement

Invite participants to move however the body wishes:

- stomping,
- stretching,
- shaking,
- dancing,

- or using sound and voice if it arises naturally.

Facilitator Script:

“Feel the energy in your body. Keep this energy with you as we move into the next part.”

Allow approximately 7–8 minutes total for activation.

3. Facing the Challenge

Purpose:

To embody resistance and explore the experience of moving through obstacles using the body, breath, voice, and relational support.

Forming Groups

Divide participants into groups of 3 or 4.

Choosing a Goal and Obstacles

Each participant chooses:

- a meaningful personal goal,
- dream,
- or direction in life.

A goal point is marked a few metres away in the room.

Participants then identify:

- inner obstacles,
- fears,
- limiting beliefs,
- social pressures,
- or judgments connected to this goal.

Group members may optionally embody or voice these obstacles with phrases such as:

- “You’re not enough.”
 - “Who do you think you are?”
 - “You will fail.”
 - “It’s too difficult.”
-

Resistance Scale

The participant chooses a resistance level from 1–10 depending on what feels manageable and meaningful.

Group members provide corresponding resistance using:

- hands,
- arms,
- body positioning,
- or symbolic blocking.

Facilitator Reminder:

“Create enough resistance so it feels real — but not so much that the person cannot succeed.”

Reaching the Goal

The participant attempts to move toward the goal while facing the resistance.

Encourage use of:

- breath,
- movement,
- voice,
- sound,
- or gestures of release.

The focus is not performance, but embodied experience.

Rotation

Repeat the process until all participants have had a turn.

Allow approximately 15–20 minutes total.

4. Integration & Reflection

Purpose:

To release physical intensity, reconnect with grounding, and integrate the experience through reflection and self-awareness.

Body Release

Invite participants to:

- shake out arms, legs, and shoulders,
- take three deep breaths,
- exhale with sound (“Ahhh”),
- and place a hand on the chest or belly to reconnect with the body.

Reflection Questions

Participants may reflect individually, in pairs, or briefly in the larger group.

Possible prompts:

- What did it feel like to face resistance and continue moving?
- What helped me move forward?
- What judgments or obstacles appeared most strongly?
- What quality or strength do I want to carry with me from this experience?

Allow approximately 5–10 minutes.

Facilitator Note

This activity combines:

- reflection,
- activation,
- symbolic resistance,
- and embodied exploration.

The goal is not to “defeat” obstacles through force or toxic positivity, but to explore:

- agency,
- resilience,
- emotional activation,
- and the relationship between inner resistance and action.

Facilitators should:

- emphasise participant choice and consent,
- encourage symbolic rather than physically aggressive resistance,
- and adapt intensity according to the emotional state and physical capacity of the group.

Participants always choose:

- their goal,
- their resistance level,
- and how they express themselves physically or verbally.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- or participants with physical limitations,

resistance may remain:

- playful,
- symbolic,

- verbal,
- seated,
- or movement-based without physical contact.

Some participants may experience:

- emotional vulnerability,
- frustration,
- empowerment,
- grief,
- or strong activation.

Facilitators should maintain pacing, grounding, and emotional containment throughout the activity.

The symbolic “obstacles” are not presented as simple enemies to eliminate, but as experiences, fears, judgments, or pressures that participants are invited to recognise and move through with awareness and self-support.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What did you discover about yourself while facing resistance?
- How did your body react when obstacles appeared?
- Did the experience change your relationship to your goal in any way?
- What kind of support helps you move forward in difficult moments?

III.8. Optional Energizers – Presence, Agency, and Self-Confidence

These energizers are not part of the core flow of the workshop. They can be used after a break or whenever the facilitator feels the group’s energy needs to shift.

They are connected to the workshop theme of self-confidence and self-esteem, as they invite participants to act, respond, and adapt through the body. Through simple playful actions, participants practise attention, agency, and responsiveness — qualities that support the development of self-confidence and a more embodied sense of self.

III.8.1. Be Present – Touch Colours

Type of Activity

Quick energizer / Attention and awareness practice

Timing

3 minutes

Materials

None

Goal

- To activate the body and bring participants into the present moment.
- To strengthen attention and responsiveness through playful movement.
- To reconnect participants with a simple sense of agency in action — a small embodied component of self-confidence.

Facilitator Script:

“Let’s do a quick activity to bring our attention fully into the present moment.”

“In a moment, I will call out a colour. Your task is to quickly find something in the room with that colour and touch it.”

“It can be anything — clothing, a chair, a notebook, a wall, anything you see.”

Call out colours one by one:

“Touch something red.”

Pause while participants move, then continue with other colours such as:

- blue,
- green,
- black,
- white,
- or yellow.

Gradually increase the pace to create more energy and movement in the room.

After several rounds, invite the group to stop.

Facilitator Script:

“Pause for a moment. Take a breath and notice how awake and present your body feels now.”

Facilitator Note

This activity works well:

- after breaks,
- during low-energy moments,
- or when the group feels mentally overloaded.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- or participants with mobility limitations,

facilitators may adapt the activity by:

- using categories instead of colours (“touch something soft,” “touch something round”),
 - simplifying verbal instructions,
 - demonstrating visually,
 - or allowing participants to point toward objects instead of moving across the room.
-

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- How did it feel to respond quickly and act without overthinking?
 - Did you notice a shift in your energy or attention?
 - How does this relate to trusting your ability to respond to situations?
-

III.8.2. Statue – Run, Freeze, Transform

Type of Activity

Movement energizer / Embodiment / Spontaneity practice

Timing

10–12 minutes

Materials

Optional lively background music

Goal

- To energize the group through playful movement.
- To practise adaptability and creative response to unexpected situations.
- To explore how accidental or uncomfortable positions can be transformed into intentional action — an embodied metaphor for resilience and self-confidence.

step 1. Moving Through the Space

Facilitator Script:

“Let’s wake up our energy with a playful movement activity.”

Invite participants to move freely around the room:

“They can walk, run lightly, or dance — whatever feels natural.”

After a short time, introduce movement variations such as:

- moving with the nose leading the way,
 - moving with the finger guiding the body,
 - or moving with another body part such as the elbow or shoulder.
-

step 2. Freeze

After a moment, suddenly call:

“FREEZE!”

Participants immediately stop exactly where they are.

Facilitator Script:

“Do not adjust your position. Let the accidental statue be exactly as it is.”

step 3. Transforming the Statue

Facilitator Script:

“Look at the position your body is in. Now slowly transform this frozen statue into a movement or action.”

The movement may become:

- a stretch,
- a gesture,
- a push or pull,
- a small dance,
- or any action that emerges naturally from the frozen pose.

To add shared observation, the facilitator may gently tap one or two statues. When tapped, those participants come alive and perform their action while the others remain frozen. After a few seconds, they freeze again.

Repeat several cycles.

step 4. Closing

Facilitator Script:

“Release the statues and shake out your body.”

“Notice how it felt to be caught in an unexpected position — and how you were able to transform it into movement.”

“This ability to adapt and respond creatively is closely connected to self-confidence — trusting that we can act even when situations are unexpected.”

Facilitator Note

This activity explores:

- spontaneity,
- adaptability,
- embodied creativity,
- and the ability to respond rather than freeze when situations change unexpectedly.

Facilitators should encourage:

- playfulness,
- experimentation,
- and non-judgmental exploration rather than “performing well.”

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- or participants with physical disabilities,

movements may be adapted through:

- seated gestures,
- wheelchair movement,
- sound,
- facial expressions,
- or smaller physical actions.

The activity works best when participants feel permission to explore movement without pressure to appear “good,” coordinated, or original.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- How did it feel to freeze in an uncontrolled position?
 - What helped you transform the frozen shape into an action?
 - How was it to be seen by others while doing the movement?
-

Theory & Facilitation Notes - Session 3

This section offers theoretical references and facilitation perspectives connected to Session 3.

The aim is not to turn the workshop into a lecture, but to support facilitators in understanding:

- the educational rationale behind the activities,
- the emotional and relational processes involved,
- and the broader frameworks that inform the session design.

Facilitators are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this material before implementation and to adapt the depth of theory according to:

- the group,
- the context,
- and the available time.

The workshop itself should remain primarily experiential.

III.T.1. Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem & Self-Compassion

III.T.1.A. Self-Confidence

Self-confidence generally refers to the belief that one is capable of acting effectively in a situation.

It is often connected to:

- competence,
- practice,
- learning,
- mastery,
- and previous experience.

Self-confidence usually develops through action and repetition:

trying,
failing,
adjusting,
and trying again.

Within experiential and embodied educational approaches, self-confidence is often strengthened through:

- participation,
- experimentation,
- movement,
- relational support,
- and direct lived experience.

The activities in this session invite participants to experience self-confidence not only as a mental belief, but also as something connected to:

- posture,
- action,
- voice,
- movement,
- and the ability to respond to challenges.

III.T.1.B. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers more broadly to the way individuals perceive and evaluate their own worth or value.

While self-confidence is often connected to the question:

“Can I do this?”,

self-esteem relates more closely to:

- “Am I valuable?”
- “Do I deserve care and respect?”
- “Do I feel worthy even when I fail, struggle, or feel vulnerable?”

Many psychological perspectives suggest that self-esteem is shaped not only by personal achievements, but also by:

- attachment experiences,
- relationships,
- social feedback,
- culture,
- education,
- and internalised messages from family and society.

Humanistic psychology, particularly through the work of Carl Rogers, emphasised the importance of acceptance, empathy, and unconditional positive regard in the development of a healthier sense of self-worth.

At the same time, many contemporary perspectives note that self-esteem can become unstable when it depends too strongly on:

- comparison,
- productivity,
- social approval,
- or achievement.

Several activities in this session invite participants to recognise strengths, needs, and vulnerabilities while remaining connected to a sense of dignity and shared humanity.

III.T.1.C. Self-Compassion

Self-compassion, as described particularly through the work of Kristin Neff, refers to the ability to respond to one's own suffering, imperfection, or difficulty with:

- kindness,
- mindfulness,
- and recognition of shared humanity.

Neff describes three central dimensions of self-compassion:

- **Self-Kindness**
Responding to oneself with care rather than harsh criticism.
- **Common Humanity**
Recognising that imperfection, struggle, and vulnerability are part of the shared human experience.
- **Mindfulness**
Noticing emotional pain without suppressing it, exaggerating it, or becoming completely overwhelmed by it.

The opposite tendencies may include:

- self-judgment,
- isolation,
- and over-identification with emotional pain.

Within this workshop, self-compassion is approached not as passive self-soothing, but as a relational and embodied practice connected to:

- awareness,
- boundaries,
- emotional regulation,
- care,
- and the capacity to remain present with difficulty.

Self-compassion does not necessarily remove pain or difficulty, but may change the way individuals relate to their emotional experience.

III.T.2. Embodiment, Regulation & the Sense of Safety

III.T.2.A. The Body and Emotional Experience

Many contemporary approaches in psychology, neuroscience, trauma studies, somatic education, and embodied learning recognise that emotional experience is deeply connected to bodily processes.

Emotions are not experienced only as thoughts.
They may also appear through:

- posture,
- breath,
- muscle tension,
- movement,
- facial expression,
- activation,
- collapse,
- or bodily sensation.

For this reason, experiential and embodied approaches often invite participants to:

- notice bodily sensations,
- experiment with movement,
- and develop awareness through direct experience rather than intellectual analysis alone.

Several activities in this session use:

- posture,
- movement,
- breath,
- grounding,
- and symbolic action

as ways to explore emotional and relational experience through the body.

III.T.2.B. Regulation and the Sense of Safety

Practices involving:

- grounding,
- breath,
- imagination,
- rhythm,
- sensory awareness,
- and supportive social connection

may help participants regulate activation and reconnect with a sense of stability or safety.

Within Compassion Focused Therapy (Paul Gilbert), feelings of safety are often associated with the activation of the soothing system, which is connected to:

- rest,
- care,
- affiliation,
- connection,
- and emotional regulation.

Gilbert describes three broad emotional regulation systems:

- the threat system,
- the drive system,
- and the soothing system.

The threat system is associated with:

- protection,
- danger detection,
- anxiety,
- shame,
- and survival responses.

The drive system is connected to:

- achievement,
- motivation,
- performance,
- and goal-seeking.

The soothing system is associated with:

- calmness,
- connection,
- care,
- and feelings of safety.

Many people function primarily through threat and drive while having less access to soothing and self-regulation.

Activities such as:

- grounding,
- safe-place visualisation,
- breathing,
- symbolic anchoring,
- and compassionate group processes

may help participants reconnect with experiences of regulation and support.

This workshop does not attempt to create “perfect safety,” which may not feel accessible or realistic for all participants.

Instead, participants are invited to explore:

- moments of relative safety,
- grounding,
- support,
- comfort,
- or emotional regulation.

The “Safe Place” activity functions as a symbolic and sensory anchor rather than a therapeutic intervention.

Facilitators are encouraged to invite flexibility and imagination during this exercise, recognising that experiences of safety, comfort or grounding may differ significantly between participants.

III.T.3. Judgement, Inner Criticism & Internalised Voices

Many people carry internal critical voices shaped through:

- family systems,
- school experiences,
- social expectations,
- discrimination,
- comparison,
- shame,
- or cultural pressure.

These judgments may eventually become internalised and appear as:

- self-criticism,
- perfectionism,
- fear of failure,
- chronic self-monitoring,
- or feelings of inadequacy.

From a self-compassion perspective, the inner critic is often understood not only as an “enemy,” but also as a protective strategy attempting to:

- prevent rejection,
- avoid failure,
- maintain belonging,
- or anticipate danger.

This perspective appears in several contemporary approaches, including Compassion Focused Therapy and parts-work approaches such as Internal Family Systems (Richard Schwartz).

The “Box of Judgement” activity allows participants to:

- externalise judgments symbolically,
- embody their effects,
- and create temporary distance from them.

The goal is not to deny the existence of judgment, but to loosen over-identification with critical narratives and create space for more compassionate self-awareness.

III.T.4. Agency, Obstacles & Embodied Resilience

The “Overcoming Obstacles” activity draws from experiential, embodied, and action-based educational approaches.

Experiential learning theories, including the work of David Kolb, emphasise that learning often emerges through:

- direct experience,
- reflection,
- experimentation,
- and active engagement.

Rather than discussing obstacles only cognitively, participants are invited to experience:

- resistance,
- movement,
- frustration,
- effort,
- support,
- and persistence through the body.

Embodied activities may support:

- emotional awareness,
- insight,
- memory,
- integration,
- and relational learning.

Within this activity, obstacles are not framed as simple enemies to defeat.

They may represent:

- fear,
- social pressure,
- limiting beliefs,
- internal conflict,
- practical barriers,
- emotional wounds,
- or external systems of difficulty.

The emphasis is not on forced positivity or performance, but on:

- awareness,
- agency,
- adaptation,
- resilience,
- and the possibility of continuing movement even in the presence of difficulty.

Facilitators should remain attentive to:

- pacing,
- emotional activation,
- physical safety,
- and participants' freedom to regulate intensity and participation.

Many of these activities also rely on relational witnessing, group support and shared experience, recognising that resilience and self-awareness often develop not only individually, but also through supportive human connection.

IV. Session 4 – Remembering Our Strengths and Seeing Each Other¹⁹

Overall Goal

To explore and affirm participants' strengths and positive qualities through embodied, relational, and symbolic practices — and to connect these experiences with self-esteem, compassion, belonging, and shared humanity.

Exploring strengths and recognition is important because self-esteem becomes more grounded and relational when people can:

- recognise positive qualities in themselves and others,
 - experience being seen and witnessed,
 - explore visibility and vulnerability,
 - and connect personal value with collective humanity rather than comparison or performance.
-

Estimated Duration

Approximately 2h 15m – 2h 45m depending on:

- group size
 - breaks
 - depth of sharing
 - movement duration
 - emotional pacing
 - optional reflection and theory moments
 - adaptation choices made by the facilitator
-

Materials for Session 4

- small pieces of paper or sticky notes
 - pens and markers
 - large paper roll or flipchart sheets taped together
 - tape
 - optional symbolic cards or objects
 - optional music speaker
 - chairs and/or mats
-

¹⁹ To dive deeper into these topics, check out **Articles 1 “From Safe to Brave”** and **Article 7 “Sharing Circles – The transformative power of being seen and heard”** on our website : <https://www.lesphilentropes.org/en/projects/compassion-is-sexy/compassion-is-sexy-articles/>

IV.0 Structure (Overflow Version)

Positive Qualities, Common Body, and Sharing

Seeing Each Other

Naming Qualities — Recognising Ourselves and Others

Child of the Universe — Story, Writing, and Dance

Closing Circle — The Gift of Attention

Theoretical Notes for Facilitators — Session 4

IV.1. Positive Qualities, Common Body, and Sharing

Activity Type

Embodied movement / Symbolic collective creation / Group reflection

Timing

40 minutes total

- Positive Qualities – 10 min
- Common Body – 20 min
- Sharing – 10 min

Materials

- Small pieces of paper or sticky notes
- Pens
- Large paper roll or flipchart sheets taped together
- Markers
- Tape

Goal

- To help participants recognise and affirm positive qualities in themselves.
- To embody these qualities through posture, movement, and presence.
- To gather individual strengths into a shared collective body.
- To deepen self-esteem by making positive qualities visible, relational, and collective.

IV.1.A. Recognising and Embodying Positive Qualities

Invite participants to write down two positive qualities they recognise in themselves.

Facilitator Script:

“Take a small piece of paper and write down two positive qualities that you recognise in yourself.

They can be:

- simple or important,
- quiet or strong,
- visible or hidden,
- anything that feels true for you.”

“When you have written them, keep the paper somewhere on your body — in your hand, pocket, or attached to your clothes.”

Then choose one of the following two versions.

Version 1 – Positive Qualities as Statues

Divide the group into two halves:

- one half becomes statues,
- one half becomes witnesses.

Facilitator Script:

“Begin walking slowly in the space.

As you walk, connect with one of the qualities you wrote.”

“Now allow this quality to influence:

- the way you walk,
- your posture,
- your rhythm,
- or your energy.”

“After a little while, choose a moment to stop and create a pose — a statue — that expresses one of your qualities.”

The witnesses walk around and observe.

Then participants switch roles.

Facilitator Script:

“Notice what changes when a positive quality moves from being only a word into bodily presence.”

Version 2 – Playful Exaggeration of Positive Qualities (Optional Variation)

This version can be used instead of the statue version, especially with groups that respond well to playful exaggeration and movement.

Facilitator Script:

“Instead of creating a still statue, you may choose to exaggerate the quality playfully.”

“This is not about mocking yourself or becoming ironic.

It is about allowing yourself to amplify, embody, and explore a quality you genuinely value in yourself.”

“If your quality is courage, maybe your body becomes larger, brighter, more daring.

If it is kindness, maybe your movement becomes softer, warmer, or more open.”

“Allow yourself to explore a playful and generous exaggeration of something valuable in you.”

IV.1.B. Creating the Common Body

Facilitator Script:

“Now we will create one shared figure — a common body — made from all the good qualities we carry together.”

Ask for one volunteer to lie down on the large paper so the facilitator or another participant can trace the outline of their body.

Facilitator Script:

“This body will not represent one person only.

It will represent all of us together — a common body of strengths, qualities, and possibilities.”

Invite participants to come one by one and add into the figure:

- words,
- symbols,
- simple drawings,
- or qualities they recognise in themselves or in the group.

Facilitator Script:

“You may write:

- your own strengths,
- qualities you noticed in others,
- or qualities you feel are present in this group today.”

“Let this body become full of what feels alive, beautiful, supportive, or valuable among us.”

When the body is complete, invite the group to stand around it and observe in silence for a moment.

IV.1.C. Reflection and Sharing

Invite participants into a circle around the Common Body.

Possible prompts:

- “What was it like to focus on positive qualities today?”
- “Was it easy or difficult to recognise something good in yourself?”
- “How was it to see these qualities gathered in one common body?”
- “What do you notice when individual strengths become something collective?”

Facilitator Script:

“Self-esteem is not strengthened only by focusing on what is difficult.

It can also grow when we recognise:

- what is already valuable in us,
 - what helps us survive,
 - what supports others,
 - and what becomes possible when strengths are shared collectively.”
-

Facilitator Note

For some participants, recognising or naming positive qualities may feel:

- uncomfortable,
- emotionally vulnerable,
- unfamiliar,
- or even threatening.

Participants may:

- minimise themselves,
- become ironic,
- disconnect emotionally,
- or struggle to identify strengths at all.

Facilitators should avoid:

- forcing positivity,
- pressuring participants to “love themselves,”
- or correcting participants’ emotional reactions.

The purpose of the activity is not to create perfect self-esteem, but to explore the experience of:

- recognising value,
- being witnessed,
- and allowing strengths to exist visibly in the group.

The “Playful Exaggeration” variation should be framed carefully as:

- playful amplification,
- not ridicule or parody.

Participants should always remain free to:

- adapt movements,
- participate more quietly,
- contribute symbolically,
- or pass certain parts of the activity if needed.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- or participants with disabilities,

qualities may be expressed through:

- symbols,
- gestures,
- seated embodiment,
- facial expressions,
- colours,
- or verbal contribution to another participant writing on the Common Body.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- Was it easier to recognise qualities in yourself or in others?
 - How did it feel to embody a positive quality physically?
 - What changed when individual strengths became part of a collective body?
 - What qualities do you wish to remember more often in yourself?
-

IV.2. Seeing Each Other – A Practice of Gaze and Presence

Activity Type

Silent movement / Eye contact practice / Presence and witnessing

Timing

10–12 minutes

- Walking & gaze awareness – 3–4 min
- Pausing gaze – 3–4 min
- Sustained silent gaze – 3–4 min

Materials

- Open space to move and stop freely
- Soft instrumental background music (optional)
- Bell or chime (optional)

Goal

- To cultivate awareness of presence and connection through gaze while remaining grounded in oneself.
- To explore the experience of seeing and being seen without words.
- To invite participants into a quieter and more attentive relational space.
- To prepare the group for deeper relational acknowledgement in the following activity.

IV.2.A. Introduction

Facilitator Script:

“Before speaking to each other, we’ll take a moment simply to see each other.”

“This is a small practice of presence — noticing how it feels to meet another person through gaze while staying connected to ourselves.”

“There is no need to perform, smile, or create anything special. Simply notice the experience.”

IV.2.B. Walking & Brief Gaze

Facilitator Script:

“Begin walking slowly around the space. Try to use the whole room.”

“As you pass someone, allow your eyes to meet theirs briefly.”

“A soft gaze, perhaps a small nod, and then continue walking.”

“Notice the rhythm of:

- seeing,
- being seen,
- approaching,

- and moving on.”

Allow approximately 3–4 minutes.

IV.2.C. Pausing with Gaze

Facilitator Script:

“This time, when you meet someone’s eyes, pause for a moment.”

“Simply notice:

- their presence,
- your own presence,
- and what happens inside you during this small encounter.”

“After a few seconds, continue walking and meet someone else.”

Repeat several times.

Allow approximately 3–4 minutes.

IV.2.D. Silent Sustained Gaze

Facilitator Script:

“Now choose one partner.”

“You may stand or sit facing each other.”

“For the next moments, remain in silence and simply look at each other.”

“There is nothing to do, nothing to perform, nothing to prove. Just presence.”

“If direct eye contact feels uncomfortable at any moment, you may:

- soften your gaze,
- look at the space between the eyes,
- or reconnect with yourself before continuing.”

Allow approximately 1–2 minutes depending on the group.

IV.2.E. Optional Reflection

Possible prompts:

- “What did you notice in yourself during this exercise?”
- “How was it to meet someone’s gaze without speaking?”

- “What felt comfortable or uncomfortable?”
 - “Did something change between the beginning and the end of the exercise?”
-

Facilitator Note

For some participants, eye contact and visibility may feel:

- calming,
- intimate,
- uncomfortable,
- emotionally activating,
- vulnerable,
- or culturally unfamiliar.

Facilitators should avoid framing eye contact as:

- an obligation,
- proof of connection,
- or emotional openness.

Participants should always remain free to:

- soften or interrupt gaze,
- look nearby rather than directly into the eyes,
- increase or reduce intensity,
- or participate in a more regulated way.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- neurodivergent participants,
- trauma-affected groups,
- or participants with disabilities,

presence may also be explored through:

- gesture,
- proximity,
- shared silence,
- voice,
- or body orientation rather than sustained eye contact alone.

The aim of the activity is not intensity, but awareness, presence, and relational attention.

IV.3. Naming Qualities – Recognising Ourselves and Others

Activity Type

Movement / Relational affirmation / Verbal reflection

Timing

10–12 minutes

- Round 1 – Naming our own qualities – 5–6 min
- Round 2 – Recognising qualities in others – 5–6 min

Materials

- Open space
- Optional music

Goal

- To strengthen self-esteem by naming positive qualities in ourselves.
- To cultivate compassionate attention by recognising strengths in others.
- To practise careful, respectful, and non-defining language when acknowledging others.
- To deepen relational awareness through movement, witnessing, and verbal affirmation.

IV.3.A. Introduction

Facilitator Script:

“In the previous activity we practised seeing each other in silence.”

“Now we will slowly add words — first recognising qualities in ourselves, and then recognising qualities in others.”

“We will continue moving around the space and meeting different people.”

IV.3.B. Round 1 – Naming Qualities in Ourselves

Participants begin walking in the space.

Facilitator Script:

“When you meet someone, pause briefly.”

“Each of you says one good quality you recognise in yourself.”

“It can be something simple:

- patience,
- courage,
- humour,
- sensitivity,
- curiosity,

- calmness,
- creativity,
- or anything that feels true for you.”

“You may repeat the same quality each time, or say a different one.”

“After both of you have spoken, continue walking and meet another person.”

Encourage quick exchanges so participants speak with several people.

Allow approximately 5–6 minutes.

IV.3.C. Round 2 – Recognising Qualities in Others

Facilitator Script:

“Now we slowly shift our focus outward.”

“When you meet someone, pause again and take a moment to notice them.”

“Share one quality you recognise, sense, or appreciate in them.”

The facilitator may model trauma-informed and non-defining language.

Possible examples:

- “I see kindness in you.”
- “I recognise calmness in your presence.”
- “I noticed courage in the way you participated today.”
- “I sense warmth in you.”
- “I appreciate the way you listen.”

“If you are not sure, you can also speak more gently and tentatively:

- ‘I believe you carry...’
- ‘I imagine there is...’
- ‘I felt... when I met you.’”

“After sharing, continue walking and meet someone else.”

Allow several exchanges.

IV.3.D. Optional Reflection

Invite participants to gather briefly in a circle.

Possible prompts:

- “What was it like to say something good about yourself?”

- “What was it like to hear a quality from someone else?”
 - “Did anything surprise you?”
 - “Was it easier to speak or to receive?”
-

Facilitator Note

For some participants, receiving positive attention or affirmation may feel:

- supportive,
- uncomfortable,
- emotionally activating,
- unfamiliar,
- or difficult to trust.

Facilitators should encourage:

- observational language,
- respectful wording,
- and spaciousness rather than exaggerated praise.

It is important to avoid:

- defining people completely,
- idealising others,
- or speaking with certainty about another person’s identity.

Prefer language such as:

- “I see...”
- “I recognise...”
- “I noticed...”
- “I felt...”

rather than:

- “You are...”
- “You always...”

Participants should also be reminded that they are free to:

- receive,
- reinterpret,
- question,
- or simply listen to what is shared.

The intention of the activity is acknowledgement and relational attention — not evaluation or judgment.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,

- neurodivergent participants,
- or participants with disabilities,

qualities may also be expressed through:

- gestures,
 - drawings,
 - symbols,
 - movement,
 - or shorter verbal phrases.
-

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What was easier: recognising qualities in yourself or in others?
 - How did it feel to receive recognition from someone else?
 - Did any qualities shared with you resonate strongly?
 - What makes it difficult or easy to acknowledge strengths openly?
-

IV.4. Child of the Universe – Story, Movement, and Reflection

Activity Type

Storytelling / Embodied movement / Group support / Reflective writing / Optional sharing

Timing

Approximately 35–45 minutes

- Story – 5 min
- Free movement / dance – 10 min
- “Becoming Stars” group support – 10–12 min
- Reflection & writing – 5 min
- Optional sharing – 5–8 min

Materials

- Paper and pens for participants
- Open space for movement
- Optional soft instrumental music

Goal

- To awaken a sense of belonging, preciousness, and existential worth beyond achievement.
- To reconnect participants with self-esteem through the symbolic perspective of being a “child of the universe.”
- To explore embodied experiences of support, visibility, and connection.
- To express reflection and self-worth through movement, imagination, and symbolic language.

IV.4.A. Introduction

Facilitator Script:

“This activity uses imagination, symbolism, movement, and reflection.”

“It invites us to explore self-worth not only through achievement or external validation, but through a broader sense of existence, belonging, and connection with life itself.”

“You do not need to believe anything literally in order to participate.”

“You are invited simply to explore the images, sensations, and reflections that emerge for you.”

IV.4.B. Story – Child of the Universe

Invite participants to sit comfortably or stand in a relaxed position.

Facilitator Script:

“At the beginning of everything, scientists tell us that the entire universe was concentrated in a single point — unimaginably small and incredibly hot. From that moment emerged the Big Bang, the cosmic event that brought expansion, the movement of particles, and the creation of everything we know today.

You might imagine that even then, the building blocks of all life that would later appear in the universe were already present.

It took a chain of events — rare, improbable, and unique — for the Earth to form and for life to flourish upon it. A line that was never broken, from the dawn of time until today. From the most distant ancestors, through your parents, the chain of life has brought you here.

Perhaps you can see it this way: your existence is a gift of the universe itself.

As if you are a precious child of the stars. Your presence on Earth is not simply coincidence, but the expression of an ancient potential that found a way to appear through you.

For this moment, allow yourself to feel that the life that lives in you is a miracle — a miracle that travelled through space and time to take form in your face.”

Pause briefly.

IV.4.C. Free Movement / Dance

Invite participants to stand and spread through the space.

Facilitator Script:

“Now we will allow this experience to move through the body.”

“As the music begins, start moving in any way that feels natural to you.”

“You might begin very simply:

- breathing,
- swaying,
- stretching,
- or walking slowly.”

“Allow the movement to grow if it wants to.”

“Imagine you are moving as a child of the universe — carrying your worth, your existence, your belonging.”

“There is no right or wrong way to move. All expressions are welcome.”

Participants move freely through the space.

Allow approximately 10 minutes.

IV.4.D. Becoming Stars – Group Support

Facilitator Script:

“This next part may involve physical contact and optional lifting. Participation is always voluntary.”

“If you prefer not to participate in this part, you may continue dancing, moving, resting, or observing.”

“When supporting someone, move slowly and carefully.”

“Use many hands to support the body and keep stable footing.”

“If lifting happens, it should only happen if:

- the group feels comfortable,
- the person clearly consents,
- and the movement can remain slow and controlled.”

Facilitator Script:

“If at any moment during the dance you feel ready, you may slowly raise your hands into the air.”

“This is a sign that you would like the support of the group.”

“When someone raises their hands, the others slowly come closer and gently place their hands to support them.”

“As the person feels the support, they may slowly allow some of their weight to rest in the hands of the group.”

“When the group feels ready and safe, they may gently lift the person — ideally not higher than shoulder level.”

“In this moment the person becomes like a star — held among the stars.”

Allow a short moment in the lifted position.

“Then the group slowly lowers the person back to the floor.”

“The person may lie down, rest, breathe, or return slowly to movement when ready.”

“The dance continues, and others may also choose this experience.”

Allow approximately 10–12 minutes.

IV.4.E. Reflection and Writing

Invite participants to sit or lie down quietly.

Facilitator Script:

“Take a quiet moment for yourself.”

“If you feel like writing, take a piece of paper.”

Possible prompt:

“I am a precious child of the universe, and my offering — my gift to the world — is...”

Participants may:

- write,
- draw,
- remain in silence,
- or simply reflect internally.

Allow approximately 5 minutes.

IV.4.F. Optional Sharing

Invite participants to gather in a circle.

Participants may share:

- something they wrote,
- something they experienced in the movement,
- or what the phrase “child of the universe” means to them personally.

Sharing is voluntary.

Allow approximately 5–8 minutes.

Facilitator Note

This activity combines:

- symbolic imagination,
- movement,
- support,
- embodiment,
- and existential reflection.

The “Child of the Universe” metaphor is offered as:

- a symbolic,
- poetic,
- and reflective invitation,

not as a religious, spiritual, or scientific truth claim.

Participants should remain free to:

- interpret the imagery personally,
- connect with it metaphorically,
- adapt it internally,
- or engage only with the parts that feel meaningful or accessible to them.

The lifting component requires particular attention to:

- consent,
- physical safety,
- pacing,
- and emotional readiness.

No participant should ever feel:

- pressured to be lifted,
- pressured to touch others,
- or emotionally exposed beyond their comfort level.

Alternative forms of support may include:

- surrounding someone with hands nearby,
- sitting close,
- witnessing,
- symbolic gestures,
- or simply remaining present in the shared movement.

For some participants, especially those with experiences of:

- trauma,
- exclusion,
- shame,
- loss of trust,
- or body-related vulnerability,

receiving collective attention or support may feel emotionally intense.

Facilitators should:

- normalise different reactions,
- avoid idealising emotional openness,
- and allow multiple levels of participation.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- neurodivergent participants,
- or participants with physical disabilities,

movement and support can be adapted through:

- seated movement,
- gestures,
- symbolic “lifting,”
- sound,
- fabric,
- proximity,
- or imaginative participation without physical contact.

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- What emotions or thoughts emerged during the story or movement?
 - How did it feel to receive or witness support from the group?
 - What does the phrase “child of the universe” mean to you personally?
 - Did the activity affect the way you relate to worth, belonging, or existence?
-

IV.5. Closing Circle – The Gift of Attention

Activity Type

Whole-group sharing circle / Ritual of witnessing / Reflective closing

Timing

Approximately 40–50 minutes depending on:

- group size,
- speaking duration,
- and depth of sharing.

Materials

- Symbolic cards (e.g. Dixit or oracle-style cards) or personal objects from the room
- Timer or bell (optional, to mark speaking time)

Goal

- To close the session with a ritual of presence, equal voice, and compassionate witnessing.
- To affirm that each participant's story, strength, and presence matters.
- To practise deep listening without interruption or fixing.
- To create a final shared experience of recognition, attention, and relational care.

IV.5.A. Opening

Facilitator Script:

"We've spent this session discovering our strengths, seeing each other, and reflecting on what makes us worthy."

"To close, we'll give one another one of the greatest gifts we can offer: our full and undivided attention."

"In this circle, everyone's voice is heard equally."

"You'll each have a few minutes to introduce yourself again — not formally, but in a way that feels true for you — and to share something from the heart."

"There is no pressure to be profound. The value is simply in being heard."

Allow approximately 2–3 minutes.

IV.5.B. Choosing a Symbolic Object or Card

The facilitator may offer two options.

Option 1 – Symbolic Cards

Facilitator Script:

“I’ve brought cards with images or words.”

“Take your time to look at them and choose one that speaks to you — perhaps through:

- its image,
- colour,
- atmosphere,
- or emotional feeling.”

“You do not need to explain it logically. Simply choose what feels meaningful or present for you right now.”

Option 2 – Objects in the Space

Facilitator Script:

“You may also choose a small object from the space around you:

- a pen,
- scarf,
- key,
- stone,
- piece of fabric,
- or anything else that somehow speaks to you in this moment.”

Allow approximately 5 minutes.

IV.5.C. Instructions for Sharing

Facilitator Script:

“When it is your turn, show us your card or object, say your name, and respond to one or more of these questions:”

- Why did you choose this object or card?
- What does it represent for you?
- What feels important for others to hear about you today?
- What does this object remind you to care for in yourself?

“You will have approximately 3 minutes of uninterrupted speaking time.”

“When the bell rings softly, begin finding a way to conclude your sharing.”

IV.5.D. Circle Guidelines

Facilitator Script:

“When someone speaks, we practise listening without interrupting, fixing, analysing, or reacting strongly.”

“This silence is not absence — it is presence.”

“Still water reflects.”

“If complete silence feels too rigid for the group, we may also allow gentle forms of supportive presence such as:

- small nods,
- warm facial expressions,
- or soft sounds of encouragement.”

“The important thing is that the speaker feels:

- supported,
- uninterrupted,
- and free to express themselves.”

“Everything shared here stays here.”

“We hold each other’s stories with respect and confidentiality.”

Allow approximately 2 minutes.

IV.5.E. Sharing Circle

Participants share one by one.

The facilitator:

- holds the pacing,
- keeps the space emotionally contained,
- and rings the bell softly when needed.

A brief pause may be allowed between speakers.

Allow approximately 35–40 minutes depending on group size.

IV.5.F. Closing

Facilitator Script:

“Thank you all for showing up — not only for yourselves, but also for each other.”

“Today we practised:

- presence without fixing,
- kindness without conditions,
- and attention without agenda.”

“This, too, can be part of self-compassion:
learning to remain present with ourselves and with others just as we are.”

Invite a brief shared silence before ending the session.

Facilitator Note

For many participants, receiving uninterrupted attention may feel:

- supportive,
- emotional,
- uncomfortable,
- vulnerable,
- unfamiliar,
- or deeply meaningful.

Facilitators should avoid:

- pressuring emotional disclosure,
- interpreting participants’ stories,
- or creating pressure for “deep” sharing.

Participants should always remain free to:

- speak briefly,
- pass,
- remain symbolic,
- or share only what feels appropriate.

The role of the group is not to:

- advise,
- analyse,
- rescue,
- or evaluate,

but to practise relational presence and witnessing.

When working with:

- younger participants,
- refugee or migration contexts,
- neurodivergent participants,
- or participants with disabilities,

sharing may also happen through:

- symbols,
- shorter phrases,
- drawings,
- gestures,
- movement,
- or assisted communication.

The symbolic object or card functions as:

- a transitional object,
 - an anchor for reflection,
 - and a supportive bridge between inner experience and expression.
-

Reflection Questions (Optional)

- How did it feel to speak while being listened to without interruption?
 - What was it like to listen silently to others?
 - Did the object or card help you express something difficult to say directly?
 - What kind of attention helps you feel truly seen and respected?
-

Theory & Facilitation Notes - Session 4

This section offers theoretical references and facilitation perspectives connected to Session 4.

The aim is not to turn the workshop into a lecture, but to support facilitators in understanding:

- the educational rationale behind the activities,
- the emotional and relational processes involved,
- and the broader frameworks that inform the session design.

Facilitators are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this material before implementation and to adapt the depth of theory according to:

- the group,
- the context,
- and the available time.

The workshop itself should remain primarily experiential.

IV.T.1. Self-Esteem, Recognition & Human Worth

IV.T.1.A. Self-Esteem Beyond Achievement

Many people learn to evaluate their worth primarily through:

- performance,
- productivity,
- comparison,
- achievement,
- appearance,
- or external approval.

While positive feedback and accomplishment can support confidence, self-esteem may become unstable when it depends entirely on external validation.

Humanistic psychology, particularly through the work of Carl Rogers, emphasised the importance of:

- empathy,
- acceptance,
- authenticity,
- and unconditional positive regard

in the development of a healthier sense of self-worth.

Rogers suggested that many people gradually disconnect from their authentic experience because they learn that acceptance is conditional:

they feel valued only when they behave, perform, or appear in socially approved ways.

Within this session, self-esteem is explored not as superiority or perfection, but as the ability to recognise:

- personal value,
- strengths,
- vulnerability,
- dignity,
- and shared humanity.

Several activities invite participants to experience recognition through:

- movement,
- witnessing,
- reflection,
- creativity,
- and relational acknowledgement.

Positive Psychology perspectives, particularly strengths-based approaches such as the VIA Classification of Character Strengths (Peterson & Seligman), also emphasise the importance of recognising existing capacities and qualities rather than focusing exclusively on deficits or pathology.

Within this workshop, strengths are approached not as fixed labels or ideal identities, but as human potentials that may appear differently across situations and relationships.

Participants are also encouraged to recognise that strengths may coexist with vulnerability, insecurity or limitation rather than replacing them.

IV.T.1.B. Recognition and the Social Mirror

Our sense of self is shaped not only internally, but also relationally.

Developmental, relational, and social perspectives suggest that human beings develop identity partly through:

- recognition,
- mirroring,
- attention,
- and relational feedback.

The way we are:

- seen,
- ignored,
- encouraged,
- criticised,
- accepted,
- or acknowledged

can deeply influence how we relate to ourselves.

Activities such as:

- “Seeing Each Other,”
- “Naming Qualities,”
- and “The Gift of Attention”

explore this relational dimension of self-esteem through:

- eye contact,
- witnessing,
- affirmation,
- and listening.

The emphasis on presence and witnessing also resonates with dialogical perspectives such as Martin Buber’s concept of the “I–Thou” relationship, where another person is encountered not as an object to evaluate or control, but as a living presence deserving attention and respect.

The goal is not to idealise praise or create artificial positivity, but to explore what happens when people experience:

- respectful attention,
 - recognition,
 - and non-judgmental presence.
-

IV.T.2. Embodiment, Visibility & Vulnerability

IV.T.2.A. Being Seen Through the Body

Embodied and experiential approaches recognise that visibility is not only psychological, but also physical and relational.

Being:

- looked at,
- witnessed,
- acknowledged,
- listened to,
- or physically present in front of others

may evoke many different responses, including:

- connection,
- joy,
- discomfort,
- shame,
- activation,
- vulnerability,
- or fear of judgment.

For this reason, activities involving:

- gaze,
- movement,
- bodily expression,
- touch,
- or group attention

require careful pacing, consent, and freedom of participation.

Within this session, embodiment is used not for performance, but as a way to explore:

- presence,
- authenticity,
- expression,
- relational awareness,
- and self-perception.

Participants are encouraged to:

- remain connected to their own boundaries,
- regulate intensity,
- and choose their level of participation.

Experiential theatre and drama-based educational approaches, including the work of Augusto Boal and Jacob Moreno, have long explored how:

- movement,
- roles,
- witnessing,
- improvisation,
- and embodied interaction

may support awareness, empathy, expression, and relational understanding.

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, for example, emphasised the importance of transforming passive spectators into active participants capable of exploring experience through the body and collective interaction.

IV.T.2.B. Play, Creativity & Positive Embodiment

Several activities in this session invite participants to:

- exaggerate qualities,
- move freely,
- play symbolically,
- or explore non-ordinary forms of expression.

Playful and creative approaches are widely used in:

- drama pedagogy,
- expressive arts,
- movement education,
- psychodrama,
- and experiential learning

because they may help participants:

- access spontaneity,
- reduce self-monitoring,
- experiment with identity,
- and express aspects of themselves that are difficult to verbalise directly.

Donald Winnicott, particularly through his work on play and creativity, suggested that playful spaces may support exploration, authenticity, imagination, and psychological growth.

The “Playful Exaggeration of Positive Qualities” activity does not aim toward mockery or performance, but toward:

- exploration,
- amplification,
- freedom,
- and embodied experimentation.

Play may support self-esteem not because participants become “better,” but because they temporarily experience themselves with:

- more openness,
- flexibility,
- imagination,
- and permission.

IV.T.3. Belonging, Shared Humanity & Existential Worth

IV.T.3.A. Shared Humanity and Self-Compassion

Kristin Neff describes “common humanity” as one of the central dimensions of self-compassion.

This perspective suggests that:

- imperfection,
- vulnerability,
- struggle,
- uncertainty,
- and emotional pain

are part of the shared human experience rather than signs of personal failure or isolation.

Within this session, self-worth is explored not only individually, but also collectively through:

- shared movement,
- witnessing,
- collective creation,
- and mutual recognition.

The “Common Body” activity symbolically reflects the idea that strengths and vulnerabilities exist not only within isolated individuals, but also within communities and relationships.

Self-compassion in this context does not mean avoiding difficulty or maintaining constant positivity. Rather, it involves learning to remain connected to one’s humanity — and to the humanity of others — even during moments of insecurity, shame, vulnerability, or imperfection.

IV.T.3.B. Existential Reflection and the “Child of the Universe” Metaphor

The “Child of the Universe” activity combines:

- storytelling,
- imagination,
- movement,
- symbolic support,
- and existential reflection.

The activity draws partly from:

- cosmological imagination,
- poetic symbolism,
- existential reflection,
- and humanistic psychology

rather than from religious doctrine or scientific proof claims.

Existential and humanistic psychologists such as Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, and Irvin Yalom explored questions related to:

- meaning,
- existence,
- isolation,
- mortality,
- belonging,
- and the human search for value.

Within this perspective, worth is not understood as something that must constantly be earned through performance, but as something connected to existence itself.

The metaphor of being a “child of the universe” invites participants to reflect symbolically on:

- existence,
- preciousness,
- interconnection,
- continuity,
- and the improbability of life.

For some participants, this may evoke:

- wonder,
- connection,
- tenderness,
- grief,
- scepticism,
- or resistance.

All responses remain valid. Facilitators should avoid interpreting participants’ reactions symbolically or spiritually, allowing meaning to emerge individually and voluntarily.

The activity is not intended to persuade participants toward a specific worldview, but to create space for reflection around:

- existence,
 - belonging,
 - meaning,
 - aliveness,
 - and shared humanity.
-

IV.T.4. Attention, Witnessing & Deep Listening

Several activities in this session explore attention as a relational act.

In many contemplative, dialogical, therapeutic, and experiential traditions, attentive listening is understood not simply as passive silence, but as a form of:

- presence,
- witnessing,
- care,
- and relational respect.

“The Gift of Attention” closing circle invites participants to experience:

- uninterrupted speaking,
- equal voice,
- and non-interrupted listening.

The practice of listening without:

- fixing,
- analysing,
- correcting,
- rescuing,
- or immediately responding

may create conditions for:

- emotional safety,
- expression,
- dignity,
- and relational acknowledgement.

This approach also resonates with person-centred and dialogical traditions that emphasise:

- authentic presence,
- listening,
- and the capacity to remain with another person without attempting to control or change their experience.

For many participants, being listened to without interruption may feel:

- unusual,
- vulnerable,
- emotional,
- calming,
- uncomfortable,
- or deeply meaningful.

Facilitators should remember that:

- silence,
- pacing,
- witnessing,
- and respectful attention

can themselves become powerful relational experiences.

Across Session 4, experiential activities invite participants to explore how recognition, embodiment, creativity and attentive presence may influence both personal self-perception and collective relational experience.

Thanks for reading !

This eBook is the result of a deeply collaborative effort. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the co-authors whose unique expertise, passion, and dedication to mental health made this Ebook possible. Together, they have brought the vision of the *ComPASSION is Sexy* project to life on these pages.

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Take care ! <3

Adrien & Anastasia

Les Philentropes



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OLOTITES
oh my wholeness