

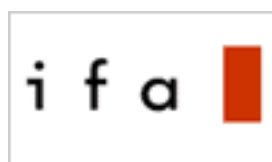


# TRAINING MANUAL

Exercises for relaxing, energizing and  
connecting

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Funded by:



# PREFACE

## *Introduction*

This volume is a manual for counsellors, psychologists, social workers and other professionals who work with women and children in a psychosocial, psycho-educational, therapeutic or advisory capacity. The warm-ups and exercises contained herein have been introduced and customized for staff members, trainees and clients of medica mondiale Afghanistan by various contributing international trainers<sup>1</sup>. While ample explanation is provided for each of these exercises, it is strongly suggested that they only be implemented by those who have received in-person training on both the theory and practice of using bodywork and/or creative arts therapy work with traumatized individuals.

This manual is divided into two parts, **WARM-UPS** and **MAIN ACTIVITIES**. Each of these contains three sections that characterize the overall objective of the exercise: **Relaxing, Energizing** and **Connecting**. Listed for each exercise, there is an estimated duration (**Time**), the reasons behind doing it (**Rationale**) and a description of what to do (**Activity**). For exercises requiring any materials, there is also a Materials section. Finally, in some instances there is an additional section called **Adaptation** or **Extension**, explaining how the exercise can be changed or continued and built upon. Most of the exercises in this manual may be used with individuals or groups.

## *Research, Assumptions and Processes Underlying the Work*

Creative arts therapy work is based on the assumption that creative, artistic, imaginative and self-expressive activities are emotionally healing and promote positive growth and development. This assumption is well-founded in concepts and observations of psychologists, educators and specialists in human development. Drawing, painting, art-making, writing and dramatic play are all naturally healing; they are particularly helpful to individuals who have experienced extraordinary difficulties and whose sense of the stability and rightness of their world and their social structures has been

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<sup>1</sup> The origin of most of these exercises can not be clarified. Modified and adapted versions have been documented by several therapists/trainers. One of them is Gabriele Müller (2008): *Training manual - Psychodrama and imaginative and creative techniques for working with traumatised clients*. Cologne, medica mondiale e.V. Another one is Sybille Manneschmidt: medica mondiale e.V. (2006): *Training Manual – A Training Manual for Psychosocial Intervention*. Cologne.

severely damaged. Playful, engaging and imaginative processes within the context of safe and supportive relationships with peers offer people an effective opportunity to connect with others, build self-confidence and discover and develop their own strengths.

The use of bodywork, movement or dance in a therapeutic setting is rooted in a deep understanding of how the body and mind interact in health and in illness. Because there is a strong connection between the mind and body, when a person engages physically, she will have greater access to her emotions. Counseling that involves a person engaging physically in an activity gently encourages her to connect with feelings surrounding trauma, confusion and pain that may be held within her body.<sup>2</sup> As a person comes into contact with these feelings, she does so from a non-rational/non-intellectual place and steps into the realm of intuition and emotion. This can facilitate emotional release, which can then be processed and integrated either physically or verbally.

### ***The Imagination***

The gift of the imagination is an essential part of our mental makeup. Our minds automatically generate images and fantasies as, for example, in our dreams. Far from being a useless activity, the imagination is a way of grasping and understanding both external reality and our internal subjective world. Very often we are not able to comprehend or resolve difficulties with our most advanced mental functions, such as rational, conceptual thought and problem solving. Instead, the first attempts emerge as images that capture feelings and the earliest glimmers of understanding. When we take our imagination seriously and give it concrete expression, we encourage and set into motion a process of understanding and of integrating even the most difficult and problematic experiences.

### ***Art Therapy***

The basic methods of art therapy can be applied to a wide range of psychological and emotional needs. When a person sits quietly looking at a blank sheet of paper and a set of colored pencils or paints, she is pulled into an internal world of feelings, concerns, wishes, and fears. Every choice she

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<sup>2</sup> See as well WORK FOR CARE (2005): a trainers' manual on sexual and domestic violence during and after war, module 14: The body remembers – dealing with feelings, developed by the Dutch NGO Admira, download: <http://www.pharos.nl/supernavigatie/english#c> – please follow the menu "English publications".

makes—color, placement, crayon or chalk, pressure on the paper, controlled vs. free flowing line, etc.—expresses personally significant issues and challenges. As the person draws, she is externalizing and giving form to these concerns. The very act of creating a drawing or painting gives direction to inner tensions and may be extended to a more full-fledged process of healing, growth, and problem resolution.

### ***Drama Therapy***

While art activities orient an individual towards her internal and private world, dramatic activities encourage energizing and spontaneous interaction with others. Dramatic enactment is similar to the dramatic play of children. It involves role playing, the creation of plots and their resolution, expression of feeling, and spontaneous dialogue. By engaging not as oneself but as an imagined or assigned other, the person can safely experience a wide range of feelings, attitudes, and actions that he may not have access to within the scope of his own identity. Since everyone knows that the action has no serious consequences, there is room to safely experiment and take risks. In the drama a person can produce alternative and more desirable - even healing - outcomes for prior experiences that may have remained unresolved or been traumatic. The person may discover solutions to certain dilemmas and feel generally released and empowered.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Group Process***

To create a safe, supportive and sensitive community atmosphere the group leader makes use of principles from group therapy. These include respect for every individual, the importance of everyone being heard and acknowledged and acceptance of diverse feelings, opinions, and attitudes.

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<sup>3</sup> See the Reference page at the end of this manual for a list of sources for the creative arts therapy exercises and group process theory and practice.

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# WARM-UPS

## RELAXING

### 1 – BODY STRETCHES

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** Stretching and warming up the body before any kind of physical activity prepares the mind, heart, muscles and joints. Warming up lowers blood pressure, improves blood flow to the heart, increases muscle temperature and helps them stretch more easily.

**Activity:** Slowly apply each stretch listed below; stretch until tension, but not pain, is felt. Hold each stretch for at least 15 seconds. Do not bounce up and down while stretching. Breathe normally.

- a) **Head Circles:** Make quarter-circles with your head. Start with your ear near your shoulder on one side, rotate your head around to the front, ending with your ear near the shoulder on the other side. Roll your head back to the other side. Repeat five to 10 times.
- b) **Arm Circles:** with one arm at a time, make a backwards arm circle, with your palm facing out and your thumb pointed up. Repeat 10 to 15 times with each arm. Then, make forward arm circles with your palm facing in and your thumb pointed down, repeat 10 to 15 times.
- c) **Hip Stretch:** Stand up, take a half-step back with your right foot. Bend your left knee and shift your weight back to your right hip. While keeping your right leg straight, bend forward more and reach farther down your right leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Switch sides and repeat.
- d) **Calf Stretch:** Stand an arm's-length from the wall or a support. Lean into wall, bracing yourself with your arms. Place one leg forward with your knee bent (this leg will not bear any weight). Keep your other leg back, with your knee straight and your heel down. Keeping your back straight, move your hips toward the wall until you feel a stretch. Hold 30 seconds. Relax. Repeat with other leg.
- e) **Leg Extensions:** Facing a support, hold on with both hands. Bending at the knee, bring one leg forward, then extend and swing that leg back and behind. Repeat 10 to 15 times, then switch legs. Be cautious of hyper-extending your lower back.

- f) **Cross-over Leg Swings:** Holding onto a support with both hands, face forward. Swing one leg in front of your body, gradually swinging higher. Swing about 10 to 15 times with each leg.
- g) **Sideways Neck Stretch:** With your right hand on the left side of your head slowly move your head to the right. Gently push it little further. Repeat to the other side. Hold for 10 seconds.
- h) **Upper body stretch:** While sitting on a chair, clasp both hands above your head. Stretch your shoulder blades together. Hold for 10 seconds.
- i) **Lower Back stretch:** Rest your shoulder on your knees and relax for 10 seconds.
- j) **Hip Tilt:** With bent knees, tilt your hips so that the small of your back rests flat against the wall. Hold for one minute. Make sure you keep the back of your head, shoulders and buttocks against the wall. Hold for 10 seconds.

## 2 – BREATHING EXERCISES

When you are guiding a person or a group through relaxation or guided imagery exercises, the tone and inflection of your voice is of utmost importance. Speak slowly and softly, but loud enough so that no one will have trouble hearing you. Participants should feel reassured by your voice and choice of words, that they can put their trust in your hands. There is no need to try to change the breath. It is perfect as it is. One does not have to make oneself breathe – it happens without our willing it. It is effortless and regular. One sometimes even feels that "the breath is breathing us."

The breath is one still point we can always come back to, because it is always happening. Some will experience a flood of emotion when space and time is made for focusing on the breath. Others will feel no emotions. Some will notice racing thoughts, others will feel emptiness. These are all normal, and there is no right or wrong way to think or feel when focusing on breathing. When we notice our thoughts or feelings have crowded out our focus on the breath, we can be reminded to gently bring our focus back to the breath. This should be done with as much gentleness as we would guide our baby who has just learned to walk and has gotten a bit off the path.

Breathing exercises can be used to help people relax even more, or as an introduction to imagination exercises. The breath can be used to scan the body to find areas of stress, pain or tension. It can also be used to relax us enough to go on the guided journeys into any area of imagination.



## **2A – Deep Breathing**

**Time:** 5 to 10 minutes

**Rationale:** The aim of breathing exercises is to bring a person into her own internal space – physically, emotionally and spiritually. Here she can get some precious time to focus inward, and let the cares of the world drop away, even for a short time. This experience can be renewing, refreshing, and restorative.

**Activity:** Have group members sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and give the following instructions in a gentle, calm voice: "Close your eyes, or if you are not comfortable closing your eyes then lower your gaze and look at the floor. Slowly count to ten, and then start to become aware of your breathing. Notice the in breath, notice the out breath, notice the momentary space between the two. If you feel discomfort in any way, adjust your body so that you are comfortable.

"Continue to inhale and exhale consciously. Now concentrate on taking slow, deep, regular, steady breaths through the nose. Upon breathing out, think the word "relax" or a word with similar meaning in your language.

"When you exhale, imagine that you let go of all tension in your body. Imagine, that with every breath leaving your body you let go of worries or thoughts that burden you. Imagine that the wind will blow all worries and thoughts away. When you inhale, imagine that you take in new energy with each breath. Imagine that a profound feeling of peace will come over you."

Let the group or the client continue this breathing exercise in silence for about 5 minutes.

## **2B – 4-7-8 Breathing**

**Time:** 5 to 10 minutes

**Rationale:** A slow inhale, followed by holding the breath and concluding with an exhale twice as long as the inhale will help balance the carbon dioxide level in the blood. This can help alleviate headaches and will help reduce feelings of stress.

**Activity:** Have group members sit on chairs in a comfortable position. Their feet should be flat on the floor and they should be sitting near the edge of their seat so that their posture is upright and not bent over. Have participants inhale to the count of four, hold their breath to the count of seven and then slowly exhale to the count of eight. The slow exhale is important to most forms of breathwork and is critical to achieving stress reduction.

**Adaptation:** *This activity can also be done with group members walking slowly around the room.*

## **2C - Breathing Spectrogram**

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Rationale:** This exercise will give participants insight into their breathing habits and how these may relate to headaches and fatigue. When we are breathing fully and deeply, the lower part of our stomach moves outward as we inhale and inward as we exhale. The more it can move, the more our lungs are able to expand, which means that more oxygen can be taken in and more carbon dioxide released with each breath. Too much carbon dioxide and not enough oxygen can create feelings of fatigue and depression. It can also cause headaches. The end result of poor breathing habits is not only insufficient oxygen to our brain and the other cells of our body, but also insufficient movement in our internal organs and in the fluids upon which our health depends.

**Respiration rate:** The average respiration rate is between 12 and 14 times a minute, but with correct breathing we are aiming for 9-11 breaths per minute.

**Activity:** Count the number of breaths you take in 60 seconds. Share that number with the group verbally or by way of a spectrogram. (Draw an imaginary line down the center of the room and have people stand somewhere on the line based on how many breaths they took in the one minute of time. 8 breaths per minute is at one end of the room and 35 breaths per minute is at the other.) After the group has shared these numbers, the leader can reveal the above information about "average" respiration rate, keeping in mind that this number may need to be adjusted according to the altitude of the area.

### 3 – DOODLE DRAWINGS

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes, plus sharing time

**Materials:** White paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons.

**Rationale:** This is a classic art therapy technique for relaxation, freedom of expression and flexible thinking. (A characteristic of trauma may be rigid thinking).

**Activity:** Each group member selects drawing materials and makes random marks on a piece of paper for about thirty seconds. They then turn their paper around and around until an image – real or symbolic or both – emerges. Group members draw the image that evolves from the random lines, perhaps separated from those lines, perhaps emerging from them.

*Adaptation – this exercise can also be done in pairs, where after each person has created a doodle, they switch papers, find the image and "complete" one another's drawings.*

## ENERGIZING

### 1 – NAME AND MOVEMENT

**Time:** 5 to 10 minutes, depending on size of group

**Rationale:** This is a great way to have fun with introductions or to check with everyone in your group at the beginning. Having other groups members repeat each person's name and movement creates attunement, facilitates emotional expression and fosters interpersonal connection.

**Activity:** Have the group stand in a circle. Ask each person to say her name and do a movement that expresses how she is feeling today. After each person does this, have the whole group repeat what she did (gesture and name).

**Extension** - After this exercise, you can work in small groups or the large group and explore how each person feels about her name. Who gave you your name? Does the name have a special meaning? How do you feel about your name? What was it like to grow up with your name? Reflect on how our names relate to our identity.

## 2 – PARTNER INTRODUCTIONS

**Time:** 20 to 30 minutes, depending on size of group

**Rationale:** This exercise is great for building interpersonal connection and enhancing listening skills and empathy. Working in pairs can make it easier to engage people who are less likely to share in a larger group setting.

**Activity:** Sit in a circle and collect ideas of what you would like to know about each other. If it is helpful, write a list of topics on a flip chart. Use the list to guide you for interviewing each other. After the interviews, each participant introduces her partner to the rest of the group. Try to avoid questions that lead to simple "yes" or "no" answers (closed questions) and "interview" your partner so you can tell the group about her.

Some examples of questions to ask include: What does your name mean? When you were younger, what were your ideas and dreams about your future? Do you have role models of women and who are they? Who are the strong women in your family? Why are they strong? What three pieces of advice you would give a young girl today?

## 3 – RHYTHM WARM-UP

**Time:** 5 – 10 minutes

**Rationale:** This is a wonderful exercise for both energizing and calming the group down. It builds listening skills, physical coordination, rhythm and empathy.

**Activity:** Have the group form a circle and tell them that they all need to be able to see you and make eye contact with one another. Once they have adjusted their distance, begin by putting your hands together in front of you, and wait for the group to do the same. (Try to do this without speaking – just by using gestures. If the group doesn't catch on, you can use words.) Once everyone in the group has their hands together in front of them, begin to rub your hands together. When everyone is repeating after you, quickly stop and hold your palms out. Then point to your eyes and ears, saying to the group non-verbally: "Watch and listen to me." The exercise will continue in a "call and response" way, with you doing a short series of claps, snaps, stomps, etc. that the group repeats. Finish this exercise with a single clap that the group repeats.

**Adaptation** – Experiment with different gestures, rhythms and speeds. You may also want to let a group member lead the activity. This is an exercise that you can repeat often and even use it as a ritual opening or closing of a group.

#### **4 – LINE UP!**

**Time:** 15 - 20 minutes

**Rationale:** This is a fun activity that allows group members to learn new things about each other and about themselves in relation to the group. It encourages teamwork, communication and quick thinking while bringing in an element of playful competition. This exercise works best in a room where you have some space to move around and with a group of at least twelve people.

**Activity:** Have group members line up single file in three or more different parallel lines, with an **equal number** of women in each line. (For example, you might have three lines of four women.) Tell them that you are about to give them instructions that will change the order in which they are standing in their line. They should listen to your instructions and then line up as quickly as they can. Once their team has lined up in order, all of the people in their line should raise their hands. Wait for all of the lines to get in the proper order, and then check the answers with the first line to see if their order is correct.

Some of the ways that you can have them line up are:

- According to height, with the shortest in front and the tallest in back (or the reverse)
- According to age, with the youngest in front and the oldest in back (or the reverse)
- According to the length of their hair, the color of their skin, how far they live away from the group meeting place, etc.

## CONNECTING

### 1 – NON-DOMINANT HAND DRAWINGS

**Time:** 15 to 20 minutes, plus sharing time

**Materials:** Paper, markers, colored pencils and crayons

**Rationale:** This easy, playful activity helps to reduce fears, embarrassment, resistance and pressures around making "good art". Often, the first reaction to art activities is, "I'm not an artist"; "I'm not very creative"; "I was never good at art". Non-dominant hand drawing is an activity that is purely about expressing one's self.

**Activity:** Using the hand that you DO NOT write with, use the art materials to create a drawing of something that will tell the group something about you. Depending on where a group is in their process, you can choose any theme around which to organize the activity, i.e., "draw something that makes you happy"; "make a drawing of a journey you have taken or would like to take."

### 2 – GROUP CHECK-IN THROUGH OBJECT ROLE PLAY

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes, depending on size of group

**Rationale:** This warm-up encourages reflection and helps connect group members to the work done in the previous session. Taking on the role of an object provides an emotional distance and allowing the women to feel safer with any disclosure that may occur.

**Activity:** Ask group members to "step into" the role of an object from their everyday life. While in the role of, for example, their hijab, their bag, their key, a ring, etc., they should tell the group about something that happened to them during the period since the last group meeting. They should start their story by saying the role that they are playing, and they should refer to themselves in the third person. For example, "I am Marina's shoe, and yesterday she..."

### **3 – EMOTIONAL RECALL WITH FOOD**

**Time:** 5 to 10 minutes, depending on size of group

**Rationale:** This activity fosters connection, creativity, spontaneity and allows group members to experiment with the power of positive imagination as a technique of self-support (this is especially important in work with traumatized women).

**Activity:** The group members are sitting or standing in a circle. The leader picks up some kind of imaginary fruit (or cake or other sweet) and gives it to her neighbor, saying (for example): "Here - I give you a wonderful bunch of grapes. Enjoy them!" The neighbor takes the imaginary grapes carefully and begins to eat, expressing how tasty the grapes are and how much she enjoys them. This person then turns to the woman next to her in the circle and chooses another kind of imaginary fruit to share with her. This continues through the circle until everyone has had a chance to participate.

### **4 – BACK-TO-BACK DRAWING**

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes, plus sharing time

**Rationale:** This activity encourages people to learn about their partner and helps the two people work together to achieve a common goal.

Ask your group participants to sit in pairs. Ask them to sit back to back. Give one of them a blank piece of paper. Hand the other woman a piece of paper with a simple drawing. Ask this woman to

explain to her partner the drawing. The woman with the drawing needs to instruct her partner in such a way that her partner is able to draw on her blank page as exactly as possible.

The woman who gives the instructions is the only one who can talk. The woman who is trying to copy the drawing is not able to see the original and cannot talk. She cannot ask questions or react in any way. The woman who gives the instructions will tell her partner when she is finished explaining the drawing. Then both are able to turn toward each other and look at the two drawings and compare the two drawings.



# MAIN ACTIVITIES

## RELAXING

### 1 – PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** Progressive muscle relaxation is a great way for group members to quietly turn inward, away from the stress and strain of external demands. This process soothes the central nervous system, eases physical tension, lowers heart rate, blood pressure and slows down racing thoughts.

**Activity:** Ask your client to sit in a comfortable position on a chair or on the floor. If she prefers to lie on her back, have her stretch out her legs. Explain that you will put her in a state of deep relaxation by guiding her to first tense and then relax specific muscle groups in her body.

Start by asking her to close her eyes and concentrate fully on her breathing. Ask her to breathe air in through her nose and out through her mouth. It is important that she feels how the air enters, reaches into the lower parts of her lungs and then leaves again through her mouth. After she has breathed this way for several minutes and her breath has become more regular, give her the following instructions:

- Forehead: Wrinkle your forehead. Raise your eyebrows toward your hairline for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Eyes and nose: Close your eyes as tightly as you can for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Lips, cheeks and jaw: Draw corners of your mouth back and grimace for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Hands: Extend your arms in front of you and clench your fists tightly for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Forearms: Extend your arms out against an invisible wall and push forward with your hands for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Upper arms: Bend your elbows. Tense your biceps for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Shoulders: Shrug your shoulders up to your ears for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Back: Arch your back off the floor. From a sitting position, arch your back away from the chair. Do this for 10 seconds. Relax.

- Stomach: Tighten your stomach muscles for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Hips and buttocks: Tighten your buttocks for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Thighs: Tighten your thigh muscles by pressing legs together as tightly as you can for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Feet: Bend your ankles toward your body as far as you can for 10 seconds. Relax.
- Toes: Curl your toes under as tightly as you can for 10 seconds. Relax.

## 2 – GUIDED IMAGERY EXERCISES

Guided imagery activities are most effective when they come after breathing and relaxation exercises. When the focus has already become internal and relaxed, it gives the imagination space to be free and uncluttered. The freer the imagination is, the more beneficial the exercises will be.

Imagination can take us from the limits of our confined lives, social roles and rational world, to see the possibilities in all of our lives. There is no limit to the possibilities, and we so seldom have the time and encouragement to let ourselves dream. Perhaps most important, especially for those who are living under hardship conditions, imagination exercises can affirm the presence of hope in our lives.

### 2A - "The Tree"

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** This exercise will help group members relax and reconnect with their inner strength and resources.

**Activity:** After a breathing or relaxation warm-up, ask group members to find a comfortable position sitting on the ground or on a chair. Have them close their eyes or lower their gaze and focus in on their breathing.

Give them the following instructions: "Imagine being in a beautiful place. It may be a place you know well or a place that only exists in your fantasies. It is a place that you love and where you feel safe.

You enjoy being in this place and you start to explore your surroundings. You notice in the distance a soft, green hill and at the top of the hill a beautiful big tree. You admire the tree and walk toward it.

"When you come close, you see the large trunk and strong branches. The branches and leaves protect you from too much sun or rain. You touch the tree trunk and feel the bark. You turn around and sit down with your back leaning against the tree trunk. You feel and enjoy the strength of the tree. Imagine that you are becoming one with the tree. You feel the deep, strong roots connecting you with the ground. You feel the nourishment coming to you through the tiny and numerous roots that give you water. You feel proud and free like the big branches spreading out into the sky. You hear the leaves whispering encouragement in the soft wind. You enjoy the warmth of the sun as well as the freshness of the rain. The birds nesting and singing in your treetop make you feel happy. You feel the energy the sun gives you. You feel what it is like to receive everything you need: the earth, the sun and the whole universe are giving you energy and the nourishment you need. Enjoy this feeling. Keep this feeling deep inside you and realize that whenever you want, you can return to this tree.

"When you feel you are ready to come back to this room, imagine slowly walking away from the tree. Open your eyes and come back into this room."

***Extension:** After the exercise you may have group members draw the trees they have imagined. They can then share these images and about the art-making process with the group.*

## **2B - "Shining Light"**

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** This exercise will help group members relax and reconnect with their inner strength and resources.

**Activity:** After a breathing or relaxation warm-up, ask group members to find a comfortable position sitting on the ground or on a chair. Have them close their eyes or lower their gaze and focus in on their breathing.

Give them the following instructions: "Imagine that there is a source of light outside of you. You allow this light to enter you through the top of your head. This light is moving to a particular area in your body – a part of your body that really needs light. When the light has settled in this part, imagine it taking on a certain color. This color feels very comfortable and warm to you. Colorful light is now spreading out and starts slowly to cover all of your body. Imagine your body shining with light and feeling warm and content. See yourself bathed with this light and feel peace and love coming from your heart. Stay with this feeling for some time. Keep this feeling deep inside you and realize that whenever you want, you can return to this light.

"When you feel you are ready to come back to this room, imagine slowly centring this light in your heart. Open your eyes and come back into this room."

***Extension:** After this exercise, you may ask group members to draw what they imagined and then have them share about their drawings and their experience of the activity.*

## **2C – "Wise Woman"**

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** This exercise will help group members relax and reconnect with their inner wisdom and resources.

**Activity:** After a breathing or relaxation warm-up, ask group members to find a comfortable position sitting on the ground or on a chair. Have them close their eyes or lower their gaze and focus in on their breathing.

Give them the following instructions: "Take several deep breaths. Begin to imagine that you are taking a walk in a peaceful place. Hear any sounds around you as you walk. Feel the breezes. Smell any flowers as you go. Off in the distance you begin to see what looks like a building and an old woman in front of it. As you come closer to her, you notice what she is wearing, the color of her skin and her hair. Her face is shining as she watches you coming toward her. You realize that she is a very wise woman and that she has a message for you.

"Ask her a question and see what she tells you. Now she is reaching behind her to give you a box. She is giving you a box with a present inside. You have received a gift from this wise woman. Open the box now and see what your present is. Once you see it and take it, you slowly begin to walk away from her, back down the path. You may look back again to see this wise woman, but continue on your journey."

**Extension:** *Have group members draw a picture to capture their encounter with the wise woman, or have them share their images and create a group story based on one or several of the images.*

## **2D - "House of Feelings"**

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** This exercise will help group members relax and reconnect with their inner wisdom and resources.

**Activity:** After a breathing or relaxation warm-up, ask group members to find a comfortable position sitting on the ground or on a chair. Have them close their eyes or lower their gaze and focus in on their breathing.

Give them the following instructions: "Imagine that all your feelings are living together in one house - the 'house of your feelings.'"

"Imagine what it looks like. Is it big or small? Is there a garden? What color is it? Are there windows? Imagine that each of your feelings has its own room in this house. There is a room for your joy, a room for your sadness, a room for your happiness, a room for your fear, a room for your love, a room for your anger, a room for your pride, a room for your hope and so on. Each of these rooms has a door, which can be closed. And since it is your house of feelings, you are the master of this house and you can decide which of your feelings you would like to visit in its room. You can enter the room, meet the feeling, and when you think it is enough, you can say goodbye, go out and close the door.

"When some feelings are bothering you and threaten to overwhelm you, imagine your house of feelings and tell the feeling that it should go into its own room, close the door and stop bothering

you. Sometimes you might have to say this several times. Imagine the shape and color of the feeling and then let it go into its room and close the door."

***Extension:** Have group members draw a picture to capture their experience of the House of Feelings. You can also work specifically with one feeling if the person or people are in a relatively stable emotional place.*

## **ENERGIZING**

### **1 – PHYSICAL EXERCISES**

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** Physical exercises tones the body and focuses the mind. Done in moderation, it improves overall health, makes one more alert and engaged and gets the blood flowing and the lungs bringing fresh new oxygen into the body.

**Activity:** Preparation: Find empty small water bottles and fill them to the top with sand or water. This will ensure that the bottles have a certain weight. Find a big enough space where all participants are able to move around.

#### **1A – ARM LIFTS**

Ask the participants to take a bottle in each hand. Hold the bottles in their middle part and so that their opening is facing up. Hold the bottles in front of you to your chest. Move your arms straight out in front of you. Move your arms out to your sides without bending your elbows. Do not drop your arms. Make sure that your arms stay on the same level as your shoulders. Shift the bottles sideways with your palms facing up. Lift your arms up above your head without bending your elbows. Count to ten in this position. Then let your arms come down slowly to your sides without bending your elbows. Put the bottles in the upright position and move them to the front and your elbows straight. Move the bottles back to your chest. Repeat this 5 to 8 times.

## 1B – TRICEP CURLS

Hold the bottles in front of your chest. Move your arms straight out in front of you. Move your arms up above your head without bending your elbows. Tip the bottles so that their opening is facing down. Bend your arms and move the bottles downwards behind your head as far as you can. Keep the bottles in this position behind your neck or shoulders and count to ten. Lift your bottles up again over your head and move the bottles upright. Now move the bottles down in front of you. Make sure that your elbows are not bent. Move the bottles back to your chest. Repeat this 5 to 8 times.

## 1C – BICEP CURLS

Hold the bottles in front of your chest. Move your arms straight out in front of you. Move your arms out to your sides without bending your elbows. Do not drop your arms. Make sure that your arms stay on the same level as your shoulders. Hold the bottles sideways with your palms facing up. Keep the bottles in this position and count to ten. Move the bottles again in front of you. This time the ends of the bottles will touch each other. Move the bottle about 30 cm apart and keep them in front of you. Bend your elbows and hold the bottles up to your shoulders. Keep the bottles in this position and count to ten. Now move the bottles slowly back down again and stretch out your arms. Move the bottles to the upright position and back to your chest. Repeat this 5 to 8 times.

## 2 – WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN?

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity increases spontaneity, creativity and engages the imagination and the body in a playful way.

**Activity:** Have two women volunteer to work in front of the group. The two volunteers tell the group three adjectives describing their character (i.e., I'm fearless, strong and quiet). After both people have done that, the group then tells them **who** they are (family relationship, profession, etc.), **what** they are doing (having an argument, buying a house), **where** they are (in a mall, in the forest, etc.), and **when** the scene takes place (the Middle Ages, Eid, etc.). It's a good idea to put a time limit on the scene.

Example: Who – The characters are cousins; What – They are burying a secret letter; Where – beside a river; When – at night.

Adding the element of first line/last line helps sculpt a beginning, middle and an end to the scene. It's as simple as asking the group to choose the first line that is said in the scene and the last, so that the characters know where they're headed. The lines can be totally unrelated, for example: "It's really hot in here" and "That's why I never go swimming during a storm."

Being in the guise of a person other than one's self provides a safe venue in which to explore personal attributes and relationships. By taking on the role of someone other than herself, a person engages in taking the perspective of another. This process is at the heart of empathy and conflict resolution.

### **3 – START WITH AN IDENTIFIED CHARACTER**

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity connects people to their bodies and allows them to engage with their physical environment in a new and different way.

**Activity:** Group members select a favorite character—fictional or non-fictional—and assume the persona and role of that character.

While sitting, assume the posture, breathing, and essence of the character. Hold an object in your hands as the character would. Ask the group to begin to move through space as their characters would move, noticing other characters in the room. (The group leader might set the scene by suggesting different environments through which the character is moving: water; outer space; sticky syrup; a forest; fog). Suggest that each character find several other characters in the room to greet as their character would. "How do you react to them, and they to you?" Extending the "meet and greet," ask the characters to gather in a circle; each character will move around the circle, introducing themselves and telling each person one thing about themselves as the character. If there is time group members can ask the character a few questions. Your intention is to offer opportunities to fully embody each character.



The leader asks group members to imagine a situation for their character: something the character wants, a problem to solve, a secret. In light of that situation, the group member casts another person for the scene, someone with whom they can share their problem or secret, or someone who might help them. It could be another character in the room, a character in literature, or perhaps a family member.

The group member—either directing and playing her character or directing only—now directs the scene. As the scene progresses the group leader guides the actors to stay within the metaphor, keeping the interactions in each scene within the imaginary circumstances, within the pretend world of the scene.

#### **4 – PHYSICAL DISCOVERY OF A CHARACTER**

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity connects people to their bodies and allows them to engage with their physical environment in a new and different way.

**Activity:** A second flow of activities begins with an awareness of one's body and movement. The group leader invites group members to walk around the room and focus on their body and how they feel in it. "Are you sore? Nervous? Tense?" "Are you holding your breath?" As group members move around the room, the group leader invites them to locate a particular part of their body that needs special attention at that moment and begin to move "into" that body part. When group members are ready, they are asked to exaggerate that part of their body and let it lead their movement.

The group leader encourages them to take some time to explore the transformation of their body as that body part moves them through the space, noticing the character that emerges. As the character begins to speak to others, she finds the voice for that character and notices how the character interacts with others. Each character finds one other character and tells

that character who they are in that role, possibly creating a name and saying something about herself.

Following the same process, the group leader asks the characters to find the counter-role, a character that is opposite, or someone who would act as a guide, a helper. After selecting one of their characters, they may form groups of three or four and create a scene in which all of the characters have a part.

## **5 – THREE-SENTENCE STORIES**

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity promotes creativity and allows for a safe exploration of a past event. It also allows people to experiment with "restorying" an event.

**Activity:** Group members write (or draw) a three-sentence story about an object they have brought from home OR about some event in their life that has been important. The format for the story is as follows: the first sentence is a statement; the second states something that happens; the third states what is changed (as a result of what has happened). Here is an example of a story about an object – let's say it is a candle. Story: There was a candle burning in the window. One night a huge wind blew the window open. Instead of blowing out, the candle's flame burned brighter.

These stories may be shared in pairs, or with the entire group. The group leader may then guide group members to create a drama based on their story.

**Adaptation** - *Group members can follow the same sequence to write a three-sentence story using a piece of art they have created. Following the same format as above, the three-sentence story can be either fictional or true.*

## 6 – CHARACTER INTERVIEWS

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity encourages people to experiment with improvisation and move away from concrete, rigid thinking.

**Activity:** Folk Tales and Myths are an excellent literary genre to use in exploring a character's journey. In this activity, each storyteller is asked to think of any folk tale or myth and decide what character she wants to be. The other members of the group interview the character: "What's going on for you right now?" "What problem do you need to solve?" "Who might help you?" "What are the obstacles in your journey?" Or, the questions might focus more on the character her/himself: "Where do you come from?" "What are your greatest joys and fears?" "Who are the people in your life?" "Who do you trust?" Rather than the group leader specifying the questions, the group might come up with their own.

## 7 – "RE STORYING" A FOLK TALE OR MYTH

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity helps group members playfully experiment with alternative endings to stories and find themselves in the themes of their favorite tales.

**Activity:** Group members recreate their own ending, or write a chapter or story that would follow the ending—as originally written—for a folk tale or myth that everyone knows.

## 8 – FROZEN SCULPTURES

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity facilitates physical engagement, interpersonal connection and the use of creativity and imagination.

**Activity:** A second **Frozen Sculptures** – The group breaks up into groups of three or four. The group leader gives each group a word. Each person in the smaller group offers an association to the word and together, they create a picture, or essence, of the word in a sculpture or poem.

## CONNECTING

### 1 – BUILDING CONNECTIONS

**Time:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity is adds an element of fun to connecting with other members of the group. Using the elements of story taps into creativity and imagination, as well as cooperation, sequencing and logic.

**Activity:** Have the group sit or stand in a circle. Ask them to choose a theme about which you will all create a story together. One person (possibly the leader) makes up the first sentence or two of a story; when she is finished, she throws a small ball to someone else. The person who catches the ball continues the story and builds upon what was said. Continue this until everyone has participated or until the story finds an ending. To create fictional distance in the story, it is a good idea to always begin with, "Once upon a time there was... (a little boy or young woman or old man, etc.)."

**Adaptation:** *Pass the ball around and have each person complete a sentence such as, "When I am sad, I..." or "The person I trust most in the world is..." You may want to do this exercise using a ball of rolled up yarn or string. The person beginning the story holds the end of the yarn, and each successive person who catches it also holds the yarn. In this way, the group ends up building a spider web – a web of connection.*

## 2 – GROUP MANDALA

**Time:** 30 to 40 minutes

**Materials:** 2 large pieces of white paper cut in the same size circular shape, markers, colored pencils, crayons, glue sticks, and scissors.

**Rationale:** A mandala is a balanced, centered design in which opposites are integrated. Creating a group mandala is a unifying experience.

Each group member will be given an irregular-shaped, numbered, segment of paper. Using drawing materials, each person fills in the segment of paper so that it tells the group something about her. The sections will be attached in an outlined circle – a symbol for the "container" of the group. After the drawing has been completed, group members work together to put this puzzle back together again within the outlined circle. In doing this, they witness, in a nonverbal way, the different perspectives of each person and how those perspectives can be maintained within the group container.

## 3 – OBJECT AS SYMBOL

**Time:** 20 to 30 minutes

**Materials:** Object brought from home, something of personal importance such as a rock, photograph, book, letter, scarf, etc.

**Rationale:** This activity is a way that group members can connect with each other and share a part of their own stories with the group. Because they are speaking about a concrete object, the story will be more "contained" than if they were simply discussing a memory.

**Activity:** Group members are given previous instructions to bring an object from home that holds important meaning for them. When the group next gathers together, participants are asked to place this object that they've brought from home in the center of the room and, if they are comfortable, talk about their object with the group.

## 4 – MASK MAKING

**Time:** 30 to 45 minutes

**Materials:** Colored construction or simple white paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons, scissors, glue sticks.

**Rationale:** Working with masks is a distanced way of working with different parts of themselves, different feelings, etc. Taking on a role and using a mask feels a little bit safer than speaking without one. It gives a person a chance to experiment with different roles and behaviors while at the same time having the experience of being "not me."

**Activity:** Group members will be asked to create two different masks – one of the face that they show to everyone, and one of their more private self.

**Adaptation** – They can also think of a story, folk tale or myth – even a movie – and choose two different characters from the story to create masks for. When sharing about their work, they can be asked, "How are you like each of those characters?" "What do you appreciate / dislike about each character?" "If you could choose one quality from each character to keep as your own, what would it be?"

## 5 – THROUGH THE DOOR

**Time:** 30 to 45 minutes

**Materials:** Large flip-chart paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons, scissors, colored paper, glue sticks.

**Rationale:** This activity connects people to their bodies and allows them to engage with their physical environment in a new and different way.

**Activity:** Begin with a relaxation and visualization exercise where you use guided imagery to lead group members through the forest or desert or mountains to a very safe and quiet place. "Are there

animals around you?" "What do you hear?" "What do you smell?" Then tell them that in the distance, they see something. They slowly get up and move toward it and realize that it is a door. Lead them gently out of the visualization and ask them to work together in their small groups to create an image of that door. The door they create should incorporate ideas from all group members and should represent each of the doors they imagined.

Once they have finished the door, ask them to imagine and share out loud what is on the other side. Have them work together to create an image of this and then place it in relation to the door.

**Adaptation** – *They can very easily move into story work with these images. Working alone or as a group, they can think of a character who can discover this door and then walk through it. They can then write and dramatize a group story or individual stories about what happens.*

## 7 – BUILD A DRAMA THROUGH POETRY

**Time:** 20 to 25 minutes

**Rationale:** This activity is great for building connections in the group. It also allows people to be creative and explore images and themes in a poetic way.

**Activity:** Group members are asked to share themes that connect them, experiences they share, similarities, etc. From those themes, the group is asked to select one theme to explore. Once the theme is chosen, each member offers a thought, image, word, or association to the theme. The group leader records these and reads them aloud as a single poem, unifying the group.

**Adaptation** - *The group identifies three lines from the poem that are particularly meaningful to them; the lines are beginning point for them to create a single, or multiple, dramatization(s). In building the drama, basic story/dramatic structures are revealed: setting with characters; event (conflict); reactions and actions; consequence or resolution. Moving the scene forward and with the group assuming roles other than themselves, reveals ways to promote empathic connection to others, new possibilities, a greater range of emotional expression, etc. The group is directed to stay within the story.*





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