TAKING CARE OF OUR RELATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

A resource book
for youth workers

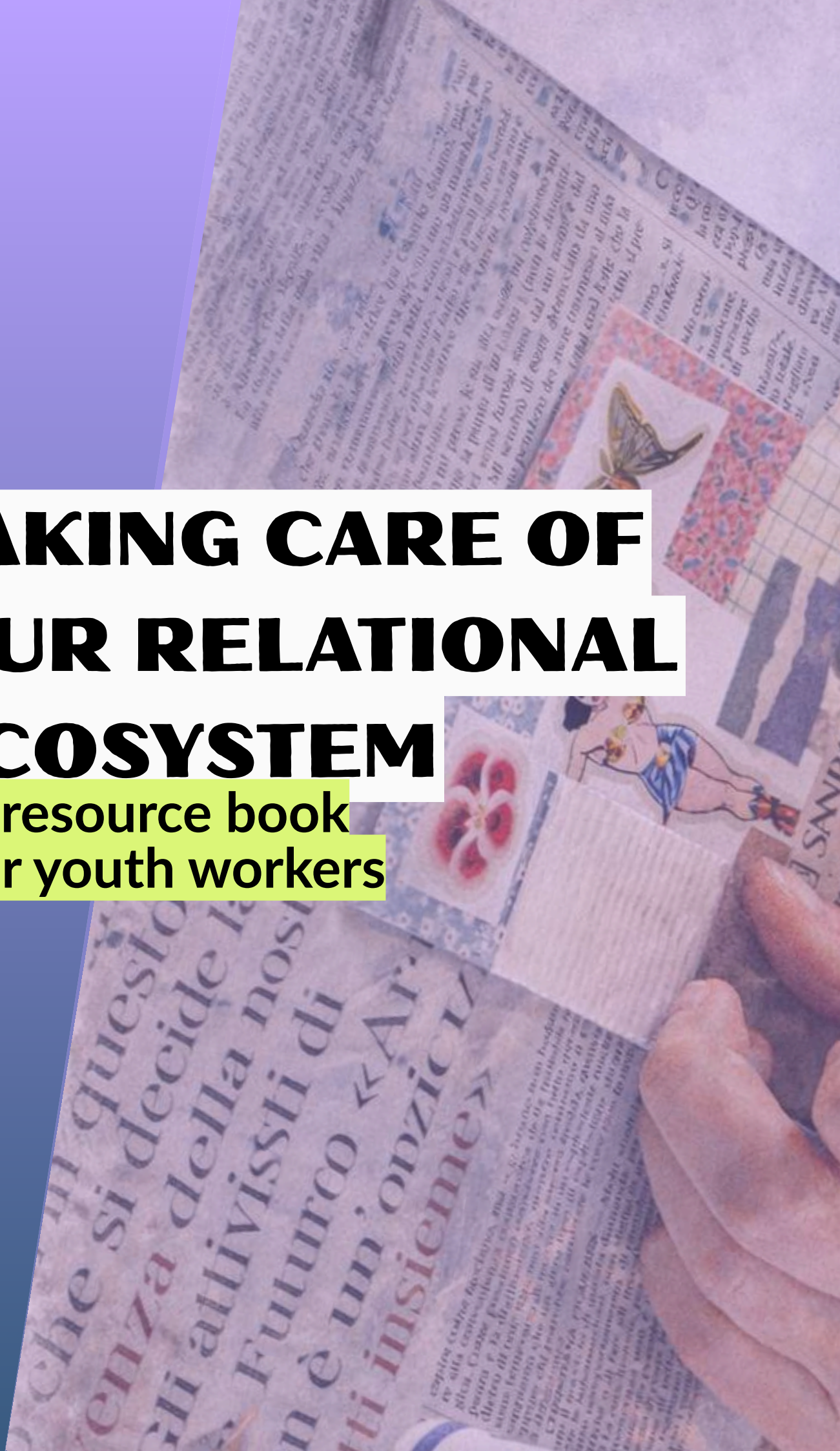

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Table of content

Introduction

Relationships matter. They shape how we see ourselves, how safe we feel, how we handle conflict, how we trust, how we love, and how we imagine our future. For young people, relationships are not just a private topic on the side of “real life” — they are one of the main places where real life happens.
This booklet was created from that simple conviction.
It is addressed to youth workers who want to open meaningful, creative, and grounded spaces where young people can explore the relational challenges they face today. These challenges are not small. They touch self-worth, loneliness, consent, attachment, jealousy, communication, belonging, identity, care, difference, and the pressure of social expectations. They also touch on the tension many young people feel between what they truly want and what they think they are supposed to want.
For Gen Z, these questions take shape in a world deeply marked by social media. Young people today grow up in an environment of permanent visibility, instant communication, comparison, and performance. Relationships are lived both offline and online, and the line between the two is often blurred. A message can be intimate, public, ignored, screenshotted, reposted, or weaponised. A silence can feel louder than words. A “like,” a swipe, a block, a ghost, or an unfollow can become emotionally charged acts. Social media does not invent relational difficulties, but it can intensify them, speed them up, and make them more difficult to process.
At the same time, it would be too easy — and unfair — to reduce a whole generation to clichés. Young people are often described as unable to commit, too fragile, too online, too confused, too demanding. This booklet starts from a different place. It assumes that young people are navigating a complex relational landscape with intelligence, creativity, vulnerability, and contradiction. They need spaces where they can think together, feel together, question dominant norms, and develop their own language for what they are living.

This is where youth work can play a vital role.

The aim of this booklet is not to offer a moral lesson about what a “good relationship” should be. It is not about prescribing one model of intimacy, one correct life path, or one universal set of values. Instead, it offers tools to help young people explore questions that many of them are already carrying, sometimes silently. It also recognises that relationships are learned: through family, peers, culture, gender norms, religion, films, songs, algorithms, personal experience, and social expectations. Because of this, relationships can also be unlearned, reimagined, and practiced differently.
The booklet is built around 15 questions. Each one opens a door into a different aspect of relational life.

Some questions deal with instability, doubt, and the feeling that something better may always be elsewhere: “Is the neighbour’s grass always greener?” asks what FOMO, comparison, and volatility do to our relationships. Others invite young people to recognise harm and protection more clearly: “How do I know if I’m in a toxic relationship?” and “What is safety in a relationship?” help name what can hurt us and what can help us feel secure.

Some chapters focus on commitment, desire, and emotional responsibility: “How to stay in a committed relationship?” asks what commitment can mean today; “Sex and relationships — what is my “true” choice, “true desire”?” explores authenticity, pressure, and desire; ”Is the other responsible for my emotions?” opens reflection on projection, accountability and emotional boundaries.

Other questions look at the stories and habits we carry with us: “What stories about relationships do we carry?” invites young people to notice the narratives that shape them; “How do I meet an intimate partner?” asks what encounter means in a time shaped by apps, speed, and uncertainty; “How to recognise our attachment styles?” helps connect present relational dynamics with deeper patterns of closeness and protection.

Several chapters engage directly with the world Gen Z inhabits online: “Swipe the ghost - how do social networks spill over to real life relationships?” explores how digital gestures affect real emotions and real bonds. “How do we balance work with our relationships?” addresses a generation facing instability, pressure, mobility, and exhaustion. “Is taking care of each other a zero sum game?” asks how we can care for others without disappearing ourselves.

This booklet also makes space for difference, justice, and relational imagination. “How much diversity fits in a relationship?” opens questions of culture, values, identity, and difference. “How to align our relationships with a culture of consent?” insists that consent is not a technical checkbox but a way of relating. “Why is a network of relationships an alternative to romantic love?” challenges the idea that one romantic bond should be the centre of everything, and invites reflection on friendship, community, and other forms of care.

Taken together, these 15 questions do not provide a single answer. They create a map. A map of concerns, tensions, hopes, and possibilities that many young people are already navigating.

Why art-based activities? Because relationships are not lived only through ideas. They are felt in the body, stored in memories, acted out in gestures, silences, fantasies, and fears. Many young people can sense that something is happening in their relational lives long before they can explain it clearly. Art-based methods make room for complexity. They allow reflection without forcing immediate clarity. Through image, movement, metaphor, writing, role play, and collective creation, participants can approach difficult questions in ways that are safer, more open, and often more honest than direct discussion alone. The booklet itself emphasizes creating trust, shared safety rules, collective reflection, and a respectful process rooted in lived experience.

We hope this booklet helps youth workers create spaces where young people can slow down, speak honestly, listen deeply, and experiment with new ways of understanding relationships. Not to solve everything. Not to produce perfect answers. But to become more aware, more critical, more caring, and more free.

How to talk about relationships and their challenges?

We are proposing four intro activities that you may find useful before going deeper and addressing any of the challenges. These have the typical objectives at the beginning of a process:

- Help participants to get to know each-other, develop a level of trust that will allow them to share and receive sensitive issues.
- Tune on the subject matter in an easy low-barrier way
- Help you as a facilitator to understand what are the particular challenges that are the most relevant for your group.
- Help establish a safe and creative learning process.

1. A page folded in four

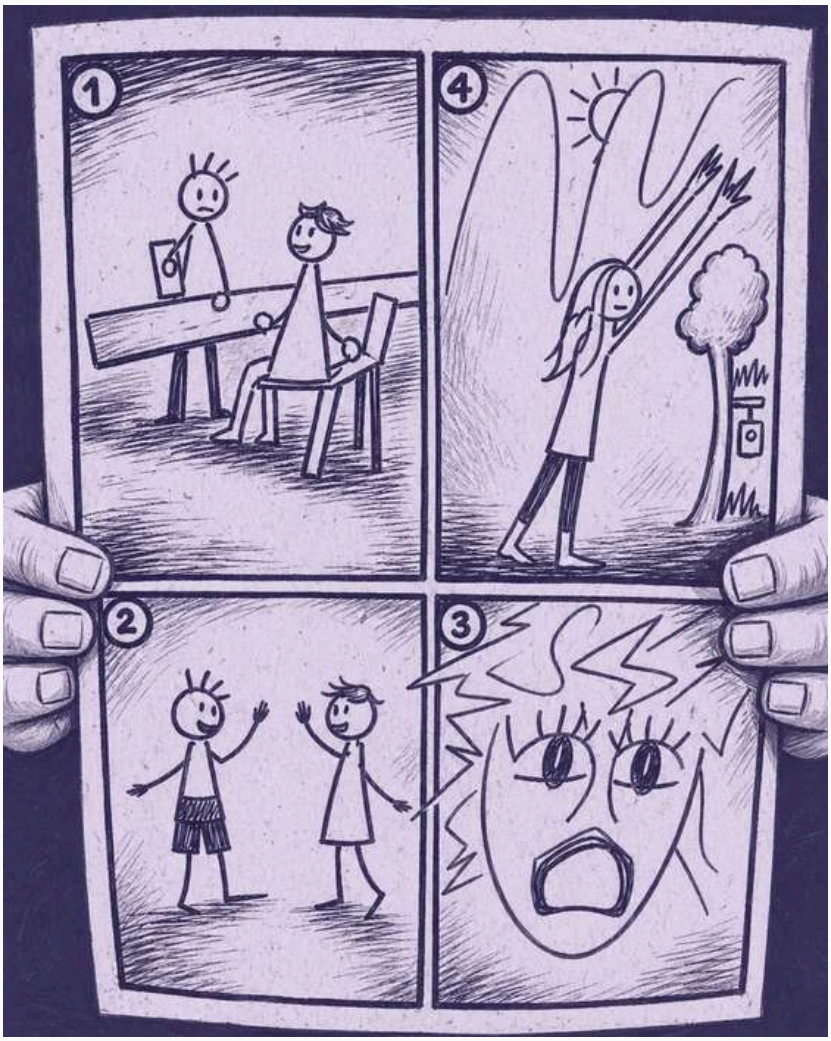
What groups this works with: any size, but you'll need to adjust the sharing accordingly (see "tips").

What materials do you need? an A4 size paper (can be recycled paper with sg on the back) and a marker for each participant.

How does it go?
Step 1: Invite everyone to divide the paper into four with two perpendicular lines.
I

Step 2: Ask everyone to draw and write their answer in the four parts for these four questions:

- What was your shortest relationship ever?
- A relationship that had a big impact on who you are?
- Is there a relationship you wish you didn't have?
- What was your most unusual relationship?



Tips for facilitators:

This can work with any group, but groups of more than 10 people you may not invite everyone to share in plenary, as it would get too long and repetitive, instead you can create groups of three to share amongst them.

2. Shared safety rules

Creating a physical safety symbol is a useful tool during all the activities to keep the playing / learning area a safe space.

3.1. General details
i.Objectives: Helping participants and facilitators to become more aware of own safety needs also during the activities
Practicing individual responsibility about our own needs and emotions and also sensitize toward empathy and care for each other

ii. Duration: 14-30'
ii. Number of pax (we'll only keep this if we see our numbers differ): 4-20
ii. Materials:

Small sheets of paper for individual brainstorming
A3 paper for the collective safety board
Coloured paper, scissors and glue for creating a safety symbol
Pens, markers

3.2. Step-by step guide:
Step 1: We make our 'Safety rules" for the group.
Individual task:
give a small piece of paper and pen to participants and ask them to answer this question: "What do I need to feel safe in a social situation?"

Alternative version: Cut out a safety symbol from color paper - everyone their own.

Optional step: Everyone gives their own safety symbol to their neighbor - symbolically we take care of each other's safety during the activity.
Step 2: Group: After individual collection of safety needs we write on a big paper all the words that participants have on their individual papers.

Alternative version: Hang somewhere in the room the big paper with the collective needs and remind participants that this is our agreed safety rule structure - any time when we need we can return to that

Debrief / reflection questions (15–20 minutes)

How did the safety symbols work during the activity? Did anyone use them? How? Would you do it differently next time?

3. When relationships are art works

This activity can be done in a museum with original art works or in a training room with prints or post cards that we prepare in advance. If you are using original art works in a museum, you still have a preparation task of "curating" the art works you'd like to propose for the activity. Ideally you can go to have a look and choose the rooms that seem appropriate, that offer a diversity of art works and have separate spaces.
What groups this works with: Groups up to 12. You may need to check with the museum you chose what their regulations are for groups.
Materials / preparation you need: You won't need any materials, but you need to choose the museum and the specific rooms you'd like to use. We propose to opt for a museum of modern arts, because they propose a variety of artists and art works that gives you flexibility to identify the rooms you'd like to propose for different questions. You should know the exhibition you chose, we propose that you have a look before going with the group.
How does it go?

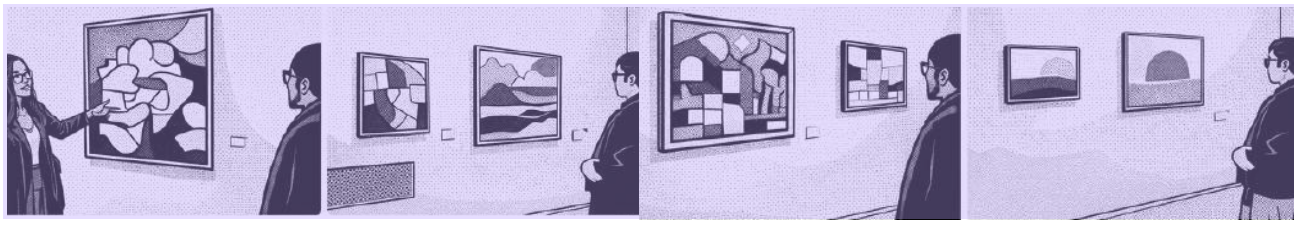
Step 1: Framing the activity
Tell participants you'd like to propose a discussion about relationships and that you'd like to invite the art works to facilitate the dialogue. This is a form of cultural mediation where we do not talk about the actual painting, their creators, the context in which they were created (you can invite participants to learn these details later on) instead invite the art works themselves in our dialogue about relationships.
Step 2: What type of relationship is this?
Choose an artwork that offers some complexity, has lighter and darker parts, and several key elements. Ask the group: if this painting was a relationship what type of relationship would it be?

Step 3: Who am I in this relationship?
In the same painting, ask each participant to choose an element in the painting that can represent who they are. Invite each person to take turns to describe which element they chose so that the group can guess.

Step 4 : A relationship I'd like to have:
For this next question, choose a hall (or two adjacent halls) in the museum. Invite participants to have a look in the room(s) and choose an artwork that represents a relationship they'd like to have. It can be any type of intimate relationship (best if they don't think of future bosses or employees..). Once they choose their art work they should give it a title. Tell them to make their choice without telling each other, since we'll need to guess the artwork they chose. Each person will take turns to tell the group first the title and then the explanation of why they chose it and the group should guess which art work

it was.
Tip: if there were two rooms, to make it simpler proceed room by room, or ask each person to say in which room we can find their artwork.

Step 5: A relationship challenge I have
Choose another room (or two adjacent rooms) for the next invitation. This time ask each person to find an artwork that represents a relationship challenge that they have. Relationship challenge can mean many things such as “I tend to lose myself in a relationship by becoming too similar to the other” “I want to give too much” or “I don’t like it when the other wants to give too much” etc
This time, we don’t need to guess, the participants take turns to lead us to the artwork they chose and explain what relationship challenge it talks about for them.
At each challenge you can ask the rest of the group if what they heard resonates with them, if they recognize that challenge, if they have experienced it themselves or know someone who has. If there are references from the scientific literature that can help gain a deeper understanding about the challenge you can mention it, again depending on how many people there are.



Facilitator tips:

For bigger groups the plenary sharing may take too long and may be too repetitive. For groups of more than 6 participants, create small groups for the sharing of 3-4 participants.
Debrief: this is an intro activity, so the debrief does not need to go to the same depth as for our 15 chapters. You can however ask participants whether the discussion was easy or difficult for them, what questions were easier, what were more difficult and what was the effect of the sharing with the others.

4. A thermometer of relational challenges

- General details:
    i. Objectives:
    ii. Duration: 2h
    ii. Number of pax (we’ll only keep this if we see our numbers differ): 4-20
    ii. Materials: sets of small pieces of paper to write different relationship challenges. Coloured tape to make a “plus” and “minus” sign on the tables.

ii. Preparation needed: print and cut into small pieces our set of 16 relationship challenges. You should have as many sets as you will create groups of 4-5 participants. Example: for a group of 15 you may create three groups, so three sets of the challenges.
5.2. Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step)

Step 1: Framing the activity: Tell participants the following activity has the objective of exploring together what type of relationship challenges they have, what are common points between members of the group and what are possible differences.
Step 2: Create groups of 4-5 participants and invite them to sit around a table and and use the tape to make a "+" sign on one extremity and "-" on the other to create the extremities of our thermometer: "+" will signal the most challenges and "-" the least challenges. Give each group a set of the 16 challenges.
Step 3: Invite each participant to take turns in drawing a challenge and place it somewhere on the thermometer and give an explanation. The other members can share their own opinion, but not in a way that discredits the experiences of the people who spoke before.
Step 5: Once the subgroups have completed their thermometer, the big group can reunite and the different groups can share their thermometer. For a visual sharing each team can take a picture of their final thermometer and send it to you, you can copy them on a ppt file that you project

Debrief / reflection questions with participants
To what extent perceptions within the group were similar and different concerning the specific challenges?
Which were the challenges where they had the most disagreement or divergence?
What were the challenges where it was the easiest to agree?

Facilitator tips
Invite participants to focus on their own experience when making the thermometer, instead of some general perception of how things are.
When sharing it is important to take everyone's experience as worthy of acceptance and respect. There can be disagreements on facts, but not on emotions and lived experience.

“Swipe the ghost” how does social media communication spill over to real life ?

When we train our minds (and hearts) repeatedly in a specific way of thinking and functioning, we acquire that particular logic, and take it for granted. It becomes “natural” and maybe even mechanised into our ways of being, an invisible but persistent routine that we don’t see anymore. It is only interesting to ask ourselves how the greatest technological change in the 2010’s have influenced the existence of young people that grew up with it. Does the way we use social media spill over to our real life relationships? How?

Testimonies

“Its honestly kind of difficult to explain how it feels. A feeling of loss, betrayal, disappointment. You immediately feel like something is wrong with you, why else would they do it? Imagine your best friend in the world stabbing you in the back. Thats probably the closest thing I can relate it to. Its awful, and it never goes away because you're always left hanging about why.”

“I was what would be considered a catfish for over a decade. I didn’t get enough attention as a kid or something. But seriously, I went through a period of extreme loneliness and I was unable to connect with peers. So I turned to online chatting with very little success.”

“I think being ghosted in worse than being blocked… when you’re blocked you know what happened, there is a clean closure. But with ghosting you are left hanging with uncertainty”

“since I cancelled my tiktok account, I feel so much better, so much lighter…”

OUR RESEARCH

In The Anxious Generation, Haidt (2024) uses “the great rewiring” to mean the sweeping shift in social and emotional skills that appear as a result of growing up in a phone-based, social-media-saturated childhood. In all the wide range of impacts in this section we’ll focus on how the gestures we use in different social media platforms spill over to our real life communication, and what is really at stake. We believe one of the reasons why social media is so addictive is that it taps into an old and basic motivation that humans have: the search for status. So before going further, let’s explore this concept and let’s dive into the analysis of different “status games” we play in the pursuit of status.

Social status

Social status refers to the relative level of respect, honor, assumed competence, and deference accorded to individuals (Anderson et al 2016). Subjectively it is the feeling of, and being perceived as, “valuable” to one's group. Status is not something we possess. It is granted by others, so it is unstable and can always be taken away.

Status games

“Status games” describe how a group distributes recognition. It is the social system, often implicit, that dictates how we gain and lose value within a group. Each group has its own rules, signals, and “scores” (what matters, what is admired, what is punished). Storr also emphasizes that this is constantly at play in small everyday interactions, not just in major power struggles. Status is the position that emerges at a given moment. It changes depending on the situation and the audience.

Storr differentiates 3 types of status games

Dominance game: Status is gained by imposing one's will. Through force, intimidation, threats, coercion, control of resources, or the ability to humiliate. “Power” is direct and visible. The risk is high.

In virtue games status is gained by displaying moral superiority. People show that they better respect the values of the group, or that they have a better understanding of right and wrong. Power is gained through reputation, belonging, conformity to norms, and sometimes symbolic punishment of “deviants” (blame, exclusion). These games often structure ideological and cultural conflicts.

In success games we gain status because others admire us. We gain prestige through competence, performance, creativity, courage, contribution, and mastery of a field. Power is more indirect. It is based on attention, recognition, and being chosen as a role model or reference point.

Haidt, J. (2024). The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental I
Anderson, C., Hildreth, J. A. D., & Howland, L. (2015). Is the desire for status a fundamental human motive? A review of the empirical literature. Psychological Bulletin, 141(3), 574–601. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038781
Storr, W. (2022). *The status game : on human life and how to play it*. William Collins.

ACTIVITIES

General details

Objectives:

- analyse how different communication acts of social media spill over to real life communication
- understand what kind of status games are at stake in different gestures
- explore how specific gestures of social media could spill over to real life.

Duration: 2H

Number of pax (we'll only keep this if we see our numbers differ): 4-20

Materials:

- paper (A6 size pieces) markers for each group, tables and chairs (about 4-6 chairs around one table)
- Preparation needed: print the different social media communication acts on separate A6 size papers (see annex). Print the definitions of status, status games, dominance games, virtue games, prestige games.

Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step).

1 Step: framing the activity

Our mission is to explore how the communication gestures we commonly use on social media (the "likes", the "swipes", the "canceling", "blocking" etc (for our full list see annex) impact the way we communicate with each other and relate to each other in real life. We're exploring together if we're entering in a Black Mirror episode, or we're already there, or we still have a chance to change directions.

2 Step: guided Sharing

Create groups of 4-6 participants and invite them to display the social media communication acts cards on their table so they can all see them. Invite them to take turns in choosing a card to which they can give a personal experience. Ask them if any of the words need clarification. Ask the group to order the social media acts from most harmful (on one side of the table) to least harmful (on the other side of the table). Whoever places a "social media act" somewhere should explain their choice.

3 Step

Explain the concepts of status games, and invite participants to identify social media gestures that can be understood as forms of one or another status game. To introduce these concepts, we find it easier to print them out – each concept on a separate A4 sheet – and present them one after the other. We can write out the definitions or stick them on the wall, which helps participants to check them, and then add the associated social media icons. We can then look together to see if the different groups have made the same associations.

4 Step

Invite each group to choose the “top 3” social media acts that according to them have the strongest impact on people in real life.

5 Step

Ask each team to identify one of the social media acts of the top 3 and create a performance that illustrates the worst thing that can happen, and explore what can change to have a better ending.

6 Step

If you still have time, or alternatively to step 5 invite each team to prepare a short manifesto or a poster that helps them to protect themselves / each-other from the wrong.

Debrief/reflection questions with participants

You can make small debrief questions as you go along the different steps. In a way the activities themselves are quite reflective, so there is not much need for further reflection.

What can be of particular interest in Step 4 is to discover that it is not necessarily the “worst” social media acts (usually gaslighting and catfishing) that are seen as having the strongest potential impact on our real life communication. It is the “harmless” ones: the likes and the swipes.

ANNEX

Our “social media gestures” collected through one of the workshops:

Like	**block**	**cyberbullying**
Swipe	**ghost**	**catfishing**
Share / re-post	**Follow/unfollow**	**gaslighting**
unfriend / unmatch	**dry text**	**cancelling**

How do I meet an intimate partner ?

Intimate relationships are not static structures but living interactions that evolve through attention, responsiveness, and mutual presence. Often, difficulties in relationships arise not only from what we want or feel, but from how we meet the other person — how we listen, express needs, respond, and make space for both ourselves and the other. This activity invites participants to explore these questions through movement and embodied interaction. By paying attention to the body, participants become more aware of their own needs and of how connection with others is co-created moment by moment.

Testimonies

"Most of the time relationships start through apps like Tinder or Instagram. You talk for a while, maybe meet once, and then it disappears. It can feel a bit superficial."

"I notice that we spend a lot of time texting instead of actually being present with each other. Sometimes it feels easier to write something than to say it face to face."

"I think meeting someone in a relationship is not only about liking each other. It's also about how we listen, how we respond, and whether we can make space for both people."

"I sometimes feel that we look at each other quickly and move on just as quickly. It makes me wonder what it means to truly encounter another person."

OUR RESEARCH

Relationships can be understood as ongoing patterns that require flexibility, emotional presence, and ongoing adjustment. Contemporary relational approaches emphasize the importance of active listening, empathy, and the ability to negotiate personal space within partnerships.

Philosopher Martin Buber describes the difference between two modes of encounter. In an I–It relationship, the other is experienced functionally or superficially. In an I–Thou relationship, the encounter is mutual, present, and alive. In simple terms, this means the difference between relating to someone as an object that serves a role and truly meeting them as a person in the present moment. The methodology of this activity — movement, mirroring, and embodied awareness — invites participants to shift from simply observing the other to genuinely encountering them.

The embodied exercises used in this activity allow participants to experience this idea of "meeting" in practice. By becoming aware of their own needs and noticing the presence of others in the shared space, participants explore how connection emerges through responsiveness and mutual awareness.

ACTIVITIES

Mirror of Care

Objectives:

- To become more aware of personal needs.
- To explore how needs can be expressed and communicated.
- To develop empathy and sensitivity toward the needs of others.
- To strengthen bodily awareness as part of relational communication.
- To practice presence and responsiveness in interaction.

Duration: approximately 2–2.5H
Number of pax: 10–20 people

Materials: small cards with written needs (see Step3), blank cards, music playback.
Space: open indoor space allowing free movement.

1 Step: Warm-up: activating the body (10–15 minutes)

Objective: to activate the body and focus attention. Participants walk freely in the space while soft music plays. The facilitator gradually introduces variations: walking and changing directions, walking and changing speeds, and walking while activating different parts of the body (arms, shoulders, head, whole body). The aim is to help participants become present in their bodies and aware of the shared space.

2 Step: The body speaks (10–15 minutes)

Objective: to explore the body as a means of expression. Participants continue moving in the space. The facilitator introduces prompts and invites participants to express them through movement and posture rather than words. Prompts may include: I breathe, I travel, I dream, I feel alone, I am afraid, I am anxious, I calm down, I search, I balance. Participants interpret each prompt in their own way, allowing their bodies to express the emotional or experiential meaning.

3 Step: Recognizing personal needs (20–25 minutes)

Objective: to explore and become aware of personal needs. Small cards are placed on a wall or spread on the floor. Each card answers the question: “What do you need?” Examples include friends, time, rest, a trip, a hug, watching movies, visiting a doctor, a book, a walk by the sea, listening to music, a party, a conversation, a change of appearance, tidying my room, sleep, change, a massage, new faces, new ideas, a goal, a chocolate bar, calm, exercise, a walk in the mountains. A blank card is also available so participants can add their own needs. Participants take a few minutes to look at all the cards and choose one need that resonates with them at that moment.

4 Step: Embodying needs through movement (20–25 minutes)

Participants move freely in the space while soft music plays. Each participant expresses the chosen need through body movement, posture, rhythm, or interaction with the space. At the same time, participants are encouraged to remain aware of the presence of others in the room — noticing how people move, sharing the space, and allowing their movements to coexist without interrupting one another. When the music slows down, participants return to the wall of cards and choose another need. When the music becomes louder again, they move once more through the space, expressing the new need.

5 Step: Mirroring needs in pairs (10 - 15 minutes)

Objective: to explore how personal needs can be perceived and communicated through non-verbal interaction with another person.
Participants form pairs. The facilitator invites everyone to briefly think of three personal needs that feel important to them at that moment. In each pair, one participant begins by expressing one of their needs through movement, posture, and rhythm. The partner observes and responds using the practice of mirroring: they attempt to reflect or follow the movement of the first participant, paying close attention to the quality, intensity, and intention of the movement.
Through this process, the observing partner tries to sense and interpret the need being expressed. After a short moment, the pair pauses and the observing partner shares which need they believe was expressed.

The first participant then reveals the actual need and the pair briefly reflects on whether it was correctly perceived. The partners then switch roles, allowing the second participant to express one of their needs in the same way. After both participants have completed the exercise, the facilitator invites everyone to change partners and repeat the process using another one of their needs. This may happen several times so participants can experience expressing and perceiving different needs with different partners.

6 Step: Group reflection (20–30 minutes)

Participants sit together in a circle and reflect on the experience.
Possible questions include:

- How did you feel during the process?
- Was it easy or difficult to express a need through movement?
- Did you notice similarities or differences between your needs and those of others? What did you discover about your relationship with your own needs? What does this say about how we communicate needs in relationships?

Facilitators tips

Facilitators should create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable moving and expressing themselves. It is helpful to emphasize that there is no “correct” way to perform the movements. The focus is on exploration and awareness rather than performance. Soft background music can support concentration and help participants remain present in the shared space.

What is Safety in a Relationship ?

To understand safety within relationships, we must start by honoring our own needs and boundaries. Safety is both a felt experience and an intentional practice: naming emotional, physical, and psychological needs, noticing what triggers us, and making consistent choices that protect those needs. This requires ongoing self-reflection, clarity about limits, and willingness to communicate those limits so others can respond reliably.

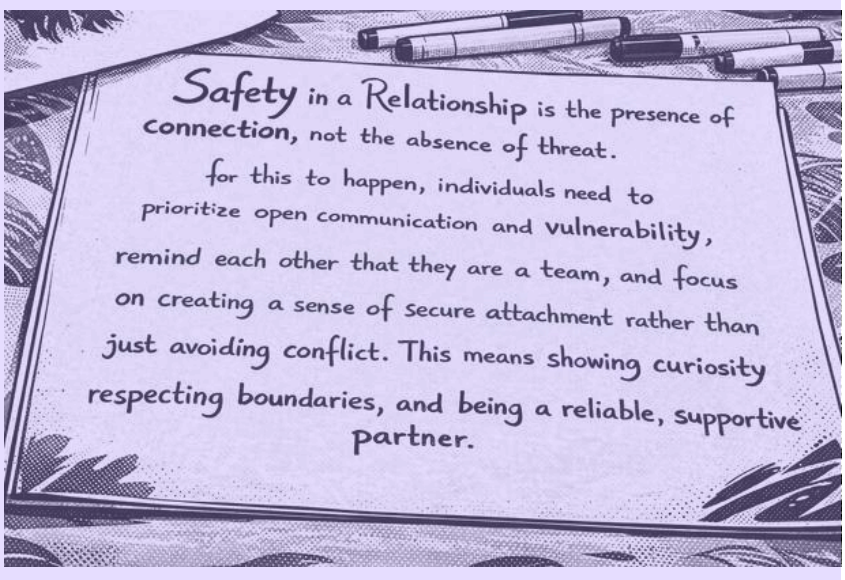
Testimonies

"I just realized that there is no full safety in any of my relationships. I am wondering if this is for everyone?"

"Safety seems to be crucial in a relationship, however, not something that we continuously and consciously create for each other. For me 'safety in a relationship' equals a lot of inner and outer work. It's not always easy to keep myself and others safe."

" I was surprised to see that we just make exactly the same mistakes in our conflicts with my girlfriend as I do with my mother. It's not easy to change old patterns. Terrible!"

" Wow! It feels like a superpower that I could change the situation from unsafe towards something more constructive!"



OUR RESEARCH

“Safety in a relationship is the presence of connection, not the absence of threat. For this to happen, individuals need to prioritize open communication and vulnerability, remind each other that they are a team, and focus on creating a sense of secure attachment rather than just avoiding conflict. This means showing curiosity, respecting boundaries, and being a reliable, supportive partner.” Gábor Máté; "The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture" (2022), Penguin Books LTD

Gábor Máté is a Hungarian-Canadian physician, best-selling author, and public speaker known for his work on addiction, stress, trauma, and the mind-body connection. His work and distinction reframes safety: as not merely the lack of harm but the active presence of connection. Avoiding conflict without connection leaves relationships hollow; true safety grows when partners practice honest expression, mutual curiosity, and consistent responsiveness. Secure attachment emerges from patterns of predictable care - asking for needs, answering them, and repairing ruptures when they occur. Practical work includes naming feelings, checking in regularly, and treating problems as shared tasks rather than personal failures.

Being aware of recurring patterns and dynamics helps reveal how safety erodes over time. Patterns can be enacted by either partner or by the relationship system itself: withdrawal, escalation, dismissal, or repetitive blame. Mapping these cycles - who tends to shut down, who pursues, where respect is compromised - makes hidden processes visible and actionable. Naming patterns reduces shame and opens pathways to change.

Toxicity and (un)safety are deeply connected. Unsafe or toxic in the context of relationships can be used often as synonyms. Relationships require continual adjustment between closeness and autonomy. Toxicity often seeps in gradually - a crossed boundary here, a pattern of control there - and becomes normalized. Identifying behaviors such as manipulation, repeated disrespect, or erosion of consent is not moralizing but diagnostic: it tells us what needs repair. Balancing emotion and reality means using emotions as signals while testing assumptions about present intentions, allowing partners to respond rather than react. Patterns repeat partly because familiarity feels safer than the unknown.

Many people “find themselves” in similar toxic dynamics because those dynamics mirror early family systems - the known script gives a sense of control even when painful. Paradoxically, growth often requires experiencing discomfort: suffering can catalyze change by revealing the cost of staying the same. That may mean enduring temporary pain in therapy, boundary-setting, or difficult conversations as part of unlearning old responses.

Safety is not a given, nor something to be taken for granted; it exists when we actively address and repair the issues that undermine connection.

Creating safety means naming harms clearly, holding each other accountable without shaming, and agreeing on concrete practices—respecting declared boundaries, asking for consent, responding reliably to needs, and making timely repairs after ruptures. It requires predictable routines of check-ins, transparent communication about limits and expectations, and mutual agreements on how to de-escalate conflict (timeouts, third-party support, or therapy). Where threats or coercion are present, safety also means prioritizing physical and emotional protection through safety planning and outside help. In short, safety is built through intentional, repeated acts that restore trust and demonstrate care.

Changing relational patterns takes sustained effort: attention, humility, practice, and often external support. It involves naming wounds, practicing new behaviors, repairing ruptures, and reinforcing healthier interactions over time. Community and dependable connection matter because healing is relational: "We are wounded in relationships, and we heal in relationships." When we can find safety and support, we create the conditions for trust, repair, and long-term growth.

Maté, G., & Maté, D. (2022). The myth of normal: Trauma, illness, and healing in a toxic culture. Penguin Books.

ACTIVITIES

TEA FOR 2 - drama game

Objectives:

- Better understanding of our reactions in different one-o-one relationship dynamics
- Practicing to say and accept “no”
- Raising awareness of the multiple layers of relationships dynamics
- Learning communication tools (verbal & nonverbal) for self protection and change unhealthy dynamics toward healthy ones.

Duration: 1 H 30’ 2h
Number of pax: adaptable for 4-20 participants

Materials:

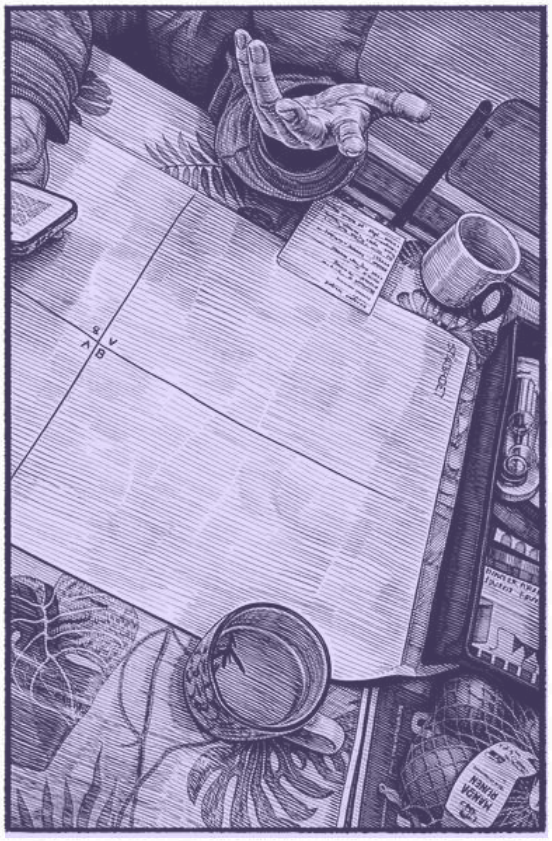
- Printed copies of the dialogue - 1 copy/participant
- A4 paper (for A/B role experiences and reflection)
- Pre-prepared role/dynamics cards (romantic relationship, friendship, etc.)
- Pens and markers
- Optional props to support the participants: mugs, a box of tea
- Cards for the well-being tea recipe.

1 Step: Safety Rules

see @ intro activities)

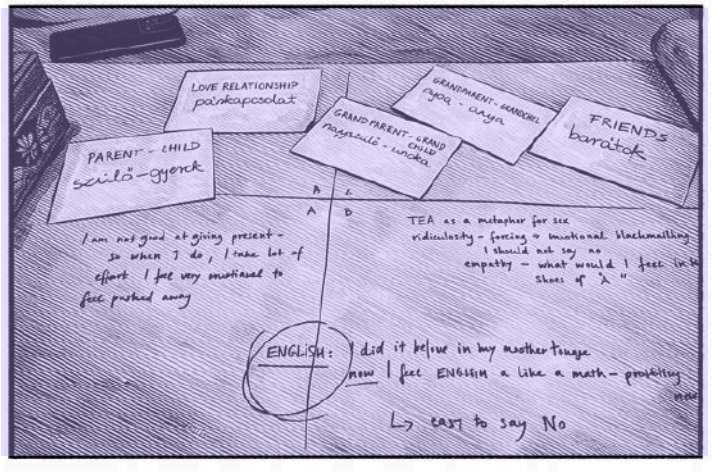
2 Step

The workshop facilitators read the following dialogue to the group aloud.
→ Short reflection in the group about the text.



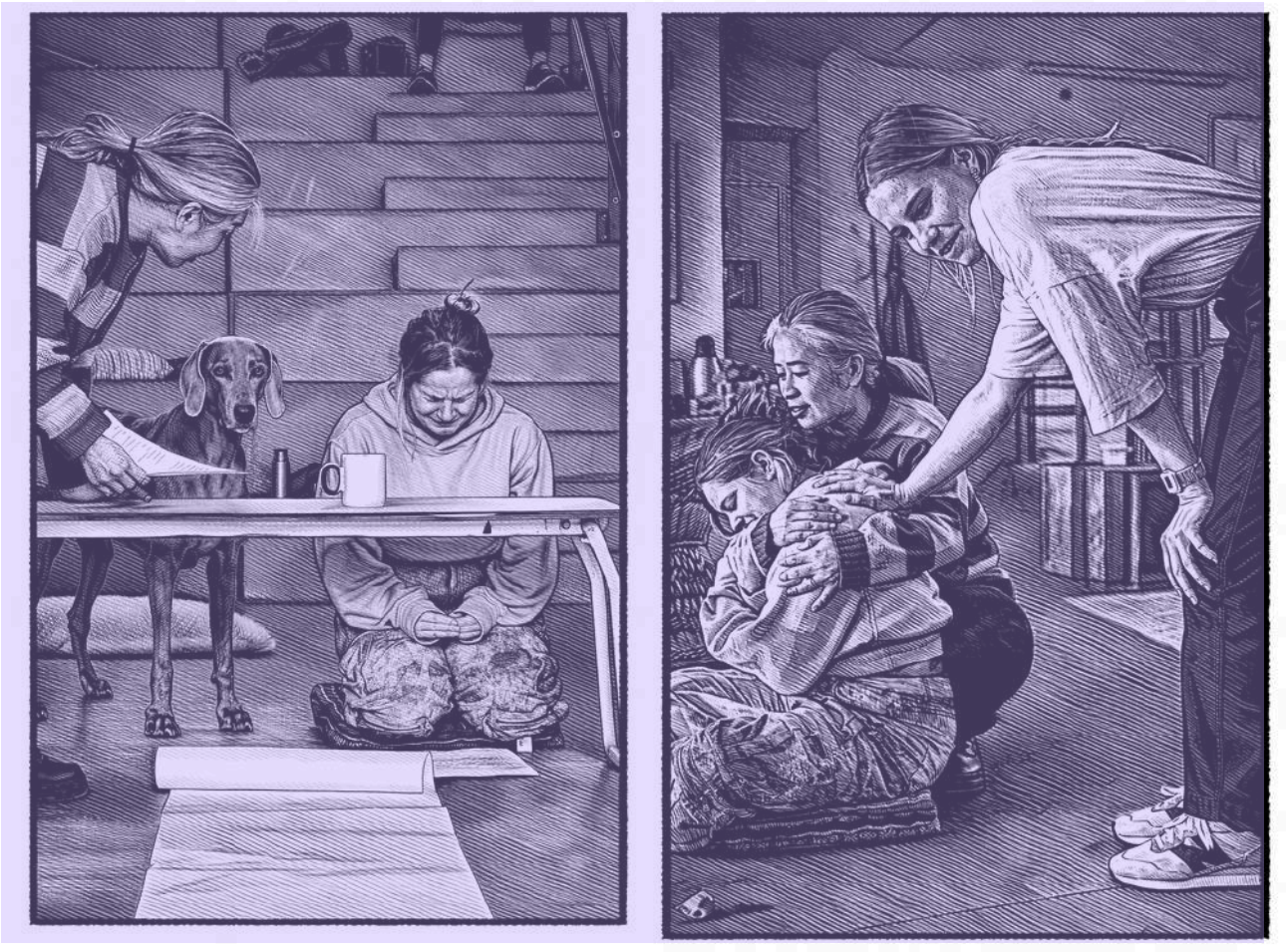
TEA DIALOGUE:
A: I bought you this ridiculously / fucking / crazy* expensive tea because you really liked it before.
B: I don't want tea right now.
A: But why??? What's wrong? I don't get it. Is there something wrong with it?
B: Oh…
A: Is it suddenly disgusting to you? Too strong? Too weak? Completely tasteless?
B: No, it's really good.
A: Then what is the problem? Same cup, same tea, same situation.
B: But I don't want it now. I don't feel like it. I don't want it.
Why is that so hard to understand?
*(see hint to facilitators)

1. **Working in pairs:**
2. →Try out the situation. Facilitators invite participants by saying: Write or draw what you experienced when you were in the role of A and B. Share your reflections with each other.
3. Situation cards: romantic relationship, family, parent–child, friends, workplace, etc.



→ In pairs, create a short scene based on one of the situations. (pic #11)** (see hint to facilitators)
→We watch the scenes together and reflect on them as a group. (pic #12) (pic #13)
→ **Reflection at first level (feelings / thoughts within the situation)**: the characters remain in a frozen picture, and in the final moment of the scene, participants can give voice to the inner thoughts and feelings of the character whose shoulder they touch. (pic #14)
**(see hint to facilitators)
→ **Close the situational games** and come out to plenary discussion. ***(see hint to facilitators)
→ **Reflection second level:** Discuss with the group what they experienced, learned. Possible guiding questions: How was it to say “no”? How does it feel hearing / accepting a “no”? How difficult is it to protect our boundaries? What kind of patterns do we recognize? Is there a difference in dynamics if it's between two friends or child and parent? Do you also see similarities?**** (see hints to facilitators)

Why is it often difficult to say no?
Why do we sometimes want the other person to want what we have already decided for them?
What kinds of situations feel hopeless, where the only solution might be for **B to step out**?



Debrief / reflection questions (15–20 minutes)

→ **“What if…”> we can change something**…The group collects together possible changes, scenarios, “supporting sentences” to achieve good (enough) solutions for toxic or just simply difficult one-on-one situations. We sit in a circle and share ideas, facilitators make notes on a big sheet of paper. If you have time and an eager group, ask them if they want to try the drama scenes and how the situation would change with using different words, sentences. Feel free to explore, experiment and try these situations as many times and many ways. *****

Closing - what do I take home:

→ Closing the activity you might want to watch together this film: Tea and Consent

→ **How did the safety symbols work** during the activity? Did anyone use them? How? Would you do it differently next time?

→ **Recipe for my ‘well-being tea’**: Facilitators can prepare nice cards in advance (they can be simple white cards or cards with images on the front). A summary of the activity invites participants to take some time making notes for themselves on the cards: what would be the ingredients of your own “safety or well-being tea?”. Encourage the group to remember back to the intro safety activity when we were collecting our individual safety needs but also remember back to everything what we have learned during the activity. These “tea recipes” are kind personal self-reminders that everyone can take home. Everyone writes their own recipe, then we share it with each other. This can deepen the self-reflection process, the sharing can be empowering and inspiring for the group.

Hints:

* To create a proper tension for the drama game it does matter what kind of words we use in the dialogue. There is one expression: *“fucking expensive”* which is supposed to create the initial atmosphere. This may sound and give different connotations in different languages. We tried multiple versions to find the best one in English. Take some time to find the best translation in your mother tongue and feel free to experiment using multiple versions. Our experience is that *ridiculously / crazy* works well because the scene doesn’t start too extremely, whereas when we used *fucking* it was much more direct and easier to play the scene with. These are the key words though in the dialogue to create the tension for the drama game. Depending on the group, the translation can be adjusted, but it’s important that the tension of the scene is maintained.

- For facilitators important note: during the scene reflection participants are not allowed to go into a ‘meta discourse’, talking about themselves, their own stories, opinions, etc: they are allowed only to mention what the character in the scene feels or thinks. This is not an easy task for the facilitator: it needs strong focus and keeping this rule strict, ensuring the safety of the participants. The group can try all the versions of how the characters feel, think and this has to happen in a well choreographed way: go to the frozen character and by touching the shoulder say it loudly what they think / feel. In addition, the facilitator signals the beginning and end of the scene with a clap, thereby focusing attention and clearly defining the framework.
- For facilitators it is important to make clear that participants go into a role during their scenes, these roles protect them not to mix the game with real life. Help them with an obvious visible opening and closing “ritual”. -> Begin each scene with a clap.-> At the end of the scene you tell them: “you can come out now from the role”.
- Encourage participants to talk about themselves, practicing self-reflection by using “I statements”. If participants want to reflect on someone else, help them to express their opinion in a respectful way and remind them if we have an opinion about something or someone, in reality we talk about ourselves. Still, an ‘outer eye’ can be helpful but in this case we might ask the person in question if there is anything that resonates on their side from our opinion. (see quote about healing from Gábor Máté)
- Depending on the group dynamics, this can be an individual or group task. Instruction: Rewrite the dialogue so that the person who does not want tea is able to make the other understand and accept that they do not want it. You may be able to change only the lines of B. How should they behave differently, and what and how should they say it?
- A possible next step is to create and perform these scenes (in that case, the rewriting should also be done in small groups rather than individually).
- Drama games help us to “step out of our heads”. Learning by doing: practicing in a safe, supportive and inspiring environment is a very empowering way to learn useful communication (verbal &non-verbal) and self reflection skills to learn how to protect ourselves and become more self confident, assertive, and resilient in unsafe, harmful or simply difficult social situations. Theater and drama games furthermore provide a very rich, “3D” learning environment: encourage participants to “use” the whole space; the furniture, body language, movement, physical distance, etc.

Is the other responsible for my emotions?

This activity explores the question of emotional responsibility within dyadic relationships: are others responsible for how we feel, or do we hold responsibility for our own emotional responses? Through discussion and experiential exercises, participants reflect on expectations, boundaries and communication patterns that shape relational dynamics. The activity draws on the work of Virginia Satir and her concept of the five “freedoms”, which support authenticity and shared responsibility in relationships.

Testimonies

“Part of me believes that if someone really cares about me, they should be able to understand how I feel without me having to explain everything. When that doesn’t happen, I feel disappointed or hurt, but then I question whether it’s fair to expect that.”

“I grew up thinking that if someone is hurt in a relationship, someone must be to blame. It’s difficult for me to accept that sometimes feelings just exist, and they’re not always someone else’s fault.”

“Sometimes I also notice that I expect the other person to meet needs that I haven’t even expressed. When they don’t, I feel frustrated. That’s when I start wondering how much of what I feel is actually my responsibility.”

“There are moments when I feel that my emotions are like a mirror of the relationship. If the other person is distant, I feel insecure; if they are warm, I feel safe. It makes me question how much of what I feel actually belongs to me and how much comes from the space between us.”

“Sometimes I realize that I’m afraid to take full responsibility for my feelings. If I admit that my emotions are mine, then I also lose the comfort of blaming someone else for them. And that can be a difficult place to stand.”

OUR RESEARCH

Many relational tensions arise when we expect others to regulate our emotions or understand our needs without communication. Satir's concept of the five freedoms offers a framework for recognizing personal responsibility and authenticity in relationships.

Virginia Satir, a pioneering family therapist known for her work on communication, described five basic freedoms that support authentic and healthy relationships. These freedoms allow individuals to move away from patterns of blaming and move towards awareness and responsibility for their own feelings and needs.

The first freedom is the freedom to see and hear what is present now instead of interpreting reality through expectations of how things should be. The second is the freedom to say what one truly feels rather than what one believes they should feel in order to maintain harmony in the relationship. The third freedom is the freedom to feel emotions without shame or guilt. The fourth is the freedom to ask directly for what one needs instead of expecting others to guess. Finally, the fifth freedom is the freedom to take relational risks — to expose oneself, get closer to others and allow change instead of always choosing what is safe out of fear of disapproval.

Practicing these freedoms helps shift relational dynamics away from a victim–perpetrator pattern, a dynamic in which one person is perceived as responsible for another's emotional experience.Instead of attributing emotional responsibility entirely to others, individuals learn to empower themselves and recognize their own role in expressing needs, setting boundaries and navigating relationships.

Satir, V. (1988). The New Peoplemaking. Mountain View, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

ACTIVITIES

General details

Objectives: to reflect critically on personal responsibility for emotions in relationships; to develop awareness of how boundaries, needs and emotional expression shape relational dynamics; to explore the idea of relational freedom through Satir's five freedoms; and to identify personal or cultural beliefs that influence how people set boundaries or communicate needs.

Duration: approximately 2–2.5 hours (the duration of each step may vary depending on the number of participants).

Number of pax: around 10–20 people. 

Materials: papers, markers, crayons, clay, soft wire, scissors and printed cards with the five freedoms. Optional materials include printed memes for the opening check-in.

Space: indoor space with room for movement and small group work.

1 Step 1: mood check-in (10–15 minutes)

The activity begins with a short mood check-in about participants' relationships at the present moment. To create a light and relaxed start, facilitators may prepare a board with memes from series familiar to the age group (for example Friends or The Office). Participants choose the image that best represents the state of their relationships at the moment and briefly explain their choice if they wish. It is made clear that sharing is voluntary and that everyone can decide how much they want to disclose.

2 Step: opinion line: responsibility for feelings (5 minutes)

Participants are then asked the question: "Are others responsible for our feelings?" An imaginary line is created in the room. One end represents "I completely agree" and the other "I completely disagree." Participants position themselves on the line according to their opinion and share briefly why they chose that position. Facilitators do not comment at this stage; the exercise simply helps observe the group's initial attitudes toward emotional responsibility.

3 Step: exploring the five freedoms in pairs (30–40 minutes)

In the next step, papers with Satir's five freedoms are placed on the floor or on the wall around the room. Participants form pairs and then are invited to think about a time when they felt trapped or emotionally stuck in a relationship. Together, they reflect on which of these freedoms might not have been exercised or may have been difficult to practice in that situation. They also discuss which freedoms they personally find most challenging and which make them feel most safe, cared for, and understoodParticipants are reminded that they do not need to share personal stories with the whole group, only insights from the process if they wish.

Optional: relationship sculpture / thread variation (30–45 minutes, depending on group size)

An optional deeper exercise is the relational sculpture method. A participant who wishes to explore a relationship further selects two volunteers to represent the two people involved. The participant positions them in the space as a "sculpture" that represents how the relationship currently feels. In a second phase, the sculpture is rearranged to represent how the participant would like the relationship to be. Finally, the people acting as sculptures and the observers share what they experienced and noticed while in those positions.

A simpler alternative version of this step is the "thread" exercise, where a piece of string is used to represent the connection between two people and how distance, tension or closeness changes the relationship.

4 Step: boundaries as objects (creative exploration) (30–40 minutes)

The activity then shifts to a creative exploration of personal boundaries. Clay, wire, paper and drawing materials are placed in the center of the room. This step links back to the five freedoms by inviting participants to translate them into practice: our ability to say what we feel, ask for what we need, and take relational risks often depends on recognizing and communicating our boundaries. Participants are asked to reflect on the question: “If my boundaries were an object, what object would they be?” Using the available materials, they create an object representing their boundaries. When everyone finishes, participants present their creations and share what they wish about what the object represents for them.

Debrief / reflection questions (15–20 minutes)

To close the activity, facilitators invite reflection either as a whole group or in smaller groups using questions such as:

- How can I remain free without limiting the freedom of the other?
- How can I meet the other without diminishing myself?
- When I strongly protect my boundaries, how does it affect connection?
- What am I afraid of losing when I take care of my needs?
- Have there been moments when I felt that standing my ground might cause me to lose someone?
- What cultural ideas influence how we understand love and relationships — for example ideas about sacrifice, compromise or duty?
- Can setting boundaries sometimes function as protection, withdrawal or moral positioning?

These questions are offered to deepen the final reflection rather than to be answered one by one. They can serve as questions participants may take with them as they leave. Facilitators should again remind participants that the activity is intended as a space for reflection rather than therapy. Participants should only share what feels comfortable to them. It can be helpful to emphasize observation and curiosity rather than interpretation of others’ experiences, and to allow pauses if strong emotions arise during the process.

How to recognise our attachment styles ?

Attachment theory describes how relational patterns developed in childhood influence the way we seek emotional closeness, trust, and security in adult relationships. These patterns — secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized — guide how we manage needs, dependence, and intimacy. However, adult relationships and life experiences offer the possibility to transform these patterns, developing greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, clear communication, and reciprocal reliability. Emotional security thus becomes a dynamic skill, built through intentional practices of care, listening, and support, regardless of the form or number of relationships.

Testimonies

"I am aware of this pattern in myself, and I think I pushed certain relationships to the extreme, and the fear of being left often came true, because I believe I was creating an environment where they eventually couldn't handle it anymore."

"Unfortunately, dealing with an anxious/avoidant personality can unsettle a secure personality."

"I have learned to trust myself more, realizing that my anxiety is not the problem—it's the people with whom I experience that feeling."

"Being able to recognize them will surely help me understand them."

"Nurturing one's own attachment styles in order to be free."

OUR RESEARCH

Fern, J. (2020). Polysecure: Attachment, Trauma, and Consensual Nonmonogamy. Thorntree Press.

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, describes relational models that guide how individuals seek and manage emotional closeness in adulthood: secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized. These styles originate from early caregiving experiences and become internalized maps that shape trust, autonomy, and emotional regulation in relationships.

Jessica Fern, in *Polysecure* (2020), expands the attachment perspective by showing that relational security does not depend on the number of partners or the structure of the relationship, but on the ability to build secure bases and safe havens. Secure bases allow individuals to explore and grow with confidence that autonomy will not threaten connection, while safe havens provide spaces for emotional regulation and comfort. This security can also emerge within broader affective networks: different relationships can provide distinct forms of support, intimacy, or stability.
Fern identifies five key dimensions of relational security: self-awareness, emotional regulation, transparent communication, reliability, and reciprocal compassion. Cultivating these skills allows anxious or avoidant attachment patterns to be transformed, making it possible to build more stable, empathetic, and regulating relationships. In this sense, attachment theory becomes a universal tool, applicable to everyone, to understand and enhance the quality of affective connections in everyday life, regardless of the form or number of relationships.

ACTIVITIES

General details
Objectives:

- Understand one's own attachment styles and their impact on romantic, familial, and friendship relationships.
- Experiment with relational alternatives by adopting different attachment styles in a creative and non-judgmental context.
- Develop awareness, empathy, and flexibility in interpersonal interactions.

Duration: 2 H
Number of pax (we'll only keep this if we see our numbers differ): max15

Materials:

- Attachment style worksheets (Att. 1)
- Paper and pens.

Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step).

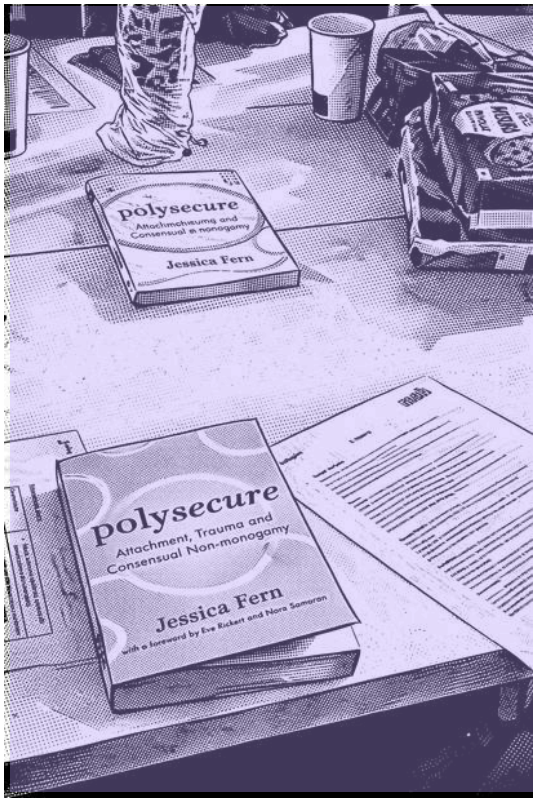
1 Step 1: introduction

- The facilitator presents the participants with the main attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganized), explaining their characteristics, typical relational behaviors, and emotional implications;
- It is clarified from the outset that the activity has artistic and reflective purposes through creative writing and is not intended as therapeutic or diagnostic;
- Participants are shown how to use the attachment style worksheets to guide their exploration of their own relational experiences.

2 Step: a mapping of myself - presentation and first writing exercise

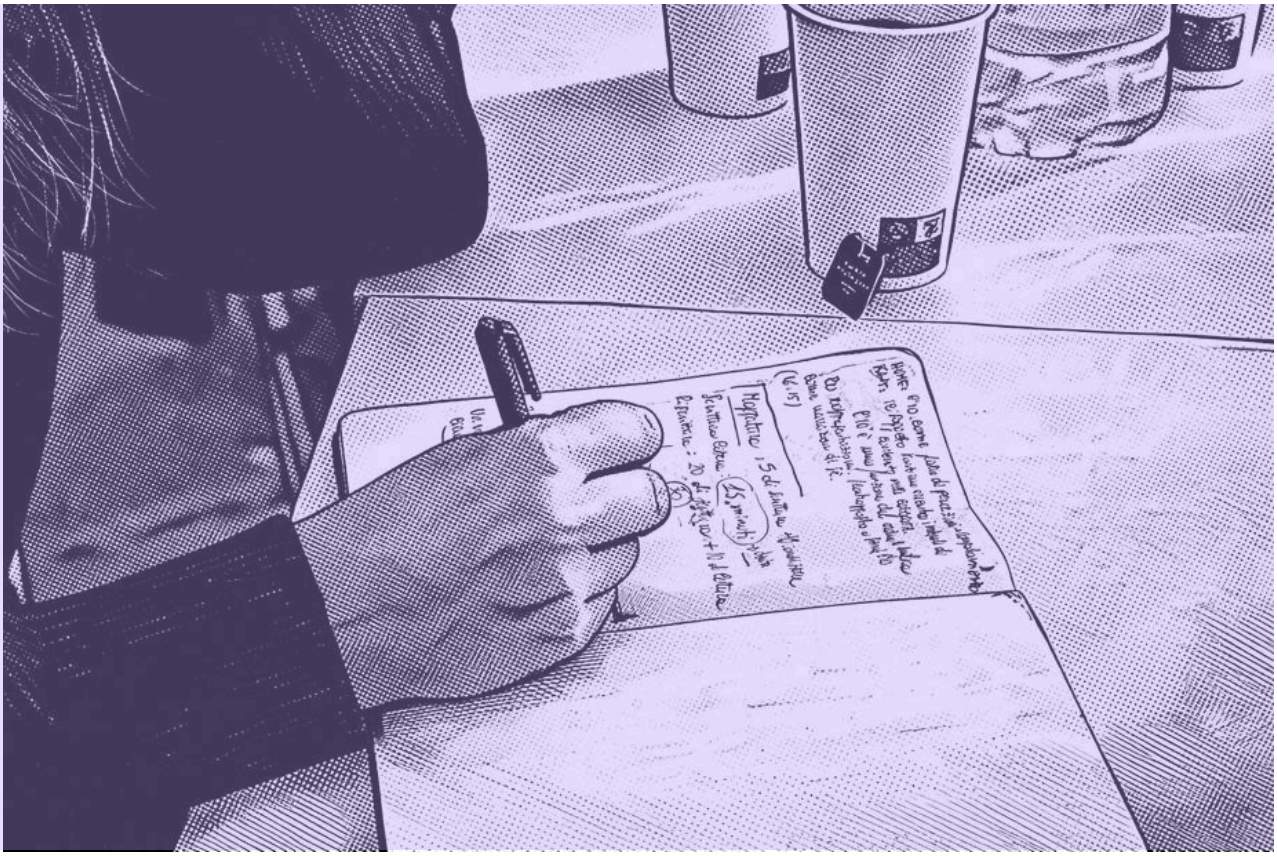
- Participants will be asked to share their personal journey using a timeline. Each participant will draw their own timeline, identifying five transformative moments in their life that reflect the major developmental events of one's relational world. Once identified, they will write the date of each event on the timeline (the more precise, the better; otherwise, just the year or season) and assign a title to each event.
- Once the activity is completed, each participant will present themselves through their timeline.

3 Step: the Same Scene, Another Self



Phase 1 – Identification:
After reading the descriptions of the four attachment styles (att. 1), each participant chooses a real or plausible episode in which their attachment style was evident (e.g., an argument, a moment of closeness or distance, a misunderstanding, etc.).

Phase 2 – Free Writing (10–15 min):
Write the scene from your own perspective, in the first person, exactly as it happened. This freely written scene will not be shared with the other participants.



Phase 3 – Transformative Rewriting
The creative exercise in this phase consists in rewriting the same scene adopting a different attachment style.
To do this, participants can choose one of these narrative inputs based on what they wrote in the free writing exercise:

- **The letter:** participants must write a letter to the co-protagonist of the story. To do this, however, they must identify a new attachment style that does not correspond to their own.
- **The mirror:** participants have to rewrite the story, swapping the attachment styles of the characters. The text can be written in prose or as dialogue.
- **How it ends:** participants must identify another attachment style and rewrite the ending of the story, taking into account the characteristics of the chosen attachment style.

4 Step

Participants will be invited to share their rewritten stories in a plenary session, emphasizing the artistic/reflective value of the exercise

Facilitator tips:

- Avoid psychological interpretations: let the work speak for those who created it.
- Maintain an atmosphere of trust and slowness. “No” or “maybe” should never be judged as negative.
- Remember the artistic/reflective value of the exercise.
- Sharing should never be compulsory, but remind participants that the important thing is not to share a real personal experience but rather to use creative writing to recognize different styles of attachment.

How do I know if I am in a toxic relationship?

“What is a toxic relationship? - Any relationship that makes one or both individuals involved feel unsupported, misunderstood, demeaned or attacked. A toxic relationship can threaten one’s emotional, psychological and/or physical well-being. Toxic relationships don’t only appear in the romantic context. Relationships in families, friendships, or even at the workplace can be toxic.” This is the most common definition of toxic relationships. But what if we go beyond the word “toxic” toward a better understanding of relationship dynamics?

Overall you can say that any relationship that makes you feel worse than you felt before the start of that relationship is unhealthy for you.

But how does it evolve? And what is needed to change tracks and make it healthy? Labeling often doesn’t lead us to real solutions. Fostering critical thinking, opening up an honest dialogue that leads us to exchange ideas on the complexity of relationships - serves as a tool to develop new vocabularies that enable us to change our mindset and narratives. It helps us to start seeing how we bring our familial patterns into various types of relationships - sometimes unhealthy ones. How we continuously recreate these dynamics through our pre-owned patterns of behavior. Making a collage is an easy way also to visualize and go beyond words.

Testimonies

“Sometimes I cannot really explain with words what is wrong between us. There is something invisible, like a ghost. If I could just see, I think, I could recognize what I feel when something goes really harmful.”

“I often find partners with whom I don’t know why I start to feel very soon that I can’t breathe and feel claustrophobic. Usually after a year or so I need to run.”

“ I still remember a few words and sentences we said we wanted to get rid of. Never forget. Words are powerful, they can do a lot of harm. But they can also be healing.”

“ As much as we are able to become easily toxic, the same works the other way around. We can heal together, be nice and just change tracks. Sometimes we create toxicity together. ”

OUR RESEARCH

Esther Perel is a Belgian-born psychotherapist known for her work on modern relationships, intimacy, desire, and infidelity. She emphasizes that relationships are complex and dynamic, often characterized by a mixture of intimacy and independence. She talks about how patterns of toxicity can develop when boundaries are blurred or when there's a loss of mutual respect. Perel encourages self-awareness and reflection as key components of healthy relationships. To imagine this in practicality she encourage us to reflect on concrete signs of manipulation or control - guilt-tripping, gaslighting, isolation, monitoring, conditional affection, ultimatums, micromanaging, or emotional withholding - and notice bodily cues like anxiety, walking on eggshells, or relief when apart. Some warning signs can make us realise if our relationship is toxic:

- You give more than you get back. You put more effort, energy and maybe even money into the relationship than your partner does.
- The other person does not try to understand, support or respect you.
- After talking to or being with the person you feel depressed, angry or tired.
- You bring out the worst in each other. You like yourself less when being with them.
- You feel like you have to walk on eggshells around this person because you have to be scared of outbursts
- When something is wrong they turn it around to make it look like it is your fault.
- There is either physical or verbal abuse involved.

But these signs can also be tricky. We would feel so but the other might be feeling very similar. Nonetheless, it is always easier to blame issues in a relationship on the other party but in every interpersonal connection, it is important to question your behavior too. Maybe you are the toxic part. Being aware of your flaws is the first step to changing. So here are a few signs that your behaviour creates unhealthy patterns in a relationship.

- You lie or hide information from others or try to make them question their judgment.
- You try to control and dominate others. You often demand things from them and always want things to go your way.
- You threaten the other person to leave them if they don't act according to your demands. We call this emotional blackmail.
- You don't give the other person their own space.
- The relationship is all about you. You put your own needs above theirs and they cannot come to you to find support.
- You never take responsibility when things go wrong and blame the other person.

Perel discusses awareness of power and control - how issues of power, control, and boundaries within relationships help us recognize toxic patterns like manipulation or coercion highlighting the importance of mutual consent and respect.

By using her approach we can inspire participants to reflect on their own patterns and feelings, fostering deeper understanding of whether their relationship behaviors are healthy or harmful. Balancing Emotions and Reality: Perel's work on managing desire, conflict, and emotional nuances also helps participants to understand that recognizing toxicity isn't about blame but about mutual awareness and growth. Self reflection, mutual sharing, expressing ourselves by using art can be encouraging to explore feelings honestly and consider how to foster healthier dynamics.

Perel, E. (2017). The state of affairs: Rethinking infidelity. HarperCollins.

ACTIVITIES

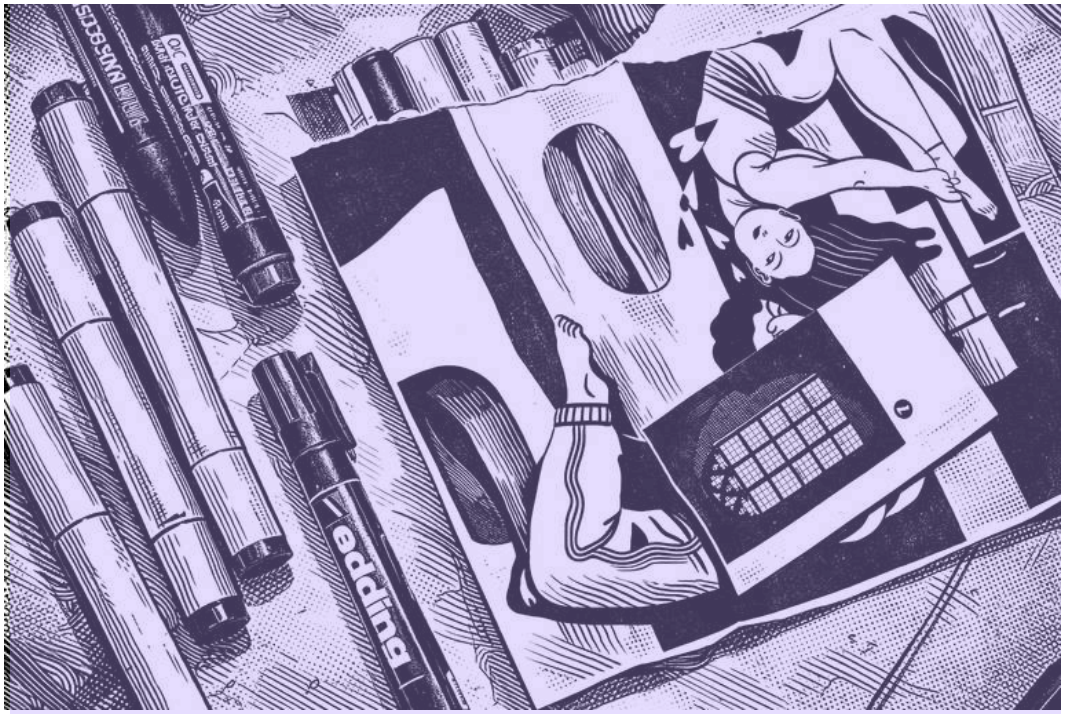
General details

- To help participants recognise and differentiate between toxic and healthy relationship patterns.
- To support participants in reflecting on the space between these two extremes, identifying their own needs, boundaries, and expectations within relationships.
- To encourage a shift away from rigid labelling towards a more nuanced understanding of relational dynamics and contexts.
- To enable participants to visually represent the complex and hard-to-verbalise aspects of relationships, using collage as a tool to explore ambiguity, emotions, and relational complexity.

Duration: 90-180 minutes*
Number of pax: Adaptable for 2-15 participants

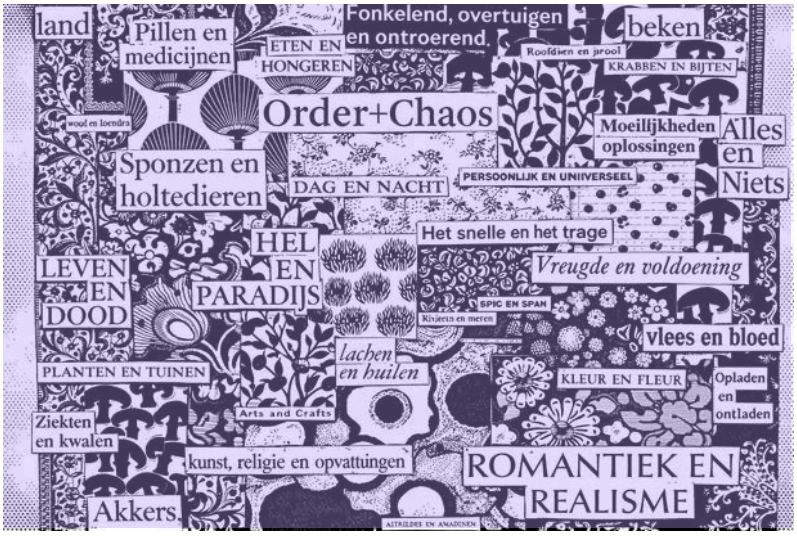
Materials

- A3 or bigger paper, thicker for a collage
- Newspaper, journals, reviews with pictures
- Scissors, glue
- Coloured pen, markers.



1 Step: galaxies of relationships

- Plenary discussion: Collective brainstorming on what comes to participants' minds when hearing the terms toxic relationship and healthy relationship. Key words and associations are gathered;
- Collage-making activity: If it's possible, divide the group into 3 smaller groups**;
- Group 1 makes individual work: invite participants to make a collage of their "galaxy of intimate relationships (family, friends, romantic relationship all alike part of the galaxy);
- Group 2 creates a collage reflecting on toxic relationships;
- Group 3 is invited to create a collage on healthy relationships.



- **Gallery walk and group reflection:** The collages are displayed in the space, followed by a facilitated group discussion focusing on what participants see, notice, and interpret in the visual works. Invite participants as a big group to sit in a circle. We are going to make comparisons among the visual works. You can explore together directions such as:
    - Can you recognize healthy patterns in the collage of toxic relationships?
    - Can you recognize toxic, unhealthy elements in the collage of healthy relationships?
    - What are the visual elements that you identify as toxic? Can you show and be specific? For example using color codes, red represents danger, fear, pain…
    - Search all the concrete elements, details on the collages; you would consider them healthy / unhealthy? Can you explain why?
    - What is the difference if you take a look at the “galaxy of your personal relationships”? Can you recognize any of the patterns, elements from the toxic / healthy collages?
    - Do you think it's possible to change an unhealthy dynamic into a healthy one? Why? How?

During the discussion, encourage participants for a dialogue. Remind them to share their thoughts, opinions respectfully by using “I statements” and listen carefully to each other. One of the objectives of this activity is to help participants to realize the diversity where our boundaries, sensitivities lie, how we react, interact and end up together healthy or unhealthy dynamics. Participants can learn a lot from each other by sharing these reflections. Use the collection of words from the brainstorming to create as nuanced dialogue as possible to show the complexity of relationships and to get closer to what toxicity can mean. It is important for facilitators to know in this activity that the aim is not triggering traumas or creating difficult therapeutic situations that cannot be solved in a context of a training. That’s why keep in mind that by facilitating it is not only important to unfold unhealthy patterns but also important to show the possible solutions toward healthy scenarios.

That is the reason we continue the activity by exploring personal needs, feelings and verbal expressions that can be useful to recognize and change unhealthy patterns.

2 Step

“What lies in between?” – open writing exercise: Using large sheets of paper, participants are invited individually to freely write or draw as much as they wish on a shared paper in response to the following prompts:

- What are my needs in a relationship?
- How do I feel within a relationship?
- Which sentences, expectations, or narratives would I like to erase?

3 Step: closing activity together and group reflection

Invite the group to create a big new collage work or an exhibition using all the visual materials that so far have been produced. During the work participants are welcome to share their thoughts.
During the final discussion use all the guiding questions you can find in the brainstorming and encourage participants to connect all the elements that they created. Share ideas and explore how our needs are satisfied or not in relationships, what can we do for ourselves to feel safe and take care of ourselves. Encourage participants to share ideas on how to communicate feelings, needs, how to change sentences which hurt into kind ones.

Debrief / reflection questions (15–20 minutes)
Brainstorming:
Understanding and recognizing toxic behaviors and unhealthy dynamics

- Define toxicity: Explore what makes a relationship or behavior toxic.
- Differentiate between toxic people and toxic dynamics: Recognize that toxicity can stem from individual behaviors or unhealthy patterns within interactions.
- Collect synonyms or related words for "toxic" such as harmful, draining, unhealthy, destructive, manipulative, and abusive.
- Gather words and descriptions that depict real situations: for example, "constant criticism," "gaslighting," "lack of respect," "emotional exhaustion," etc.
- Emphasize that toxicity is not a static label—people can change, but patterns tend to repeat.

Hints:
*Time frame: you can decide how much you want to execute the activity, it can be kept shorter and longer depending how much time is available.

**The way collages are created can vary depending on the group size and how attuned participants are to one another. Collages can be made individually, in pairs, or even as two separate groups focusing on *toxic* vs. *healthy* relationships. Facilitators are advised to provide papers of different sizes and allow flexibility, assessing in real time—based on group dynamics—what approach works best for progressing through the task.

Is the neighbour's grass always greener?

(On the FOMO and volatility of relationships)

It is probably some form of cliché that each generation perceives that the newer generation does something totally different - but maybe not only. This may be the case concerning relationship patterns and Gen Z, or even the Millenials. We hear that "Gen Z does not engage in deep relationships" or that they are doing it later, "they don't commit". Gen Z members can be caught complaining also that relationships are somehow so volatile. This activity invites us to dig a bit deeper in this question: are relationships really more volatile? If so why? And is that a problem?

Testimonies

"I wonder if online dating has unconsciously reinforced this sense that there is always someone else out there who is better than the person I am currently dating?
I realize there are plenty of exceptions and success stories out there. Personally I am very forgiving, but I won't compromise on my boundaries.
It just seems like quite a few people have been unconsciously conditioned to treat others (for better or for worse) as disposable, since there seems to be always more fish in the sea."

> *"Relationships aren't a requirement like they were in previous generations. My dad could not cook and my mom didn't work. They each required a partner to eat. We don't have to settle anymore. There are definitely other contributing factors including OLD and and absence of religious pressure. But the main reason is that we don't require a partner to put food on the table anymore."*

"This may also be a good thing. And I don't mean it as a judgment, but an observation. I look at all the people I know who got married in their early twenties and ten twenty years later they are in divorce. We should use the time to experiment, understand who we are before committing. So yes, maybe being twenty something is the time we can have more volatile relationships."

> *"It's just the logic of capitalism, everything becomes disposable. Our clothes, our machines, all our objects…it's this logic of instrumentalisation that And that we would have a relationship just to display appropriately attractive photos on the networks, when you know that behind the perfect smiles they are angry at each other or merely empty."*

OUR RESEARCH

"Connections are 'virtual relations'. Unlike old-fashioned relationships (not to mention 'committed' relationships, let alone long-term commitments), they seem to be made to the measure of a liquid modern life setting where 'romantic possibilities' (and not only 'romantic' ones) are supposed and hoped to come and go with ever greater speed and in never thinning crowds, stampeding each other off the stage and out-shouting each other with promises 'to be more satisfying and fulfilling'. Unlike 'real relationships', 'virtual relationships' are easy to enter and to exit. They look smart and clean, feel easy to use and user-friendly, when compared with the heavy, slow-moving, inert messy 'real stuff. A twenty-eight-year-old man from Bath, interviewed in connection with the rapidly growing popularity of computer dating at the expense of singles bars and lonely-heart columns, pointed to one decisive advantage of electronic relation: 'you can always press "delete"' (Bauman 2003:5)

When we ponder about the volatility or disposability of relationships there is already a hint of judgement: that indeed relationships should be stable and last across time and space. But we should be careful not to make this judgement too soon. If black and white reasoning comes natural to us, it doesn't always serve us well. So let's make it clear: we are not saying that today all relationships are shallow and short, nor do we say that such relationships are necessarily toxic or useless. Imagine your landscape of relationships as a garden: there may be some strong trees with impressive trunks and roots, but there can also be smaller bushes and herbs and weeds, which you may be tempted to get rid of but can ultimately be beneficial for your garden. Of course if you only see bad grass and weed in your garden you may doubt your gardening skills. But even so, no need to despair: gardens may need some period of rest, where we can't see a lot, but underneath the surface the seeds are already planted and preparing to bloom.
To push this metaphor of gardening a bit further, here are some key skills for a contemporary gardener of relationships:

- do not be overwhelmed by what we see as "the perfect garden" on social media posts. Instead of fixating on the garden of the neighbour that is always greener, orient your attention to your own, what feels right for you, what plants and colours you are attracted to
- gardens are complex: an interplay of weather, solid conditions, the quality of seeds all influence what is happening, don't try to plan and control it all at 100%, take sometimes a step back to see what is happening and then make small gestures
- gardening takes time and attention and the process itself is precious, ultimately more interesting than receiving a pre-boxed fully grown garden and ordering a new one each time you're bored of it.

ACTIVITIES

General details

Objectives:

- address a sense of “FOMO” (fear of missing out) that young people may perceive concerning their relationships
- explore the diversity of relationships we can have and contrast it with cultural expectations
- address apprehensions about lack of control, unforeseen events that may influence our relationships.

Duration: 2 H 30’

Number of pax: 6-8

Materials:

- A3 or bigger paper, a bit thicker to allow
- different materials: oil pastel, markers, watercolour pencils, paint brush, images for collage, coloured paper, scissors, glue
- Space big enough (or two separate spaces) where participants can sit in front of their works without the sensation that they are observed by others
- A4 paper and pen for everyone

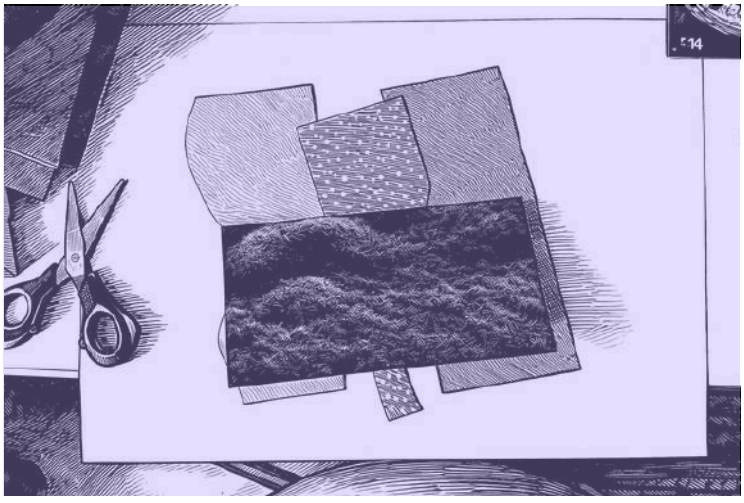
Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step).

1 Step: introduce the subject

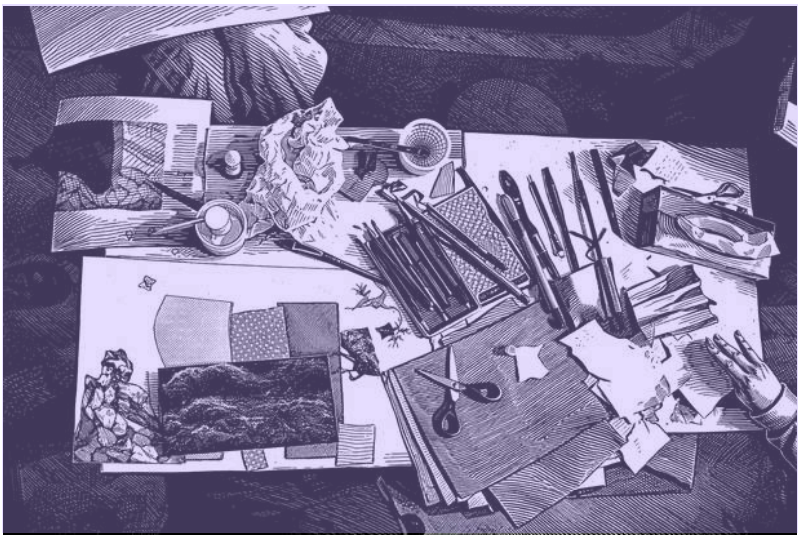
(This should not be the first activity of a workshop, make sure that you have done some activities before. For some examples go to the “intro activities” section).

2 Step: preparing the garden

Give an A3 (or bigger) paper to each participant and show them where the materials are displayed, give any explanation on the use of materials. Invite everyone to draw the beginnings of a garden: find a way to represent the ground (is it flat, is there a hill, what is the colour, texture etc) and one or two first plants. Let them know,, that after 15 minutes we will make a rotation and that other people will continue to cultivate their garden.



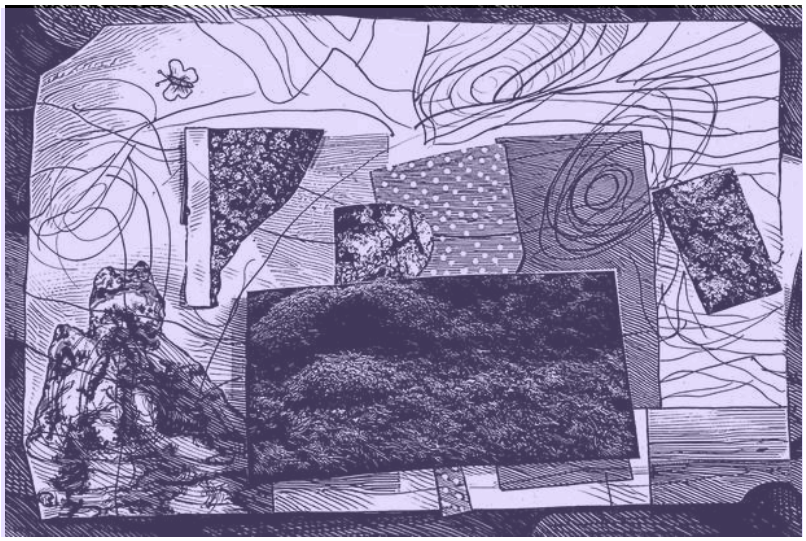
3 Step: attending the gardens of others



After 15 minutes, invite everyone to finish the first touches on their garden. For the next 20 minutes ask them to attend the gardens of others: everyone should add something to at least two other gardens. It can be something small, or big. Ask them to try to have a feel of what that drawing / collage may need visually.

4 Step: adding what is missing to our garden of relationships

When the 20 minutes are gone, invite everyone to find their original garden. What do they see? Did it turn out as they thought it would? Ask them to imagine that they are 80 years old and look back at their life, and contemplate their garden of relationships. What are aspects that they are happy about? Is there an aspect that they are unhappy about or that is missing? Give them 10 minutes to make 1-2 changes, additions they wish if something is missing from their garden of relationships.



5 Step

For sharing, if you have the space you can display the different gardens on a wall and invite participants to have a tour in the exhibition. Invite them also for a round of verbal sharing :

“Imagine you’re 80 years old and you’re looking back to your life, and you contemplate the garden of your relationships. Name 1-2 aspects of your garden that you are happy about, and tell us what you were missing, unhappy about and that you changed.”

6 Step: automatic writing

Invite participants for a session of “automatic writing” using two prompts. The first prompt is “When relationships are volatile…” This means they should use these words to start a sentence and then answer, without editing, without censoring, whatever comes, and continue to write as long as there are thoughts that come. When a train of thought ends, again they should go back to the prompt. Give 7 minutes for this first sequence.
Then, ask them to do the same with “when my relationships are solid”, for another 7 minutes.
When they are done, invite them to be the curator or editor of the text, and select about 6 lines that they feel are the most interesting / important for them. They can make any changes necessary. The final piece can be a poem or a sort of manifesto, as they wish.
When they are done, invite anyone to read the piece they made if they wish to do so.

Debrief / reflection questions with participants:

- Were there recurrent patterns in the changes we made in the last round?
- In real life what helps us make such changes? What hinders us?
- How do you feel about others intervening in your gardens? To what extent is that realistic?
- To what extent the process we used to draw / create the gardens is illustrative of relationships? Can you draw any parallels?

Facilitator tips:

Give participants the freedom to go as deep as they wish. Verbal sharing is not compulsory, and even if they choose to speak, they can talk about merely the visual aspects or about relationships, as they wish.
For bigger groups (more than 6) the last sharing can happen in smaller groups (2-3-4 participants) where each participant has 2 minutes to share while the others are listening.
In our debriefing a participant told us that she felt strange that in her garden of relationship there were drawings / items made by others, not only by her. Another participant responded that it is rather like that in real life, not everything is under our control, we can react to what we see the result of external conditions or actions of others. Make sure to give importance to this dialectic between what is happening and how we can react to it.

How to stay committed in a relationship ?

Commitment in a relationship is a very controversial topic, not only for young generations. Long term engagement, loyalty, constant effort sounds like a “cage”, especially in the more individualistic hemisphere of civilizations. While safety, belonging, a predictable future seems an important value and need also among young people. What is commitment in the context of human relations? Where does it come from and what purpose does it serve? How to create a healthy committed relationship with someone(s) that provides as much safety such as much freedom?

Commitment in a relationship is less a static promise than an ongoing, conscious practice rooted in self-awareness, safety, and courageous vulnerability. Healthy commitment balances connection with autonomy - interdependence, not fusion. Partners commit to shared goals and support each other’s healing, while maintaining individual agency and self-care. Practical habits - weekly check-ins, shared rituals, therapy when patterns repeat, and personal regulation practices like sleep and mindfulness - keep reactivity low and appreciation high, making the day-to-day work of commitment manageable.

But what are the motivations and needs behind? Why are we interested at all taking such tasks on ourselves?

Testimonies

“Since we are engaged and moved to live together it is a constant challenge to find and maintain “quality time” with my boyfriend.”

“For me the biggest challenge in my long term committed relationships - with my love, family, friends - is to adjust our daily rhythm, routines and needs. This difference can cause even stronger conflicting situations if we are not aware, committed and trust each other. But it's still worth it because I feel much more free myself among people I love than alone.”

“ I don’t know, if I hear this word ‘commitment’ it freaks me out. I am happy to hang out, be with you, even take efforts. But as soon as it becomes a “task”, somehow all the fun is gone.”

“ I still remember a few words and sentences we said we wanted to get rid of. Never forget. Words are powerful, they can do a lot of harm. But they can also be healing.”

OUR RESEARCH

What is commitment? At its core, commitment is an intentional, ongoing dedication to another person or to a shared purpose that combines reliable action, emotional investment, and the willingness to work through difficulties. It's not a single promise but a pattern of choices: showing up, repairing ruptures, and prioritizing the relationship's health over momentary impulses. True commitment balances closeness and autonomy, requires consistent accountability, and is enacted through small, repeatable behaviors as well as larger decisions during crises.

What does it mean to stay committed in a relationship? From a trauma-informed angle and drawing on Gábor Máté's insights - commitment is not only a promise but an ongoing practice shaped by our nervous systems and the relational scripts that we inherit. Gábor Máté is a Hungarian-Canadian physician, best-selling author, and public speaker known for his work on addiction, stress, trauma, and the mind-body connection. Many of our reactions in partnerships - he says - are echoes of earlier family patterns: survival moves learned to keep us safe as children (people-pleasing, withdrawal, pursuit, or control) that later show up as automatic responses. Recognizing our own trans-generational inheritance helps us pause and choose differently: instead of reacting from old pain, we can respond with curiosity and intention. Commitment, then, begins with awareness of those scripts and the willingness to interrupt them rather than repeat them unconsciously.

Safety is the key to sustainable commitment. Máté stresses nervous-system regulation: when individuals learn to calm themselves and co-regulate with a partner after stressful situations - a dependable base for intimacy forms. This might look like small, predictable practices, such as checking in weekly, naming needs before they swell into blame, using agreed time-outs, and making timely repairs after ruptures. If safety has been repeatedly violated (abuse, chronic disrespect, or persistent boundary breaches), the healthiest commitment may be to step back or leave. But where safety can be rebuilt, repair rituals and consistent responsiveness prevent wounds from hardening into resentment and allow commitment to remain a living, repairable choice.

Sustaining commitment requires sustained inner work: radical self-awareness and self-compassion. Rather than assigning blame, partners can ask what old hurt or unmet needs have activated their behavior? By practicing compassionate inquiry, such as naming feelings, accepting discomfort, and making practical changes - we can assure growth. This stance reduces shame and opens space for mutual learning. Practical tools such as - therapy when patterns recur, mindfulness or sleep routines to reduce reactivity, and shared rituals that reinforce appreciation can deeply support this inner work and translate intention into everyday behavior. Commitment becomes less about proving loyalty and more about practicing care, repair, and growth.

Finally, commitment is also communal: we are shaped and healed in relationships, thus trustworthy community and external support matter.

Changing entrenched dynamics takes time, humility, and repeated practice. Trusted professionals, family, friends, or group work can guide the process. When partners commit to small, consistent acts of responsiveness and to naming and working on repeating patterns, they build a resilient form of commitment - one that allows autonomy and closeness to coexist, treating ruptures as solvable problems, and seeing that staying together is an active, courageous choice rather than a passive default.

Maté, G., & Maté, D. (2022). The myth of normal: Trauma, illness, and healing in a toxic culture. Penguin Books.

ACTIVITIES

Commitment

Objectives:

- Gain a better understanding of what exactly commitment means in relationships
- Gain awareness of diversity in commitment behavioural patterns
- Achieve a better understanding of our own relationship / commitment patterns
- Gain a better understanding of our motivation for being committed to someone. Through non-verbal activities participants can explore their own relationship dynamics with special focus on: trust, proximity, needs for closeness and safety, sharing love and attention, managing boundaries, keeping connection just to mention a few key ingredients (and more which arise in the group).

Duration: 120-180 minutes

Number of pax: adaptable for up to 4 -20 participants* (hint to facilitators)

Materials:

- Small sheets of paper for individual brainstorming
- Pens, markers
- A4 papers
- Objects. Imagine all kinds of objects that could symbolize relationships or somehow connected to the life of your age group : stones, rope, a bucket, a book... practically anything, even simple household objects can serve this purpose. Create a selection of variety so participants can make their choices. Make sure that there are at least as many objects as many participants in the group.

1 Step: what is commitment?

First, in this part of the activity, we are going to explore together what exactly commitment is. If you want, the group can watch this video, it's a good conversation starter:
https://vimeo.com/52744406

The animation focuses on a one-to-one relationship, its changes over time, and through that the idea of commitment as well. If there is enough time, it can serve as a good introduction and a starting point for the discussion.

(15+5miutes)
Concept game, collective brainstorming:

Sit in a circle with the group and place a big paper in the middle. Invite participants for individual work (5 minutes).

Everyone takes a piece of paper and writes down:

- What does commitment mean? (dictionary definition / ChatGPT style). You can also collect synonyms and explore the nuances.
- Why do we choose to commit to someone? What is the purpose of “commitment”?
- If it were a recipe, what would be the ingredient list of commitment?

Everyone keeps their paper with the “ingredients”. Divide the big group into small groups of 3 or 4. Participants bring their papers into the small groups. Invite the small groups to:

- Collect all the ingredients they have on the individual papers.
- Put together a common "recipe": When and why do we want to “consume” a “tea of commitment” and what are the ingredients and process of making?

Come back to plenary. The small groups share their “recipes”. Discuss commitment in different contexts: reflect together if there are differences depending on if we talk about a work / study context or relationships. How? Invite participants to continue the dialogue toward discussing relationships (friends, family, romantic, etc.).

2 Step: our personal needs behind commitment - is it better with or without?

We named this game "Gate" (inspired by the feeling of absence).

Gameplay:

- Participants stand in a circle.
- One person leaves the circle and stands somewhere a little distance outside the circle or even leaves the room. The rest standing in the circle first do not close the gap. Invite participants not to talk but listen: “How does the “gap” feel? Do you feel the absence? Do not answer, just feel.” Now, invite the group to close the circle and the person who left earlier comes back and gets in the circle to move to the middle.
- Participants standing in the circle select two people standing next to each other to be the "gate." The "gates" cannot communicate verbally or through movement; they can only "call" the person intuitively. The person can enter the circle only through the gates.

- After the player manages to get in the middle has 3 attempts to find the exit and leave.
- If the person in the middle does not start walking towards the gate, “gates” can slightly open inviting the person in the middle to leave. Encourage participants to feel the activity. Try to connect as a group without speaking. Players in the circle can make the whole circle smaller or bigger. Multiple gates can open and close. The player in the middle can experiment either: trying to leave the circle fast or slow. Trying not to leave at all.

Reflection:

- How did it feel to be in the middle?
- What was it like to be a gate?
- What was the basis for the decision?
- What did you notice during the activity?

3 Step: beyond me - 1. When being together becomes a burden

Continue the group dialogue by introducing the idea; commitment is something that requires effort. When we are ready to sacrifice our own interests, boundaries, “freedom”, time, the “fun” part and eager to work for the shared entity, we prove our commitment. It is a sort of loyalty; we stay even if we experience challenges. In this part we are going to explore the challenges and how we cope with them. Invite participants to answer this question: ‘What is the biggest challenge in your relationships?” Encourage participants to mention as many as possible, even “silly things” are welcome. Examples: “to create quality time with my boyfriend”, “to adjust to the daily routine of the other”, “bear his smell of cigarette…” etc… Collect all the words, ideas on the big paper.
*Note for facilitators: importance of writing these down because these words will serve as a basis further in the non-verbal sequence.

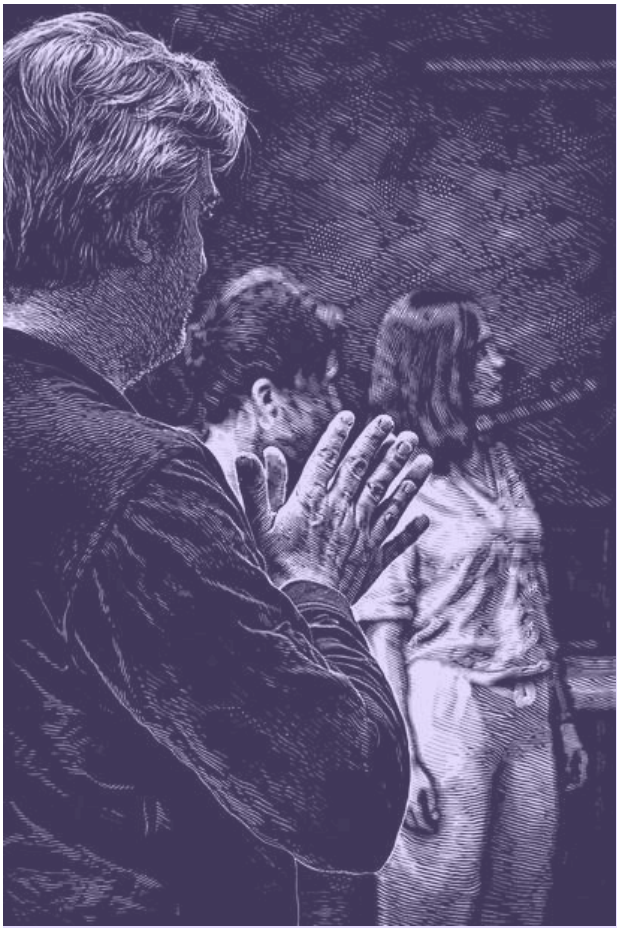
Attitude scale: After the talking/collecting part, participants can indicate their relationship to the difficulty on an imaginary scale laid out across the room. The facilitator defines the two ends of the space: one side represents “this does not cause me any difficulty at all,” while the opposite side represents “this causes me a great deal of difficulty.” Facilitators read loudly all the sentences from the paper and participants are moving in the space on the scale. Participants position themselves physically in the space along this scale to express their opinion.

4 Step: beyond me - 2. Taking the effort for “us”

In this part we are going to explore how it feels to take the effort for a joint interest. This activity is meant to explore and experience when a group takes over the individual. How can we cope together with challenges for survival? How can we tune to each other while keeping or losing ourselves?
Explain to participants that the following activities are meant to be silent. Silence helps us to direct our focus from verbal and mental expression toward our more automatic, embodied reactions. Tell participants that at the end of the activity they will be able to reflect also verbally.

Group work:
Swamp crossing
The floor is a “swamp.” The goal of the game is to get your whole group from the start point to the finish point without touching the floor. You can only step on the paper sheets. A sheet sinks (the facilitator takes it away) if no one is standing on it. You cannot step off the papers, throw them, or slide them. Everyone must cross together, so you need to plan and communicate carefully. You can hold hands, help each other, or lift teammates if needed. If anyone touches the swamp, the whole team must return to the start. Ban talking during the crossing; allow only a single tactical discussion before the start. Work together, move carefully, and think strategically to get everyone across safely. * (Hint to facilitators).

“Catch the clap”
Players in a circle. Toss a bean bag or easy-to-catch ball back and forth around the circle. Let players know that it is the thrower’s responsibility to allow the catcher to catch it! Once a rhythm is established, introduce a “clap” every time the ball is in the air. All other players must clap in unison while the ball is in the air. Play until there is a nice rhythm and flow! For more advanced drama groups, introduce another ball into play.



5 Step: you + me = US

- **Working in pairs**

The following sequence of non-verbal activities is meant to explore the very physical feelings of belonging, trust and togetherness and also to feel the challenges we face in close proximity with someone.

These are basic ingredients of commitment. We are about to explore what it feels creating the “bad” and “good” proximity, mutual trust, intimacy that creates that quality of connectedness which makes - we believe - commitment sustainable in the long run.

- **Eye contact: (*Hint to facilitators)**

Divide the group into pairs of two. Stand 1.5m apart. Partners stare into each other’s eyes without speaking. Begin 30 seconds, increase to 2–3 minutes.

If one laughs/looks away, they swap roles (the other chooses new posture).

- **Leading with voice - Echo guide**

One partner is blindfolded or closes their eyes. The leader uses only voice (tone, volume, rhythm, short phrases) to guide movements across the space (walk, turn, pause, small gestures). Switch roles after 2 minutes.

- **Mirror Walk**

One leads by subtle physical signals (hand on shoulder, pressure on arm) to mirror a slow walk or sequence of shapes. After a minute, swap leader. Encourage silent communication.

- **Share a burden - The invisible box**

Partners stand side-by-side, hands together as if carrying an invisible heavy box. Walk, climb imaginary steps, navigate obstacles while keeping the “box” level. Add changes in weight (leader cues heaviness). Switch who sets the pace.

- **Lost my freedom - Tied together**

Tie a soft scarf/rope loosely around both waists/hips (comfortable, non-restrictive). Task pairs to move across a short course, retrieve an object, or perform a short choreography without breaking the tie. Encourage problem-solving and communication.

- **Happy surrender - giving and receiving weight - body contact activity**

One partner stands rigid, the other approaches and leans their weight gently into them; the receiver absorbs and finds balance. Progress to walking while supporting a leaning partner, or slow counterbalances. Switch roles.

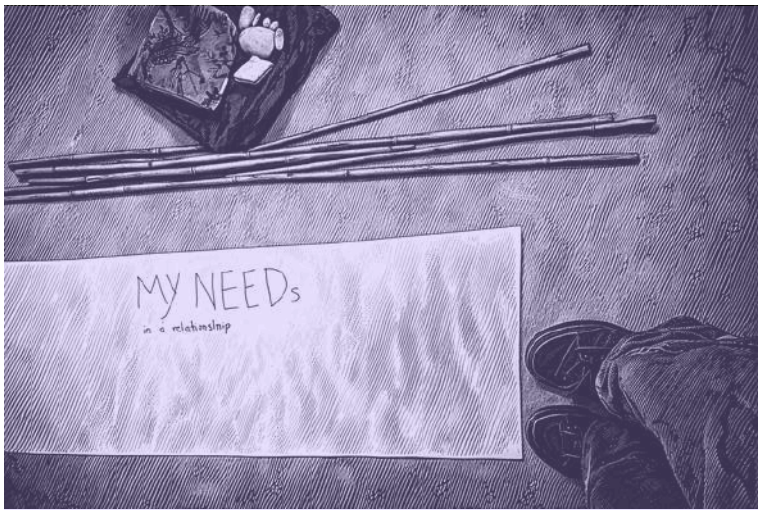
- **Good proximity - playing with a ball or balloon**

Partners face each other and pass a balloon/soft ball using varied rules: no hands, keeping eye contact, using only breaths, or passing a count rhythm. Add challenges like increasing speed or changing rhythms.

6 Step: just me - what it feels to be committed to myself

Individual work with objects:
In this part we are exploring in a non-verbal way the very basics of commitment; our personal traits and ability to get committed, first of all with ourselves. We are using objects for this game which through their material existence help us to embody feelings, behaviour patterns.

Prepare a table or a space with the previously collected objects (see suggestions above at materials). Show them to participants and explain to participants that in the following part we are going to work with these objects. We begin the activity warming up in a group.



Warm - up sequence in a group

- Invite participants to stand in a circle and circulate the objects among each other. Invite everyone to take the object in their hands. Invite them to explore the objects in their hands: the material, the temperature, form, size. They can say out loud what they experience. Ask them also a bit about their feelings: if they can name any feelings when taking an object in their hands: nice cozy feeling, disgusting, funny...? Pay good attention also to how you pass the object to someone else in the circle: do you want to get rid of it? Or it would be nice to keep it longer?
- After trying all (or many enough) objects, ask participants to choose one object they like the most.
- Invite participants to get in a more intimate connection with their object(s). They can leave the circle and slowly walk in the space with their object. They can place the object on their body, walk with it, play, hold in their hands, explore, everything without speaking. Give enough time for this part, even if it feels awkward, encourage participants to engage with their objects.

- Invite participants to try different movements with their object in the space and finally find a spot where they are invited to find a comfortable position placing the object somewhere on their bodies. Give enough time to find the best position.
- Invite participants to change place and position again now focusing on trying the most comfortable position. They are free to place their object wherever they want, which makes the most relaxed, the most comfortable feeling for them. Give again some time for this part. Encourage them just to look at themselves, maybe look around in the space, remind them to breathe normally, take some time to explore body sensations, and change anything if their body still needs more comfort

- Reflection & sharing in the group:

1. How did you feel during this activity? What was easy / difficult / awkward / funny?
2. What was your object? Why do you think you chose that object?
3. What happened? Can you recall what you did with the object?

Debrief / reflection questions (15–20 minutes)

As closing the whole activity, sit with the group and share: what do you take home? What was the most challenging? Most exciting? Where did you discover something new for yourself?

Hints:

- *Difficulty adjustments for the swamp walk (optional): Use fewer papers (always less than half the group size).
- ** The eye contact activity often causes some discomfort, and one common coping strategy is laughter. This is completely fine, but it's worth reflecting on it. It's up to the facilitator when to do this: if they feel the discussion would interrupt the flow of the activities, it can be included at the end.
- This sequence of activity is advised to an age group 18 or older.

Sex and relationships - what is my “true” choice, “true desire”?

Sexuality and relationship choices are not mere consequences of attraction - it reveals a person's inner landscape, showing their needs for safety, healing, and reworking early experiences of love and pain. By questioning fixed categories of gender, sexuality, and relationship norms, we create room for fluid, contextual expressions of desire and commitment. Rejecting inherited scripts allows partners to intentionally design their relational terms, making connections in an authentic way and continuously renegotiating rather than being in automatic duties. This approach challenges social norms and expectations - roles, timelines, and prescribed behaviors - and invites partners to craft relationships that better reflect who they are and what they truly need.

In this activity we would like to open up a space for an unusual creative exploration of sexuality. Imagining yourself as an animal taps into hidden aspects of personality - resilience, independence, protectiveness, or wildness - and offers a playful way to explore those traits in relation to intimacy and selfhood. Choosing an animal identity can surface strengths and vulnerabilities that everyday social roles obscure, helping you see how instinct, habit, and unmet needs shape your desires and responses. This visualization creates a safe space for gentle self-inquiry and creative reflection, encouraging acceptance of instinctive or misunderstood parts of yourself and supporting mindful self-care.

Testimonies

“Sometimes I feel it's just better to live without sex. Any time I start a sexual relationship, I end up somewhere I hate being. ”

“Sex, desire... I love it and I hate it, its pleasure and its danger. Personally, for me it is difficult to think about it in a linear way, there are so many aspects to it. I want to find my freedom, deepest desires but it is not an easy task to shed everything that I, as a woman, have been taught about sex. Doing so can be freeing, but it is not always a safe journey.”

“I feel like sexuality is such a taboo subject, or something that we never address critically or even give enough thought for ourselves and in a broader discourse. Therefore, unfortunately it often is exploited and never taken seriously enough. We take it for granted as something that we just DO.

OUR RESEARCH

Gábor Máté is a Hungarian-Canadian physician, best-selling author, and public speaker known for his work on addiction, stress, trauma, and the mind-body connection. He teaches that our sexual choices and relationship patterns are deeply shaped by early attachment experiences and transgenerational survival strategies. People often repeat relational scripts learned in childhood because familiarity can feel safer than the unknown, even when those scripts are harmful. Partners may be unconsciously chosen to reenact parental dynamics or to try to "fix" old wounds, and sexual intimacy can become a way to seek the connection or validation that was missing in early life. Recognizing these dynamics is the first step toward changing them: once patterns are seen as survival responses rather than moral failings, shame decreases and real work becomes possible. Maté, G., & Maté, D. (2022). The myth of normal: Trauma, illness, and healing in a toxic culture. Penguin Books.

Grounded in Máté's theory, sexuality here is understood as an embodied extension of early attachment patterns and transgenerational survival strategies: our erotic templates - what we find attractive, how we seek intimacy, and the scripts we enact in sexual encounters - are often shaped by the relational needs and wounds of childhood. When desire is read through this lens, sexual behavior ceases to be merely a set of acts or moral choices and becomes a language of unmet needs, safety-seeking, and attempts to repair early disconnection. This perspective helps illuminate why some people repeat coercive or avoidant sexual patterns - because they are familiar survival responses - and why shame so often colors sexual expression once those dynamics are recognized.

Because these dynamics are often implicit and embodied, the workshop opens with unexpected exercise - which is meant to "trick" our "civilized" mind. Choosing an "inner animal" gives people a symbolic, nonthreatening way to access their instincts, strengths, fears, and needs. The animal acts as a mirror for personal qualities - resilience, protectiveness, wildness, or dependence - that may underlie sexual desire and relational behavior. Using this playful symbol helps participants notice which impulses are authentic and which are habitual reactions rooted in earlier insecurity.

Moreover, learning, changing behavioural patterns and personal growth is grounded in a community and not isolation - when we work with our animals by creating islands of desires, jungles, and connecting them with others - that is when we learn more how our own needs and fears work in a social context. By working with others, negotiating and re-negotiating different scenarios, we are able to map out our inner patterns within ourselves and others.

Maté, G., & Maté, D. (2022). The myth of normal: Trauma, illness, and healing in a toxic culture. Penguin Books.

ACTIVITIES

“back to the wild…” - collage activity

Objectives:

- To gain a better understanding of our relationship dynamics through the lens of sexuality & seek of intimacy.
- To gain a better understanding of social norms and expectations on sexuality and relationships
- To create an open space to explore different relationships solely based on your own ‘deep/honest’ desires rather than outside world expectations.
- To open the space for the word ‘ queer’ to become a resource that allows you to be ‘free-er’.
- To explore the dynamics: how to get rid of problematic ‘ideas’ about what relationships should be and rather focus on and what is ‘honest’ to yourself and your partner.

Duration: 120-180 minutes

Number of pax: Adaptable for 4-16 participants

Materials:

- A3 or bigger paper, a bit thick for the collage
- Newspapers, journals, reviews with pictures
- Prepare animal, animalistic, realistic and/or illustrated images of various animals
- Scissors, glue
- Coloured pen, markers, paint.

1 Step: our inner animals

Individual work

Prepare the room for the workshop by spreading images, illustrations and cut outs either in the middle of a room, or a table, allowing everyone to sit in a circle. Invite participants to explore various animal images whilst introducing the activity and why we choose to work / play / experiment with the idea of 'inner animals'.*(hint for facilitators)

"Visualizing yourself as an animal allows you to tap into different, sometimes hidden aspects of your personality. Through the qualities of your chosen animal, you can gain insights into your own strengths, fears, and desires, helping you reconnect with your true self."

Invite participants to think individually - *If they could be an animal - what animal they would be? Describe your animal: what are the characteristics and needs of your animal?*

Let participants either choose the animal from the prepared images, or if they cannot find their representation, draw their own.

Group discussion

Invite participants to share, "introduce" their animals in the group and why they chose this particular animal. Encourage them to talk about the characteristics and needs of their chosen animal but do not force sharing. Keep the atmosphere light and playful.

Working in pairs

Invite participants to find a partner, after pairing up invite participants to think of the two following questions:

1. How do you take care of your animal?
2. How does your animal take care of you?
3.
4. "Reflect on the ways your "inner animal" provides care for you - note how it offers strength, comfort, or guidance when you need it most. Write down specific actions you take to nurture your animal - consider how you can support its traits and qualities in your daily life. Caring for your animal is a way of emotional and spiritual nurturing of yourself."

2 Step: our secret garden

Individual collage-making activity

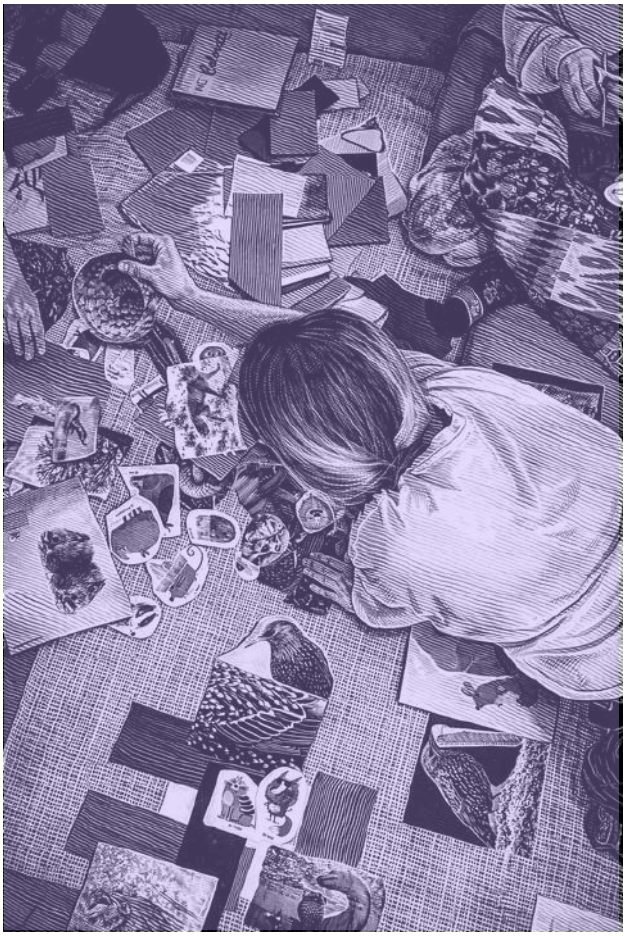
Invite participants to create individual collages with the title: “Make your jungle or garden of desires!”. Prepare the space with the materials and invite everyone to explore the images that are provided for them. Afterwards, let each of them take one sheet of white paper (used as a background) and choose different images that they want to work with. Let everyone find their individual work station/spot and after everyone is settled introduce guiding questions for the process of their work. Invite and encourage everyone that now they are allowed to choose more animals, plants and whatever they need to create their “garden”. At this stage it is important to note that no humans are allowed in the garden / jungle collages. Only images from the “non-human world”.

3 Step: “islands of desire”

Invite participants to look at everyone's individual collages. After observing everyone's work let participants create small ‘islands’ of desires, by choosing carefully two or more people that they want to place their own individual work next to. Observe whose garden you can best co-exist with and with whom you would like to share the island with. Where does your curiosity bring you? Invite participants who placed their collages next to each other to work in pairs or in small groups.

Let's create our small islands together! Also, explore by talking, sharing the following questions:

- What do you see - what are the things in common in your individual gardens?
- What has attracted you to the other garden, what are their and your island's strengths?
- How can these jungles / gardens create a healthy co-existence?
- Do you see any challenges / dangers? Where? How? Do you see solutions for those?
- What are the “weaknesses”, vulnerabilities of your island?



4 “Our universe: humans and animals”

Invite participants to create the final universe using all the ‘islands’ of collages. Give people time to create, re-create, move and add new things if they want. Encourage them to talk, discuss, play. For guidance you can use questions from the earlier stages of the activity.

As a final step, invite them to place humans into their universe. Take some time to imagine how the presence of humans would change it.

Would it make it better or worse? What challenges would arrive and how could it be conquered?

Debrief / reflection questions/Closing plenary session

The final joint collage is displayed in the space, followed by a facilitated group discussion focusing on what participants see, notice, and interpret in the visual works.

Discuss the following questions together:

- How did you feel during the activity? What was easy, what was difficult?
- What do you think the aim of this activity is?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself?
- Did you discover / learn anything about sexuality through this activity? What?
- After making all the collages and exploring what do you think is the answer to the initial question of what is my “true” choice, “true desire”?

Explore together by discussing the “nature or nurture” dilemma; feel free to discuss and recognize how social norms, cultural expectations, and inherited family patterns are "writing" our behavior and our choices. And also feel free to explore the “animal kingdom” in humans; after the activity what can we recognize as more “natural” in our patterns in our sexuality and relationships. As facilitator, be aware that there is no one final answer to these dilemmas; the goal of the activity and the discussion is that participants can explore, discover something for themselves which can be enriching in their lives.

Hints:

*Use the Ecologies of Care Self Care cards and theory for this activity. You can help participants by using these tools to understand the idea of the “inner animal” and encourage them to play with it in a meaningful way. For the first two parts of the activity you can use the Self care cards.

Why is a network of relationships an alternative to romantic love ?

In contemporary societies, monogamy has historically imposed affective hierarchies, valuing the exclusive couple and relegating other relationships to secondary roles. However, feminist and queer perspectives highlight alternatives such as polyamory and relationship anarchy, which prioritize horizontal affective networks based on mutual recognition, autonomy, and the plurality of bonds. These models invite a rethinking of intimacy, care, and emotional responsibility, showing that the quality of connections and the freedom to define them can replace the exclusivity of the monogamous couple. Affective networks thus offer a way to liberate desire and relationships from the hierarchical and normative logic of traditional romantic love.

Testimonies

"Consensul non-monogamy is not a solution to a failed monogamous relationship. If you can't establish and maintain trust with one partner, you won't succeed with more than one."

"I felt like someone had to be exploited in that situation, and it would have made me completely unhappy. But then I realized that everyone is an adult, their honesty is a great safeguard against exploiting anyone, and the fact that it wouldn't work for me is completely irrelevant."

"Sometimes I feel like I prioritize the time I spend with my partner. My friends are relegated a waiting room."

"I don't have a boyfriend, and sometimes it's hard for me to find company. All my friends go out with their partners, and I feel out of place."

"I'm in a polyamorous relationship, and I realize that sometimes I feel like I don't have enough time for myself."

OUR RESEARCH

Vasallo, B. (2022). For a revolution of affections: Monogamous thinking and polyamorous terror. Effequ.

In Western societies, monogamy is not merely an individual relational choice, but a cultural system that organizes and hierarchizes affections. In For a Revolution of Affections, Brigitte Vasallo describes “monogamous thinking” as a normative structure that places the exclusive couple at the center of emotional life, attributing to it greater depth, authenticity, and legitimacy than other bonds. Within this framework, friendships, care networks, and family ties are often relegated to secondary roles, while the couple becomes the symbolic and identity-based core of adult existence.

According to Vasallo, monogamy operates through three main mechanisms: the positive valorization of exclusivity, the identification of the individual with the couple as an indivisible unit, and affective competitiveness, which turns relationships into a measure of one’s social and emotional worth. Indeed, in a system based on monogamy, being “chosen” by someone is interpreted as a sign of personal success, implying that a person’s value is directly linked to whether or not they are in a relationship; this functions as a competitive system in which the stake is the exclusivity of the person. Although there is currently an open debate about different relational forms, exclusivity continues to be a moral criterion that defines what “true love” is. Beyond personal principles, at a systemic level we are still immersed in a dominant narrative shaped by mass media and television programs (e.g., Love Is Blind, Temptation Island) that normalize jealousy, possession, and fear of loss as signs of emotional intensity. Vasallo’s critique does not simply propose “more partners,” but rather calls for questioning the entire paradigm that structures our expectations about love. Breaking with monogamy means interrogating affective hierarchies—asking why one bond must be prioritized above all others and how categories such as “primary” and “secondary” are constructed. Affective networks thus emerge as an alternative that is not merely quantitative, but qualitative: a relational configuration based on plurality of bonds, subjective autonomy, and mutual recognition, without a fixed scale of value.

From this perspective, a network of relationships represents an alternative to traditional romantic love because it disrupts the exclusive centrality of the couple and redistributes care, responsibility, and intimacy across multiple bonds. The goal is not to abolish romantic love, but to free it from the proprietary and hierarchical logic that often accompanies it. The “revolution of affections” proposed by Vasallo consists precisely in this transformation: shifting from a model grounded in exclusivity and competition to one based on awareness, agreement, and relational plurality.

ACTIVITIES

General details

Objectives:

- To foster critical reflection on personal and social experiences of romantic and affective relationships;
- To explore alternative relational models;
- To promote conscious relational skills, encouraging active listening, mutual respect, sharing, and greater awareness of personal boundaries and desires.

Duration: 1 H 30'

Number of pax: 8-15 

Materials:

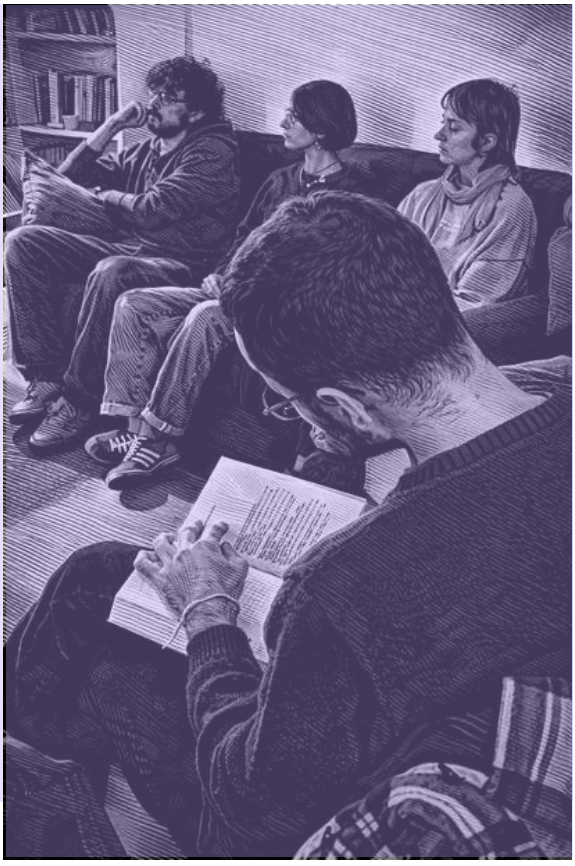
- A quiet, comfortable space where participants can sit in a circle.
- Optional symbolic objects to pass around as a "talking piece" (balls, stones, mic), indicating who has the right to speak.
- Paper and pens for personal notes or reflections (optional).

Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step).

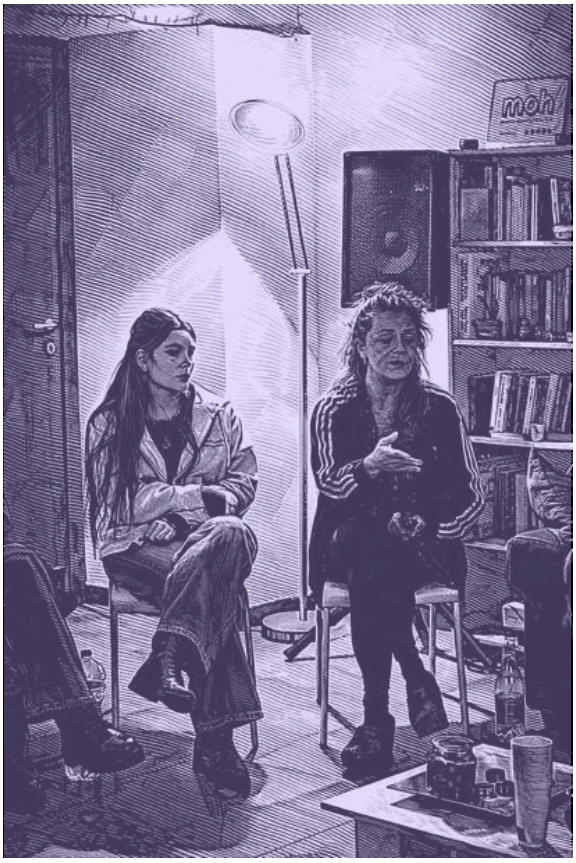
1 Step 1: introduction

The talking circle is used as a participatory and reflective methodology that creates a structured yet open space for sharing personal experiences. Rather than transmitting knowledge through lectures, it encourages participants to engage in collective reflection by starting from their own lived experiences and listening to those of others. Within the circle, each participant is invited to speak in turn and to listen without interruption or judgment. This structure helps create a safe and respectful environment where different perspectives can emerge and coexist. By hearing a diversity of experiences and viewpoints, participants are often able to recognize how many aspects of romantic and affective relationships—such as expectations, norms, and emotional responses—are socially shaped rather than purely individual.

For this reason, the talking circle supports critical reflection on personal and social experiences of relationships. It also exposes participants to a plurality of relational narratives, which can help broaden the imagination around possible relational models beyond dominant cultural scripts. At the same time, the methodology itself becomes a space for practicing relational skills. The process of speaking in the first person, actively listening to others, and respecting turn-taking fosters mutual respect, empathy, and awareness of how we relate to one another in conversation. This can help participants develop greater clarity around their own boundaries, needs, and desires within relationships.



- The facilitator introduces the theme: monogamy, polyamory, and affective networks as systems that influence emotions, desires, and relational hierarchies.
- Explanation of the talking circle rules: only the person holding the talking object can speak, no interruptions, active listening without judgment.



2 Step: guided Sharing

Initial prompts to stimulate conversation: the prompts can be guideline questions or excerpts from specially selected texts (focusing on the topic). For example:

- What does exclusivity mean to you? Is it more of a choice, a value, a sense of security, or a habit?
- How do you imagine an affective network where multiple relationships can coexist without fixed hierarchies?
- What fears arise when the centrality of the couple is questioned?

3 Step

Participants speak in turn, passing the symbolic object. The facilitator observes and moderates, reminding participants of mutual respect and confidentiality.

Facilitator tips:

- Emotional Intensity: Participants may share personal experiences of jealousy, heartbreak, or relational trauma. Facilitators should be prepared to manage strong emotions and provide support or referrals if needed.
- Confidentiality: Ensure that all participants understand the importance of keeping shared information private to create a safe environment.
- Triggering Content: Discussions about non-monogamy, infidelity, or power dynamics may trigger discomfort or distress. Facilitators should be attentive and provide options to step out or pause if necessary.
- Group Dynamics: Dominant voices may overshadow quieter participants. Facilitators must actively ensure equitable participation and respectful listening.
- Norms and Judgment: Participants may have differing values regarding monogamy, polyamory, or relational hierarchies. Facilitators should avoid imposing their own beliefs and focus on creating a non-judgmental space.
- Expectations: The activity is about reflection and awareness, not about persuading participants to adopt a specific relational model. Clear communication of this purpose is essential.
- Boundaries: Facilitators must monitor the discussion to prevent any invasive questioning or pressure on participants to disclose more than they are comfortable with.

What happens when needs collide
The multiple stories we carry ?

This activity begins from the idea that our relational lives are shaped by multiple “voices” within us, each expressing different needs, desires, and orientations toward others. These voices are not always in harmony; we may simultaneously long for independence and closeness, safety and excitement, stability and change. Some of these inner voices emerge from personal experience, individual disposition, and the circumstances or phases of life we find ourselves in, while others are shaped by the cultural stories about love and relationships that we encounter and internalize over time.. The expectations we bring into relationships are formed through the interplay of these different voices and narratives. The aim of this activity is to make these dynamics more visible, so that participants can reflect on their expectations and relate to their needs—and to others—with greater awareness and care.

Testimonies

“Sometimes I wonder if the expectations I have about relationships are really mine or if they come from the way we grow up hearing about love. It’s hard to separate what I truly want from what I think I should want.”

“With friends I feel very free to be myself, but in romantic relationships I sometimes become more careful. It makes me wonder why different relationships bring out such different sides of me.”

“Sometimes I feel like the person I am in a relationship with is not exactly the same person I am when I’m alone. Different parts of me become louder depending on the situation.”

“Being close to someone often brings out contradictions in me. I want stability, but I also want excitement. I want closeness, but I also need space.”

OUR RESEARCH

According to psychologist Hubert Hermans and the theory of the dialogical (polyphonic) self, our identity is not a single, unified voice but a dynamic dialogue among multiple inner voices. Each voice represents a different perspective, emotion, or position within ourselves, shaped by our experiences and relationships.
This perspective is particularly useful when thinking about relationships, because many relational difficulties emerge when different needs within us compete with one another. For example, one part of us may seek closeness and reassurance, while another values autonomy or fears vulnerability. The theory helps us recognize that these tensions are not contradictions to eliminate but voices to listen to and negotiate between.
Understanding the self as polyphonic allows us to approach relationships with greater awareness and care. Instead of assuming that our expectations are simple or singular, we can begin to see them as the result of an ongoing inner dialogue influenced by personal experiences and broader cultural narratives about love.
Hermans, H. (2001). The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning.

ACTIVITIES

General details

- Recognize that different inner voices express different desires, which can sometimes conflict within ourselves, and notice how these desires also influence how we relate to others.
- Identify cultural narratives or myths about love that influence relational expectations.
- Reflect critically on relational expectations and distinguish between personal needs and socially inherited ideals.

Duration: approximately 2–2.5 hours (the duration of each step may vary depending on the number of participants).
Number of pax: around 10–20 people.

Materials: papers, markers, crayons, print the myths (*see step 6*).
Space: indoor space suitable for individual reflection and group discussion.

Introduction:Human desires are rarely stable or singular, and we often carry multiple, sometimes conflicting, desires at the same time. This activity explores how different desires may be expressed by different inner voices within the self, and how these internal tensions can also influence our interactions with others. By exploring these inner voices, participants can notice how internal conflicts may influence both their own experience and their interactions with others, helping them understand tensions that arise in real relationships.

1 Step: Individual reflection on desires (10–15 minutes)

Participants are given a sheet of paper and a pen. Facilitators explain that this short exercise is primarily for personal reflection and that participants will only share what they feel comfortable sharing later in the process.
Participants are invited to write at least 15 desires that are important to them, including those that relate to their relationships. They are asked to write down whatever comes spontaneously to mind, without judging it, and to record all their desires, whether they consider them trivial or crucial.

2 Step: Identifying key desires (10 minutes)

Once participants have written their list, they are asked to choose or group their desires into five categories that feel most important to them at this moment.
Each category can include one or more desires that are related or similar.
The aim is not to find the “correct” categories, but to identify the ones that feel most meaningful in relation to their life and relationships.

3 Step: The flower of the polyphonic self (20–25 minutes)

Participants take a new sheet of paper and draw a flower with five petals. Each petal corresponds to one of the five categories of desires selected in the previous step. Inside each petal, they write the inner voice or self that expresses the desires in that category. For example: the independent self, the romantic self, the cautious self, the perfectionist, the dreamer, the fearful self that seeks security, etc. Participants are encouraged to name these selves in their own way and give them meaning.
This step allows participants to explore how different desires are expressed by different inner voices. Recognizing these voices helps participants understand that desires often come from multiple internal perspectives, which can sometimes conflict. This also reflects how tensions inside ourselves may appear in our interactions with others.
Participants are then invited to use colors, symbols, or images to represent each self and its emotional tone.

4 Step: giving each voice a song (10–15 minutes)

Participants are invited to imagine each of their five selves as part of a choir. For each one, they reflect on the question:
“If this self were singing a song, what would it be?”
They write down a song that they feel represents each voice. This playful step helps participants experience the idea of the polyphonic self more concretely and creatively.

5 Step: sharing observations (20–25 minutes)

Participants who wish to do so may share what they observed during the process. The discussion focuses on questions such as:

- Did some inner voices seem to want different or even opposing things?
- Were some voices louder or more dominant than others?
- Were there voices that seemed quieter or more hidden?

6 Step: Exploring cultural myths of love (60–90 minutes)

In addition to our inner voices, the expectations we carry into relationships are also shaped by cultural stories about love. To explore these narratives, participants engage with two myths from Plato's Symposium. The group is divided into two subgroups. Each subgroup engages with a different narrative from Plato's Symposium:

- one group explores the myth of Aristophanes,
- the other is the myth of Diotima.

The Myth of Aristophanes:

In the beginning, humans were not just male and female, but three kinds: double male, double female, and male-female. They had four arms, four legs, two faces on a round head, and double genitalia. The male came from the sun, the female from the earth, and the male-female from the moon.

These beings were strong, fast, and proud, even challenging the gods. To reduce their power without destroying them, Zeus split them in two. Humans became less powerful but more numerous, walking upright on two legs.

From that moment, each half spent its life searching for its "other half" to feel complete. When they found it, they would embrace and cling, sometimes neglecting everything else. If one half died, the remaining half would desperately seek any other half, even from a different original gender.

The Myth of Diotima:

The Birth and Nature of Eros:

At the time of Aphrodite's birth, the gods were feasting, and Poros (Resourcefulness), the son of Metis, fell asleep in Zeus's garden. Penia (Poverty), who was nearby, lay with him and conceived Eros.

Eros inherited qualities from both parents: from Penia, he is always poor and dependent; from Poros, he is clever, ambitious, and resourceful. He is never fully rich nor completely poor, never completely wise nor ignorant. He is restless, active, and unpredictable, moving between abundance and lack, wisdom and folly.

Symbolically, Eros represents the human experience of desire and love: a mix of longing and creativity, striving and imperfection, constantly seeking connection and fulfillment while navigating life's uncertainties.

Each group reads their assigned myth, discusses its meaning, and creates a short artistic presentation (for example a small performance, drawing, or visual representation) to share the story and its meaning with the rest of the group.

Alternative approaches:

- Depending on the participants' background and interests, facilitators may **choose films, series, or stories** that convey similar myths or cultural narratives about love instead of Plato.
- Alternatively, **participants themselves may select a film, series, or story** that reflects a similar myth or cultural narrative, allowing for more personal connection.

Important: In the final presentation, participants are encouraged to **connect the myth or story to contemporary experiences**, discussing how these ideas are reflected in modern relationships, dating, or social expectations—even if Plato is used.

After both presentations, the whole group reflects together:
What ideas about love do these myths suggest?
Do we still carry elements of these stories in the way we imagine relationships today?
How might these narratives shape our expectations about closeness, completion, sacrifice or devotion?
This discussion opens space to identify other contemporary myths about relationships and how they influence the different "voices" participants identified earlier.

Closing reflection

Facilitators guide a final discussion connecting the two parts of the activity: the inner voices identified in the flower exercise and the cultural stories explored through the myths. Participants reflect on how personal needs and cultural narratives interact in shaping their expectations in relationships.
Participants are invited to consider how becoming aware of these different inner voices can help them better understand moments of tension or conflict, both internally and in their relationships with others. Recognizing these dynamics supports more conscious and flexible ways of relating to others
Facilitators remind participants that the aim of the activity is not to judge or eliminate certain desires, but to become more aware of the **many voices that coexist within us** and how they influence the way we relate to others.

Is taking care of each-other a zero sum game - or: how can I take care of the other while taking care of myself ?

Reciprocity is often imagined as the ideal foundation of a healthy relationship: equal care, equal effort, equal attention, equal return. Yet in real life, relationships rarely unfold in such a neat and measurable way. People do not enter relationships with the same histories, resources, wounds, or capacities. At certain moments, one person may need more support; at others, they may be the one able to give more. The challenge is that the desire for fairness can easily become a demand for constant symmetry. When that happens, we may start counting, comparing, and protecting ourselves so carefully that the relationship loses warmth, generosity, and movement. The search for perfect balance can become rigid, leaving little room for vulnerability, change, or trust. Reciprocity matters, but not as a fixed mathematical rule. Instead, it may be better understood as a living process of adjustment, where balance is not given once and for all, but continuously negotiated between imperfect human beings.

Testimonies

« Hahh…the story of my life…I always want to give, keep, care, even when the other is completely out of the thing..I wonder if all women are in the same logic.."

"We can never really achieve full reciprocity… I mean our situations are necessarily different. Maybe the other has problems that I've never had. It's kind of normal that we carry different weight in the relationship if we have so different weights in real life"

"Relationships are naturally unbalanced at different times, on either side but long-term, they are balanced. You both help each other out when the other is sick, down, grieving, jobless, whatever. You both support and celebrate the other when they are getting promotions, accomplishing tasks, learning new things, winning competitions, enjoying their life, etc. The scale will tip due to life circumstances and stressors but overall the contribution on both sides is even. »

"I'll simplify it for you guys.. if you show genuine interest in a potential partner and they don't reciprocate.. move on. The end. »

OUR RESEARCH

“In Hegel’s notion of recognition, the self requires the opportunity to act and have an effect on the other to affirm his existence. In order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for another. It would seem there is no way out of this dependency. If I destroy the other, there is no one to recognize me, for if I allow him no independent consciousness, I become enmeshed with a dead, not-conscious being. If the other denies me recognition, my acts have no meaning; if he is so far above me that nothing I do can alter his attitude toward me, I can only submit. My desire and agency can find no outlet, except in the form of obedience.

We might call this the dialectic of control: If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist. A condition of our own independent existence is recognizing the other. True independence means sustaining the essential tension of these contradictory impulses; that is, both asserting the self and recognizing the other. Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition.

“In mutual recognition the subject accepts the premise that others are separate but nonetheless share like feelings and intentions. The subject is compensated for his loss of sovereignty by the pleasure of sharing, the communion with another subject”

(Excerpt From The Bonds of Love Jessica Benjamin)

Here’s the trick: mutual recognition isn’t a static and stable end state. It is subject to permanent negotiation and adjustment. To track how these adjustments happen, we can invite the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) proposed by Giles and Ogay (2007). CAT unveils the relational dynamics underpinning social interactions.
Accommodation refers to the “constant movement toward and away from the others” (Giles & Ogay, 2007, p. 295) which constitutes the relational dynamics underneath all communication consisting in the interplay of three gestures: convergence, divergence and maintenance. Convergence is used to become more similar to the other, marking agreement and connection to the other. Convergence is nicely illustrated by forms of interpersonal coordination, where people in interaction coordinate the rhythm of their breathing, mirror each other’s gestures, etc. (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). On the verbal level convergence can be reached through adopting the other’s vocabulary, imagery, and metaphors, and through person- centred messages which take into account the other’s preferences, words, style, etc. Convergence is in line with the motivation to be accepted and appreciated by others. Its risk is a loss in the sense of social identity, continuity or distinction. Chartrand and Bargh (1999) also found that convergent behaviour makes the interaction partner feel more appreciated, the other person nicer and the interaction having a better flow. The authors attribute this to a relational automatism that most humans have incorporated at a very early age referred to as “interpersonal coordination”.
In contrast, divergence accentuates the differences between interlocutors, indicating disagreement and the need to separate, marking one’s distinctiveness and asserting oneself.

It could be connected to the strategy of separation. It is important to note that the convergence strategy is not superior to divergence; both have their places in relating to others in dynamic ways. The third relational movement maintenance in fact implies that a person does not change their behaviour (rhythm, speech, gestures etc) as a reaction to another person. CAT proposes that in each interaction, depending on our intentions and motivations connected to the relationship and the subject matter, we will employ consecutively and in a dynamic way these three relational movements. Becoming aware of how we feel using these dynamics and how we use them can help us be more grounded and present in our relations.

ACTIVITIES

Objectives:

- De-dramatise the concept of difference, lift it from a possible negative, threatening association.
- understand what kind of status games are at stake in different gestures

Duration: 2h for sequence (if you work with a new group you need to add warm-up games to state with)
Number of pax: 6-16 

Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step)

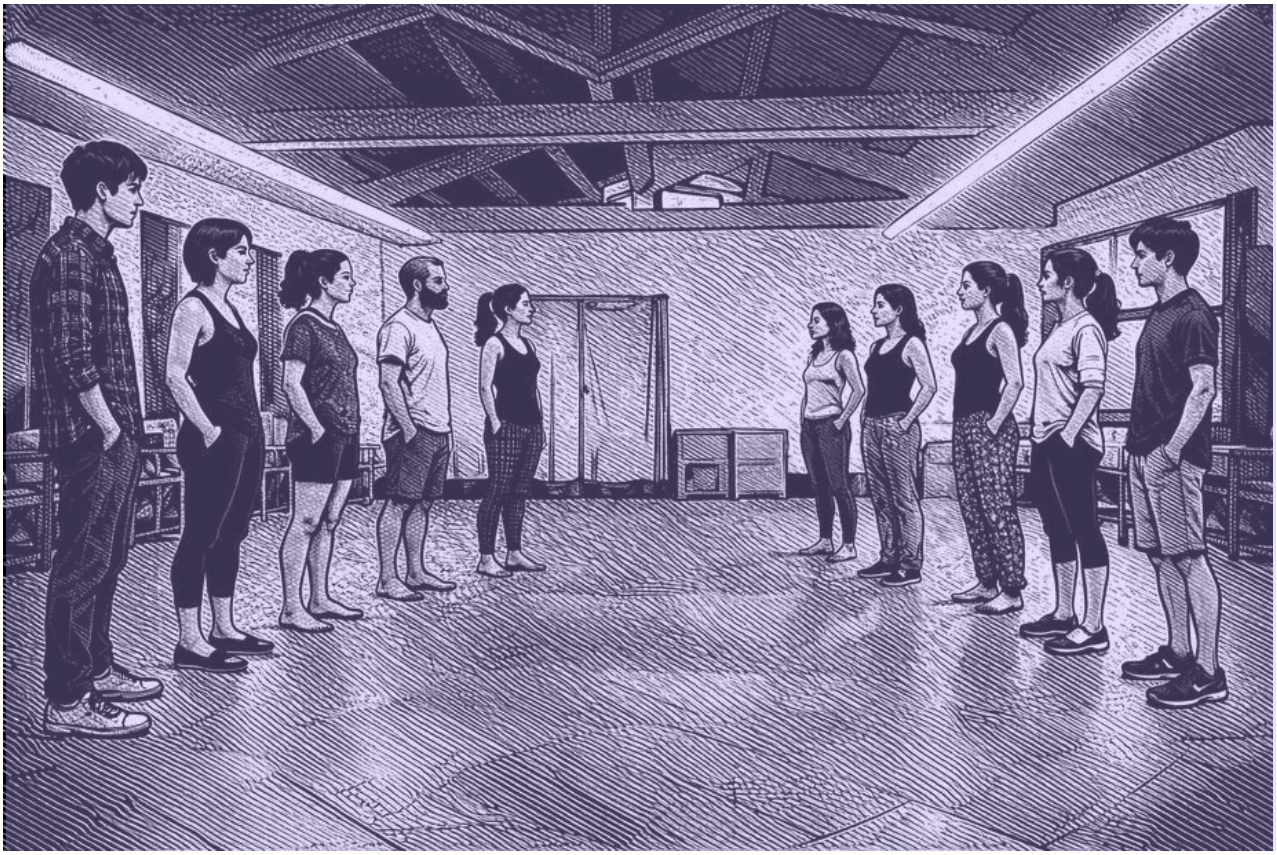
Materials: A4 paper and pen to each.
Preparation: playlist for the movement activities and presentations

1 Step: framing the activity

In this session we'll explore the micro-dynamics within relationships that constitute our sense of balance, equilibrium or the lack of. We will focus on five key concepts: attention, contact, resistance, recognition, and reciprocity. We'll explore these with movement activities and towards the end, some writing.

2 Step: attention

Invite participants to make pairs. They should take in the sight of each other as much as they can, without being inquisitive, but trying to register the details of the other. Each duo decides who's person A and person B. Person A should turn their back to person B, while person B changes something in their outfit. When done, person A can look again and should guess what the change was. You can invite for a change of roles, or propose a variant to keep things interesting. All the "B"s turn their back while the As change something in their outfit amongst each other (one A gives their shirt to another A etc). When done, the Bs should guess what was exchanged.



3 Step: contact

Invite participants to make pairs, with people they don’t know. Ask them to sit face to face in a comfortable distance to have eye contact. Invite them to keep the eye contact as much as they can, but no longer than 4 minutes. This is not a staring competition, if they feel uncomfortable, they can close their eyes or look away and then look again. To debrief ask them to share what are the consequences of 4 minutes of eye contact? What type of contact does it generate?

4 Step: resistances and balances

Invite participants to create duos with people roughly the same size. Invite them to explore different ways to push each other, finding an equilibrium: hand to shoulder, hand to waist, side to side, back to back etc.
Ask for a change of partners and explore counterweight: participants should hold each-other by the wrist, with both hands or one hand, and give their weight to each-other, maintaining each-other. Ask them to explore the movements they can do without ever losing the weight sharing.
Invite participants to make new duos. Introduce the activity as a leader-follower contact exercise. Invite the duos to get connected with their forearms. The person with the longer hair will be the guide, the other the guided. The guided person can close their eyes, if it is ok for them. Tell them that you will signal when to change roles, both will experience both roles. Invite them to put their attention on the quality of the contact in their forearms, maybe even making small adjustments to see what their impact will be. Invite them to explore different forms of resistance. Leave about 1,5 minutes then signal a change of roles. After 1,5 minutes repeat the activity with new duos to allow comparisons. To debrief, ask when was it easier to move together? Technically it is impossible to lead someone who's offering no resistance, as much as someone who offers 100% of resistance, so there is a good blend of resistance that is actually the condition to allow someone to lead us.

5 Step: simulation of caring for someone

Make new duos. In this simulation one of them will take care of the other, without speaking. If they can't decide, the person with longer hair takes care of the other. They don't need to imagine any specific context, which may be difficult, but that is the creative constraint of the activity. In this pseudo-relationship, they are together, and you as facilitator will pronounce the hours of the day. Start with the middle of the night, at 4 am, 6 am etc. Give more time if you see that there are movements, people start to wake up etc. Go through the whole day, until 3 am.
When the simulation is over, ask the pair to take a paper and without thinking, as automatic writing, write at least 12 endings to: "taking care of someone is…" / "being taken care of is… " respectively, according to the role they have experienced. When done, invite each of them to create a poem selecting the 3 key ideas.
Depending on the group, there are different ways of sharing:

- The poems can simply be read one after the other. First, we can hear the poems of the people who were taken care of and then those who were taking care.
- We can have three people who read their poems simultaneously, three times in a loop.
- We can have 2-3 duos (4-6 people) on stage. 2 or 3 readers (poems of taking care) read their poems while their partners move to the poems. Then change of roles. If you opt for this version, let the duos read out their poems to each-other a couple of times and rehearse the movement sequence that goes well with the poems

6 Step: relational grammar

We propose a last activity to close the sequence: three versions of the mirror game (for other uses of the mirror game see also the activity "how do I meet an intimate partner?)
Invite participants to make duos, if possible, someone they haven't worked with yet, and after each variant invite for a change of partners.

- The "right mirror": the person with darker coloured pants is the mirror, the other is the subject. The task: for the mirror to follow as closely as possible all the gestures, movements, rhythms of the subject. For the subject: this is not a competition to outwit the mirror, rather propose movements that the mirror could get. They should be so finetuned that an external observer should not guess who's mirror and subject. Invite for a change of roles after two minutes.

- The “silly mirror”: here the mirror does “the opposite” as the subject, something complementary, totally different. Invite for a change of roles after one and half minutes.

After the two initial sequences introduce the 3 relational dynamics proposed by the Communication Accomodation Theory[1]: convergence, divergence, maintenance (see theory intro). Check if participants can connect convergence with the “right mirror” and divergence with the “silly mirror”.

- The alternating mirror: invite participants to make new duos. Tell them they will be alternating the right mirror and the silly mirror, and also moments of “maintenance” where they are not reacting to the movement of the other person. Accordingly, there are no fixed rules of mirror and subject, instead they should put their attention to align their movement with what they perceive as right.

Debrief / reflection questions (15–20 minutes)

As each step was a separate activity, some debrief is useful at the end of each segment. As a general closing you can invite participants to get back to the initial question: how they feel now, can we take care of the other while taking care of ourselves? Or is taking care of the other necessarily to the detriment of taking care of oneself? Is there a “right balance” for a relationship? What can help us find it?

Facilitator tips

Be attentive to how the group receives the different instructions and adjust the timing accordingly: if an activity is very engaging, give them more time. Ultimately the objective is not to go through the whole sequence, but offer a landscape that is useful for learning, and that will always depend on the receptivity of the group.

(REF: Giles, Howard; Ogay, Tania (2007). "Communication Accommodation Theory". In Whaley, Bryan B.; Samter, Wendy (eds.). Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.)

How much diversity fits in a relationship ?

Addressing diversity in a relationship can mean different things. We could think of individual differences, and to what extent people with different tastes, habits and passions could form reliable intimate relationships. Is there a point where the differences are so numerous and deep that they would make it impossible to stay connected?
And there is another, rather social or cultural level of difference: here the focus is on different cultural values, norms and expectations that are transmitted intergenerationally and negotiated with more or less fluidity. Can we establish deep intimate connections across cultural groups? What happens if cultural norms and expectations of the family or community enter in tension with personal desires?
These two aspects may seem completely different at first, we believe that there is an underlying mechanism that connects them and would like to tackle them together. This will allow you to address whichever aspect of difference or diversity is relevant for your group using the same activities.

Testimonies

“ My family is quite religious and for them it is important that faith has a continuity, and that faith appears in all aspects of life – also, and maybe particularly in love life. What’s funny is that I agreed with the principle, but since I came to France as an international student, things have changed, or rather, I have changed. I have a French girlfriend with whom we get along very well and have a real connection, also physically. I haven’t collected my courage to talk to my parents about this. And I don’t know what I’ll do when it’s time to go back home.”

“She loves taking nude pictures. Fine. Problem is, she’d like to take nude pictures of me. I don’t want to keep on refusing her, but I’m not comfortable with posing either..”

« I have two questions about compatibility with someone I’ve recently started dating. When it comes to fundamental values and what we both want from a relationship, everything fits wonderfully. But can a partner actually be too active? I mean, I enjoy doing things after work—meeting friends, going out occasionally—but I also really value my downtime. I like reading, cooking, or watching a good movie at home.
She, on the other hand, seems to be in motion constantly: sports after work, then dance class, then meeting friends at a bar, followed by a midnight swim with others. And if she’s at home, she still works out before bed. That’s basically her daily routine.
I’m starting to wonder how I would actually fit into that kind of life. Would I get swept up—or burned out? »

OUR RESEARCH

“Difference” today has something of a bad press, too often it is associated with something rather negative or even threatening. It is interesting to start with the etymology of difference, here it goes from etymonline:
Etymology: present participle of differre "to set apart," from assimilated form of dis- "apart, away from" (see dis-) + ferre "to bear, carry,"
(https://www.etymonline.com/word/difference)
If difference is connected to setting apart, it is a primary condition for becoming separate entities. In this sense, without difference there is only sameness, fusion and mirroring that makes any communication or relationship pointless. What for? We are already one. (If interested in a contemporary cultural reference, have a look at the series “Pluribus” and see how people who are united communicate: they don’t).
Difference is then not a defect in the relationship. It is the condition of possibility for encounter, for love. In this sense, it is necessary to confront with alterity, to realize that the other is not an extension of the self and recognize the other as separate[1].
Differences do not simply exist as static traits. They become accentuated through interaction.

We owe the concept of “Schismogenesis” to Bateson, his description of the Iatmul people. Literally translating to “emergence” or “birth from the rift” the concept hints that big differentiations are not the departing conditions but possibly necessary conclusions of relational dynamics. In intimate relationships, a small difference in need for autonomy versus closeness can, through repeated exchanges, harden into a polarized identity: “I am the independent one.” “You are the needy one.” The distinction becomes larger than life. This connects directly to recognition. When a partner feels unseen or misrecognized, they often intensify the behavior that expresses their distinct position. If I feel that my need for space is not respected, I withdraw more strongly. If I feel that my need for reassurance is dismissed, I demand more explicitly. The interaction does not reduce difference. It sharpens it.
The instability of mutual recognition can push the partners into the dynamics of a recursive escalation. The struggle is not about objective difference in preferences. It is about stabilizing a position from which one’s subjectivity feels acknowledged.
Bateson shows how alterity becomes dramatized. The other is not only different. The relationship actively produces difference through patterned responses. Difference becomes strategic. It can function as a defense of identity. In the end the obstacle to sustainability is not difference itself, but unregulated schismogenesis. When partners lack the capacity to interrupt escalation, difference becomes polarized. When they can meta-communicate about the pattern, difference remains dynamic rather than rigid.
Reference : Bateson, Gregory. 1958. Naven: A Survey of the Problems suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe drawn from Three Points of View. Stanford University Press

ACTIVITIES

General details

Objectives:

- De-dramatise the concept of difference, lift it from a possible negative, threatening association.
- Understand that difference is dynamic in a relationship – both between individuals or cultural groups, reinforcing it is part of a battle of need of recognition.
- Find pathways to de-escalate a schismogenesis, find the basis of negotiating mutual recognition.

Duration: 2h30

Number of pax: 4-20

Materials: Materials: papers of different sizes (A5, A6, but also bigger as A3 or flipchart paper) and different colours markers, journals with images, scissors, glue, tables and chairs (about 3-4 chairs around one table).

Step-by-step guide (number the separate steps, add a visual illustration for each main step).

1 Step: introduction

In this session we'll address the issue of "difference" and how it can appear in an intimate relationship. "Difference" can have a bad press and be associated to something negative or threatening. That too much difference can kill a relationship. In this session we'd like to invite to explore this issue a bit deeper.

2 Step: warming up to difference: to warm us up to the concept of difference, you can propose a round to:

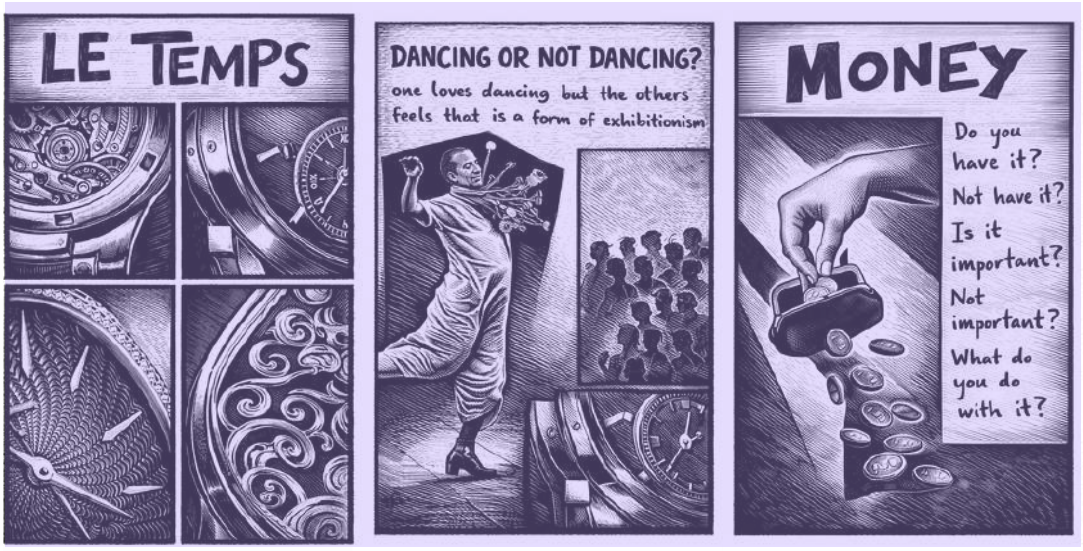
- "share a last experience of difference that made you happy" (ex: having fun trying to eat with chopsticks, seeing on the metro a man with very nice make-up etc..).
- or continue the sentence "if there were no differences…"

We don't need to analyse what is said, just collect a bouquet of different perceptions and associations to difference that put the word in a positive or not negative light.
You can also share the etymology of the word "different" and refer to some key questions from the theoretical intro: all problems of "difference" in the end are problems of "recognition".

3 Step: inventory of "all the differences that set us apart"

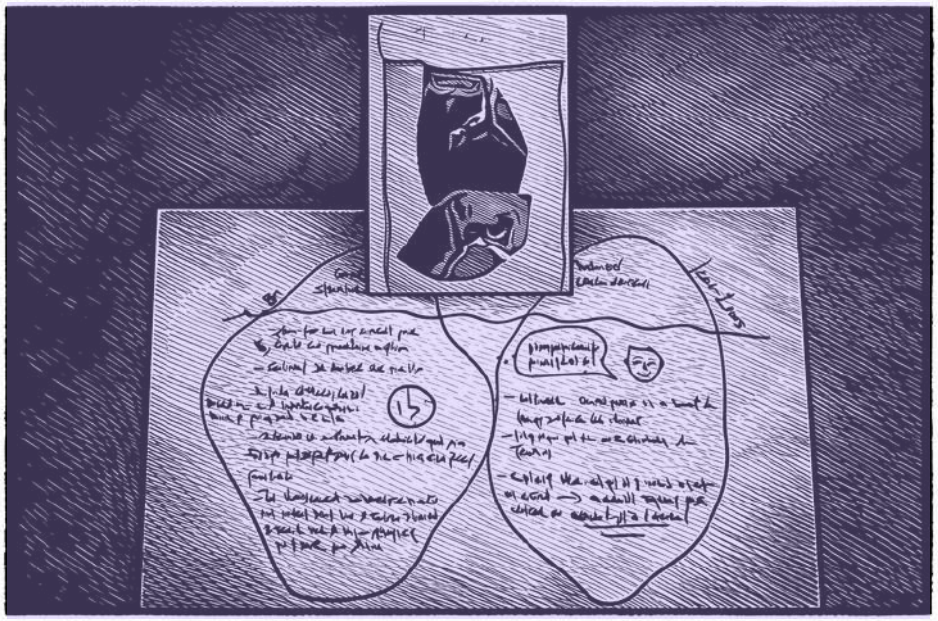
Invite participants to create groups of 3-4, and to make a visual inventory of "all the differences that set us apart".

This means they should collect all those aspects of life where either they, or their friends experienced that difference implies a challenge in their intimate relationships (eg: she spends time on social media, I don't, she is vegan I eat animals, she is atheist, and I am a believer etc.) "Visual inventory" means that for each item they should use a separate post-card size paper, on which they can draw, write, or use images to signal what aspect of difference this is.
Make a small exhibition of the post-cards and invite the groups to give a guided tour to their postcards. Check to what extent the cards are similar and different.
For the next step, each participant should choose a card that refers to a difference that to some degree they have already experienced as a source of challenge. Ideally, you should create small groups of 3-4 participants around specific cards.



4 Step: diving with Icebergs

Introduce the metaphor of "iceberg" proposed by E.T.Hall. For interculturalists this is a powerful metaphor to explore why some seemingly superficial things are really important: how they are connected to deep values, norms and representations. To make sure people understand you can invite them to make a first analysis together.
Give each group flipchart paper and ask them to draw two adjacent icebergs on it. Ask them to place their "difference card" between the top part of the icebergs.
The two icebergs will represent the two people (or groups) that have different viewpoints, opinions or beliefs concerning the selected cards. For instance: one for the person that spends a lot of time on social media and the other for the person who doesn't, or one for the family who believes sexual life is to be reserved for married life and the other for the person who doesn't, etc).
Invite each team to take 20 minutes to try to answer the same questions for both parties: a) What does this thing (social media, sexual relations etc..) mean for me/us/them? What is important for me/us/them? Write or draw everything in the bottom of the two icebergs.



5 Step: gold-digging in the bottom of the icebergs

In this final step we're going to harvest what is at the bottom of the icebergs. We're interested in two kinds of gold nuggets: elements that are very important for the other and that we are able to recognize, i.e.; understand their importance for the other. We can also find another type of treasure: elements that we appear in the bottom of both icebergs. These are the main take-aways of our session. To give them a visual form, create small tokens for each or one that combines them. You can encourage participants to take these with them and remember that these nuggets can help negotiate recognition across the differences.

6 Step: theatre of recognition

If you still have time you can improvise a situation that illustrates how one of the aspects noted in the "difference cards" with a potential to become rigidified and polarized could be de-escalated. Ask each group to come up with a scene that show the worst possible outcome, and then another where the golden nuggets are used to de-escalate the situation by ensuring the other of our recognition.

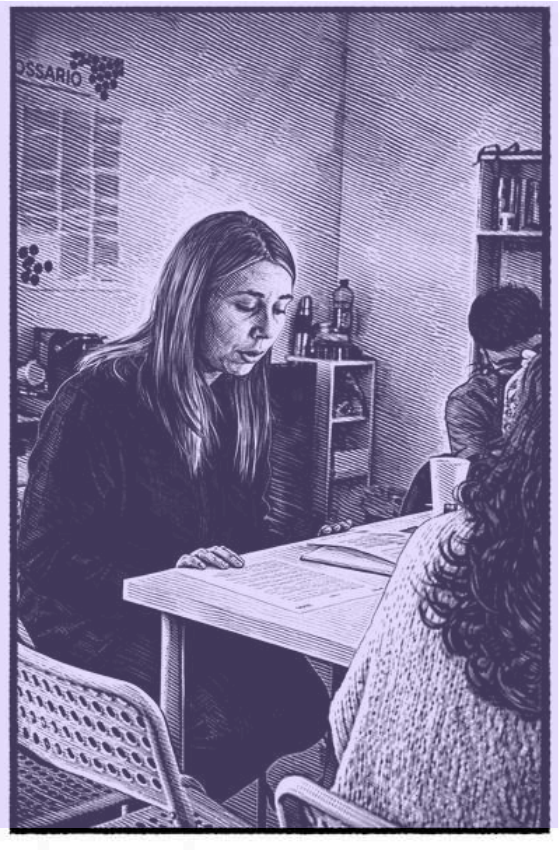
Debrief / reflection questions with participants

The key question to check would be how this exploration changed participants' motivation to approach the other person in their "otherness". The idea is not that participants "give up" their original positions or that they "surrender" to the other. Rather it is an invitation to identify with precision, what it is that they would be willing to recognize in the other person – their needs, their identities, their desires. This capacity to identify elements in the other person's "iceberg" as worthy of recognition can be the basis to explore practical solutions to the problem, in a way to go back to the top of the iceberg.

Facilitator tips:

For step 3: encourage participants to look for challenges related to diversity that they have experienced first-hand, or that their friends and acquaintances have experienced, instead of theorizing about what differences could matter.
For step 4: it can happen that participants can constitute groups where two sides of a “difference” are present: a person that does and another that does not spend time on social media, one that does and another that does not like dancing, etc. This can be precious because participants can get closer to understanding a standpoint that is not theirs and expressing their own. However, such groups must take extra care for protecting both sides. In no way should the discussion center on who’s right to the detriment of the other.

See our chapter « is taking care of each-other a zero sum game?” to address the logical next question of how mutual recognition works.



2 Step: themes and guiding questions

- Iso-work and professional solitude:
  - At what moments do you feel most alone at work?
  - What is missing for that solitude to turn into cooperation or mutual support?
- Emotional labor and body-mind on sale:
  - Which inner resources do you feel you have to “perform” at work (empathy, smile, calm, availability…)?
  - What is the emotional cost of your daily work?
  - How can we collectively reduce affective alienation?
- Precarity and desires:
  - In what forms does precarity manifest in our lives today?
  - Which desires emerge despite or because of precarity?
  - Which desires remain postponed or suppressed due to precarity?

3 Step

Rotation and sharing; After the allotted time (15-20 minute), one or more people from each table move to a different table, bringing with them the main ideas that emerged, while others stay to welcome the new arrivals. This allows the content to be shared and different perspectives to be compared, enriching the reflections.

Facilitators tips

The topics addressed may bring out strong personal vulnerabilities, even during the session. Do not suppress these emotions, diminish them, or try to psychoanalyze them. To handle the emotional load for both the participants and the facilitator, we suggest actively guide the group to transform personal experiences into collective ones, finding common points for dialogue.
During the World Café, time management is essential. It is useful to make each table responsible, in turn, for signaling the end of the activity.
During the World Café, ensure that participants’ discussions are recorded (even using clear keywords) on the table’s flipchart. This will serve as a collective archive and help subsequent participants pick up the conversation where it left off, deepening it further.

Sample 3 hours workshop		
Time	**Phase / Module**	**Key focus with corresponding activities**
14h00	Intro & warm-up	Get to know each other - name games Understand what we'll do and why - see intro and theory capsules Collaboration norms to keep everyone safe and engaged > safety rules activity short version Create trust, build group - icebreaker & warm-up ("Page folded in 4" - intro session)
14h45	Main sequence: choose any of our activities that can be delivered in two hours.	
15h30	Propose a break within the activity	
15h45	Continue the activity, make sure to leave sufficient time for the debrief moment	
16h55	Closing of the day	Round of words: what do you leave here, what do you leave with?

6 hours session examples
Here is an example of a 6 hours long workshop flow focusing on intimate relationships and sexuality.

Sample 1 for 6 hours workshop on the "intimate relationship & sexuality" thread		
Time	**Phase / Module**	**Key focus with corresponding activities**
9h30	Intro & warm-up	Get to know each other - name games Understand what we'll do and why - see intro and theory capsules Collaboration norms to keep everyone safe and engaged > safety rules activity long version Create trust, build group - icebreaker & warm-up (page folded in 4)
10h45	Coffee break	
11h00	Main sequence 1st part:	Why is a network of relationships an alternative to romantic love?
12h30	Lunch break	
13h30	Main sequence 2nd part:	Sex and relationships - what is my "true" choice, "true desire"?
16h15	Closing of the day	Round of words: what do you leave here, what do you leave with?

Here is an example of a 6 hours long workshop flow focusing on relationships in a digital era.

Sample 2 for 6 hours workshop on the "relationships in the digital era" thread		
Time	**Phase / Module**	**Key focus with corresponding activities**
9h30	Intro & warm-up	Get to know each other - name games Understand what we'll do and why - see intro and theory capsules Collaboration norms to keep everyone safe and engaged > safety rules activity long version Create trust, build group - icebreaker & warm-up (page folded in 4)
10h45	Coffee break	
11h00	Main sequence 1st part: h	Swipe the ghost - from liking to stalking: how does social media communication spill over to real life?
13h00	Lunch break	
14h00	Main sequence 2nd part:	How do I meet an intimate partner?
16h15	Closing of the day	Round of words: what do you leave here, what do you leave with?

12 hours session examples

Here is an example of a two day long workshop covering a general activity to map relational challenges (thermometer of relational challenges) and 3 different questions of our inventory. You can use the same structure to create workshops of different foci and content, while you maintain the main phases of the process.

Sample of 12 hours workshop - Day 1		
Time	**Phase / Module**	**Key focus with corresponding activities**
9h30	Intro & warm-up	Get to know each other - name games Understand what we'll do and why - see intro and theory capsules Collaboration norms to keep everyone safe and engaged > safety rules activity Create trust, build group - icebreaker & warm-up (page folded in 4)
10h45	Coffee break	
11h00	Exploratory activity:	Thermometer of relational challenges
12h30	Lunch break	
13h45	Main sequence 1st part:	How to stay committed in a relationship? *(insert a coffee break within the activity around 15h15)*
16h15-16h30	Closing of the day	Round of words: what do you leave here, what do you leave with?

Sample of 12 hours workshop - Day 2		
Time	**Phase / Module**	**Key focus with corresponding activities**
9h30	Intro & warm-up	Short body warm-up or energiser
10h00	Main sequence 2nd part:	What happens when needs collide? (insert a coffee break within the activity around 11h)
12h30	Lunch break	
13h30	Main sequence 3rd part:	How to align our relationships with a culture of consent? (insert a coffee break within the activity around 15h15)
16h00-16h30	Closing of the workshop	Paper folded in 4: what I enjoyed the most / my least exciting moment / what I have learnt about myself / what I have learnt about relationships

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TAKING CARE OF OUR RELATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

A resource book for youth workers

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