

A HEAD HEART HAND-BOOK

A creative MindCare process handbook for art teachers

Art therapy concepts with & for resilient young people



Your heart speaks.
Your hands create.
Your mouth sings.
Your body moves.
Your eyes dance.
Your fingers feel.
Your imagination runs wild.
You heal.

We're cautious about expressing our true thoughts and feelings.
We don't want to say the wrong thing.
Our inner voice is silenced.
Who am I to have an opinion about this?
Who wants to know what I think and how I see things?

Time forces us to do things alone, quickly, and well.
I want togetherness, time, and genuine connection.
Time to develop as a person, at my own pace.

That's what I've been waiting for. That's what my soul has been waiting for.
I need to allow what's going on inside me to flow out.
That I feel unhappy, unhealthy, apathetic, angry and scared.
It's all inside me.

What I feel and think and want, all of that is crying out to be expressed.
Is that my creativity?
Is that my whole self?
Living without expression isn't really living.
Being human starts with humanity.
Life is full of uncertainty, doubt, and desire.
Drop the mask and look inward.
Insight into what's inside
Inside insight

How do you look at the deeper story, buried underneath what's on the surface?
How can you use imagination to see and feel other perspectives?
How do you learn the language of the heart, the head and the hands?
How do you strike a balance between helping, healing, and giving space?

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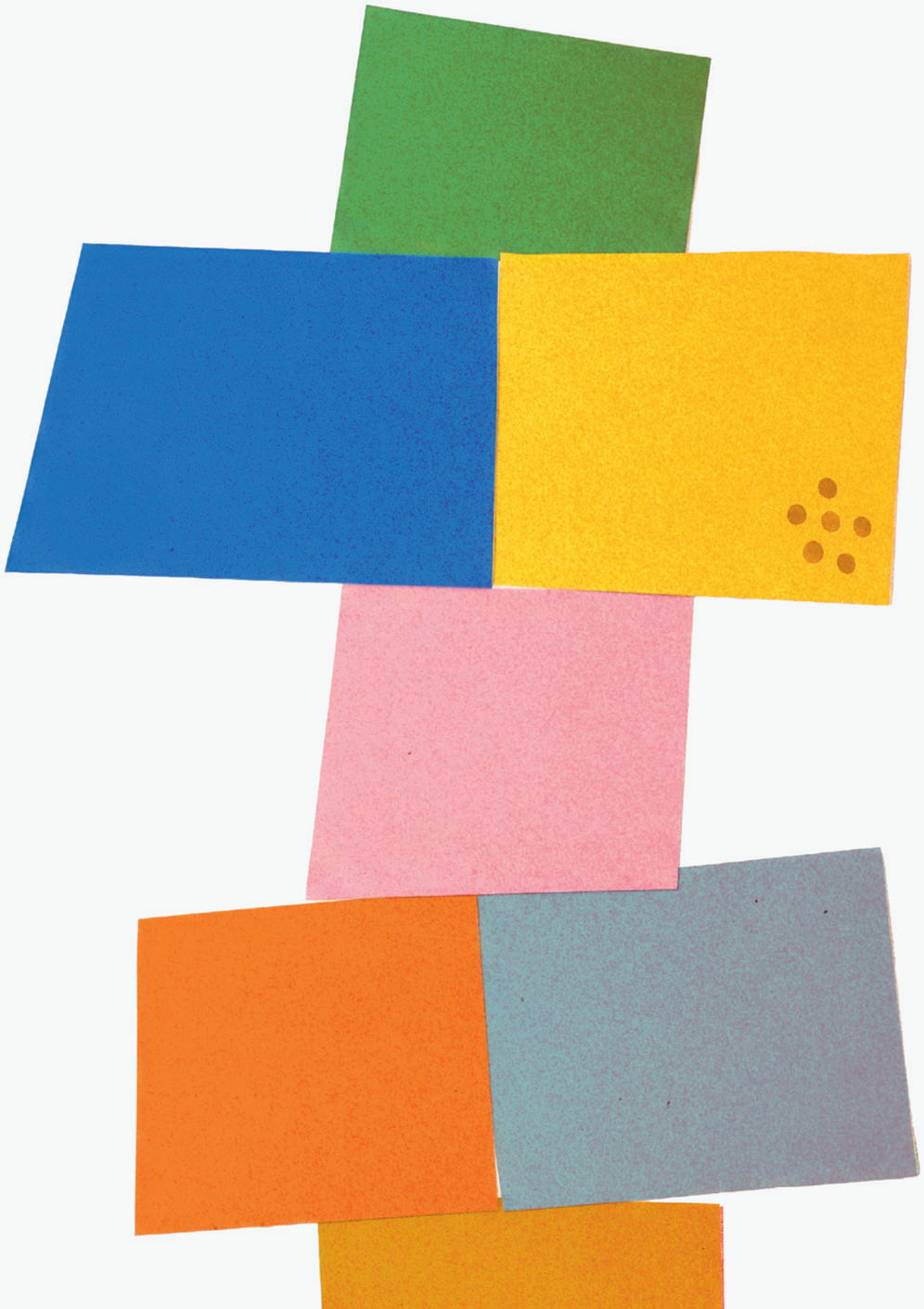

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How to use this handbook

This Head Heart Handbook is a practical guide to helping young people build their resilience through cultural activities. It explains how you, as an art teacher or artist, can guide them on this journey. The book sets out a number of creative concepts and methods, and you can explore the links between the concepts and methods on the fold-out pages.

What will I find in this handbook?

- Twelve creative concepts, designed to act as a framework to inspire your practice and support your own intuition.
- A number of creative quick guides to scientific background knowledge.
- Methods: Concrete tools that you can use immediately.

The power of art & MindCare

As a society, we urgently need to improve the mental health of the younger generation. The care and education sectors are under immense pressure, and research has shown that art is healing. A combined approach – that draws on both art and MindCare – can be incredibly valuable.

What this looks like in practice comes down to your personal choice. You will have your own unique approach, influenced by:

- Your own goals and target group
- Your own artistic form and artistry
- Your own vulnerabilities, awareness and (psychological) challenges
- Your authenticity
- Your sense of humour and tenacity

Make it your own

Use the concepts in this book as a guide, but put your own personal stamp on them. Play around with the methods, adapt them to suit your group, and use them to develop your own self-awareness. Use them creatively, make new connections and discover brilliant new ways to invite your groups to explore themselves and the wider world more deeply. And ask yourself the question: How do I strike a balance between being my authentic self and acting as a healthy role model in the lives of the young people I'm working with?

CRITICAL NOTE: In some cases, a concept or method requires a critical note – from you, from the young people, or from the wider field. We've allowed space for that!

TAKE CARE

There isn't a hard-and-fast rule for how many paintings you need to see to get yourself out of a state of depression (maybe three and a half?). There is no 'artistic pill' that instantly cures loneliness. This handbook is an ever-evolving document. We're constantly gaining new insights and replacing outdated thinking. This handbook is not about creative therapy or art therapy; it's about the practice of the art teacher. Sometimes, there is overlap between these fields. This handbook is a living document. It serves as a guide along a path that is both new and well-trodden, where the effective ingredients of art are combined with the everyday human struggle to cope with the demands of our increasingly complex world.

It's a unique, personal art form
rather than a one-size-fits-all.
You, as an art teacher,
are a key figure in the process.
And the world needs you.

"Share like an artist." Respect the work done by others. Always mention who has inspired you.

The opposite of depression isn't pleasure.
It's expression.
—
Edith Eger



Context of the handbook

This handbook was created as part of MindCare, a joint project by the German Federation for Arts Education and Cultural Learning (BKJ) and the Dutch National Knowledge Institute for Culture Education and Amateur Art (LKCA), with funding from the European Union.

Through this project, we aim to provide support and guidance to art teachers in the prevention and handling of mental health issues in their students. As this handbook demonstrates, the arts can be a powerful way to support good mental health.

The first part of the project was comprised of research into the needs of young people and teachers. Once this phase was complete, we organised a European conference in Berlin focused on the topics of mental health and art. During the conference, we aimed to raise awareness of the connection between these two fields, highlighting a number of projects from across Europe.

The conference provided a huge amount of inspiration for this handbook. We also organised a number of training courses for art teachers, equipping them to prevent and identify mental health issues. The culmination of the project is this handbook of concepts, tips and methods for art teachers to use in their work. It has been published in Dutch, German and English.

As we've unpacked this topic for the project, we've seen that there is a lot of great work being done in the fields of art and mental health – but sometimes, the connection between the two is lacking. This book aims to bring different approaches and visions together into a practical model that teachers can use as a starting point. This handbook isn't a definitive set of instructions, but a guide for you to work from. We want you to apply your ideas and share your contributions as we work together to develop a shared language for this field.
This handbook is intended more as a source of inspiration than as a textbook. It's a collage of different points of view; a hands-on guide that combines practical methods with knowledge and experience directly from the field. Start with some exercises and see how you can add your own new layers. Teaching is both a craft and an art form. It requires authenticity and a genuine desire to spend time with young people; a great deal of practice in the studio and in the classroom; an ability to make connections and, above all, a willingness to accept the unknown.

A handbook for anyone who works to guide, educate or train young people through artistic, creative or cultural activities (whether as an artist, teacher, researcher or leader). In these activities, the creative process helps participants to identify solutions that are new, unique and relevant. Young people develop their creative ability in a rich learning environment that encourages them to co-create and find the answers themselves.

We need new ideas about talent, intelligence and creativity. The Element is the point at which natural talent meets personal passion. When people arrive at the Element, they feel most themselves and most inspired and achieve at their highest levels. Curiosity is the engine.

— Sir Ken Robinson

Daisy Fancourt on art



In the book *Art Cure* (2026), Daisy Fancourt, Professor of Psychobiology and Epidemiology at University College London, explains the powerful effect that art and creativity can have on our physical and mental health. The book combines years of collected data from the fields of neuroscience, psychology and immunology to demonstrate how creative activities can reduce stress, pain and depression.

Key insights from the book

- Participating in artistic activities interrupts the stress cycle. Your focus shifts to what you are creating, and this enables your nervous system to enter a state of calm. You forget about time and the outside world. This state of intense concentration (flow) has a relaxing and meditative effect, just like mindfulness.
- Art regulates your emotions and helps you build an awareness of these emotions.
- Art activates the areas of the brain that are responsible for survival (the two other activators are eating and sex).
- Participating in artistic activities serves as a distraction from worrying or anxiety. In people who have anxious or negative thoughts, creativity can provide a healthy distraction. Making something forces your brain to focus on the task and materials in front of you. Repetitive actions (such as knitting, crochet or drawing) are particularly effective.
- Working with your hands reduces the level of cortisol, the stress hormone, in your body.
- Creativity helps process trauma. Creative therapy is a recognised, safe way to examine and process traumatic experiences without having to directly talk about them.
- Creative challenges activate and strengthen the network of connections between your brain cells. This helps to keep your brain healthy and makes it easier for you to think outside of the box.
- Art is the foundation of a young person's brain. Telling stories, dancing and singing is a part of everyday life.
- Art is accessible to everyone. You don't have to be a professional artist. Whether you colour, knit, or take photographs, it's about the process and the pleasure you derive from it.
- Art creates a new language. A physical, non-verbal language of feeling. Art functions as a kind of release valve. Some emotions and thoughts are hard to express in words. Writing, painting or music provide an alternative way to express and process feelings.
- Music and theatre in particular stimulate language development, and this effect is present from a very early age (as early as in the womb).
- Art enables you to experience both negative and positive feelings. It provides psychological distance so that you can reflect on these feelings without having to directly connect them to yourself.
- Looking at a piece of art that we like generates a great deal of activity in the brain. This triggers the imagination and sets the creative process in motion. In turn, the creative process draws on a number of networks in the brain, including the memory network and the emotional regulation network.

Experience and insights from the field.

- Art stimulates your creativity and your ability to imagine. By doing so, it gives you space to fantasise about the future, to imagine it. *(Merlijn Twaalfhoven in 'It's Up to Us', 2020)*

- Art is a conscious process of making something beautiful or meaningful using your skills and your imagination.

- Looking at a piece of art we like causes the brain to enter an aroused state, which generates a great deal of brain activity. This triggers the imagination and sets the creative process in motion. In turn, the creative process draws on a number of networks in the brain, including the memory network and the emotional regulation network. *(Erik Scherder in www.onvz.nl/gidsingezondheid/mentaalgezond/het-effect-van-kunst-opmentale-gezondheid, 2020)*

- Art opens a door. And finding that door to the world is crucial, because – paradoxically – that is the exact door that will show us who we, as unique, responsible subjects, can be. *(Gert Biesta in 'Door kunst onderwezen willen worden', 2017)*

- Art connects you with others, through shared exploration and mutual understanding (which, in turn, builds your understanding of yourself). Art activities appeal to you more as a member of a group than as an individual (with all your doubts, labels and quirks). *(Anne Graswinckel)*

- Art explores the idea of not knowing; it's impossible for an experiment to fail.

- Art is something that allows you to breathe a different kind of happiness. *(Anni Albers, 1968)*

- Around 8 years of age, your brain begins to dislike or reject your drawings. How can you give yourself permission to let go once more? *(Brankele Frank in 'het grote ontprikkelboek', 2026)*



The creative MindCare process

A thought experiment

What is the difference between the creative process and a creative MindCare process?

The creative process is a way to arrive at new ideas or solutions. This process is usually split into four set phases: orientation (exploring the issue), investigation (gathering inspiration and information), execution (bringing the idea to life), and evaluation (reflecting on the result). This process usually results in a product or presentation.

The creative process and MindCare?

What does the creative process look like in a situation where you want to (preventively) support mental health? The core element of this creative MindCare process is increasing your awareness of yourself, others and the world around you. It's all about creating insight, making connections, creating calm and making life feel manageable, to boost resilience and increase ownership of your own mental well-being. In turn, this increased awareness could even result in a change in attitude.

A stepping stone could be to look at cultural awareness; the human capacity to reflect on the truth. Cultural awareness* is an awareness of your own culture and that of others. Who am I and where do I come from? How can I expand this awareness to the wider world? Is there any overlap between these two areas?

Participating in a creative process results in more than just a product. It stimulates your creativity and your ability to imagine. By doing so, it gives you space to fantasise about the future, to imagine it. Creating something boosts your self-confidence and creativity. Completing a creative project leaves you with a pleasant feeling of pride and productivity. It contributes to a positive sense of identity and brings balance to your life. You try things out, make 'mistakes' and look for solutions. You discover that mistakes still help you move forward, which helps you handle setbacks and problems with greater flexibility. In short, it trains your resilience muscles.

Creative process	**Cultural awareness**	**Creative MindCare process**
Orientation	perception	the call/invitation
Investigation	imagining	creative exploration
Execution	conceptualising	connection to yourself
Evaluation	analysis	insight & attitude

How do you progress through the creative MindCare process?

The grey area. An invitation to explore the unknown together.

The first step – Want to join in?
The call, an introduction to a relevant topic, a question. Build curiosity. Invite.

The second step – What moves you?
Experience flow, creative exploration; expression, material, expectations. Self and the group. Add a deeper layer. Mistakes are part of experimenting.

The third step – What is your experience?
Connect to self. Reflect without judgement, all feelings are welcome and allowed.

The fourth step – What do you want to create? Together?
Create & operate with the new insight. Explore attitude.

The fifth step – What do you want to show?
Connect to others, your relationship to the world around you. Show, present, be proud.

You can jump forwards and backwards.
If you go left, you take the path that focuses on fun and skills.
If you go right, you take the path that focuses on finding meaning.



The art teacher's role in this process

Your role as an art teacher is to guide students through this process. You create the invitation and walk the young people through the process. Sometimes you take more of a leading role, by offering creative exploration, guiding reflection, and steering students towards the next phase of the process. When do you simply affirm, and when do you enter into dialogue? How can you act as a role model?

You provide safety, but you also challenge the young people to venture down new paths towards all of the adventures that life brings. In the concepts, we take a closer look at how you can be an artist in this process: How you, in an ideal situation, can build a relationship with the young people you're working with and start to establish the foundations of trust.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- What is the role of art, the role of the question, and the role of the art teacher?
- How do you think these elements interact?
- What is the power of creativity? And what is the power of the art teacher?
- What kind of flow and energy does the teacher bring?
- How does your involvement encourage insight in others?
- Is creativity something magical or otherworldly?

A MANIFESTO: GUIDING THE CREATIVE MINDCARE PROCESS

1. Your starting point is that you want to make a difference in this process. You want to meet people where they are.
2. It is important that the group feels safe with you.
3. Be authentic and genuine. Be really boring, if that's who you are.
4. Be here now! If you can't be fully present in the moment with the group, then be open with them about it.
5. You can't fake it. Be real.
6. Spark the flow, your flow.
7. Each individual group 'clicks' in its own unique way, and comes with its own instruction manual and energy. Stay open for that.
8. Always be overprepared (with your materials and ideas).
9. Befriend the group, move to their rhythm, and give them a nudge in the right direction.
10. Seek out connection offline.
11. Don't give the answers, but lead the group in a process of asking questions and slowing down.
12. Know the strengths and talents of your team, and use them.
13. Start sessions in a relaxed way with a cup of tea.
14. Recognise when you're no longer needed, but stay close by.

Created with Matt Robinson, Paper Lantern.

If *you* know beforehand what the young people are going to make, you know for sure that *they* haven't used their imaginations.



Guiding the unknown

The twelve concepts

What happens in art, in creativity, and in the interactions between you and the young people you work with? Twelve concepts guide us through the process.

The grey area and the foundations

First, we venture into a grey area and learn how to move around it safely:

Concept 1:

Area of knowing and not knowing – Getting to know the unknown

Concept 2:

Adding layers to your programme – How to create a safe and challenging space

Concept 3:

The effective ingredients – How we can administer art by exploring lots of different ways of working (including a brief look at emotions and insight into your internal world)



Exploration

Then we enter the world of creative exploration:

Concept 4:

The artist's mindset – How we experience, feel, think and create

Concept 5:

Generating flow – Striking a balance between challenge, enjoyment, *awe* and *wonder*







Connection to yourself and the narrative

We then work with the participants to explore how we can bring the story to the surface and heighten their awareness:

Concept 6:

Finding the way by embracing adventure – What does the story actually tell me – enabling me to build a better connection with myself?

Concept 7:

Attitude glasses – Moving from feeling to attitude

Concept 8:

Balance between looking and seeing – How can we increase awareness?

The other, co-creation and your role

We slowly move past a boundary we had previously stayed on one side of, and now begin to focus more on our connection to others, empowerment and your own role as a guide:

Concept 9:

The art of growth between myself and the other – How do mirror neurons and making contact work?

Concept 10:

The balance between doing it yourself and co-creation – How can we hand control to the young people and empower them within our programme?

Concept 11:

There are always two sides to balance – What is your role in the grey area, and how do you keep track of the balance between knowing and not knowing?

Concept 12:

Balance between authenticity and healthy artistry – How can you achieve this balance by walking down the path with young people and increasing your satisfaction as an artist?



concept 1

The grey area – Knowing and not knowing

Creativity is magical. Don't study it too closely.

Edward Albee

The grey area of art

We enter the vast grey area of not knowing, but feeling. An extraordinary landscape of the known and the unknown. There's a lot happening in this magical forest. Deciding which route to take can be a puzzle. Do you have the courage to wander, knowing that it will lead you to the right path? Turning to art helps you find the way. Artistic experience heightens your intuition. In the grey area, you use your imagination to create something beautiful and meaningful.

Spending time in this twilight world nurtures your ability to cope with uncertainty. It surprises you, with rocky paths that suddenly give way to a calm and serene landscape. Asking questions and slowing down takes you to places where you can experience colours, smells and sounds that touch something inside of you. Which blue? What and who am I going to meet here?

This grey area is similar to the domain of mental health (in young people). Where is the line between feelings of depression and pressure to perform? Are you in a state of freeze, fight or flight – or is this all fawn? Do you have an anxiety disorder; do you feel lonely? Are you seen and heard as you are? And on top of all that, your brain is growing in all directions, and not always in a balanced, even way. The view is panoramic and foggy at the same time.

How can you act as a guide?

As an artist, you know all about the grey area. You love the adventure of not knowing; it makes you happy. You trust in the path that appears in front of you. You know that you don't have to explain; all you have to do is ask questions and slow down. It's an area full of its own terms and broad definitions, so we need to take time to make sure we're all on the same page. You're here: a grey area full of questions, immeasurability, and observation.

Wonder

There are lots of things that we can't understand. Why is it that we sometimes find a place where we immediately feel at home? Why might we trust one person we meet right away, but prefer to keep our distance with somebody else? What does a robin's song mean? What on earth is Putin thinking? Why are Bach's compositions so beautiful?

If we could Google the answers to these questions, we could understand and store the information somewhere deep in our memory. If something cannot be understood, you can just ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist. Or you can choose to wonder. You can make contact without making a decision. You reserve judgement and open your senses. You build a relationship between yourself and the unknown. This happens in rituals, but also in art. You get a sense of the richness of the space between you and the other.

Merlijn Twaalfhoven

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- What do you need in the grey area?
- How will you discuss the grey area with participants?
- Would you be able to map out the grey area with participants?
- And could you add words and meaning to it?



concept 2

Safe & brave – Adding layers to your programme

Guiding young people through the grey area requires both safety and bravery.

In the creative MindCare process, guiding requires you to consciously work through a number of steps, encouraging young people to explore, connect what they learn to themselves, and use this insight to determine what the next steps should be. This might be a change in attitude, or it could be making and presenting something as a group.

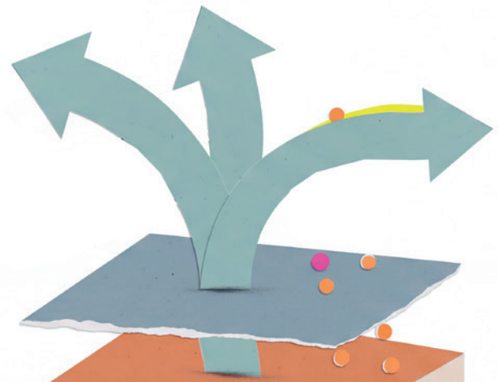
All of this requires a **safe space** where people can safely develop their ideas and perspectives through mirroring, where they can experiment and relax, engage with others and explore their own feelings. At the same time, you also need to create a **brave space**: a space in which young people feel empowered to face challenges, explore exciting new things, and meet other young people with their own unique insights. Where they have the courage to venture into new territory, practise, and fail.

The creative MindCare process also includes **space for adventure**. If you've explored in a safe and brave space, how do you then transition into the world and venture down an unknown path? By sharing insights, changing your attitude, facing the dragons you've slain, and presenting what you've learnt.

John Palfrey, Professor at Harvard Law School and author of *Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces (2017)*, **emphasises that free expression and diversity are not mutually exclusive, but actually complement one another. Safe spaces are essential for developing a diverse cohort of voices; brave spaces ensure that these voices meet, challenge and add nuance to one another. This creates a culture of learning, mutual understanding and collective growth in which personal safety and critical debate are central. (https://www.tlcenter.nl/inclusief-lesgeven/)**

Guiding wisdom

A rich sensory environment reduces anxiety, stress and other psychological challenges. How can you enrich the group by allowing your participants to see the full spectrum of your own sensory experience? Real people for real people. A safe and relaxed environment to come together is essential for (young) people's growth. And you also want to challenge them to go one step further; to embark on the adventure in front of them. Add depth to the activities and make the safe space bigger, to enable young people to move from safety to bravely venturing further. Work together to grow both personally and as a group. (See also concept 12; Follow your bliss)



concept 2

The safe, brave and adventure layers in the creative MindCare process
When we're exploring the creative MindCare process, what steps are involved in each of the layers? Incorporating these layers into your work more deliberately enables you and your participants or target group to move forward more consciously – and therefore with a greater sense of safety.

LAYER 1

SAFE – Invite and take part

In this layer, the exercise is easy and feels super safe. You aren't asking for reflection at this point; the objective is to have fun, play around and get to know one another.

Be present I'm here, and I've got time to feel grounded in the space (sitting mindfully). Relax. Enjoy a cup of tea together.

Step inside Find a way into the group, check in.

Into the groove Explain what we're going to do and why. How will we communicate, what are the rules? Brief explanation of the 'plan'. Highlight the starting point so that the finish line becomes visible on the horizon.

Call (Brief) exercise to kick off the 'adventure'. Get participants on board. Introduce the question/topic.

Fun and play Get started! Observe the outcome of the explanations you've given. Add fun and playful elements, and some competition if the group wants to.

Add calm music into the mix. Having fun = a first step towards habit

LAYER 2

BRAVE – Challenge and heighten awareness

Tell the group that this exercise requires a little courage (for them and for you) and personal reflection through drawing, writing and making.

Exploration Add depth to the topic/question. Build curiosity. Experimenting means making mistakes. Encourage the group to lengthen the process. Use an artist's mindset. Experiment with different 'doses' of the effective ingredients.

Deepen Add a question to take participants deeper whenever the process allows.

Converge, diverge, allow time. Add compliments and new forms of art to the mix. We're going to do something that will change your life. Practise getting comfortable with discomfort.

Experience your space Reflect on your process. Writing, drawing, singing; how did it go? What went well? Keep it succinct!

Become your own friend Reflect positively on your brave actions: what went well, what needs attention and what can you leave out next time? Feel free to give yourself a pat on the back!

LAYER 3

ADVENTURE – Facing the unknown & ownership

Ask your young people not to avoid discomfort, but to actively seek it out. What do we need to venture down our new path? Young people embark on an adventure to explore life.

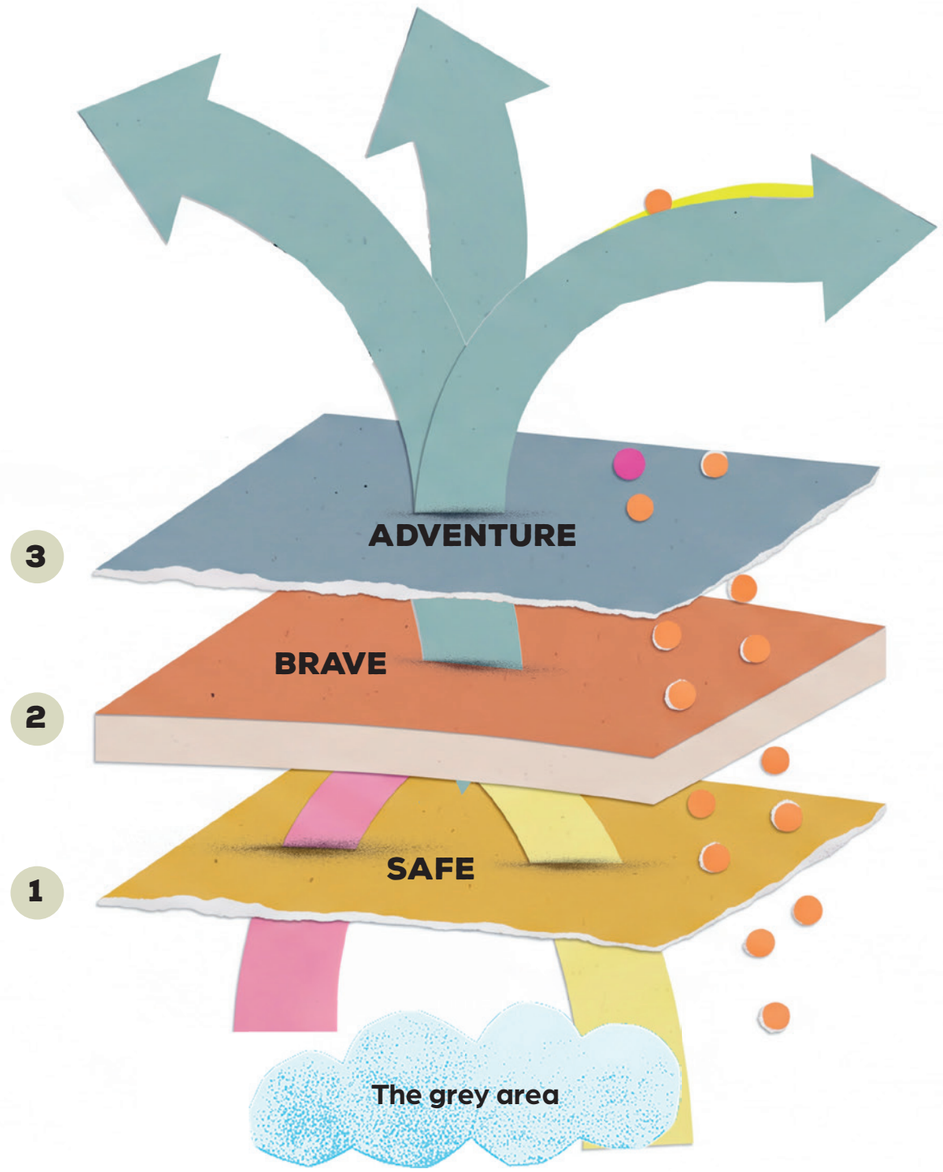
Exchange Having the courage to share with others leads to wider and deeper insights. Mirror neurons build acknowledgement and recognition. Listen and share.

Connect New perspective by working together. Empathy. What needs meaning? Stories, movement, play, creative activity.

Making Repeating the activities with new insight. Co-creation, play, making mistakes, repetition.

Presenting Develop something for a podium or presentation. Pride, nerves, togetherness, empowerment.

Reflecting Look back at the route you've travelled. What you've learnt, unexpected lessons. Connect the 'I' to the 'we'.



After each step, you could add: and we'll celebrate this with:

a compliment | seeing and hearing one another | a treat | adding a rich new layer of art | listening to or watching a story together | fun | music | ownership | poem | painting | time to come together | singing | sensory surprise | taking a break, if we can | a nice group exercise | ritual | time to reflect | a moment in nature | options | a thought-provoking question | confetti | breathing exercise | ...

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are. Anaïs Nin

concept 3

All art forms – The effective ingredients

Before we dive into the methods, let's take a look at how they came into being.

Art as a vitamin for the brain
In her book *Art Cure (2026)*, British professor Daisy Fancourt states that art is a 'forgotten pillar' of human health. She lists three elements that have a powerful positive effect on mental health:

Making (expression): The process of active creation reduces stress hormones. It provides a safe space to explore and express complex emotions without the need for words. All kinds of making work: from crochet to writing, and from drawing to colouring. Goals: expression, experimentation, be heard and seen | build connection by making, dancing, singing or acting together.

Taking part (experience together): Looking at a painting or sculpture, losing yourself in literature, or getting absorbed in a play or film helps you find a way out of your own mind. These receptive experiences improve empathy, allow you to recognise yourself in the stories of others, and increase emotional resilience without you having to put yourself front and centre of the process. Goals: encourage empathy, fun, new experiences, activate mirror neurons.

Assign meaning (identity and awareness): Art challenges you to reflect on who you are and how you relate to the world. It helps you build a positive self-image that is entirely separate from academic achievements or (societal) labels. This is something that only you as an individual can do. And it's also unique to you as a person, because your meaning is based on your experiences, your cultural awareness and the place you experience flow.

Knowing all of this, it should come as no surprise that these three elements are the pillars of the art and culture curriculum for basic education in the Netherlands.

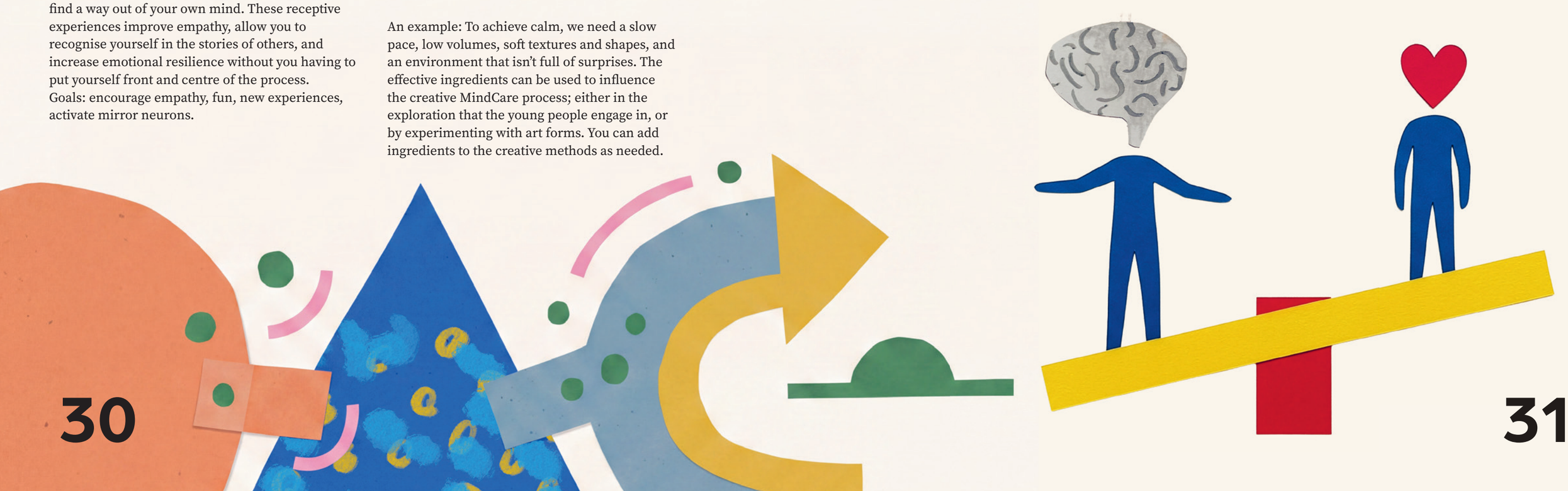
In *Art Cure (2026)*, Fancourt describes the effective ingredients of art. Some of these ingredients are effective in and of themselves, while others act as a 'filler' to supplement an effective ingredient. Her list has been expanded to include well-known elements from various art forms.

An example: To achieve calm, we need a slow pace, low volumes, soft textures and shapes, and an environment that isn't full of surprises. The effective ingredients can be used to influence the creative MindCare process; either in the exploration that the young people engage in, or by experimenting with art forms. You can add ingredients to the creative methods as needed.

Working with physical sensations
Alongside sensory experiences, we also perceive stimuli from our own bodies. This includes interoception (signals from organs, such as hunger, thirst, our heart rate and emotions), proprioception (posture and muscular tension via muscles and joints) and the vestibular system (sense of balance). (More detail further on in the handbook.)

IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Which ingredients are effective in your art form?
- What do you use as a filler?
- Which ingredients do you use to inspire wonder/awe?
- Do you have any secret effective ingredients?
- Are you yourself an ingredient? What is your special talent as an ingredient?
- Can a good question be an ingredient?
- Choose one of your favourite exercises. How can you improve it with a soft, colourful or surprising ingredient?



A brief guide to the methods

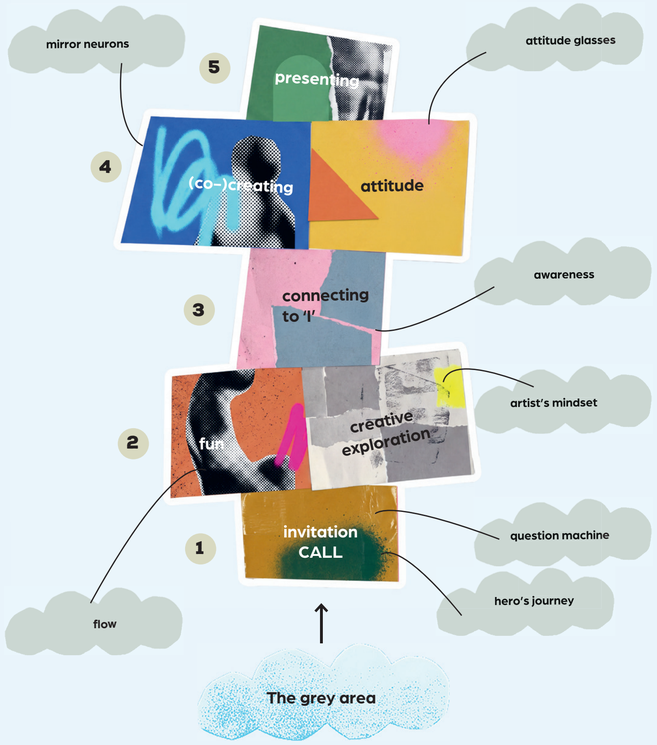
- Each of the methods is based on a particular art form.
- In each case, we provide a short description followed by suggestions. Refer to the inspiration legend.
- Use your own judgement to decide whether there is scope to add your own suggestions or ideas to each method.
- The goals of each exercise might also differ, depending on how you use them;
- this is an opportunity for you to get creative.

The creative MindCare process
Where are you in the process? Could we also take a step back?

The first step	1	The call, an introduction to a relevant topic, a question. Build curiosity. Invite.
The second step	2	Experience flow and pleasure. Creative exploration. Expression, material, expectations. Self and the group. Add a deeper layer. Mistakes are part of experimenting.
The third step	3	Connect to self. Reflect without judgement, all feelings are welcome and allowed. Insight.
The fourth step	4	Create and operate with the new insight. Explore attitude. Work together.
The fifth step	5	Connect to others, the world around you. Show, present. Pride.

Effective art ingredients
Which ingredients could you add to go deeper?

Pace	Volume
Texture	Dissonance
Symmetry	Shape
Surprise	Space (dimensions, level, direction)
Collaboration	Improvisation
Colour	Focus of attention
Breathing	Scale
Resistance	Alienation/context
Awe	Time (speed)
Story	Emotion
Rhythm	Power (energy, weight, flow)
Focus	Power and body (parts, shapes and relationships)
Ritual	Balance





Emotions
What do you feel?

Anxiety, anger, sadness, happiness, restlessness, apathy, tension, attentiveness, in love, unhappy, disappointed, joyful, disgust, angry, aroused, bitter, melancholy, sombre, scared, resilient, proud, serene, abandoned, satisfied, hopeful, stressed, dejected, depressive, pessimistic, broken, peaceful, demoralised, grieving, sad, disheartened, calm, happy, restless, bored, irritated, panicked, glowing, chronic stress, being 'on', unsure and inferior, hopeless, shame, fearful of failure, pressure to perform, lonely (in spite of feeling connected)...

Physical sensations
How does it feel inside?

Irritating, thick, flowing, grey, vast, breathless, fluttering, full, sharp, soft, cloudy, blunt, dull, glowing, rolling, silky, abrasive, trembling, warm, thumping, spongy, clammy, far away, twisted, fitting, too big, sticky, grainy, long, short, ticking, loose, regular, drizzly, rainy, muggy, colourful, stiff, calm...

Art forms
How do you mix the art forms?



Inspiration legend

Suggestions

- OA — Add another art form
- S — Add or dive deeper into a sensory experience
- E — Add an emotional experience or angle
- M — Make this, using materials, in 2D or 3D
- I — Add an imaginative or storytelling question
- EI — Which effective ingredient will support or lead to deeper insight?
- SB — Which safe, brave or adventure layer could you add?
- WK — What do we know?
- C — This exercise refers to concept...
- P — Could this become a project/presentation?
- T — Could you do this together?
- EM — Empowerment
- TC — Take care: what is your stance as a teacher?
- # — goal hashtags

Art forms

METHODS

The methods are listed below. Quick guides for each method (including the acronyms) are provided on the fold-out pages. Many of the methods were developed especially for this handbook; where we were inspired by others, we have included the relevant credits.



CHECK–IN

Start safe together

Starting with a check-in is a great idea, because it helps participants settle into the space, builds connection and creates a safe environment. Focus on the goal for today. Ask a playful question to introduce the topic. For example, if you want to focus on talent: “If you could choose one superpower for this meeting today, what would it be?” Give everyone an opportunity to answer the question.

SB Use the ‘popcorn’ approach. Each participant gets to choose when they ‘pop’ and answer the question. This feels safer than going round the circle.

SB Ask an easy additional question to encourage everyone to speak.

Favourite vegetable, colour, animal…

OA Drawing: “Draw a house in ten seconds, with your eyes closed.”

Standing: and add a movement.

Check in with your favourite song.

#check–in

#groupbuilding

#hearallvoices

Inspired by Deep Democracy.



VISUAL

Create a roadmap of your path

Create a bridge between where you are and where you want to be

Hand out large sheets of paper, or use a single large roll of paper if you want to work as a group. Get participants to draw two dots on the paper, representing where they are now and where they want to be. Give everyone the time they need to add their dots.
You can choose between a road, a path or a bridge; a way of getting from here to there. What does the road, path or bridge look like? The material you use will produce different insights and results. Collage, watercolour, pens, paint.

I — What does the connection between where you are and where you want to be look like?

Reflect on your own or with a peer.

OA — You can also do this exercise in the space as a dance, perhaps even in the form of a cypher?

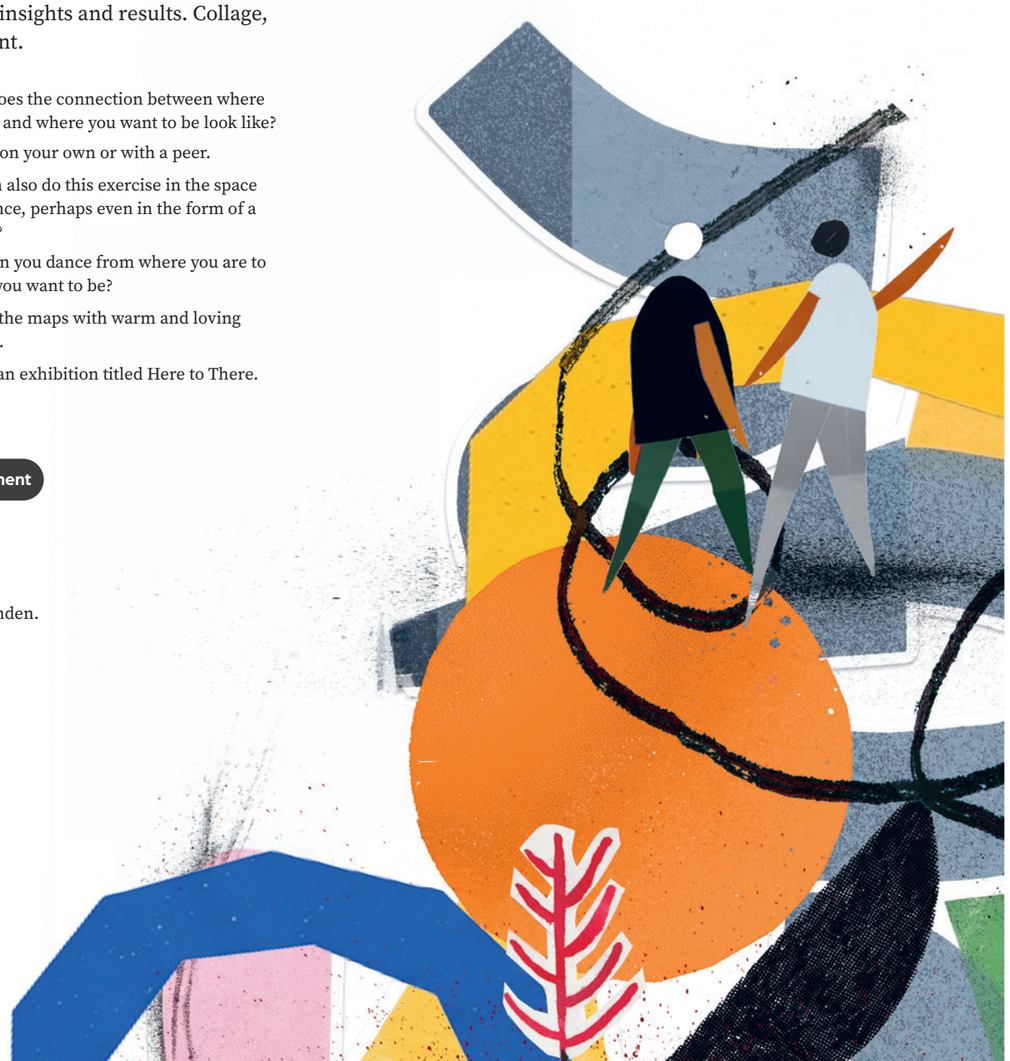
How can you dance from where you are to where you want to be?

S — Colour the maps with warm and loving colours.

P — Create an exhibition titled Here to There.

#selfinsight
#expressionwithoutjudgement
#perspective

Inspired by
Celine Schweitzer/NHL Stenden.



VISUAL

Make your own emotion cards

How many emotions do you know?

This is a great preparatory exercise that you can combine with lots of different methods later. Use the list of emotions on the fold-out page. Discuss these emotions with the group. Do they know any other emotions? Which emotions are we less familiar with? Hand out large sheets of thick, white paper (A3). Ask the group to create large abstract images using watercolours or another visual method. Cut the images down into small (A6) cards. On each card, write down the emotion that the image depicts.

S — If this emotion was a sound, smell, colour, shape, taste, shoe, or kitchen utensil, what would it be?

I — Choose a short, well-known story, such as Little Red Riding Hood. Tell the story with different emotions (pick three at random).

M — Make cards with sensations, colours or obstacles.

SB — As a group, discuss whether to add anything to the cards. A description of the emotion as they feel it? Which physical sensation comes with this emotion? A question?

P — Scan the cards and have them printed so that each participant has their own game.

#selfinsight
#emotions
#ownership





As you start to walk on the way,
the way appears.
Rumi



VISUAL

Question card game

Design your own question card game for your topic



Hand out large sheets of thick, white paper (A3). Ask the group to create large abstract images using watercolours or another visual method. Cut the images down into small (A6) cards. Ask the group to work in pairs to come up with questions based on a topic you've chosen. What would you like to ask others? What would other young people in the same situation as you like to be asked?
Share the questions in the group or swap sets of cards with another pair. Discuss your ideas.

T

The group designs its own game so that the questions can be asked in a playful way. Let the young people decide if they want to discuss the questions individually or as a group.

OA

Working as a group or individually, decide on another art form that you would like to explore. Pick a card to begin.

EI

Create three sheets of drawings in various colours. Think of eight funny titles, then eight interesting questions and eight art forms. Pick a card from each category so that you have a title, a question and an art form.

TC

Not everyone enjoys the same kinds of materials. Something that might open up a world of inspiration for one person might be considered too messy by another. Offer multiple types of materials.

M

With your group, make cards from the list of physical sensations. Ask the group to work in pairs to come up with more words for each sensation.

#empowerment
#curiosity
#mirrorneurons





VISUAL

Emotional face-off

Draw faces to explore feelings

Ask the young people to work in pairs to draw and colour circles on a large sheet of paper. Hand out the list of emotions (see fold-out page) to the group. Get them to try out the facial expressions for each emotion and draw them in the coloured circles.

S

Play relaxing music while the group is busy colouring the circles.

OA

As a group, make masks of faces displaying the different emotions. What does the emotion look like in your body? Practise with the masks.

E

Work together to try to come up with definitions of the emotions. You can do this exercise in a humorous way if you choose.

#emotionalregulation
#recognition
#practiseempathy
#mirrorneurons

Inspired by Elizabeth Haidle (@ehaidle).



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Monsters with a user manual

Children and young people work togeth–er to create helpful monsters

This is an exercise for two groups, children and young people. Ask the children what they worry about. Is there anything that concerns them? Something they have very little control over? Give the children a sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a monster that can help them with their problem.

With their permission, share the children's drawings with a group of young people. Ask them to make a clay version of the monster in the children's drawings. While the clay monsters are being fired/drying out, ask the young people to write a user manual for the monster in the form of a poem or a story. Share the clay monsters and the user manuals with the children. Work with both groups to set up an exhibition of the helpful monsters.

P

Work together to write and illustrate a children's book about how the helpful monsters can help and how they want to be taken care of.

OA

Make the monsters from fabric instead of clay.

T

If you don't have two groups to do this exercise with, you can do it with one group by splitting the various activities across multiple sessions.

TC

Keep the pace slow and the atmosphere light and relaxed.

Show your vulnerable side by sharing a thought or feeling that you'd like to have a monster's help with. Bring your own monster to life too.

Make sure all participants feel safe when the different age groups come together to present their work. If the situation is safe enough, get the young people to interview the children about their monsters.

SB

Did you feel supported in your feelings and thoughts?

How did this change your feelings towards others?

WK

Working with clay calms your mind; the tactile material helps you stop worrying. You can release and feel your emotions as you shape the material.

#workingtogether
#empathy
#imagination
#empowerment





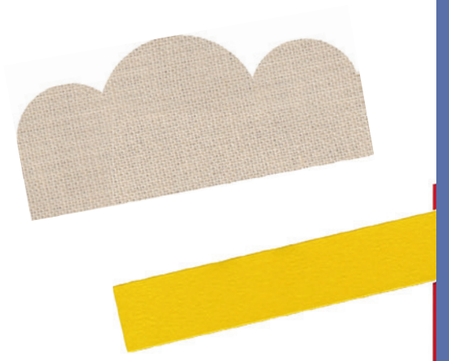
Inspired by Charlotte Prokop/BKJ.

LITERATURE

Seesaw poem

Looking for balance

Give each participant a sheet of paper and ask them to draw a large seesaw. On the left end of the seesaw, ask them to write a topic they're struggling with or something a friend is struggling with. What is the opposite (word or topic) of the topic they've written down? Write that on the right end of the seesaw. Add word clouds above each end. Write two or three lines of poetry about balance. Read the texts aloud as a spoken word performance, perhaps with a beat in the background.



TC

Look for similarities: What do you recognise in others? Answer as part of the group or for yourself.

P/T

Use the sentences to make a zine or poster. Add images.

OA

Could we turn this into a circus act? Huge seesaw balance poem.

C

Looking for balance

TC

Start by making a line through the space, from one wall to another, using tape or a ribbon. Place opposite words relating to a topic on either side of the line. Ask the young people where they would put themselves in relation to each of the words. Ask them to repeat this exercise after the presentation/method. Have their positions changed? Why?

#twosides
#empathy
#lookingforbalance



DANCE

Dance your story

Dancing inspired by a topic, such as friendship

Stories give us direction. What story does your group need right now? As a group, read an excerpt about friendship from a young adult novel, or a poem about friendship. Explore the topic together (with an artist's mindset). Write down which feelings, sensations, behaviours and attitudes you associate with friendship, using the format of a mind-map or a large hand-drawn map. What music suits this topic? Create short dance routines in groups, then put them all together.

OA Get the young people to draw the various forms of contact in dance.

OA Those who are feeling brave can write their own pieces about friendship.

EI First, get the group to improvise with various effective ingredients, such as power, symmetry and surprise.

E Will you come up with the choreography, or will the group do it?

C Artist's mindset (concept 4)

#ownership
#groupdynamic
#movement



DANCE

Balance in dance

Dancing across a line

Use chalk to draw random long lines on the pavement or across an open outdoor area. If you're indoors, use masking tape instead. With the young people's input, decide what is on either side of the line. What kinds of issues or topics do they find it difficult to strike a balance with? For example, this could be something like stress and relaxation, and asking for help and getting help. Play music that is good to dance to. Get the group to dance over and along the line as if they are walking along a narrow bridge. Everyone is free to come up with their own dance. Freeze, speed up, slow down, turn around, make yourself big, make yourself small. Can they say anything during the 'freeze' moments?

SB Reflect on the impact of dancing on this line.

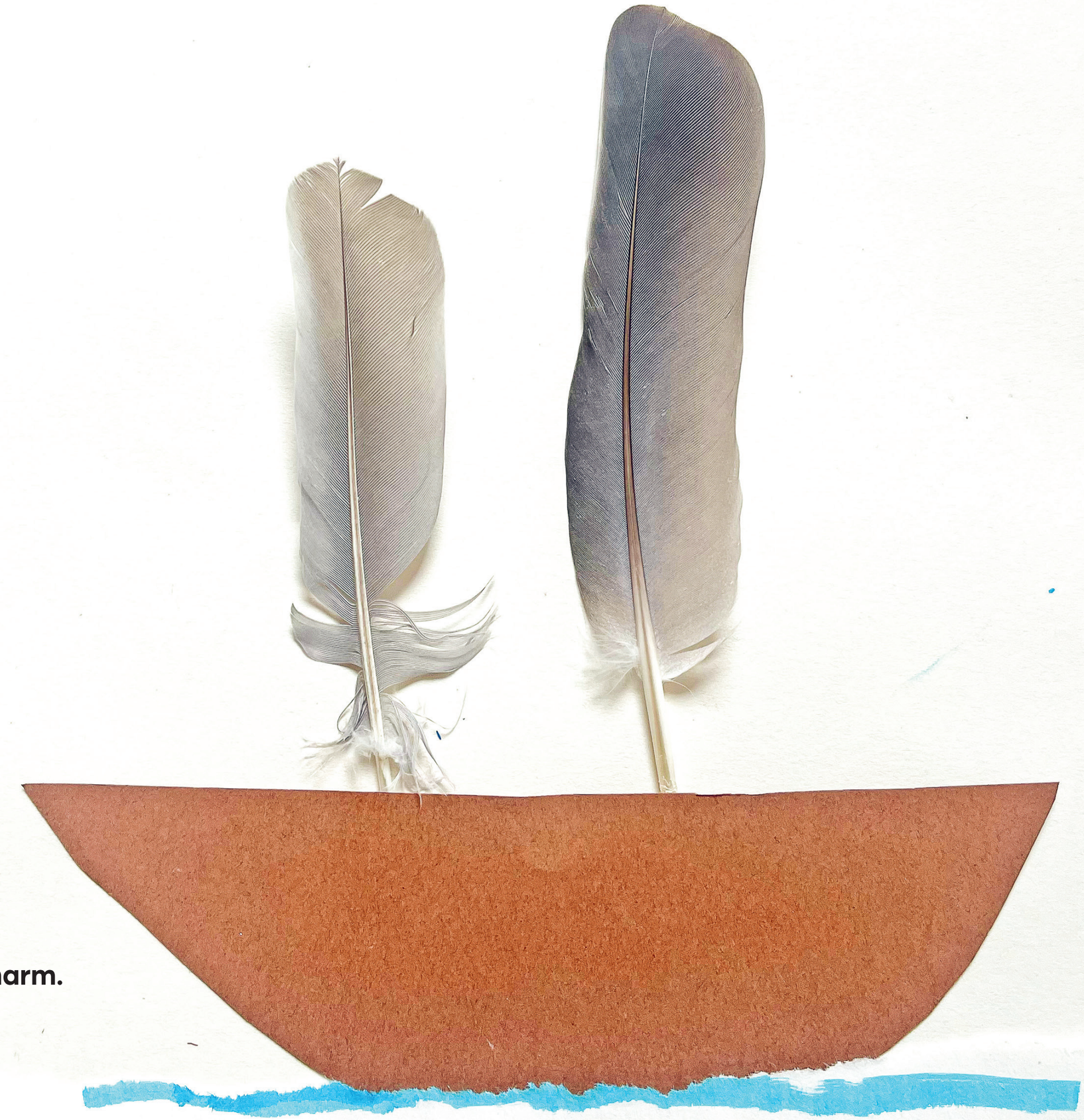
P Present the dance to parents and discuss these topics with them.

OA Have photos taken of the individual dancers while they're dancing.

Young people who find dancing difficult can opt to do a drawing during the presentation instead.

C Balance (concept 12)

#exploration
#lookingforbalance
#embodiedlearning



Culture and care can heal trauma before it causes harm.

Izzeldin Abuelaish

THEATRE

Viewpoints 1

Moving as a flock 1

Viewpoints, a concept from the fields of theatre and dance, is a powerful, non-verbal method to help (young) people in a group work with their emotions and behaviour patterns through the medium of the body. This method focuses on physical improvisation in the here and now. A form of mindful movement, it provides a safe structure to work on a group feeling without language. There are nine Viewpoints (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viewpoints).

This first exercise focuses on topography (the patterns you follow), pace, and relationships (the distance between people).
The teacher should follow the steps below:

Step 1: Pace.

Ask the group to spread out across the entire space. Everyone stands still. Start with clear instructions. Walk around the room. Spread yourselves evenly across the space. Fill the empty spaces (white areas). Stop (freeze) the group, then restart and repeat a number of times. Introduce the Viewpoint Pace. Call out numbers from 1 to 5 (1 = slow motion, 3 = walking pace, 5 = running). The group all changes pace at the same time.

Step 2: Topography.

The group can only walk in straight lines and at 90-degree angles. Keep filling the white areas at all times.

Step 3: Group flow.

Allow the group to stop and start in its own time. When one person starts walking, the rest must immediately follow. When one person stops, the others must immediately freeze too. There should be no fixed leader; the group members respond to one another's actions.

Step 4:

If someone jumps or falls to the floor, the rest of the group should immediately copy (within a fraction of a second).

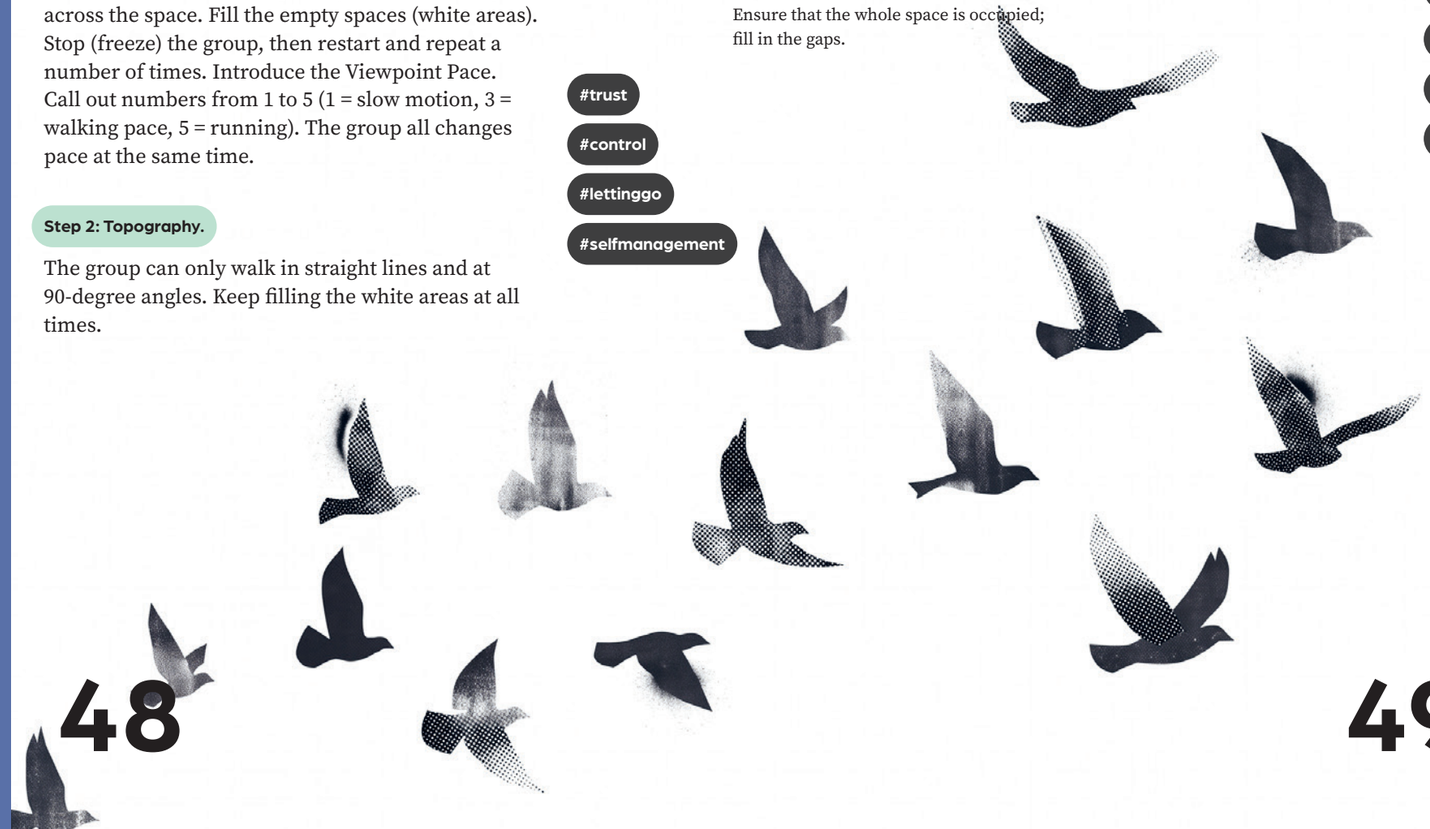
TC

Don't look down at the ground while giving instructions; keep your eyes open.

Don't think about when you're going to stop. Decide when the moment feels right for the group.

Ensure that the whole space is occupied; fill in the gaps.

#trust
#control
#lettinggo
#selfmanagement



THEATRE

Viewpoints 2

Moving as a flock 2

The group stands in a small triangle shape, all facing the same way. The person at the front is the leader. The leader starts moving very slowly (pace of 1 or 2) using their arms, legs or torso. The rest of the group follow the movements exactly, moving at the same speed as if they are all one (a flock of birds). If the leader turns to the left, a new person is at the front. This person immediately becomes the new leader and everyone fluidly follows the new 'front'.

EI

Perfect for young people who worry a lot or who have the urge to always be in control.

T

The leaders experience what it feels like to lead without any pressure (the group will always follow). The followers experience ultimate peace; all they have to do is move with the group, without thinking.

#trust
#control
#lettinggo
#selfmanagement



THEATRE

Viewpoints

Group heartbeat

The group stands in a tight circle, shoulder to shoulder with eyes closed.
Everyone focuses on their own breath. After a minute of standing like this, group members try to start synchronising their breathing, without talking, until the whole group is inhaling and exhaling at the same time.
This is followed by movement. On a breath in, the whole circle organically takes a small step forward (shrinking the circle). On the next breath out, the group steps back (widening the circle again).

WK

This exercise immediately reduces cortisol levels and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which allows the body to enter a calm state. The participants feel held by the group.

WK

This exercise helps to reduce anxiety and create a deep feeling of safety in the group.

OA

Add soft music, or ask a participant who can play an instrument to accompany the movement.

#trust
#control
#lettinggo
#selfmanagement



THEATRE

Viewpoints

The magnet

This exercise helps young people to feel that their presence matters and that others are seeking them out.
Everyone walks randomly around the room (any route, no fixed pattern). Ask the group to each choose one person in the space (without disclosing who they've chosen). This person is now their **magnet**. The task is to keep moving but stay as close as possible to the magnet at all times. After two minutes, change the rule: the person they chose now has **repulsive force**. They have to stay as far as possible away from the chosen person. During the check-out, the group discovers that everyone was connected throughout the exercise. You're never out there alone; every step you take has an impact on everyone else.

I

How can we take this feeling of 'not being alone' into the coming week?

S

While the participants are walking around, remind them to feel the warmth of the room, listen to the footsteps of others and to notice the colours that those around them are wearing.
This will help bring them into the moment and out of their internal dialogue.

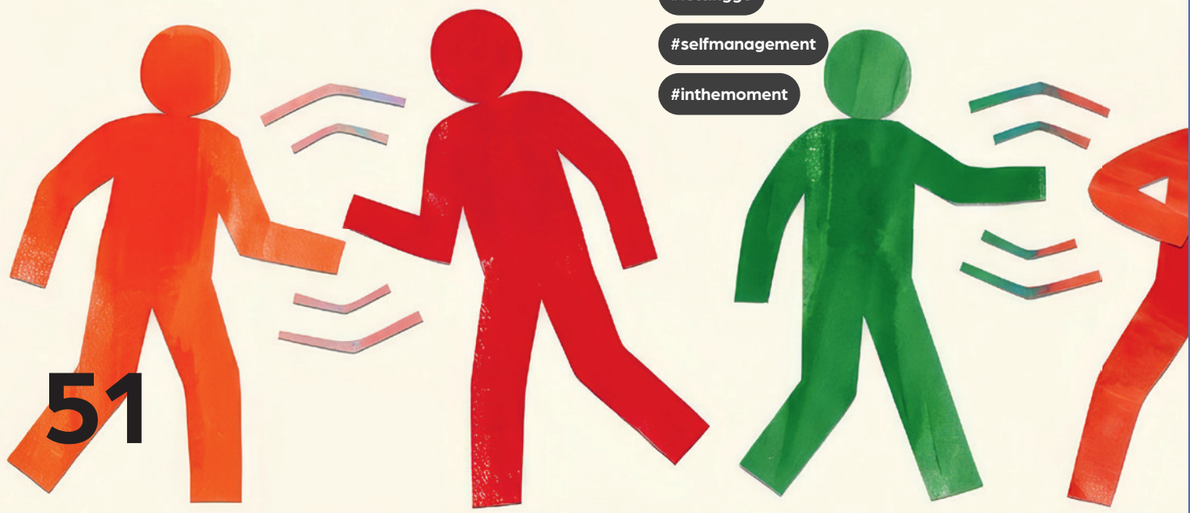
TC

How did it feel when you realised that your movement had an impact on the whole room? How did it affect you when you noticed that people were walking towards you?

TC

It's fine to sit something out. If someone doesn't want to contribute during the check-out, that's OK.
Before the exercise, say: "If you want to skip this, just say 'pass'. Your presence is enough."

#trust
#connection
#lettinggo
#selfmanagement
#inthemoment



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Young teach old

Act, don't tell

Organise a festival for adults with workshops delivered by the young people. First, make a list of the talents everyone has or what the young people think is absolutely essential for the festival. What do adults need to learn (or unlearn)?

For example, you could explore workshops in skateboarding, printing techniques or crafting for grown-ups. Create a safe space and teach them popping, locking and crumping. Set up a parent moshpit. What do they need to learn and try out?

E

Independently organising the event and inviting attendees: who will do what?

T T

Working together and building empathy.

Involve the community and local area in your centre's activities.

TC

Don't give the young people too much responsibility; keep the flow high.

OA

Make a wall display to announce the festival and produce short zines.

I

Are there any major sources of inspiration locally (such as a festival organiser) who could give you a lesson in hosting a festival?

#parentparticipation
#empowerment
#selfmanagement



MINDFUL

Draw a map of your breath

Give each participant a large sheet of paper (A3/A2) and let them choose something to draw with. Give them the following instructions:

- Take a deep breath in (through your nose) while holding the pen/pencil/brush/... above the paper.
- As you breathe out (through your mouth), draw a line downwards.
- When you breathe in again, lift the pen/pencil/brush...
  Breathe out and draw another line. Keep breathing like this in your own natural rhythm.
- Continue until the paper is full or until you feel you've drawn enough.

What does your breathing rhythm look like? How long and deep is it? Next, add sloping lines from left to right, without thinking about your breathing. Draw any other shapes that feel calming to you, such as clouds, circles, waves, treetops or streams. Repeat with chalks.

I

What story does this map tell? Add some words.

OA P

Hang the maps up and create a dance based on the lines.

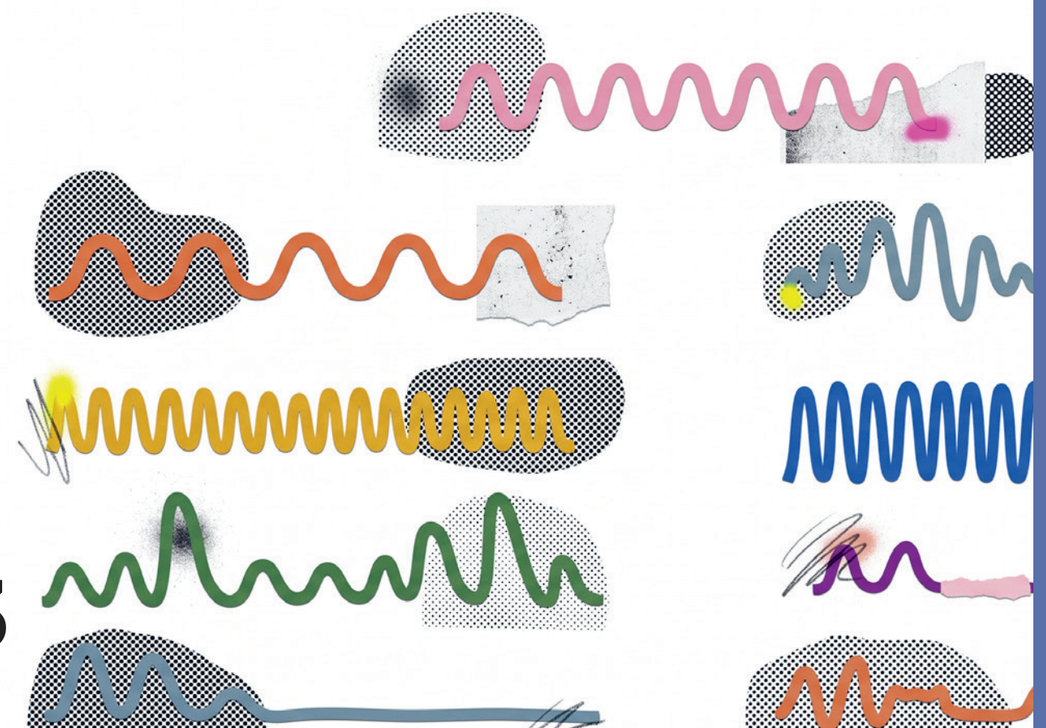
T

What are the similarities between the maps?

TC

If you think the young people need a little more support, offer this as a guided exercise. Write these instructions down and record yourself reading them out. Use the recording to do the exercise yourself first, so that you can get a sense of where you're giving too much direction or not being clear enough.

#mindful
#slowingdown
#inthemoment
#check-in



LITERATURE

Make your own Head Heart Handbook

A journal to explore a 'user manual' for yourself

Source some exercise books for the participants, ideally A4 size and without lines.
They can use this book to write down and draw their own strange, raw, self-important or sensitive thoughts. Give the group 15 minutes to work on their books at each meeting. There's no filter and no editing. The book is a safe space just for them. Ask the participants to use their handbook for reflection from time to time.

I

Who inspires you? Make a list of names, films, books, artists and scientists. Use quotes and describe magic moments.

OA

Build on your ideas in the form of an infographic, mindmap, drawing or comic strip.

Create a zine

Make a manifesto for yourself

C

Create your own personal quote and put it on a poster

SB

Follow your bliss: What are your desires and talents? What skills would you like to learn?

Do you dare to write everything down? Do you feel anything? Is there something that even you aren't allowed to know?

I

If you were given €20,000, what would you want to make/do/develop? Draw out your plan as a comic strip/storyboard with a start, middle and end.

E

Make a user manual for yourself, your fears and your anger.

Give yourself space for expression without judgement; all feelings are welcome and allowed.

#exploration

#personalsafespace

#inspirationbook





DANCE/MULTIDISCIPLINARY

May I have this dance?

A dance about consent; an exercise in safe, brave and adventure mode

Safe

- Start with a focused greeting, such as a breathing exercise or a cup of tea.

Be present/check-in
- Tell a joke about two people walking into a bar.

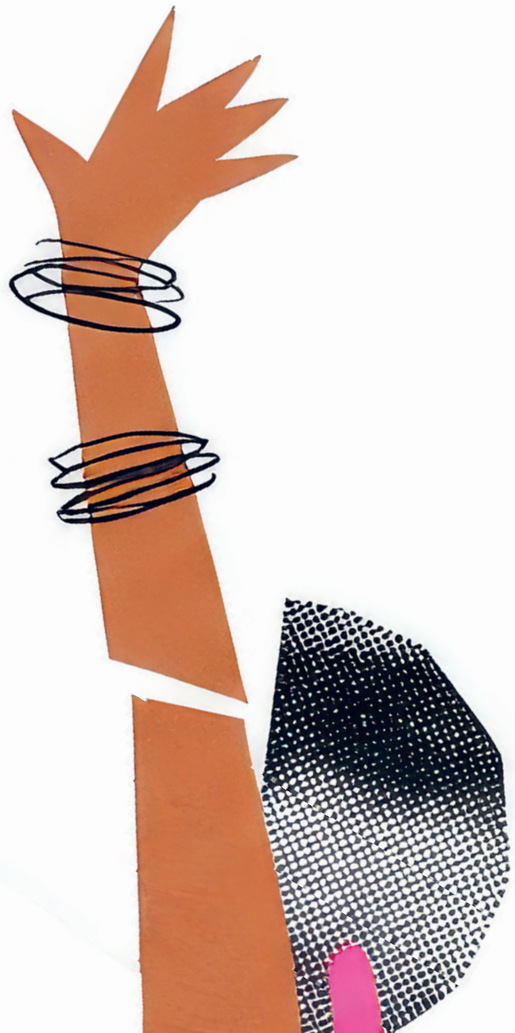
Into the groove
- Explain what we're going to do today.

Step inside
- Check-in without words. Put some nice music on.
- Walk around the room.
- Look at the floor and the ceiling.
- Wave to someone on the other side of the room. Keep walking and waving.
- Ask the group about different types of greetings, from a wink to a handshake.

Call
- Do you always make contact with a greeting?

Fun & play
- Speed up, slow down, freeze like a statue.
- Greet like an old man, a nice guy, etc.
- Write different types of greetings on cards and read them out at random.
- Start a dance with participants standing back to back, with the backs of their hands together.
- Change the type of music: fast, slow, classical. Surprise us.
- Play greeting tag; make up your own rules.
- Copy the expressions of emojis.





Brave

Explore
- Why do people greet one another?
- Think of ten new ways to greet someone that don't feel weird or impractical, and practise them.
- How does a greeting smell and sound? How does meeting someone feel?

Go deeper Is meeting and saying goodbye to others easy for some people? How do they do it?

Explore your space Write your own song lyrics/review about greeting others and about other aspects of communication that you don't like.

Befriend yourself What step that you've taken today are you most proud of? Draw your thoughts.

Differentiation

WK — Dancing has a positive effect on social-emotional development and learning capacity (Brankele Frank).

OA — Do the dance in a circle, without 'performing' it. Add language/music.

Instead of a dance, create a series of photos about greetings.

TC — Adjust the steps as appropriate to suit your group. This guide is just a suggestion.

You could also create a dance about inclusion.

#safeandbrave
#consent
#broadeningawareness

Adventure

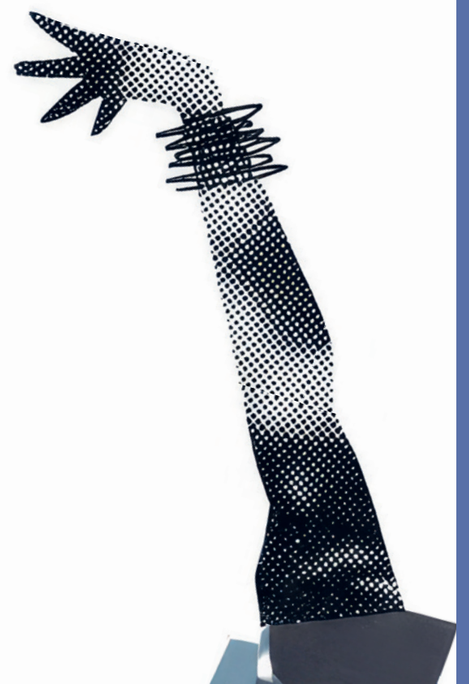
Discuss with others
- What is consent? Talk to another person in the group about what makes you happy when you meet another person. (See also the mirror neuron concept.)

Create
- How do you ask for consent without words? Create a scene, choreography or tableau vivant for a funny dance about greetings and consent.

Presentation
- Perform the dance. Make the space safe. Clearly explain what the participants can expect. Celebrate the tension and pride in the room.

Ownership
- Reflect: Did you learn anything else about greetings?

Me–We
- You're closer together.



LITERATURE

Make stress* your friend

Write a letter to your stress

Ask the young people how they view stress. Get them to write a loving letter to *Stress*, imagining that it's their best friend. Where did you encounter *Stress* today? If the group feels safe enough, read the letters out to one another.
What can we learn about stress together?

If you want to use the letters for a performance, you could also do the exercise below. Provide instructions and keep an eye on the time.

- Choose a topic (stress): Write about this topic for five minutes; don't let your pen stop moving.
- Read through what you've written and underline a word that strikes a chord with you. This word then becomes the title of the next text.
- Spend another five minutes writing around this new topic. Then choose a sentence that resonates with you. Write it out at the top, as the heading for your next text.
- Spend another five minutes writing around this new topic. Everyone now reads the whole piece. Which sentence or sentences resonate the most? Expand on them a little more. This is now your performance text.

I
OA

T

I

TC

Be a good friend and be nice to Stress.

Turn your writing into a play/musical/circus act.

Write an advertisement or rap about stress.

Play instrumental music and give the young people a chance to read out their texts in turn (popcorn style, so only if they want to). A shared spoken-word performance.

Turn Stress into the hero in a story (= a search for the inner wisdom of stress).

This exercise is about attitude and exploration of feelings. Write exactly as you would talk and don't worry about mistakes.

#journalling
#selfinsight
#freewriting

*You can also use this method with other feelings, such as anxiety, sadness, performance pressure or loneliness.

Inspired by Elizabeth Gilbert (2022) in Big Magic



LITERATURE

I have no words

Create a comic strip about how complex language is

First, make a long list of feelings, sensations, uncomfortable situations or sources of stress. Choose your own feeling, word or uncomfortable situation.
Working in groups of three, create a storyboard which explains how this feeling works.
Words are forbidden in this exercise. Explain the feeling as if you're explaining it to someone who can't read or write, or to someone who speaks another language.
Create your first draft, then share this with the group. What could you improve on or make funnier? Build on your storyboard in poster format.

I

I

OA

What would it be like if this feeling was a character?

Choose an artwork to use as inspiration (replicate the style).

Theatre; do this exercise with your body, starting with a tableau vivant.
Create four slides.

Or present your ideas as a pantomime.

Create a punky zine and hand it out to people on the street.

#illiterate
#communicatedifferently
#multilingualism



I discovered that I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way. Things I had no words for.

—

Georgia O'Keeffe

MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Where does loneliness live?

Draw a map of your area

How does loneliness smell, sound and feel? How does it look? Can you pinpoint where it lives? Create a colourful topographic map of the area around the location you're all currently in. Where in particular do you think that lots of people feel lonely?

Draw the streets, benches, shops and houses. Mark out the places where you think loneliness is less prevalent, too. Can you be lonely even if you know lots of people?

Next, create some postcards with a comforting sentiment or a thought to cheer the recipient up.

Or write a poem about loneliness that will make the reader smile and feel like you're there for them. Illustrate the poem with an appropriate image. You could take a photo or use a printing technique. Leave your postcards in the 'lonely locations' you identified for people to find.

SB
Hand out the postcards to random people in the lonely locations. Try to strike up a conversation with them.

Invite young people to join in with the activities going on at your centre.

P
Set up a market stall in a lonely location and display your map and postcards.

I
How are loneliness and poverty connected?

OA
Form a band and improvise some songs about friendship; play to the public on lonely street corners.



#exploration
#understandingfeelings
#mapping
#connection

MUSIC/LITERATURE

Sharing rhythm

Find one another in rhythm

Source (or make) some small musical instruments or rhythm sticks.
As a group, come up with some words and phrases that you could perform in time with a rhythm. Think about words like rain, wind, angry, sad or tree. Or read out a story or poem with rhythmic words.
Sit in a circle, take a card and create some musical rhythms together. Listen and take turns. Try to find a rhythm that fits the word you've chosen.

OA
Combining words and rhythm is what makes language and music.

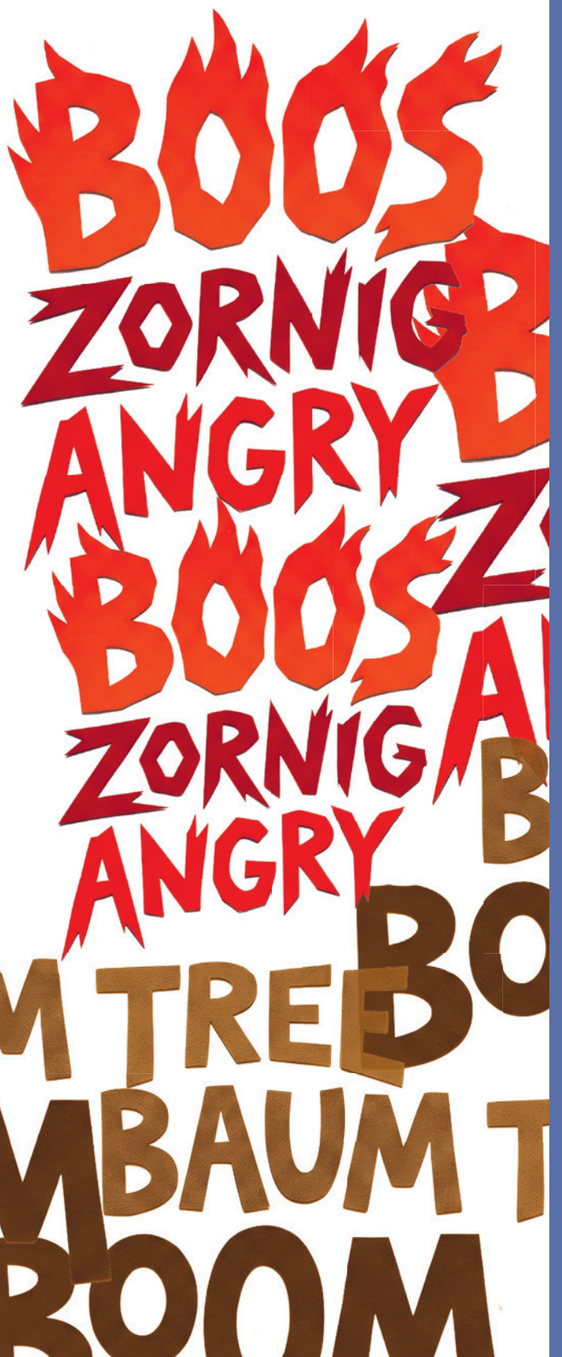
OA
Use the instructions from the Viewpoints exercises.

P
Add a dance. Choose who will be a drummer and who will be a dancer, and who will read out the story or words.

E
Can we use this technique to present an emotion as a group? Show the word and then play the accompanying rhythm? Get parents to take part by handing out rhythm sticks.

TC
Allow the group plenty of time and provide guidance as needed to help them find the rhythm together.

WK
There are 69 genes that are connected to rhythm. These genes are associated with breathing and walking. This is why music and dance are so important (Brankele Frank).



#workingtogether
#listeningexercise
#languagemusic

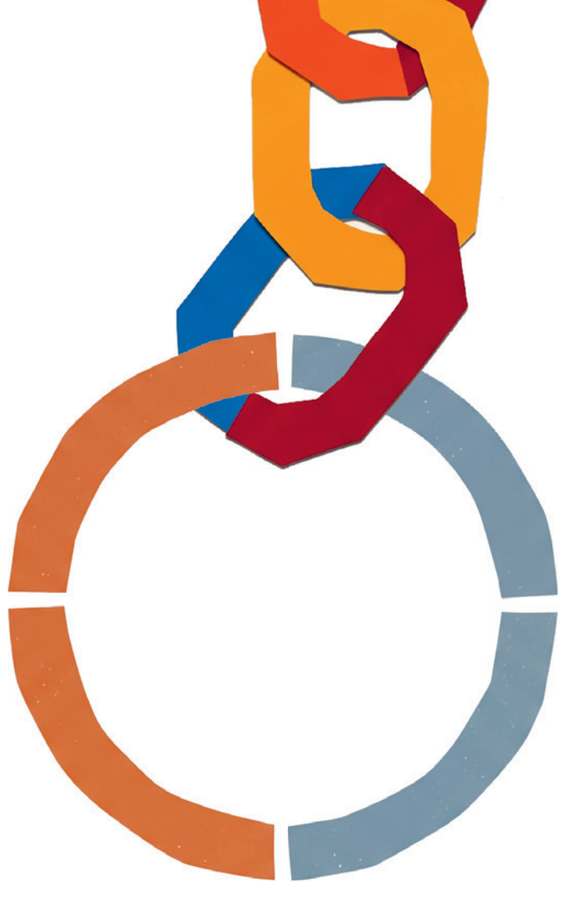
DANCE/MUSIC/THEATRE

The magic circle

Lose yourself

The circle is as old as time itself. In hip-hop, it's known as a cypher. What can we learn from this age-old shape? You can use the concept of the cypher in many different ways:

- Ask the group to form a large circle, so that each participant can clearly see everyone else. Support the group by clapping, cheering and bringing your positive energy. The whole group can perform together or you can choose a 'dance-off' style.
- Use movement: Start with a 'pass-the-movement' exercise. Let the young people choose if they want to step forward when the person before them has finished. Set a rule, such as 'floor movement only' or 'use only your hands'.
- Use words: Play an instrumental beat, agree on a topic (such as pressure or anxiety) and give one another space to rhyme or speak with no judgement.
- As a ritual: Work together to come up with a ritual involving clapping, movement and a group slogan that you all shout out. Start each meeting with this ritual.
- As a check-in: Ask a question and allow people to respond. Step in if you agree. Step out and wait for the next response.
- As a 'jump-in' game on a particular topic. Someone starts the game by standing in the middle of the circle and acting out a scene. If someone feels inspired by what they see, they can jump in and play along. There may only be a maximum of three people in the circle at any one time. If there are three people in the game, one steps aside to make room for another participant to join.
- Use singing: Sing songs that will connect and uplift the group.
- Use rhythm: Start with a rhythm. Everyone claps along; ask someone to direct and give instructions like hard, soft, slow etc. Make a rhythm wave or play two rhythms at the same time. Can you create variations of the rhythm together by listening? Slowly transition to a moshpit (= intimacy combined with testosterone).
- Chill: Circle with a cup of tea and a biscuit.



T

Ask the group members what kind of circle they want to be.

I

How do you use the cypher in your field?

SB

You can practise working in a circle. Add layers to the activity.

WK

Circles create connection, enabling you to see and sense one another.

EI

Can you also dance with soft shapes?

E

Allow the participants to form their own cypher with their own 'rules'.

TC

It's really important that you fully commit to taking part in this activity and that you show where you sense tension and pleasure.

EI

Hip-hop saved my life. DTRH2026

Zwangere Guy quote

#enlargesafespace #groupbuilding #support

#empathy #creatingrituals #everyonetakespart

LITERATURE

Write it off

Write a book about a specific feeling or topic

As a group, work together to write a book about a topic that is important to all of you.
Committing your innermost thoughts, feelings and emotions to paper is an act of ownership, pride and visibility. But just how simple is it?

Think carefully about the concept before you start. How in-depth do you want your book to be? Work together across the various disciplines: design, imagery, text, photography. Gather texts for your book over an extended period of time. Write poetry and prose, take photos and create comic strips. Appoint an editing team. Distribute your book.

WK

Siegnella Concincion wrote a children's book for and with Amsterdam children with obesity. The book included drawings and stories from the children themselves, and formed part of her doctoral research into the voice of children in the healthcare sector at the University of Amsterdam.

T

Come up with forty humorous book titles.

E

When you create a book, you draw on a vast pool of different talents. It can be very empowering to manage all this as a group – from publishing and finance to the design, title, distribution, structure and acknowledgements.

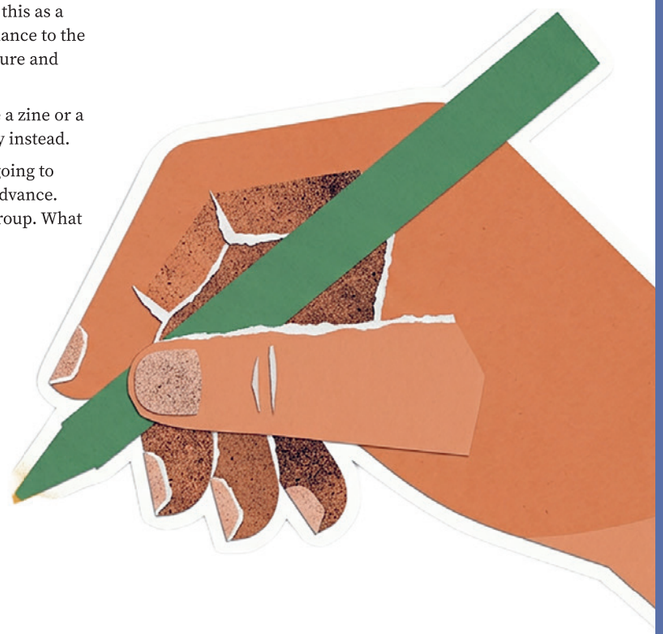
OA

If a book is too big a task, create a zine or a group newspaper or wall display instead.

TC

Decide whether or not you are going to correct the texts in any way in advance. Discuss this decision with the group. What do they want?

#ownership #pride #visibility #hearallvoices



THEATRE

I see you, you see me

Exercises with mirror neurons.

SB

SB

WK

Choose a nice piece of slow, relaxing music, like ‘Spiegel im Spiegel’ by Arvo Pärt.

- Stand opposite one another and pretend you’re mirror images.
- One person leads and the other copies. Start practising: Raise one arm. The other person copies. Change roles a few times and slowly expand the exploration.
- Add a theme, such as a morning routine, bedtime ritual or brushing your teeth. Emphasise the importance of being careful with this exercise. Give the group emotions to practise with.
- Too difficult? Start with jobs instead.

EI

OA

TC

What happens if you do this exercise in three dimensions: through the mirror, one foot forward, the other foot back? Can you move around the room together? Form a circle and move as a group. Are you really seeing one another?

Choose a person you don’t know well. Stand opposite one another. Look at one another and move slowly. By looking at you, I learn to understand you. Empathy is the

power of the future.

You can very gradually allow this exercise to transition into a pretend fight. Practise your posture, saying no, and strong body language.

Observing the movements of others activates the parts of the brain that are linked to our own systems of movement (mirror neurons).

Start as a character.

Start with an emotion.

Start with a piece of art (cards).

Would you understand your enemy better if you could see things from their point of view?

Create a play in which two characters with opposite traits learn to understand one another.

Young boys sometimes find mirror neuron exercises quite difficult. Demonstrate using a mirror.

Slow music will help the group focus and create a calm environment. If the group comments on the music, explain that this type of music is good for the brain.

Challenge them to move in a way that makes it impossible to see where the movement began.

#mindfulmovement

#reflection

#empathy



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

I can see what you haven’t said

Practising non–verbal communication

SB

SB

SB

A great deal of communication happens without words, via your posture, tone of voice and facial expression. That’s why it’s so important to practise non-verbal communication – not only because it enables you to present yourself more positively, but also because improving your posture can make you feel better, by improving your breathing, mood and self-esteem.

TC

Get the young people to work in pairs or groups of three to create short practice scenes about challenges they face in day-to-day life. Think about moments where confrontation, conflict or discussion are unavoidable, but where you already know beforehand that you won’t win.

OA

OA

For example:

- You want to go to a party that will finish really late: How can you get your parents to agree to let you stay to the end?
- Where are you going to hang out? Your group has chosen, but you don’t agree.
- Someone has told someone else your secret.
- Your teacher says you’ve used AI. Your writing style has changed compared to previous work, but you just did your best on this particular task.
- You’re negotiating to get more pocket money from your parents without taking on any extra household responsibilities.
- A discussion with your parents over your bad grades. You know that they’re going to say you spent too much of your time gaming.
- A conductor comes over to you and says your ticket isn’t valid or you forgot to check in at the station.

You can also work in groups of three: two actors and one director/observer.

This option also enables the group to practise changing their attitude.

Afterwards, you could also experiment with posture, saying no, and strong body language in a pretend fight.

Everyone has different non-verbal communication methods. If you’re looking for a particularly adventurous option, you could work in two groups to describe one another’s non-verbal communication. You recognise non-verbal communication styles in everyone but yourself.

Play around with high status versus low status.

Come into the room with behaviour that represents a certain emotion (angry, defensive).

Practise the power pose (stand up straight, arms at your side and breathe, for two minutes).

Practise non-verbal communication in dance.

Practise non-verbal communication in front of a mirror. Expand on the exercise.

#attitude

#insight

#strengthenidentity

#buildselfconfidence



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Follow your BLISS

Follow your heart

Refer to the explanation of Follow your bliss (concept 12) at the end of this handbook and introduce the concept to the group. Note down some starting points for each person's 'bliss'. When did you experience real flow as a child? What happened?

Individual
Hand out plenty of interesting materials for each participant to work with, such as collage paper, images and art books. The young people can then work individually on (one of) the following tasks:

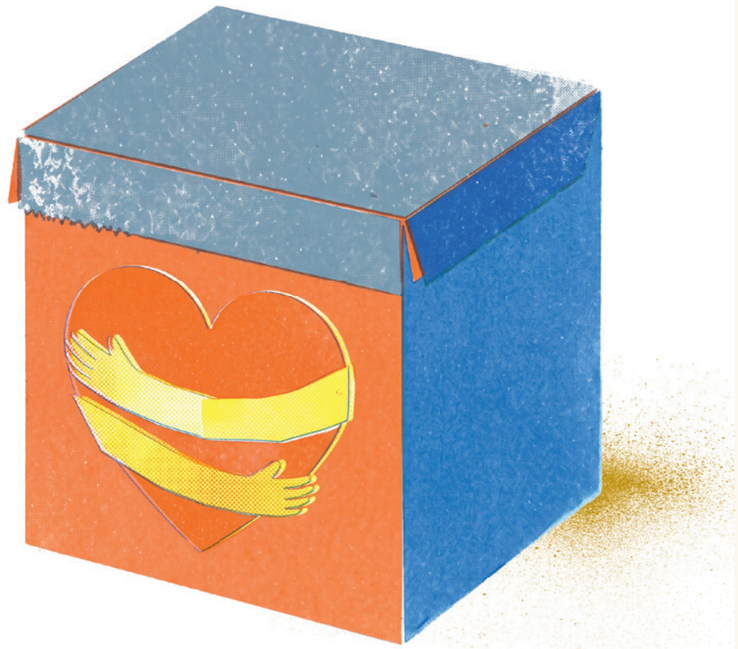
- Make a bliss box containing symbols (in drawing or craft form) that represent your four powers.
- Make a bliss cuddly toy that has the superpower you dream of having and that can make you feel stronger when you're down.
- Make a bliss compass with your own passion, talent, vulnerability and value. Make a poster of this compass for your room.

Peer to peer
What is the bliss of this group? What is our shared point on the horizon? What is the group's talent? What is it proud of? What is its strength? As a group, work on (one of) the following tasks:

- Make a bliss totem showing the four types of powers of the group (talent, vulnerability, goal and value).
- On four empty walls of the room, display the four types of power (talent, vulnerability, goal and value). Get the young people to stick up their written or drawn pieces in the relevant sections (anonymously). You've now created a bliss studio, which you can use as a space to relax and as a place for reflection at the end of the project.

TC
You can change your bliss or add another type of power at any time.
Choose your own focus for the compass. Whether you choose talent, desire or vulnerability, it's up to you what you want to focus on.

OA
Create a bliss dance.
Compose and improvise your bliss.



CHECK-IN

Collecting balls

Are we becoming one group? Or are we multiple smaller groups?

The group stands in the room.

- Ask a multiple-choice question and get the participants to form groups based on their answers.
- Start with an easy question to split the group initially, such as eye colour. Blue to the left, brown to the right, green in the middle. The participants will all look at one another.
- Contact is established. Do the same with other topics. Make the exercise exciting and lively, and keep things light when reflecting on the results.

Form groups based on:
eye colour, dog or cat, where you live, birthplace, family type, clothing, style, like to read or not? Favourite drink, veggie or meat-eater, education, inclusion, preferred art form, favourite music, why are you participating? Further learning, football, politics, neurodivergence, burn-out, stress.

Form a line or circle:
by height, first name alphabetically, age.

Find one another:
hobby, sport, favourite food, music genre, art form, music style.

TC
Tailor the questions to suit the topic of your project.

Never do this exercise on autopilot; keep sensing where the group can go, wants to go, and is going.

Invite the group to ask questions too.

Help people standing on their own by going to stand next to them.

Ask the pairs what the similarity is between the two of them.

Discuss the answer if something stands out. Why is this? Make the answers funny but meaningful.
Humour at the start creates depth later.

#gettingtoknowyou
#inclusion
#openness
#safeandbrave
#everyonebelongstoagroup



THEATRE

Luckily, we can laugh about it

MindCare stand-up

This exercise is a cabaret exercise to help us learn to laugh at the things that annoy us. It's called *The Worse Annoyance* exercise.

- Make a list of minor things that might annoy young people, such as adults, hassle at school or a phone with a dead battery.
- Take the stage on a virtual podium and spend one or two minutes talking about what you're annoyed about – exaggerate and be as angry as possible.
- Practise in pairs first. Make the portrayal of the emotion as extreme as possible and use your whole body.

WK

Cabaret is about exaggeration and making reality bigger. This exercise demonstrates how you can transform a simple moment in time into an insightful joke. If this exercise feels like too big a step, choose a less serious topic first: something like a stone in your shoe or a cold shower. Or make jokes about the topic first.

S

Ask the young people to explore the sensory experiences they associate with the things that annoy them.

EI

Which effective ingredients make the whole performance
funnier? Pace? Colour?

OA

Turn the cabaret performance into a collage drama. Move to music as a group. Stop the music occasionally for someone to do their 'two minutes'.

P

Put the good scenes together to form a longer performance. Rather not be on stage? Dance or mime between the sketches.

#fun

#revealwhatsbelowthesurface

#flow

#selfconfidence



MUSIC

The Hopeless Choir

Also known as The Failed Choir /The Faint of Heart

- Each participant chooses a song that can be sung by The Hopeless Choir; the song should be about hope. Choose your own favourite genre.
- Why is this song so hopeless or hopeful? Everyone can share their thoughts.
- The group decides on five or six songs to sing together.
- Create a performance that starts with songs that are completely hopeless and transitions to songs that are full of hope. Or work the other way round.
- Practise, have fun, share ideas. Come up with crazy, hopeless costumes.

EI

Experiment with ingredients that work with your song: speed, power, colour.

I

Imagine you're an alien choir from space; these are the only songs you know.

I

Come up with a different topic and a funny name for your choir,
such as The Choir of the Faint-Hearted.

EI

Sing as slow as a snail, as fast as a hare, as loud as a…

WK

Singing together creates connection. It causes us to release oxytocin, which is also known as the cuddle hormone. In turn, we start to associate social contact with pleasure. The hormone helps to feed a shared sense of strength, which makes us want to take part and helps us feel better and stronger.

P

If you choose to sing old-fashioned songs, put on a performance for people with dementia and Alzheimer's. Your songs will have a positive impact on them and the performance will make your group feel useful and grateful.

OA

Create a Musical of Hope, with the songs you chose as a thread running through the performance.

Create a 'Cirque Nouveau' performance with your choir.

Decorate the stage to look like a hopeless dystopia.

#community

#relativising

#singingisgoodforyou



VISUAL

A zine for everyone

SB OA

Use art to express your opinion

- Choose a topic, or get the group to choose a topic that inspires lots of different opinions.
- Look at opinions from lots of different perspectives.
- As a group, think about how you can reflect these opinions in art.
- Over an extended period of time, the group meets to explore various creative techniques – such as linocutting, collage, photography, freewriting and printing – to collect the content of the zine.
- With each technique, ask imaginative, inspiring questions about the topic (see also the emotional type case on page 85). Alternate deep questions with humorous ones.

E

E

#formingopinions
#hearallvoices
#expressyourself

Stick all of the pieces produced on the wall to create a wall display.

In a group, create an interesting talk show about a specific topic.

Nominate astute, clever presenters. Share out the roles. An editorial team invites interesting guests.

Present a painting, a poem or a song.

Ask other young people what they think.

Go as big as you want.

For inspiration, search online for '100 ideas by Keri Smith'.

If the zine turned out well, sell it in the local area. Use the money to buy something nice for the group or donate it to a good cause.

Ask a journalist to promote the topic.





Inspired by Vicky and Lioba

MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Complaining is for dummies

SB OA OA OA SB TC

Monkey and bear bingo

- Everyone has a reason to exclude themselves from participating in the group from time to time; sometimes these are just excuses (monkeys), and sometimes they're genuine reasons (bears). As a group, make a monkey and bear bingo game. Which monkeys and bears can you see in your way that would stop you participating in exercises? Are you in or are you out? Are you setting your own course, or are you allowing the situation to lead you? Can you transform your fears into courage?
- As a group, come up with one short sentence that summarises the group's objective. Write this sentence at the top of a large bingo card. Now everyone can shout out real dangers and excuses. Write them on the monkey and bear bingo card.

Display the bingo card in the room. If someone shouts 'bingo', take a moment to consider this.

Write your own monkey and bear song and make it your new welcome ritual when you all enter the room.

Make protest posters for the monkey and bear bingo card.

Make an apple and pear bingo card all about inclusivity.

Make a monkey and bear bingo card with your parents.

A monkey and bear bingo card sets out the rules, behaviours and values for your group.

#icebreaker
#motivation
#groupbuilding
#spacetobreathe



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Gnome skittles

Make your own obstacle game

Ask the group to make cards (A6) with random words written on them. They can choose any words they want. Make cards in lots of categories: funny, laid-back, objects, feelings, TikTok words, vegetables, art forms... they can choose anything. There should be one word or topic on each card.

Once this is complete, ask the participants to draw three cards. This is their obstacle. Working in a group or independently, the participants will then make a creative product based on what is on their cards. The product could be anything at all. At the end of the day, present the creative products to the group.

Practise this a few times and then ask the groups to make a larger final product. Following a thorough round of feedback, this final product will then be exhibited to the public.

M
OA

Just make it

Create a scene, a sketch, a poster, a dance, a game, a ritual, a poem, a theatre piece or a story.

TC

As the teacher, become part of the group and take part.

Don't use sensitive topics; know your group.

I

Use images or an old memory game to provide additional inspiration.

#letloose
#fireupimagination
#warmingup
#creativity

Inspired by Teun Gijzen



VISUAL

Make a storyboard of yourself

Use the board as a user manual for yourself

Ask each young person to make a storyboard of themselves on a large sheet of paper. Use this 'personal' manual as inspiration. Share the storyboards and compare them as a group.

#ownvalues
#metaphors
#empowerment
#ownership

SB

This exercise helps you find the way in your own life.

By making a storyboard, you connect images and feelings with words, and you become conscious of your own imagination.

Storyboards highlight change and connections.

This is a flow activity that is likely to make you lose track of time.

Making the storyboard makes you look at and listen to your environment.

You learn how to travel in your mind.

You're allowed to make mistakes and you're allowed to get lost.

STORYBOARD



LITERATURE/INCLUSION

Please could all the white men go to the back of the line?

Inclusive text

Ask the young people to head out onto the streets with their notebooks and pens. Their task is to write down everything they notice – about people, objects, and the colours and smells that they pick up on. The rule for writing something down is that you really have to notice it. Don't add any details about feelings or images yet. Just write down as much as possible.

This exercise in sensory experiences is intended to bring more depth to written texts.

Once this first part of the exercise is complete, each participant writes two pieces of poetic prose: one that is deliberately exclusive, and one that is deliberately inclusive. The texts could be about what they just witnessed out on the street, or they could be inspired by a night out or a trip to a shopping centre.

E

What does the group want to write about inclusively/exclusively? Arrange an excursion that fits their chosen topics.

Don't write about inclusivity, but about polarity instead.

OA

Write a sonnet/poem based on the text.

Turn it into a song.

Choose the best sentence and make that into the title of a monologue.

Choose the strangest sentence and make it into the title of your new artwork.

#inclusivity
#exclusion
#everyonebelongs

Inspired by Jos Nargy.



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Stimuli

On neurodivergence and stress

Overstimulated, oversensitive and often misunderstood. Not all brains work in the same way.
And yet, we all need to adapt to society – to function in school, to follow the rules.
But why can't society adapt to you?

In this exercise, we map out stimuli. Create a map of the day so far on a large sheet of paper, starting with breakfast and going up to the present moment. What has stimulated, overstimulated or activated you? Be specific and note down positive and negative stimuli. What would you choose to stimulate or wake up?

S

Look for stimuli in your environment. What sensations do they give you?

S

What makes you feel most at peace?

I

Do you need stimuli? Or could you do without them completely?

OA

Make a film/stop-motion in which you magnify a stimulus. Give the film a happy ending.

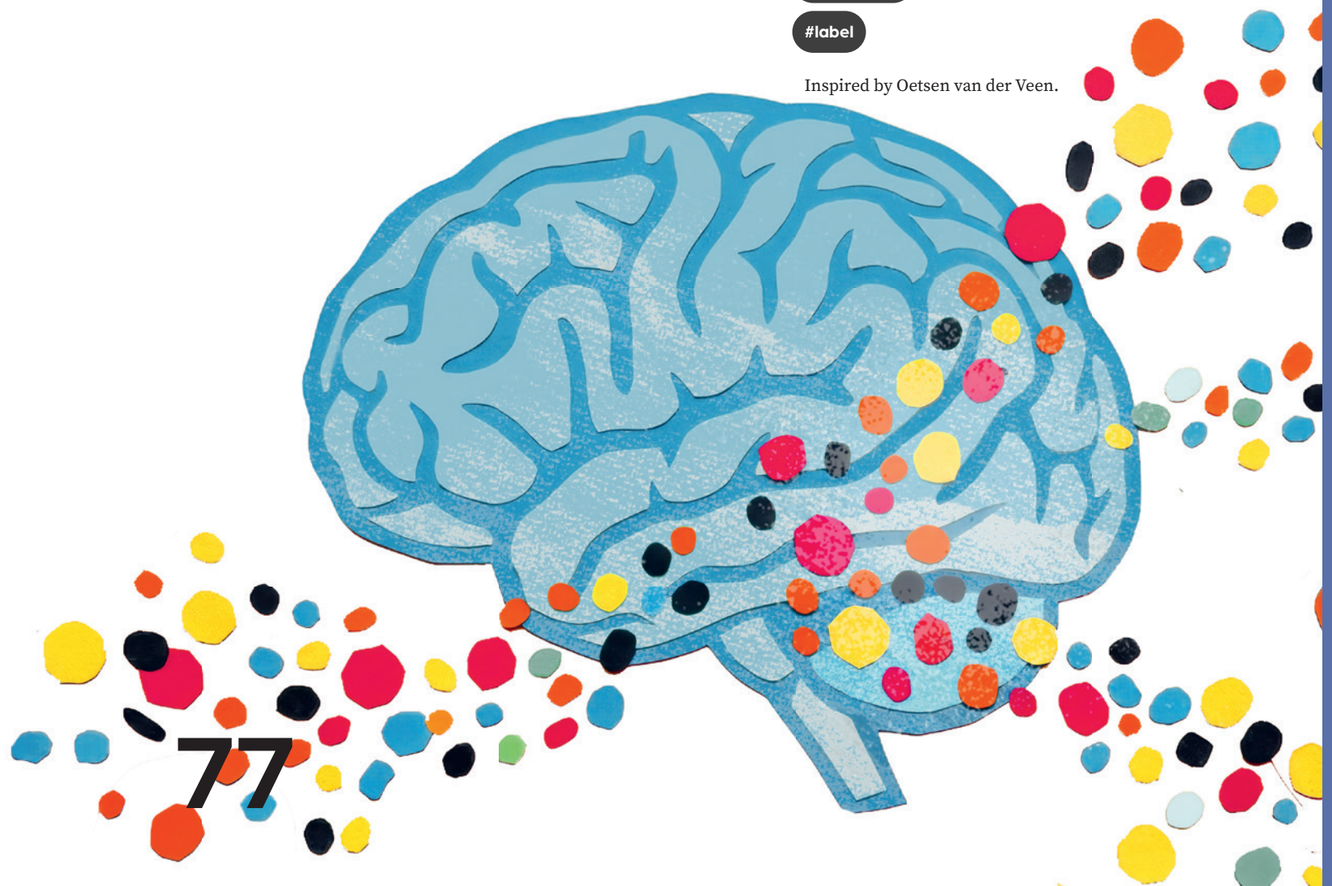
Ask a group of neurodivergent young people to create a presentation about neurodivergence.

Come up with a stand-up routine or cabaret performance about stimuli.

Create a photo showing everything that stimulates you. Zoom in and turn it into a work of art.

#neurodivergent
#exploration
#translation
#label

Inspired by Oetsen van der Veen.



MUSIC

What's the vibe?



swing your mood from stress to chill

TC

The emotional cypher

Translate a major shift in mood into a sick hip-hop playlist or a series of short, self-made beats. The move: Trigger an emotional shift (from pure stress and anxiety to relaxed, or from hyped up to full party mode). Together, create a playlist of 4 to 5 tracks that embody this shift. For each track, write down which musical elements (the tempo, kick drum, snare etc.) create the vibe.

The beat urban landscape

M

OA

Drop a sick soundscape on a specific landscape, comprised of your voice, body percussion and everyday items. Create an instrumental hip-hop track using sounds from your chosen landscape, such as a busy city or a rough sea.
Use your voice to beatbox, record sounds with your phone and use everyday objects as percussion instruments (clicking pens, chairs sliding across the floor).
Produce a simple graphical score that shows when each sound is played, so that you can perform a live hip-hop soundscape with others. Who raps when, when does the beat drop, and how is the track structured? Ask the rest of the group to guess the landscape.

E

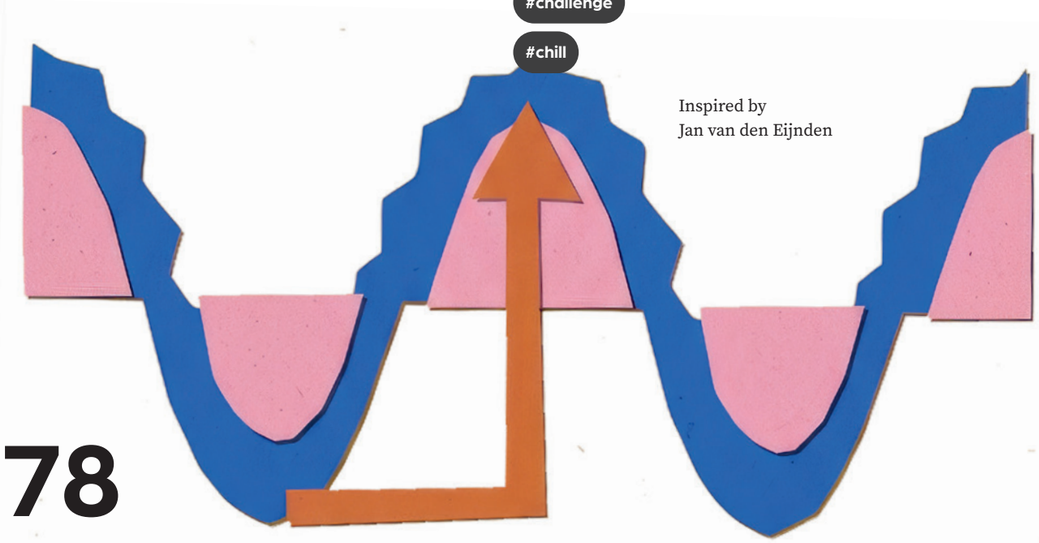
If you want to make an impression on your group, don't be too laid-back with your language; they'll be able to see right through it! Use these instructions as inspiration for the exercise and translate it into your own art form.
How could you use descriptions of tempo like 'adagio' and 'largo' to broaden the linguistic landscape?
– Don't be afraid to adapt this exercise to suit a younger age group. The point of the exercise is to connect songs to emotions. What emotion can you hear in this music, and can you reflect an emotion building up across four or five tracks? From irritated to ANGRY?

Can you sing a song with different emotions? An emotional choir.

Translate the emotional cypher/music into a cool drawing or a design for a graffiti or manga piece.
If you're not a music teacher, take a closer look at a graphical musical score! It's sure to be an enriching new experience.

Give the landscape an 'emotional title'

#artaslanguage
#workingtogether
#challenge
#chill



Inspired by
Jan van den Eijnden

CLOWN CIRCUS

Celebrate mistakes

Playing is survival

Playing with the fun of making mistakes and the opportunities they present.
In this exercise, we use the concept of clownery as a vehicle to present performance pressure in a new light.

M

P

Over the course of a week, note down all your mistakes, failures and flops. Make a long list and write them on cards or sticky notes (all members of the group should use the same cards/sticky notes). Place all the cards/notes together in a hat.

I

I

In pairs, draw three cards. Create a clown character using two of the flops noted down on the cards. Experiment with how this mistake affects your clown. How does it walk? What does its facial expression look like? Use the third card to create a scene. Act out the mistake.

EI

M

Buy a red clown nose or a funny hat for each participant. Dressing up makes this exercise easier.

Create a circus act about unwritten rules. Take photos.

Perform the acts in front of the public on the street; take music with you as an accompaniment!

Write a funny dialogue where the characters keep making mistakes.

Can you create hip-hop punk clowns? How do they look?

Use music to support the acts; experiment with tempo, symmetry, resistance or rhythm.

Make cards with the effective ingredients written on them; each pair draws a random card and uses it as inspiration to build on their act.

#developingawareness
#takingpart
#letyourvoicebeheard
#performancepressure

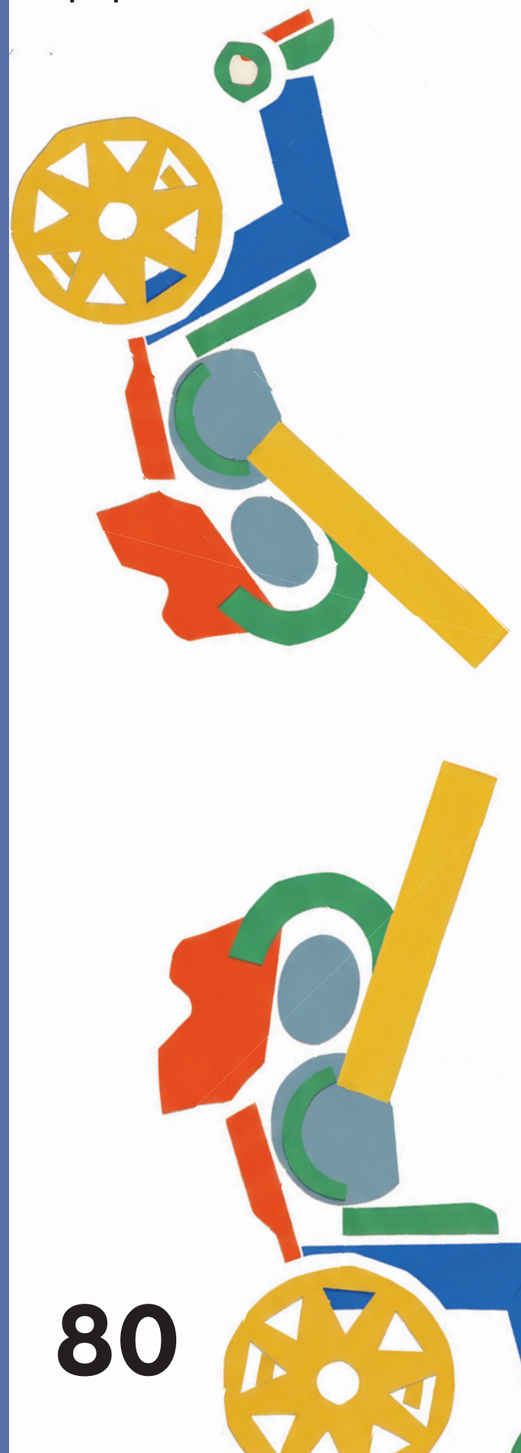
Inspired by Michael Dietrich/Clowns ohne Grenzen



DANCE

Everybody electric

Turn your limitations into your superpower!



In Doris Uhlich's show *Every Body Electric* (2018), people with physical disabilities dance in their own unique styles.

As a group, talk about dancing with your own limitations. What dance moves can you do with glasses on? How can you turn embarrassment into a strength? We always look at what's different and what stands out;
that's just how our brains are built. But what does 'normal' actually mean? And what is 'different'? It's difficult to get to grips with these concepts, particularly when you're young. Do you want to stand out, or blend in with the crowd? As a group, explore the vulnerability of society and the group itself. Are you allowed to show your weaknesses? Or do we all take the safer path of being the same?

OA
Create a scene, a sketch, a poster, a dance, a game, a ritual, a poem, an object theatre piece, or a story about this topic.

SB
M
Can we share our weaknesses?

Turn your weakness into a superpower and design a poster to show it off.

TC
Something to think about: What does visual culture say about this topic? What's normal in Western culture, and what's considered different?

E
A person with lived experience of this topic said: "When I could no longer move my body, I started dancing with my eyes. This was the first stage of art helping me get moving again."

#inclusion
#empathy
#whatisnormal

Inspired by Doris Uhlich

MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Taking a stand for mental health

Create a protest poster with your call for action

We can't go on like this: Care institutions are full to bursting, pressure on services is rising... And the government is doing nothing. It's a hopeless situation. So, are we going to stand by and do nothing? No! We want action!

Who or what would we want to protest for? How can we make our voices heard? Choose an area of activism to focus on. You could consider topics like loneliness, abuse of power, fears around climate change, inequality, poverty, polarisation, improving education, gender equality, and love for all.

As a group, come up with a solid stance. Think of a mascot for your protest. Add more detail. Form a campaign group and make a group protest poster with your call for action on it. For example: Neurodivergent Narwhals or Inclusive Impalas. Care for Capybaras. Dance against Power. Normalise gender dysphoria. Love ALWAYS wins.

OA
Write a protest song.

Curate a photography exhibition displaying confronting photos about anxiety.

Design some MindCare graffiti.

Create a satirical cabaret performance.

Film some activist TikTok videos about MindCare.

Come up with your own Banksy campaign.

Become a watercolour activist.

Create some activist fashion: perhaps a jacket that conveys exactly what anxiety is.

Organise a loud fancy-dress parade and sing as you parade around the local area.

Hold an anti-flashmob in the city centre.

Sit in a circle and enjoy a cup of tea in the town hall.

Write a poetic protest letter to the Minister of Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Send your zines, protest posters and calls for action to politicians.

Create a sombre circus parade.

Put your phones together to create one large image.

Embroider a protest slogan on your jeans.

Form a moshpit in the town square with a protest band.

Hold a lantern parade with campaign slogans on lantern poles.

Think of two thousand crazy ways to make your voice heard.

#getattention
#beseenandheard
#wevehadenough
#timeforaction





Emotions

Feelings under the microscope

I'm feeling something!!!
I'm uncertain; what's it called? Is it fear, anger, dissatisfaction? Is it an emotion or a feeling? Let's build our vocabulary around these words and concepts, because language means insight. (Attitude glasses, concept 7).

Language gives us an opportunity to change our attitude towards our feelings, as well as providing ownership and perspective on our actions. After all, if you don't have the words to describe something, does it even exist at all?

An **emotion:**

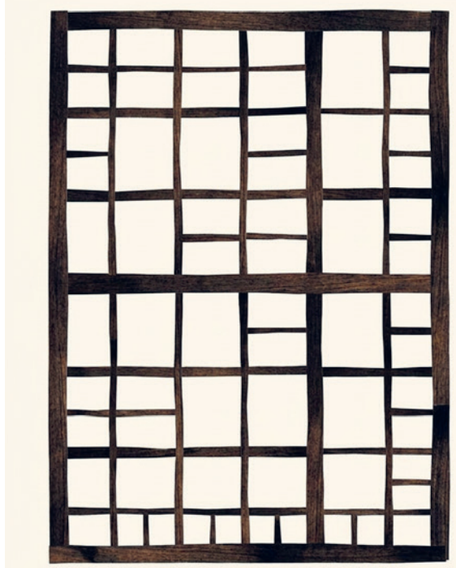
- Is a short, intense, unconscious physical reaction to what is happening around you.
- Is automatic; an immediate reflex following an event or thought.
- Is physical, and comes with physical sensations like a fast heart rate, sweating or muscular tension.
- Is short-lived. Emotions fade away rapidly when the direct trigger for the emotion ends.
- Is universal: everyone experiences basic emotions (like being scared, angry, happy and sad).

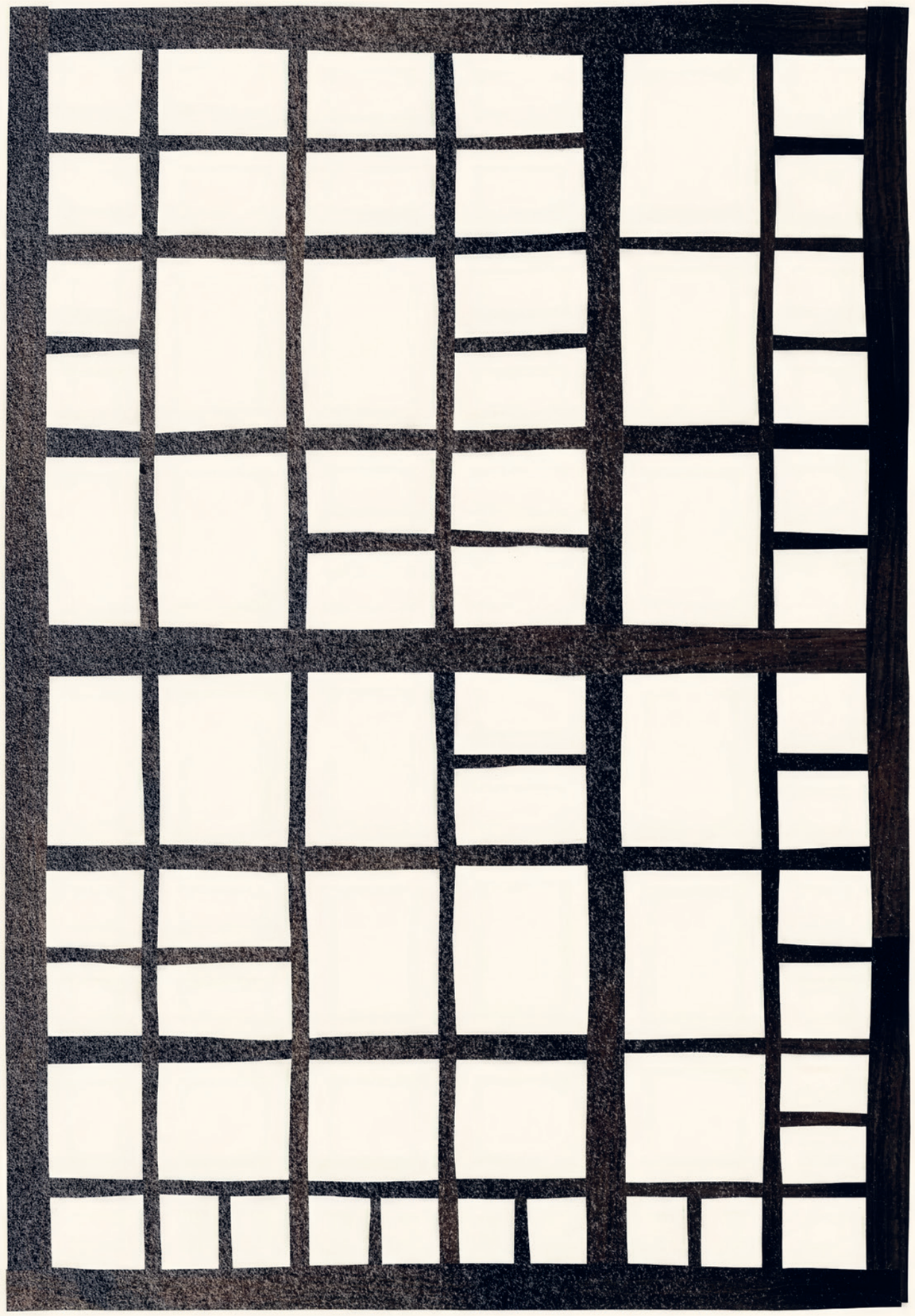
A **feeling:**

- Is how you experience something internally and what you think about it.
- Is conscious, and arises when your brain notices and understands your physical reaction.
- Is personal, because it's coloured by your own memories, thoughts and experiences.
- Is long-lasting. Feelings can last longer and develop in your mind.
- Is deeper and gives meaning to the raw emotion.

The emotional type case: Finding the words

Ask the group to explore their emotions by making small artworks for themselves. This is a kind of research exercise that allows you to look at your emotions and feelings from all sides. To do this, we use an artist's mindset (concept 4). By asking ourselves unusual questions from the perspective of an artist, we can measure the temperature of our feelings. We use our senses, imagination and creativity to create small but incredibly personal works of art and memorabilia that better describe our feelings and emotions. This gives form to our feelings and creates a foundation for further exploration, in a relaxed, light-hearted way.





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How?

- Come up with a number of questions about one or more feelings that you want to highlight. See below for a few examples of questions you could ask.
- Fill the table with a range of art and craft materials.
- Share the questions with the young people and let them respond with their own small, personal creations.
- Place their work in their own type case, in a small box or in a journal.

Anger	
S	What colour is anger? How does anger smell?
I	Describe or draw a moment that you were angry: what was good about it?
I	How would anger look if it was a type of weather?
M	Make an angry 3D monster.
Fear	
S	Draw something you're scared of and colour it in a strange colour.
I	If your fear was a superhero, what would it be called?
M	Draw a moment in which you were stronger than your fear.
S	What colour is fear? Mix them.
Shame	
S	What would shame be like as a texture? How would it feel?
M	Write a short ode to your shame.
I	If you wrote a song about shame, what would be the title?
I	Which prize would your shame win if it was in a competition?
I	Take the voice in your head telling you that you aren't good enough and change its tone or accent, or give it the voice of the Cookie Monster.
Loneliness	
I	If your loneliness was a book, what would the title be?
S	Which spice or herb smells most like loneliness?
I	Write a joke about loneliness and loneliness on the subway/train.
M	Make a cosy safe haven for your loneliness.
I	Which animal represents your loneliness? Draw it, or make it from clay.
I	Which substance is there between you and others in a room full of people?
TC	The key to this exercise is to think of lots of questions, so that there's plenty of choice. Different people will focus on different questions. Ideally, think of ten to twelve questions for each emotion.
TC	Don't reflect on the questions as a group. Give everyone space to work on the exercise independently. No-one needs to know how another person's shame/loneliness etc. looks. If the group is a safe space and you've practised reflection, you could explore this topic as a group, but always seek permission first.
C	Read the 'Artist's mindset' concept to think of questions for all human superpowers. Be specific, funny and imaginative.
OA	Fear as an art project. Choose an art form and use it as the basis for exploration and adding depth. Photograph your fear (@blackboxangst).
E	Get the young people to come up with their own questions. Use the question machine.
WK	Ask about the sensory experience in relation to one part of the body rather than the whole body. This makes it easier to make connections.

#exploration #attitude #imagination

concept 4

The artist's mindset

Balancing exploration and adventure

What makes an artist an artist?

Artists create because their ideas, thoughts or perspective on the world need to find expression. The audience can be external, or it can be the artist themselves. Artists have an intrinsic desire to create, and they do so based on their own beliefs and needs. Your story wants to be told; you have to create. As an artist, you question the world around you with an artist's mindset.

Start the exploration process with a thought-provoking question.

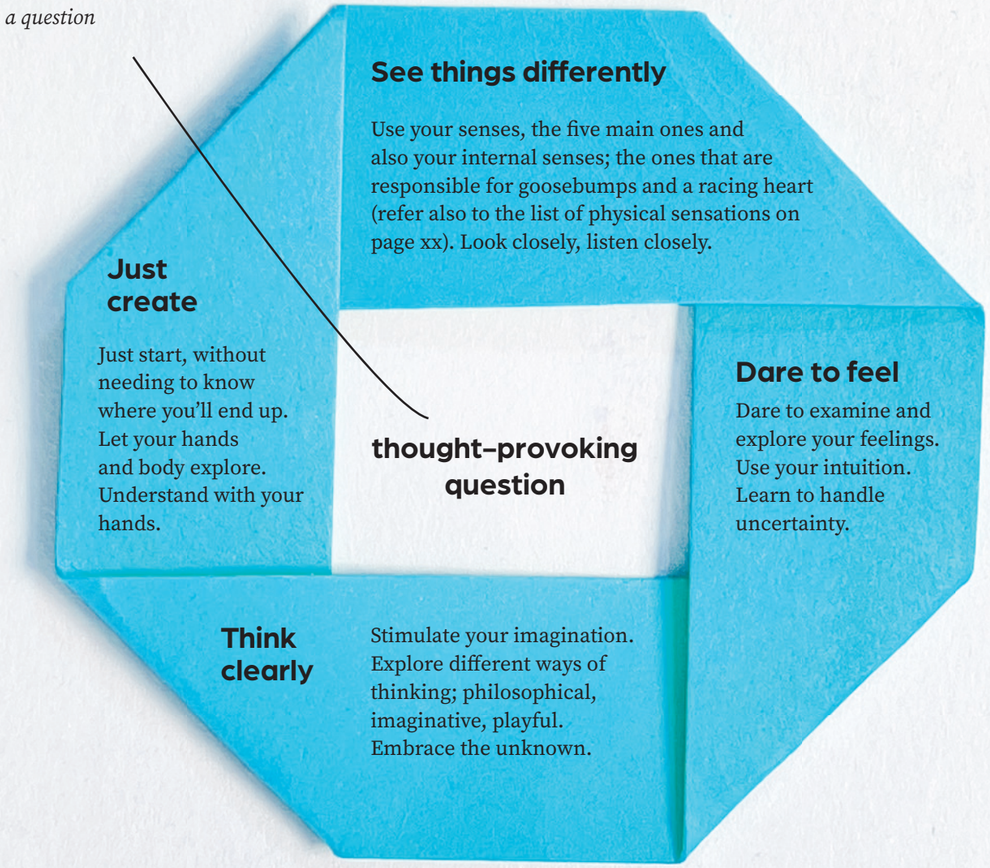
Choose a concept, experience, meeting, a motif, story, topic or purpose for the exploratory exercise. Formulate an initial question and use this as the basis for specific questions for further **exploration.** In this exercise, you'll use various aspects of the artist's mindset to explore through experience, feelings, imagination and making.

- You can do this in a journal, in four workshops, or in a group format.
- The exercise can be done individually or together.
- The tools an artist uses to explore a topic are our superpowers.
- Allow plenty of time and space for this exercise and ask the participants to be specific.
- At the end of the process, share the results to foster empathy in the group.
- Making is exploring the form in which your story wants to be shared with the world.

Listening, understanding your feelings, and imagining where you want to go. In other words: if you can awaken the artist inside yourself, you can get a grip on uncertainty. That's something that we as humans are not always good at. We need an environment of peace and calm, where we can establish trust, a foundation of feeling on which our thoughts can rest.

Composer Merlijn Twaalfhoven

Start the exploratory exercise with a question



The only questions that really matter are the questions that you ask yourself.

Writer Ursula Le Guin



Composer and social reformer Merlijn Twaalfhoven (1976) described the artist's mindset in his book *It's Up to Us. Why We Need the Artist Within to Save the World.* The artist's mindset is a research tool that allows us to explore the world with greater clarity.

The question machine

The artist's mindset question tool

How do you formulate a thought-provoking, challenging question?

All artistic exploration and research needs a good question to really make it shine:

- Question about a sensory experience.
- Question about a (secret) emotional experience.
- Make the question imaginative or philosophical.
- Does the question present an interesting challenge? Will it change anyone's mind?
- Request to create something; keep it somewhat vague so that the hands can do the thinking.
- Does the question invite storytelling or reflection?
- Does the question lead into a second or third thought?
- Can the question be answered with 'yes' or 'no'? If so, rethink it.
- Does the question allow scope for humour and personal interpretation?
- Is the question formulated in a way that does not directly refer to trauma or a source of pain?
- Is the question a bit strange? Mysterious and vague?
- Does the question contain an opposite or a contrast?

Use the question machine to come up with good questions. A good question presents an obstacle or a hurdle; it's a challenge for your thinking and your imagination. A good question does half the work.

The obstacle theory

An obstacle provides a framework for your thoughts. If you come across an obstacle on your path, you have to find a different route. Your thoughts can't keep going in a straight line. Including an obstacle in an exercise forces you to rethink. Your creative brain is activated by the challenge and starts thinking about a solution. Frameworks are a very safe way to get creative.

It's magical to see how much an obstacle can help. Initially, the reaction might be panic; help, I don't know what to do! But then the brain begins to puzzle it out and search for answers. A good obstacle is a creative thinking exercise in itself. Find an obstacle that gives direction and also introduces a source of confusion. Leave it to chance by writing obstacles down on cards and getting participants to pick one (or multiple) from the pile.

M

Draw a frog. You're not allowed to use the colour green.

I

Write a funny story using as many words as possible that start with the letter B.

M

Take a photo of yourself that you're not actually in.

T

Build a tower made of paper without using glue.

I

Use an image, photo or painting as an obstacle.

C

Introduce yourself as a colour.

TC

Which questions/obstacles could you use to encourage young people to apply the artist's mindset?

How can you invite young people to discover their story, message or purpose? Do you have the courage to push them a little when it's needed?



concept 5

Flow

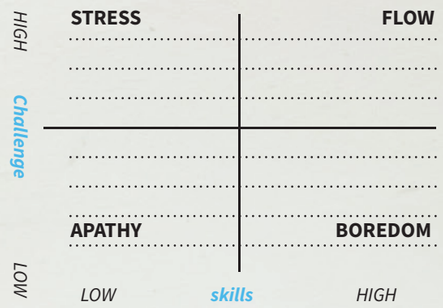
Balance between challenge & fun, awe & wonder

Teachers working in higher education are increasingly complaining about the apathetic attitudes of their students. Apathy can be caused by both physical and psychological factors, such as feelings of hopelessness, group pressure or pressure to perform, raging hormones and the developing brain. On the surface, these factors can look like a complete lack of emotion, motivation and enthusiasm – or indifference. And all of this flies in the face of what you, as an art teacher, want to embody. How can you use your 'difference' – and emotion, motivation and enthusiasm – to inspire young people? The answer lies in the concept of flow.

Flow can manifest in lots of areas. Art activities that don't require a huge amount of skill rank highly as a flow experience, alongside things like building with Lego, colouring, crochet, play, drawing, dancing and recycling waste into art.

Flow boosters:

A clear goal:	You know what you're going to do. There's nothing vague here.
Quick wins:	You can see that something is working straight away, which gives you a quick hit of satisfaction.
The sweet spot:	It's not too boring (boredom) and not too difficult (stress), but strikes just the right balance between the two.
Time and space:	Make sure that you don't do too much. Take your time and allow space.
Imaginative:	Let your mind wander into a daydream or fantasy (just like when you're in the shower).
Curious questions:	Storytelling, thought-provoking and inviting questions with humorous obstacles.



Daisy Fancourt on flow
Working towards flow: This acts as a reset button for an overstimulated nervous system, which reduces the risk of burnout at a young age.

Psychologist **Mihály Csíkszentmihályi** conducted a large study on the concept of flow ('Flow: The psychology of optimal experience', 1990) and discovered that we're at our happiest when we're completely in the zone: when time flies by without noticing, when you're super-focused and completely absorbed in what you're doing. This is also when we are most receptive to learning. Csíkszentmihályi called this state 'flow'. And what's the secret to achieving flow? It relies on you, as the art teacher, managing to strike just the right balance between what the group needs and making the task enjoyable – and that's not always easy to do. Try to identify a challenge that fits the needs of the group.

IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- How do you get into a state of flow?
- What kind of conditions help you find your flow?
- Can you get into a state of flow more often in your day-to-day life?
- What makes a difference for you? And what doesn't matter?
- Is your flow the same as someone else's?
- How can I add a layer of imagination?
- What manageable challenge can I set for the young people?



concept 6

The hero's journey

Finding the way by embrac–ing adventure

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives
are princesses who are only waiting
to see us act, just once,
with beauty and courage.

Perhaps everything that frightens us is,
in its deepest essence,
something helpless that wants our love.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Learning through stories

Stories give us direction, so ask yourself what kind of story your group needs at this moment in time. Which story would build connection, so that everyone feels a sense of belonging? A story is the shortest route to connection between yourself and another person. Assigning meaning to events, feeling, and the stories we tell ourselves and one another are crucial to human life – and yet these things are often forgotten.

Our brains love learning through stories. Stories have always been a way of imparting lessons; telling one another stories around a campfire, or learning about the world and one another on our journey. All of this can be imparted via the medium of stories (and music).

Professor of Literature Joseph Campbell developed a model known as 'The Hero's Journey', in which a hero embarks on an adventure, overcomes obstacles and returns stronger and wiser than before. The hero (or heroine) is the main character, and the hero's journey is a metaphor for life and learning 'en route'. Do your young people feel like heroes, or are they still anti-heroes?

When you use the word 'hero', replace it with 'heroine' frequently; the feminine, non-binary perspective deserves more stories.

For young people (and older people too!), stories are an imaginative way to learn about emotions, resilience, empowerment and problem-solving. Stories allow you to explore and strengthen your own identity and boost your self-confidence. They are uniquely indirect; a story can be about you, but also not, which means that they can be a safe way to learn more about yourself.

The three phases of the hero's journey

The departure	1	The hero is at home, but wants to do something new/different/craves change, or receives a challenge, task or call for help.
The challenge	2	The hero sets off, makes new friends (allies), meets a teacher figure (mentor) and overcomes terrifying monsters or accomplishes challenging tasks. The terrifying monsters can also be personal demons.
The return	3	The hero overcomes their main fear, gains insight into themselves, gets treasure or a reward and returns home wiser and stronger than when they left.



IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Which story, story questions and challenges could you add to your tasks?
- Draw or write your own hero's journey.
- Which story is a recurring theme for you?
- Which story does your group need?
- How could you use the hero's journey to reflect on processes?
- Could you use the story and plots in a gentle way?

Reflection questions

- What call to action did you receive, and why did you take part?
- A little bit of a fight is part of the process (brave), what do you want to practise?
- What did you need to take on the challenge?
- Did you want to take on the challenge?
- Who or what helped you get over that initial hurdle?
- What is the dragon you had to slay?
- When did you need more time?
- Who supported you?
- What is your challenge?
- Why I... or what now...?

Relating cognitive behavioural theory to the hero's journey

Cognitive behavioural science uses a model known in Dutch as the 5G model.
In this five-point model, which is an extension of the cognitive triangle, an event leads to a thought, which leads to a feeling, which leads to a behaviour, which leads to a consequence.
Filling in the 5G model helps you reflect on an event and enables you to consider what would be a better approach for next time. It creates awareness and helps to interrupt any negative spiralling thoughts.

You can also relate the 5G model to the hero's journey:

Event (the call to action)

This is the start of the adventure. What's happening in the hero's world? What does the hero want? Which crisis, trigger or challenge is forcing the hero out of their comfort zone?

Thoughts (the doubt/the mentor)

How does the hero interpret the situation? What does the hero think?
Are there any entrenched beliefs ("I'm not ready for this")? Can the mentor share any words that teach the hero to look at the situation differently?

Feelings (the test/the fear)

The emotional impact of the journey. The hero experiences fear, courage, doubt or anger on the journey into the new world (pah, creativity is stupid anyway) and fighting the dragon.

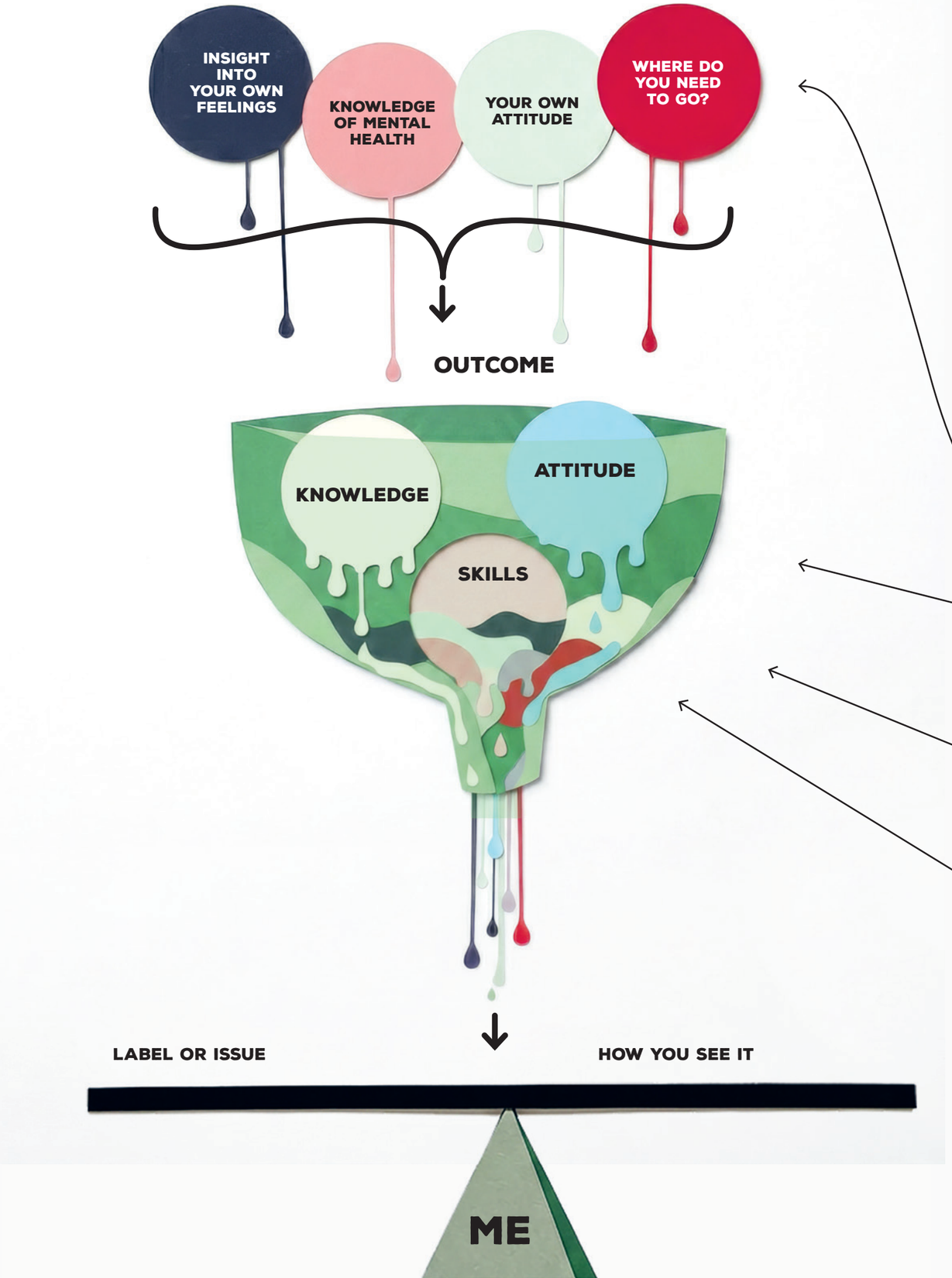
Behaviour (the climax)

What specific action does the hero take? This is the heroic deed, the careful change of behaviour, the fight with the (personal) dragon, surviving the crisis and getting their hands on the treasure.

Consequence (the return with the elixir)

The result of the behaviour. How has the world changed? And more importantly: How has the hero changed and what new wisdom are they bringing home?





concept 7

Attitude glasses – From feeling to attitude

In the creative MindCare process, we use art as a soft opening to build self-awareness. It's a gentle way to practise taking a closer look at yourself, and then at your behaviour and attitude. You might not be able to change much about the way you feel, but you can change how you act. Insight helps you do this. The process of growing up and becoming an adult is never a straight path: It's a rocky journey that involves trying things out, making mistakes and starting again from scratch. Alongside self-insight and tools to guide you, knowledge of mental health and where you can get help are invaluable in this phase of life.

Four mental health skills
Insight into your own feelings.
Knowledge of mental health.
Your own behaviour or attitude.
Knowing where to go for help (referral).

INSIGHT
What am I feeling?
Is it something different?
Is it getting worse?
Is it a feeling or is it my age?

KNOWLEDGE
What mental health symptoms am I experiencing?
What action can I take for myself?
What labels* do I have?
What labels have I given myself?

*stigma

Which attitude glasses are you wearing?
How you view your own stress determines what it looks like.

ATTITUDE
What is my attitude towards my symptoms?
Can I change my attitude?

ACTION
Where can I go for help?
Can I refer you on to someone else?

Insight+knowledge+attitude = action

Inspired by the work of
Janne Tullius, researcher.

IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Are you equipping yourself with knowledge about mental health? Do you know the signs?
- Do you know when you need to refer on to someone else, and who that person is?
- Who can you go to with questions about the mental health of your participants?
- What is your attitude towards mental health?
- What attitude exercise could you develop?

concept 8

Awareness – The balance between looking and seeing

Life is lived forwards and understood backwards

Søren Kierkegaard

What is awareness?
Awareness is experiencing that you're experiencing something. It's that magical feeling that you're perceiving the world and understanding its impact on you; of knowing that you know something. Your consciousness is where your mental health lives, where you make choices, and how you experience beauty. Some people refer to it as your soul or your spirit. But how it works is still a complete mystery; a 'grey area', as we called it in our very first concept. Awareness is a continuously evolving stream of thoughts, emotions, sensory experiences and your understanding of yourself.
It's almost like there are two worlds interacting: the outside world (people, where you are and the things around you) in dialogue with your inner world (your own stream of thoughts and feelings). If your inner world loses its balance – as a result of a major event, pressure or mental health problems – then the way you see and experience the world around you will change, too.

You only see it when you see it. And once you've seen it, you can't unsee it.

Art and becoming more you
Art brings you closer to your inner world.*
You can study it more consciously with greater distance. Artists transform their own consciousness into a tangible object. They explore everything about being human. By experiencing and questioning art, you indirectly and automatically get an insight into yourself.

*see also Art-Based Learning

Mindful exploration

- Land and ground: breathe, make yourself comfortable.
- Observe without judgement: move towards the experience.
- Active and slow: give options.
- Keep it sensory: what do you see, feel, smell, taste and hear, and how are you experiencing it through the lens of yourself?
- Train your attention: what do I notice and where do I feel resistance?
- Move into the experience. Be kind to yourself. The nervous system ebbs and flows.
- Come back: land and ground.



Art as a mirror for your brain. The more intense and complex the exchange of brain action is, the fuller and richer our experience. A subjective experience of being.
Daisy Fancourt





Nine mindful attitudes to awaken your curiosity about yourself and the world

No judgement:	Don't attach any labels (good or bad) to your thoughts or feelings. What do you notice?
Patience:	Don't rush; accept the time it takes to move into the experience.
A fresh look:	Look at everyday things with curiosity. See things for the first time. Including yourself. Wake up your curiosity gently.
Trust:	Trust your own experience. You're the expert in your own body, feelings and intuition.
Being here now:	Practise being present instead of getting somewhere else; practise has no end goal.
Acceptance:	Embrace reality as it is. Don't fight it. Befriend yourself.
Let go:	You can just let your thoughts, desires and control go – yes, really!
Gratitude:	Being grateful changes your behaviour and mindset.
Generosity:	Give without getting anything back; this creates connection.



Allow space and time to delve into complex topics. Mirror back choices. You're not the expert in their body; they are. Know your own limits. Leave therapy to the professionals.

Jolien Posthumus



IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Am I allowing space for insight (for the future)?
- Am I allowing space for awe or aha-moments?
- Am I allowing space for comfort and support?
- Could I always start each session in my programme with a moment of meditation?
- Do I offer sufficient safety?
- What else do I want to learn to become a more mindful art teacher?
- Which awareness-broadening components do I use?

concept 9

Mirror neurons

Finding growth between myself and the other

Mirror neurons are nerve cells that help us to understand what other people are experiencing. For example, if you see someone bump their head, you might also feel a mild version of their pain. These mirror neurons enable you to move with the movement of others in your mind; they activate the parts of the brain that are connected with movement, reflecting the movements of other people in your own brain and helping you learn, empathise and make contact with others.
Art – and film, literature and theatre in particular – activate mirror neurons. This is how art can help train your brain in empathy and social intelligence while reducing aggression. These lessons are essential during puberty, when social relationships become more complex and become part of brain growth.

This means that you can actually train your brain to be more empathetic. Watching a good actor at work will activate your mirror neurons, so you experience the emotions being portrayed. Reading body language and hearing, seeing and feeling non-verbal communication. Interpreting facial expressions. All of these are effective ingredients that help your brain practise empathy.

Mirroring one another, engaging in conversation, exchanging experiences and establishing contact; peer to peer. Being in a state of flow together, forming ideas in motion. Creativity is infectious.

I look at you
and I feel something
that I recognise.

We draw together.
My hand follows
your hand follows
my hand feels
what you mean.

You sketch a picture.
I see it,
the colour.
It flows.

We move,
dance
I move with you.
My heart follows

IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Am I creating enough opportunities for working in pairs to give the young people a chance to mirror one another?
- Could we visit any art events (music, film, theatre, dance, museum) together?
- How can I train the ‘listening muscles’ of my participants?
- Could we create any rituals that involve mirroring?
- Which methods could I use to explore non-verbal communication?
- Could I add variation by including movement?
- How can I use the lived experience of the participants in a healthy way?



concept 10 Inventing the wheel

The balance between doing it yourself and co-creation

Tell me and I forget; teach me and I may remember; involve me and I will learn.

Confucius or Xunzi (academics don't agree on who said this)

Inventing the wheel yourself gives you ownership and control. You learn to use your own imagination to create something, taking the reins and accepting responsibility for your own path.

Being young in a world full of uncertainty, pressure and complexity, while feeling unseen and unheard, is a paralysing experience. But creating gives you the space you need to explore things for yourself, make them your own, and grow your awareness. Create challenges that allow you to use your imagination and talents. Let the young people develop the programme or activity themselves wherever possible. Guide them through this process;
get them to create their own user manual or a set of instructions for the world. If you package up the task as a creative exercise, the brain's creativity centre springs into action (after some initial resistance) and the young person sets out on their journey. And just like the hero in the Hero's Journey, they'll have to overcome an obstacle to get to the stage of ownership.

- As a group, develop a festival to combat loneliness (the Lone Wolf Festival).
- Draw your own set of IKEA instructions.
- Create a spelling challenge in which mistakes actually help you move forward. Experimenting always pays off.

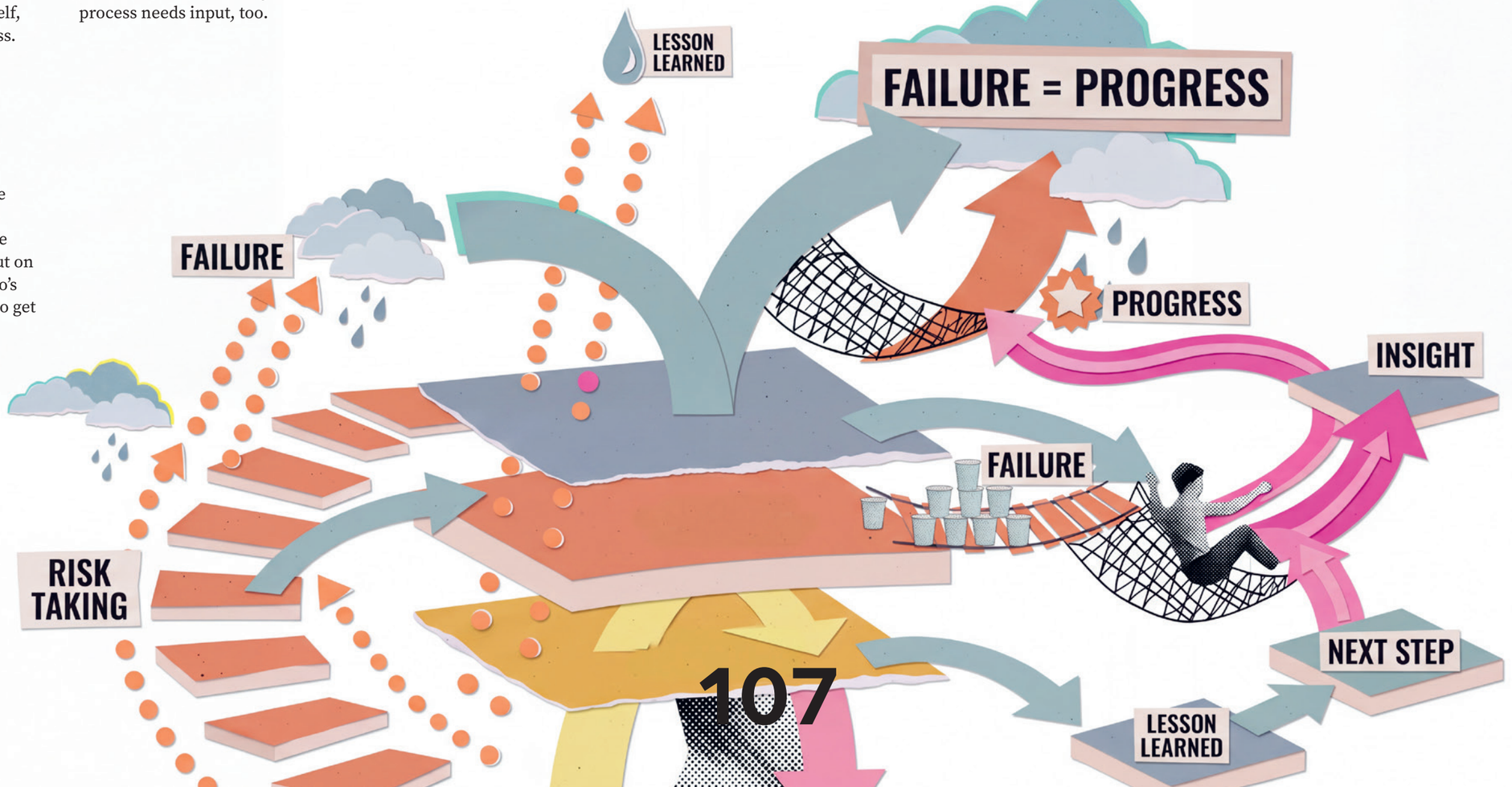
Self-management is difficult without a specific task or exercise to do. The obstacle we mentioned before inspires creativity. You can't think out of the box if there's nothing in the box. The creative process needs input, too.

Create for yourself or create for others
Young people want to talk, listen to, and support one another.
In the modern world, we collectively feel that we have less control of ourselves, the world, our groups and our culture.
But by embarking on a journey of exploration and creating something for their peers, young people can boost their own self-confidence.

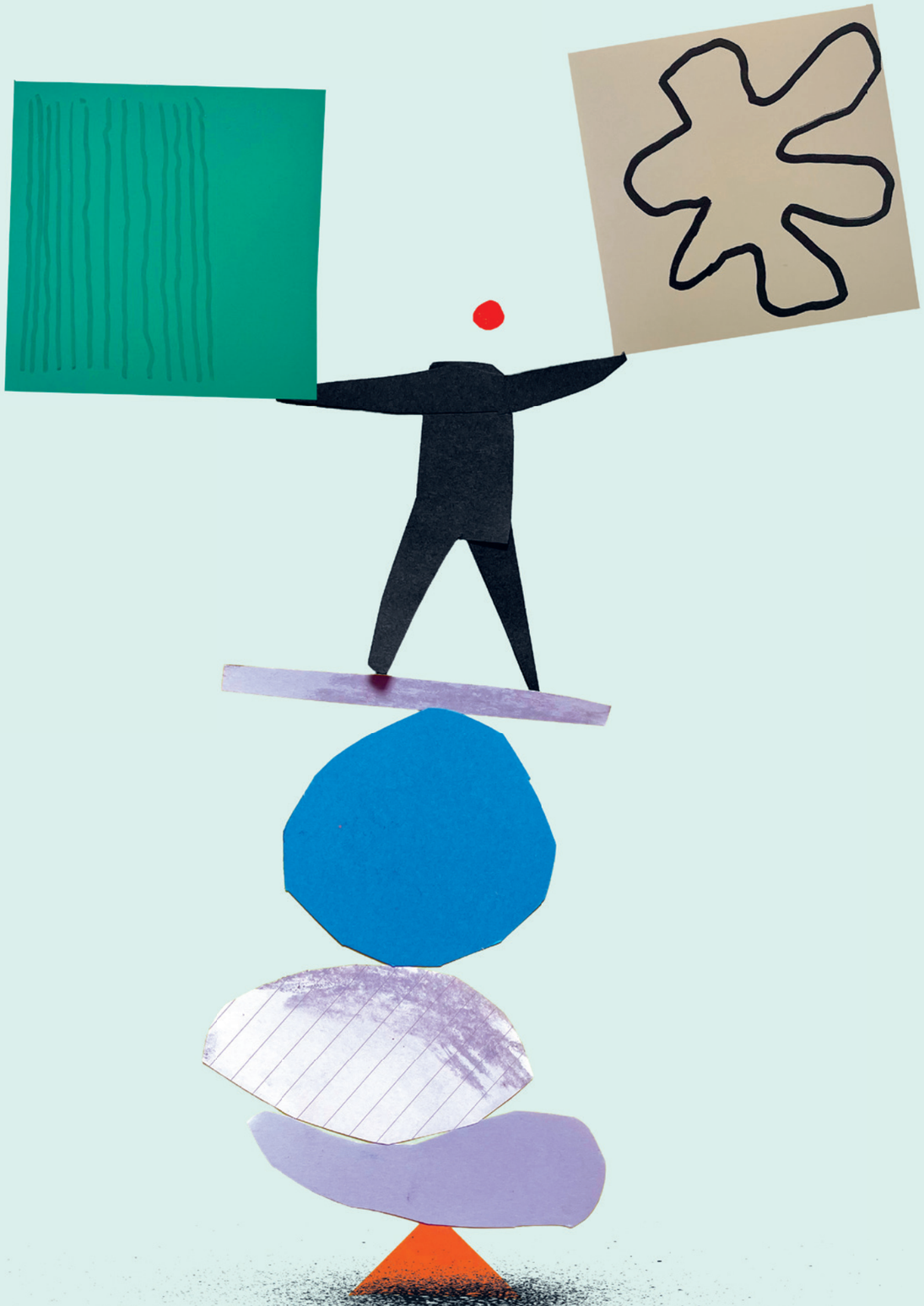
- Break your programme open, discuss your ideas and incorporate co-creation.
- Don't offer projects with no room for exploration and flexibility.
- Let the young people create something for their peers independently. This approach forces them to move away from self-centred thought patterns and encourages empathy.
- It can also work really well with young children, if you ask imaginative questions, set the challenge at the right level, and reward and praise ownership. Working in this way brings the concept of flow together with the artist's mindset; you're putting the young people themselves in charge.

IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Am I really giving the young people room for ownership?
- How can I adjust the tasks to overcome challenges?
- What kinds of exciting or engaging contexts could I add to encourage action?
- Do I dare to trust? Do I dare to let go?
- Can I really meet the young people in co-creation?



concept 11 Balance – There are always two sides to balance



Balance is something that we are always seeking to achieve and maintain; whether we're in balance, out of balance, or facing polarisation that puts us on opposing sides. But which aspects of being out of balance could escalate into a mental health issue?

It is interesting how the fields of 'knowing' (science) and 'not knowing' (art) overlap; we seek balance everywhere, even between fields like care and education and art, as well as in our personal lives.

This is an interesting topic to explore with young people, because you're looking for answers about yourself and your identity while also discovering that two opposite things can both be true.

What is the balance:
Between healthy and sick?
Between healed and healing?
Between not knowing and knowing?
Between knowing and understanding?

What role can art play as part of this process, and what can it not do?

Science provides a framework for personal growth. The medical model seeks to find concrete answers, based on facts, diagnoses and measurable data. It asks: What is wrong? This approach can be valuable to identify and understand problems, and to treat and heal them in a targeted way. But this rigid framework can also sometimes prove limiting. Art provides a different framework and asks a different question: What is going on? Instead of jumping straight into repair or healing, art provides scope for reflection, resilience and expression. Where science attempts to gain certainty, art embraces the unknown. The aim is not clinical recovery, but healing and creative growth, shining a light on the invisible and unquantifiable.

Balance

The real power lies not in choosing one of the two options, but in balance.
Science and art are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they complement one another. Sometimes we need the clarity of a diagnosis to see a way forward, and sometimes the language of art is exactly what we need to give the soul a voice and process anything that falls outside of the frameworks we apply. How can you guide people in finding balance?

Balance topics

Rules	Deregulation
Survival	Living
Poverty	Wealth
Control	Persistence
Control	Failure

Inspired by Prof. Dr. Tineke Abma

IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- How do I balance my methods?
- Can I add effective ingredients to strike a better balance?
- How can I become more perceptive of balance in/of the young people during the activity?
- Can I, and do I want to, add movement and disturb the balance to give the group a broader range of experiences?
- Is the balance safe for the group at all times?
- How can I invite the young people to get a little bit out of balance?
- Do I need to seek out more evidence as an art teacher?
- What kind of balance do I like talking about most?

concept 12

Follow your bliss – The balance between authenticity and healthy artistry

Self-awareness and your boundaries
The main challenge you face as a guide in creative MindCare processes is finding and maintaining balance. The participants must feel that you, as an art teacher, are a safe space. In the grey area of awareness, balance, art and being yourself, participants are sure to pick up on any areas of uncertainty that you have. Make sure you are tuned in and watching out for this.

'Follow your bliss' is a well-known quote from Professor of Literature Joseph Campbell. He said: 'Do what brings you real joy and satisfaction. That path will lead to a more authentic life, stimulate creativity and help you live in harmony with your deeper self.' This is a good path for your practice as an art teacher. What works for you will also work for others. How can you transfer bliss to others? What task can you give them? Which deeper layer do you want to reach? What about in yourself?

Make a bliss compass to find balance between your own authenticity and healthy artistry.

Explore: What makes you happy, what are you curious about, what are your talents, why do you like working with your target group, what do you believe is important? Add your three most important values, passion, curiosity and joy to the compass.

Make it about you: Which passion adds meaning to your life and can also help make the world a better place? Pay the same attention to yourself as you do to others.

What is your goal? This is a moving target because – as you know – goals are constantly shifting and evolving. This is north on your compass.

Find your courage: It takes courage to embark on the hero's journey. What old patterns will you let go of? Which obstacles will you overcome to realise your full potential? What trap do you often fall into? Where are your vulnerabilities?

Create a bliss studio: Create a protected space where you can find your bliss; a kind of internal studio where you can escape from hassle, ego and the pressures of society. A place where you feel a deep creative connection to your true self. What does your bliss studio look like?



IDEAS FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT

- Do you stay on top of your mental 'housework'?
- Stand in front of the mirror and look yourself in the eye: Do you know what you're doing?
- Do I have the courage to ask other people about my blind spots?
- Can I be vulnerable and open?
- Do I know my limits?
- How can you develop ways of working that bring together your bliss and the world of the young people you work with?
- Consult a professional if necessary.

inspiration from the worlds of science and art

Interesting thoughts and insights to remember



The art of being in the world

In its deepest forms, art is not about acquiring skills or consuming information. It's about a fundamental, lifelong challenge: How can we be 'at home' in the world as adults? This idea of being 'at home' is not a passive state, and it's certainly not a smooth journey or an easy place to find. In fact, encounters with art force us to confront resistance. Art asks us to push back so that we can move through that resistance to find the challenging centre. This idea is the very core of what we must do in teaching: We must not avoid what is difficult, and not seek to destroy it; we have to stay with it. This is how we can feel and connect with what is calling us, with the world outside ourselves.

Gert Biesta, Professor of Educational Theory

Art is not a pill.

"Art is good for us." This is something we often hear and often repeat ourselves. But from a scientific perspective, it doesn't have much meaning.

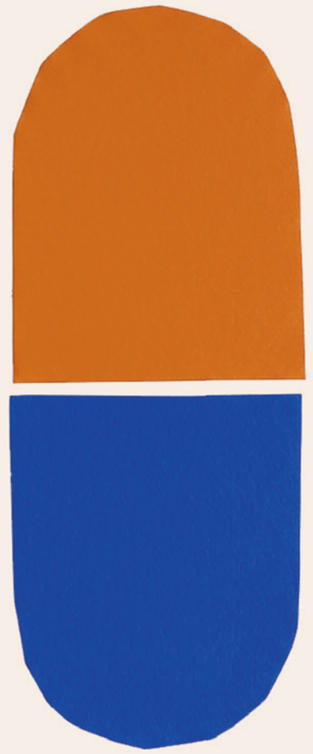
In my inaugural speech last week, I used a simple comparison. Saying "art is good for us" is a bit like saying "pills are good for sick people".
Initially, it sounds convincing, but it fails to factor in all the details that really matter.
Which pills? And for whom? In which doses? And in which situations? The same applies to art.

We now have strong evidence that shows that art and culture contribute to health and wellbeing. But the effects aren't universal and don't arise automatically. They depend on the type of art, the person, the context, the intensity and the purpose. What works in a community setting won't necessarily work in clinical care. And what helps one person might not help the next.

So the question isn't whether art can make a difference. The more relevant questions are when, for whom, and in which situations the benefits arise.

This is where the field needs to focus and get more precise answers. And where we can move from promise to practice.

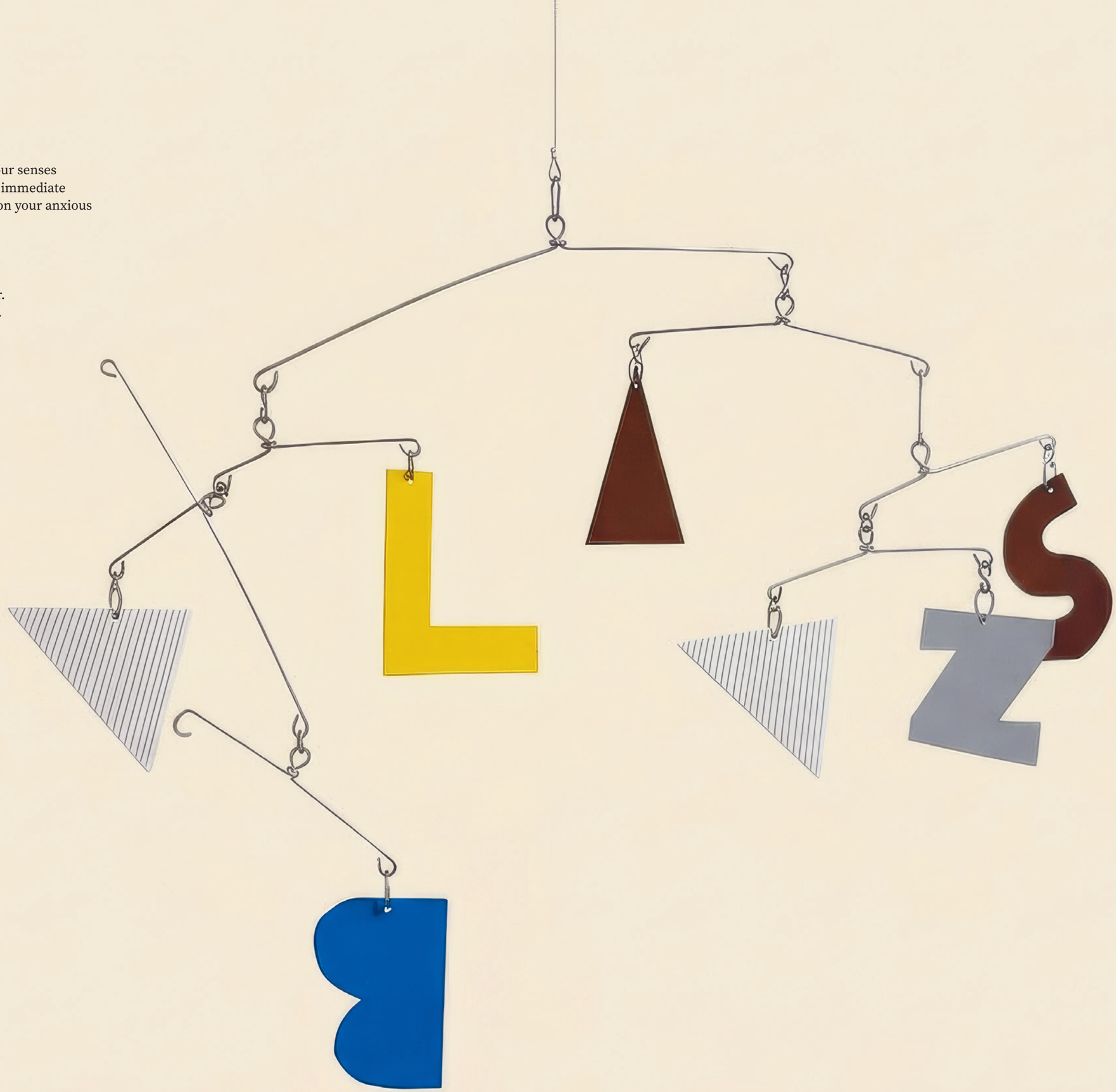
Janine Stubbe, Professor of Arts & Wellbeing



Calm down

5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise
This exercise works by activating your senses and bringing your attention to your immediate surroundings rather than focusing on your anxious thoughts.

- Name five things you can see.
- Name four things you can feel.
- Name three things you can hear.
- Name two things you can smell.
- Name one thing you can taste.



Creativity is for everyone

Art is for everyone. And this is not just something that would be ‘nice to have’; it’s a fundamental belief we should all stand behind. As a professional, you can live out this fundamental belief in your everyday practice.

If you plan and deliver your methods inclusively, you can create a space in which everyone – including you – can grow. We, Viktoria and Lilly, work for Sozialheld*innen, a German organisation that promotes inclusivity, accessibility and participation. We love sharing what we know in the form of ideas that you can immediately incorporate into your practice.

Working inclusively doesn’t mean that you have to start again from scratch. It just means pausing for a moment to take a closer look at what you’re doing. People aren’t limited by their disabilities, but by the barriers they encounter: Rooms that aren’t accessible. Methods that can only be applied in one way. Being addressed in a way that is supposed to convey care, but actually creates distance. Often, it’s not the overarching structures that determine whether or not a person can participate, but the smaller decisions we make in advance.

Inclusivity is not a state that you can achieve and then say you’re done. It’s an attitude that you choose to adopt time and time again, and it starts before you come into contact with your group. The young people shouldn’t have to adapt to you; your offering has to adapt to them. This means removing barriers rather than putting care structures in place. It means communicating on the same level rather than guiding and managing from above. The questions below aren’t a mandatory programme, nor are they a checklist. They are things to think about that will help you develop your methods more consciously, before you next start working with your group.

Reflection questions for your methods and concepts

Perception & senses:
Does your exercise presume that everyone sees things the same way? And what happens if that’s not the case? Are you relying on a single sense – such as on colour – or do the elements of your exercise also have shapes, structures or sounds to help people experience them?

Body & movement
How can you design the exercise so that it is appropriate for the physical abilities of each individual in your group?

Participation
Is there only one correct way to participate in your exercise? Have you allowed time for anything unexpected, for breaks, adjustments and meeting individual needs during the exercise? Are you open to adjusting the exercise on the spot, depending on who you’re working with?

And what about the space?
Even the best ideas will lose their power if the space itself becomes a barrier. Inclusive thinking means thinking about the space too: Is it accessible, quiet and well lit? Sometimes, these things can be the factor that determines whether a person can fully participate or not. You don’t have to work all of this out on your own. But it’s worth being aware of all of these considerations and asking other people for support when you need it.

So, choose a method and get to work. There’s no need to change everything at once, and you don’t have to figure it out alone. Working inclusively means taking action, trying things out and learning with each exercise. Stay curious, listen to the young people and have the courage to keep adjusting your methods. Because this is how you’ll get the best out of yourself – and your group. You’ll find more inspiring recommended reading at the end of this book.

Victoria & Lilly
@Sozialheld*innen

SOZIALHELDEN







On sitting back

A beautiful piece about how the creative MindCare process works. I am honoured that Nieke Koek wanted to share this with us.

I am Nieke Koek,
an interdisciplinary artist,
and I worked
on the project
'Looking for stories'.

I learnt that time
is material,

that breathing
is material,

that eye contact
posture
movement
are material.

Most movements are not chosen;
they just happen.

They were moments
that something clicked,
felt right,
shifted.

But you have to see them,
these moments.

You have to feel them.

You have to learn to see
the moments
that something shifts.

It's synchronisation,
it's noticing,

it's
being open
with all your senses

and knowing
that you don't know
and that from there you
begin
and stay
as long as possible.

And feeling
that you're doing it together
and that it can be exciting.

You follow
what is there
and what is created.

You let go,
you collect,
you wait
and try

and somewhere in this process you learn that
power
can sometimes be found in peace,
that attention
is a muscle.

And I learnt that allowing space
for things to unfold
doesn't necessarily need to succeed.

It changed me
as a maker,
as a person.

Where I previously moved to the front,
I now hover at the back.

Where I used to take control,
I now wait and see.

I follow what presents itself
and train my muscles
for attention,
for patience,
for sitting with something new and unfamiliar,

so that the bigger picture
only emerges

when it is truly ready.

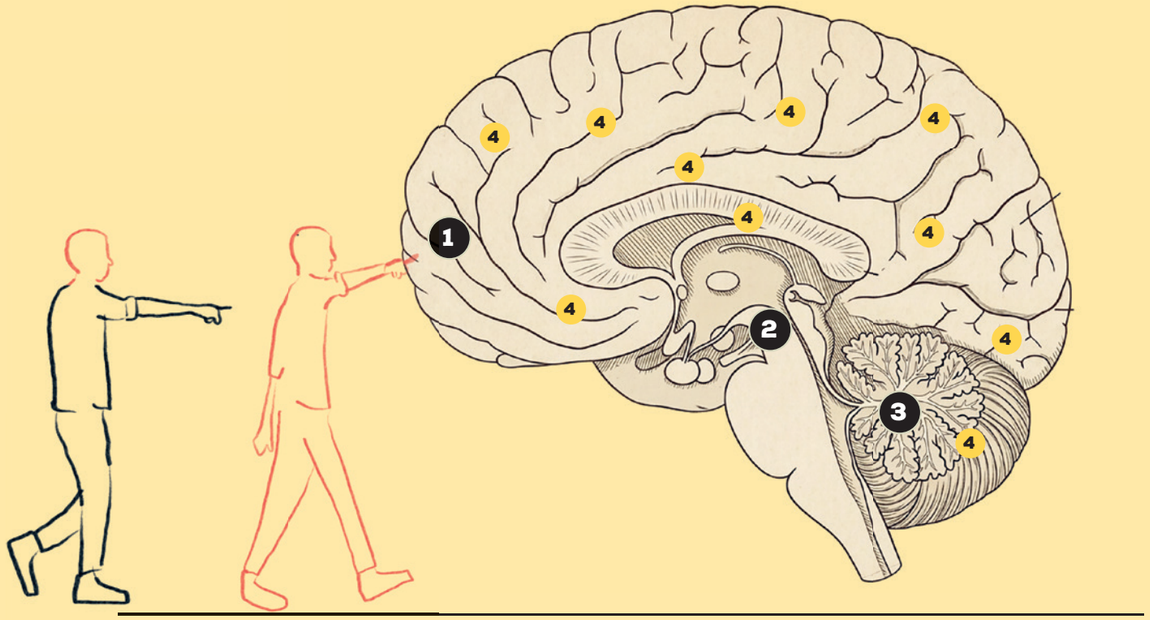
Nieke Koek

On the brain

It's difficult to determine exactly how art affects the brain. The most important thing is that you feed your brain the right kind of 'diet'. Whatever you do in the course of your day, make sure that you keep your brain active.

Erik Scherder, Neuropsychologist

	Region/substance:	**Function in creativity:**
1	Prefrontal cortex	Responsible for abstract thinking and preventing default responses (out-of-the-box thinking).
2	Hippocampus	Provides the raw data (memories) that we combine to form new concepts.
3	Cerebellum	Involved in the automation of creative processes (such as musical improvisation).
4	Dopamine	The 'reward substance' that stimulates curiosity and enables us to think more flexibly.



On wonder

The capacity for wonder is something that we quickly forget as we emerge from childhood. As we grow up, we also experience a decline in the intensity of our longing and delight. Research shows that we can no longer really tolerate wonder from the age of 12 years onwards. This loss of capacity isn't usually a conscious process, but we can all see how, when we start secondary school, life suddenly becomes all about results, grades and performance. You learn to stand up for yourself, how to present and express yourself, how to reason and engage in debate and discussion. But where is the room for simply observing, playing, not knowing?

We learn about what's realistic, rational, feasible and affordable. And we forget all about wonder. When we wonder, we leave the solid ground of experience and facts and enter an undefined space where there is room for things that are not understood or understandable.

Composer Merlijn Twaalfhoven



The teenage brain as a work of art

This text was inspired by neuropsychologist and author Jelle Jolles. In our discussion of this metaphor, we build on the developmental perspectives of Jelle Jolles and his recent books, in particular 'The Teenage Brain: A Work in Progress. A Guide for Parents, Teachers and other Educators' from 2025.

Terms and concepts – such as the teenager as 'a work in progress', the significance of language and warm executive functions in development, the concept of protected freedom, and the role of the adult as a provider of support, guidance and inspiration – have been taken from his work on the development of children. Using the creative process and studio as a metaphor, I place these principles in the context of the creative MindCare process. These have been taken from the 8 features of the teenage brain formulated by Jolles (see website).

The teenage brain: A work of art under construction
The process of growing up is similar to the creative process. It never takes the straight path; it's a rocky journey that involves trying things out, making mistakes and starting again from scratch. Teenagers are the works of art at the centre of this process.

1. You can't think out of an empty box
The teenage brain is a work in progress with lots of 'empty boxes'. You can't think out of the box if there's nothing in the box. The creative process needs input, too. The teenage brain is not yet mature, so we need to fill those empty boxes with knowledge, insight, inspiration and skills. Inspire them with images and examples.

Let go of high expectations. You can't expect an initial sketch to immediately become a fully formed masterpiece. Accept that the early stages of the creative process (puberty) are chaotic and built on unfinished structures.

2. Experimenting & making mistakes
(phase: explore & experiment)
During the creative process, you only discover what works by trying out things that ultimately don't work. The development of the social brain (feeling jealousy, empathy or irritation) is also a series of social experiments. By falling down and getting up again, young people develop an understanding of the intentions of others. Young people experiment with how their emotions and reactions affect those around them, testing the waters to see how the world responds. This is just like material research.

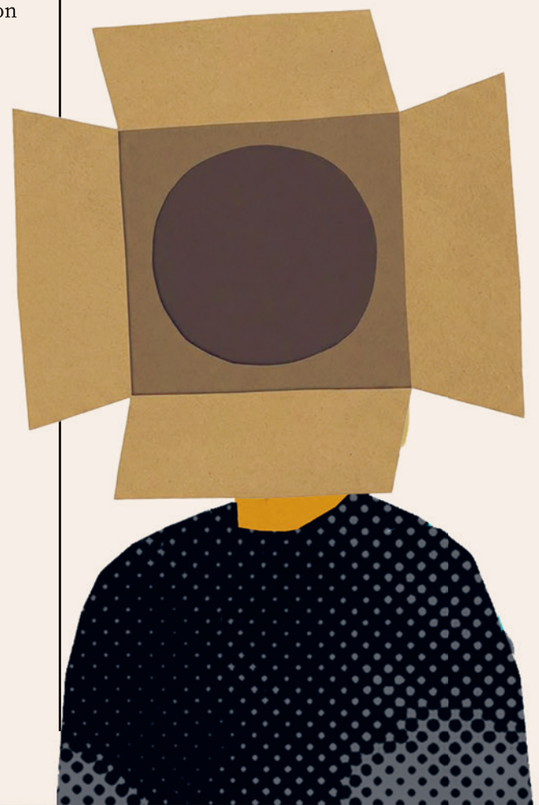
3. Language, imagination & 'what if...?'
(phase: using your creative tools)

Adding meaning with words: Language is the paint that teenagers use to colour their inner world. By talking, reading and writing, they acquire the language they need to give form to their jumbled thoughts and confusing feelings. More language means more self-control. Use sources of inspiration and questions that are rich in language.

Imagining: Creativity requires you to think about 'what if' scenarios. By telling stories and stimulating their imagination, young people learn to see different perspectives, think about the future, and work out the consequences of their choices before they act. This is perspective and hope in action. The imagination doesn't provide the answers, but asks open questions.

4. Bringing an idea to life
(phase: refinement of executive functions)
As the creative process progresses, it develops more structure (planning, setting goals, monitoring consequences). This is when you turn random, separate ideas into a clear concept. All the pieces fall into place. You aren't an 'insufferable teenager'; you're a creative work in progress. Young people are working hard to build the person that they ultimately want to be.

5. The mentor, the studio & safety
- **Take on a mentor role:** The creator (the young person) needs an experienced mentor who will offer them the space, knowledge and materials they need and act as an inspiring muse.
- **Create a studio:** A rich learning environment where young people can not only practise techniques (cognition), but can also experiment socially.
- **Protected freedom:** To create something new, you need the freedom to fail within a safe framework (protection), with direct, confidence-boosting and inspiring feedback from a mentor.
- **The teenage brain grows like a creative project:** Via falling and getting up again, imagining, testing and scrapping what doesn't work. The role of the adult is not to force the end result, but to be present in the 'studio' to provide support and guidance.



On interoception and emotions

Emotions aren't just created in your head; they often begin as physical reactions in your body. Interoception translates physical sensations into a conscious emotional experience.
In a tense situation, your heart beats faster, your breathing speeds up, and your muscles go tense. So, in summary, interoception is your internal sense of physical sensations.

Your brain receives these physical signals via your interoceptive system. It interprets them by giving them a label, such as fear, nerves or tension.

People who perceive physical signals very acutely often experience their emotions more intensely.

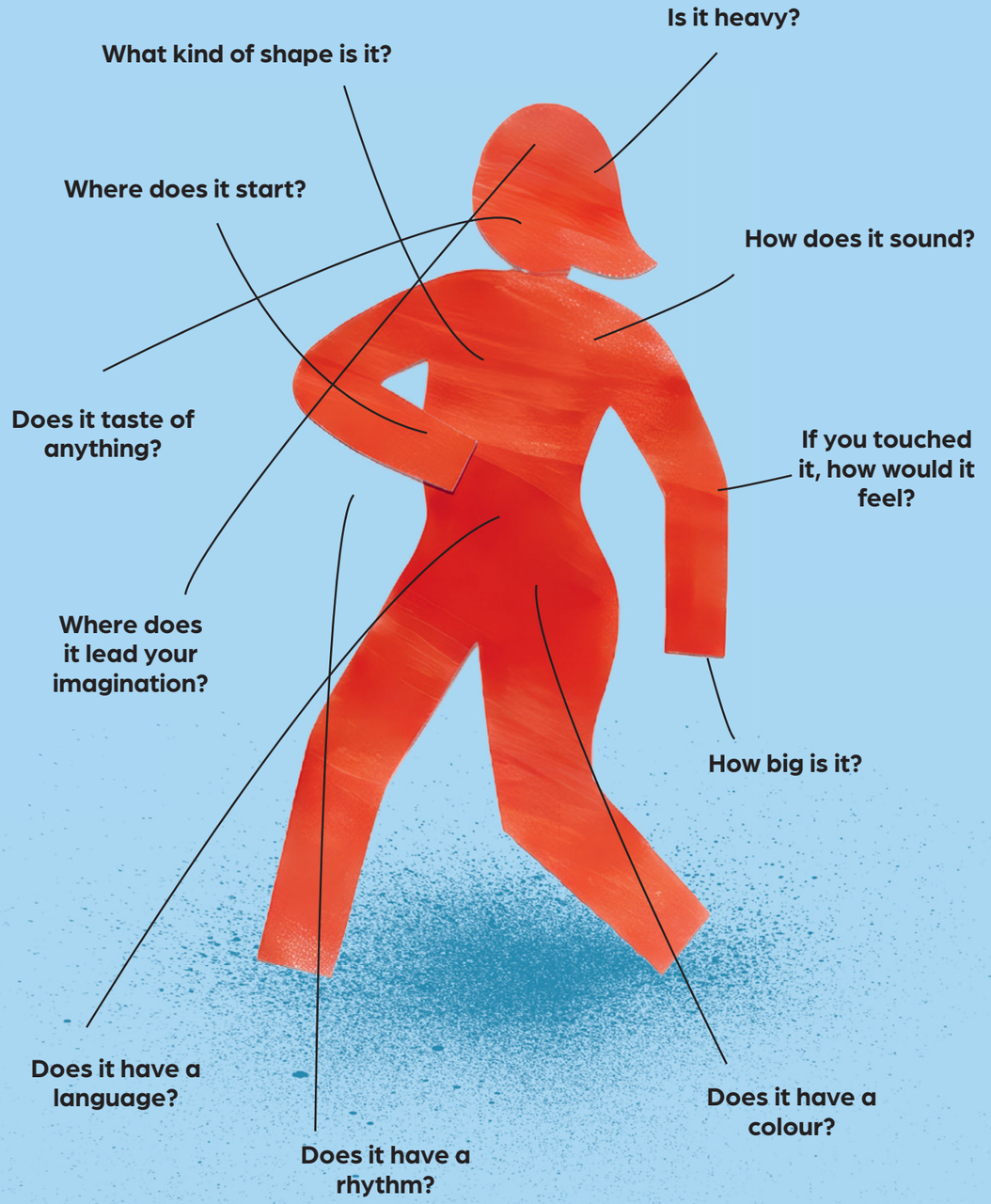
This is helpful for recognising emotions, but it can also lead to feeling overstimulated or anxious more quickly. Some people experience the opposite: If they don't pick up on their body's signals, a person may not realise that they are angry, stressed or sad until much later. The emotion then suddenly rises to the surface and seems more explosive in its expression, without any clear signals that it was coming.

Healthy interoception helps you to realise when you need rest. If you recognise the feeling in your stomach as stress, you can intervene before the situation escalates.



If you feel something, how does it feel?

Inspired by Nieke Koek



Do I have energy to take part?



Inspired by Judith Peineman, Studio Umoya

LOOK
What can I see happening around me?

THINK
Why aren't they taking part?

ASK
What could be changed?

TRY
What small changes can we make?

LOOK AGAIN
What's happening now?





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Online articles.

https://www.tlcenter.nl/inclusief-lesgeven/

The MindCare knowledge folder on the LKCA website contains various downloads, online research and many other resources.

Scan this QR code to access the folder.

dutch

german

COLOPHON

DISCLAIMER

Using creativity to prevent mental health issues and promote good mental health requires us to rethink and adjust our attitudes and beliefs. When we create something artistic and healing together – an act that stimulates the senses, pushes boundaries and utilises the full power of our collective imagination – we enter new territory. We venture into a grey area where we explore the unknown and our own authenticity and awareness. We create a free space full of our own methods and practices. What works for you might also work for me, albeit in a slightly different way. Let's share our ideas and experiences. The creative MindCare process was developed by Anne Graswinckel.

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HOW CAN YOU USE THE CREATIVE PROCESS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG PEOPLE?

Step into the grey area with your young people – venture to that place where nothing is certain, but where everything is waiting to be discovered. A safe space to create, to explore, and to have fun, but also to reflect on your own thoughts, feelings and stories. With youth mental health under more pressure than ever, art is a powerful countermovement.

This practical handbook explains the creative MindCare process and provides 12 clear concepts to work with, alongside a plethora of methods that you can directly apply to your work. It challenges you to think critically about your own role as an educator: Which ingredients do you use to create space for mental wellbeing? Whether you work in art education, the cultural sector or the social domain, this book gives you the tools and the language you need to turn wellbeing into something tangible, and to nurture good mental health in your students.

This publication includes enlightening contributions and insights from Daisy Fancourt, Nieke Koek, Jolien Posthumus, Jelle Jolles, Tineke A. Abma, Merlijn Twaalfhoven, Gert Biesta, Janne Tullius, Janine Stubbe and many colleagues from the art world in Germany and the Netherlands.

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