Art4Wellbeing

ACTIVITY 1

Opening Session: Safety & Group Cohesion

The Netherlands | Stichting Artmonia Foundation | Foundation Session
Project nr. 2025-2-NL02-KA210-YOU-000368916

TOTAL DURATION	MAIN OBJECTIVE	SESSION PURPOSE
90 minutes	To create a psychologically safe and welcoming space, establish shared group agreements, and strengthen trust, belonging and group cohesion.	To help participants arrive, connect with one another, express themselves at a comfortable level, identify what they need to feel safe, and make their expectations and anxieties visible before the thematic sessions begin.

Materials

Postcards, photographs, illustrations or symbolic image cards; large flipchart/kraft paper; coloured markers; two colours of post-it notes (e.g. green and orange); pens/pencils; coloured tape; optional coloured paint or ink pad for fingerprints; prepared large tree drawing; wall space for the Group Agreement and Tree.

Session at a Glance

NO.	ACTIVITY	TIME	PURPOSE
1.1A	Name & Movement Circle	10 min	Warm-up: names, energy and group synchrony
1.1B	Choose Your Image	15 min	Icebreaker: symbolic self-expression and connection
1.2	Safe Harbor - Group Agreement	25 min	Co-create safety, respect and participation principles
1.3	Tree of Expectations & Anxieties	30 min	Make hopes and concerns visible through a collective art activity
1.4	Session Evaluation & Closing	10 min	Reflect on safety, energy and what participants take forward

1.1 ICEBREAKER: ARRIVING & GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER 25 MIN

Purpose

To reduce first-session tension, learn names in an embodied and playful way, create early group synchrony, and then open a low-pressure route into personal sharing through symbolic images.

Part A - Name & Movement Circle

Duration: 10 minutes

1. Ask everyone to stand in a circle where each person can see the others.

2. Explain that one person at a time will say their **name** and make one simple **movement or gesture** that feels comfortable.

3. Immediately after, the whole group repeats the person's **name and movement together**.

4. Continue around the circle until everyone has had a turn.

5. Keep the pace light. Movements can be very small; participants do not need to perform.

> **Facilitator Prompt**
>
> "We will begin by learning each other's names with a movement. When it is your turn, say your name and add one simple gesture or movement. The whole group will repeat your name and movement together. Your movement can be as small or as playful as you like."

Part B - Choose Your Image

Duration: 15 minutes

Preparation: Spread a varied selection of postcards, photographs, illustrations or symbolic images on the floor or on a table before the activity begins.

1. Invite participants to walk around quietly and look at the images.

2. Ask each person to choose **one image** that connects with how they arrive today, something about themselves, something important in their life, or a personal strength.

3. Give them a short moment to look at their chosen image and notice what drew them to it.

4. Participants first share in pairs or small groups. Whole-group sharing is voluntary.

5. Invite a few volunteers to show their image and briefly explain their choice.

> **Facilitator Prompt**
>
> "Choose one image that somehow represents you today. It may connect with how you feel, something important to you, or a strength you bring. There is no right or wrong choice. You decide how much you would like to share. What made this image speak to you?"

Facilitator Note: Do not interpret participants' images. The meaning belongs to the participant. Allow passing and different levels of disclosure.

1.2 SAFE HARBOR - GROUP AGREEMENT 25 MIN

Purpose

To build a mutual understanding of respect and create a safe, non-judgmental environment for open expression. The agreement gives participants ownership of the conditions under which the group will work together.

Materials

Flipchart paper, coloured markers, tape; optional coloured paint or ink pad for the signing ritual.

Instructions

1. Divide participants into small groups of approximately four.

2. Give each group flipchart paper and markers.

3. Ask groups to discuss what they need from one another in order to feel safe, respected, non-judged and comfortable expressing themselves.

4. After approximately 10 minutes, bring everyone back together. Each group shares its ideas.

5. Write the ideas on one main sheet. Merge overlapping points into a short master list. Possible examples include active listening, no interrupting, confidentiality, respect for different opinions, the right to pass, and mindful phone use.

6. Read the final agreement aloud and ask whether anything important is missing.

7. Once the group agrees, everyone signs the paper or leaves a coloured fingerprint/mark. Keep the agreement visible throughout the programme.

Facilitator Prompt

“Imagine that this room is our safe harbor for the programme. What behaviours do we need from one another so that we can feel safe, respected, non-judged and comfortable expressing ourselves here?”

Facilitator Guidance

Do not impose a ready-made list at the beginning. Let the participants generate the principles first, then help them make the wording clear and realistic. Make sure the right to pass, respectful listening and confidentiality are discussed. Clarify that confidentiality has safeguarding limits if someone is at risk of harm.

1.3	MAIN ART ACTIVITY: TREE OF EXPECTATIONS & ANXIETIES	30 MIN

Purpose

To give participants a visual and anonymous way to express what they hope to experience and what they may be worried about, so that the facilitator can acknowledge needs and align the group process with the programme.

Materials

A large prepared drawing of a tree with visible roots and branches; green post-it notes for expectations; orange post-it notes for anxieties/concerns; pens or markers; tape if needed.

Instructions

1. Place the large tree drawing on the wall where everyone can reach it.

2. Give each participant green and orange post-it notes. No names are needed.

3. On the **green notes**, participants write or draw their **expectations, hopes or things they would like to gain** from the programme.

4. They place the green notes on the **branches/leaves** of the tree.

5. On the **orange notes**, participants write or draw **anxieties, concerns or things they need support with**.

6. They place the orange notes around the **roots** of the tree.

7. When everyone has finished, give the group a quiet moment to look at the whole tree.

8. Read a selection of notes aloud without identifying anyone. Cluster similar ideas where useful and acknowledge both hopes and concerns.

9. Connect recurring safety needs back to the Safe Harbor agreement and explain that the tree can remain visible and be revisited later.

BRANCHES & LEAVES	ROOTS
Expectations / Hopes What do I hope to experience, learn or gain from this journey? What would make this programme meaningful for me?	**Anxieties / Concerns** What am I worried about? What do I need in order to feel safe and supported? *Examples: “Will my English be enough?” “What if I can’t fit in?”*

Facilitator Prompt

“This tree belongs to the whole group. On the green notes, add something you hope to experience, learn or gain and place it on the branches. On the orange notes, add a concern, anxiety or something you may need support with and place it near the roots. You do not need to write your name. Share only what feels comfortable.”

Facilitator Note: Avoid trying to solve every anxiety immediately. First acknowledge it, normalise shared concerns where appropriate, and identify what the group or facilitators can realistically do to support safety.

1.4	SESSION EVALUATION & CLOSING	10 MIN

Purpose

To check the group's current sense of safety and connection, allow participants to name what they are taking from the opening session, and close the session in a contained way.

Instructions

1. Invite participants back into a circle.

2. Ask for a quick **1-10 rating** of the energy and sense of safety in the room. Participants may show the number with fingers or say it aloud.

3. Invite brief responses to the reflection questions below. Passing is allowed.

4. End with one final word, gesture or movement from each participant. The group may repeat the gesture, echoing the opening circle.

5. Thank the group and remind them that both the Safe Harbor agreement and the Tree will remain visible and may evolve during the programme.

Reflection Questions

1. “If you were to rate the energy and the sense of safety in this room right now from 1 to 10, what score would you give?”

2. “How did it feel to create and sign our group agreement?”

3. “What do you take with you from this session?”

4. “What would you like to bring into our next session?”

Facilitator Closing Prompt

“Before we finish, choose one word or one small movement that shows how you are leaving the session. Thank you for helping create our shared safe space. Our agreement and our tree will stay with us and can change as the group grows.”

Facilitator Principles Throughout Activity 1

Choice	Participants may pass, share briefly, or participate non-verbally.
Non-interpretation	Do not analyse images, movements or artwork for participants.
Inclusion	Make room for different languages, communication styles and comfort levels.
Shared ownership	The facilitator supports the process; the group creates the agreement and collective meaning.
Safeguarding	Do not promise absolute confidentiality where a disclosure indicates risk of harm.
Pacing	Keep the opening light and embodied, then gradually move toward reflection and deeper group work.

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