Art4Wellbeing
Project nr. 2025-2-NL02-KA210-YOU-000368916

SESSION 8

Emotional Awareness: Expressing Emotions Safely

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ART FORM USED	Movement + Music

TOTAL DURATION	MAIN OBJECTIVE	SESSION PURPOSE
90 minutes	To recognise how emotions are experienced in the body and practise expressing them through movement and music while respecting personal boundaries.	To move from emotional noticing to intentional, choice-based expression, respectful witnessing, shared rhythm and reflection on what makes emotional expression safe.

Materials

Open and accessible movement space; speaker and prepared instrumental playlist; chairs; optional scarves, emotion-word cards, paper and pens; water; designated quiet space.

Session at a Glance

NO.	ACTIVITY	TIME	FOCUS
8.1	Emotional Weather: Body Check-in	10 min	Recognise emotion and establish personal choice
8.2	Walking with Emotions	15 min	Explore intensity and return to a safe rhythm
8.3	My Emotion, My Movement	20 min	Express a feeling within chosen boundaries
8.4	Mirroring Emotions: Being Seen	15 min	Practise consent and respectful witnessing
8.5	From Individual to Collective Rhythm	20 min	Express differences safely in a group
8.6	Grounding and Reflection	10 min	Identify personal safe-expression strategies

Methodological Basis

This session combines embodied emotional awareness, expressive arts and interpersonal attunement. Safety is not an expectation to feel calm or positive: it means having choice over intensity, movement, distance, disclosure and participation. Participants may express symbolic or imagined emotions. No movement is interpreted as evidence of a specific emotional state.

8.1 EMOTIONAL WEATHER: BODY CHECK-IN — 10 MIN

Purpose

To connect feelings with body sensations while establishing a predictable, low-pressure way to participate.

Instructions

1. Invite participants to spread out. State that walking, seated movement, observing and stepping out are all acceptable. Identify the quiet space and agree on a non-verbal pause signal.

2. Play gentle instrumental music. Invite natural walking or small seated movements. Notice feet, shoulders, breath and energy without trying to change them.

3. Ask participants to imagine their current feeling as weather (sun, rain, mist, wind or something else). They may choose an imagined weather pattern instead.

4. Invite one small movement that represents this weather. Ask participants to select the size and intensity that feel comfortable.

5. Invite everyone to return to a neutral position and notice the floor or chair supporting them.

Facilitator Prompt

"You decide how much of your weather to show. A tiny gesture is enough. You may keep your feeling private, pause or observe. What makes this movement comfortable for you?"

Reflection Questions

What helped you feel safe enough to explore? How did you know when to make a movement smaller or pause?

8.2 WALKING WITH EMOTIONS — 15 MIN

Purpose

To explore emotional qualities in movement and practise shifting intensity without suppressing the feeling.

Instructions

1. Explain that emotion words are optional invitations rather than instructions to perform a particular expression.

2. Play moderate instrumental music. Invite participants to walk or move their hands while seated.

3. Offer one word at a time: joy, sadness, frustration, fear, excitement and calmness. Leave time for a small gesture, pace or posture change.

4. After each emotion, invite a return to their own rhythm. Offer the option to stay with neutral movement if any word feels uncomfortable.

5. Pause and ask participants to notice which choices helped them feel steady: distance, speed, smaller gestures, stillness or a break.

6. Invite a short optional pair exchange; remind participants they need not disclose personal experiences.

Facilitator Prompt

"Let this emotion visit only as much as you choose. You can turn the volume of your movement up or down. Now return to your rhythm. You are in charge of the pace."

Reflection Questions

Which emotions felt manageable to express? What helped you set a boundary or return to a comfortable rhythm?

8.3 MY EMOTION, MY MOVEMENT — 20 MIN

Purpose

To create a personal, non-verbal expression of an emotion and explore what safe expression looks like for oneself.

Instructions

1. Invite a manageable present, imagined or symbolic feeling. No one has to identify it aloud.

2. Round 1 — Exploring (5 min): Create one gesture for the feeling, starting with the smallest possible version.

3. Round 2 — Giving It a Rhythm (6 min): With music, vary speed, space, repetition and pauses. Ask participants to check whether the intensity still feels manageable.

4. Round 3 — Listening to the Need (5 min): Ask what the feeling might need: more space, a slower rhythm, strength, rest, connection or distance. Adjust the movement accordingly.

5. Integration (4 min): Compare the original and adjusted gestures. Choose one personally supportive movement for expressing a feeling without harming oneself or others.

6. Invite participants to orient to the room and release the movement when ready. The emotion does not need to disappear.

Facilitator Prompt

"Your feeling is welcome, and so are your limits. You can express it without making it bigger. Ask: What does this emotion need, and how can I show it in a way that feels safe for me?"

Reflection Questions

When did the movement feel too much, too little or just right? How could you express the same feeling safely outside this room?

8.4 MIRRORING EMOTIONS: BEING SEEN — 15 MIN

Purpose

To practise emotional expression in relationship through consent, boundaries and non-judgmental witnessing.

Instructions

1. Form pairs. Invite each person to agree on a comfortable distance and to confirm willingness to mirror. Touch and eye contact are not required.

2. Round 1 (4 min): A leads slow movements, expressing a mild emotion or neutral quality. B mirrors without guessing or naming the emotion.

3. Round 2 (4 min): Switch roles. Each participant may simplify a movement to fit their own comfort and ability.

4. Round 3 (4 min): Move together without a fixed leader, allowing pauses and changes. Either person may stop or reset.

5. Reflection (3 min): Invite each person to speak about their own experience only. Do not interpret the partner's feelings.

Facilitator Prompt

"Before you begin, check that the distance and pace work for both of you. A mirror offers attention, not an interpretation. You can say 'slower,' 'more space' or 'pause' at any time."

Reflection Questions

What helped you feel safe when another person witnessed your expression? How did you communicate a boundary without words?

8.5 FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE RHYTHM 20 MIN

Purpose

To experience how different emotions can be expressed together without pressure to conform or perform.

Instructions

1. Create groups of four or five. Invite everyone to offer a gesture from earlier activities or choose a neutral one.

2. Ask the group to acknowledge each gesture and check that its owner is comfortable with others repeating it.

3. Create a 60–90-second composition using the gestures, repetition, silence and changes in tempo. Give each participant a choice of movement, rhythm-making, observing or not presenting.

4. Rehearse with instrumental music. Invite the group to check whether the rhythm, proximity and emotional intensity are comfortable for everyone.

5. Offer optional group sharing. Witnesses describe visible movement qualities, not the inner emotions of individuals.

6. Invite groups to name one decision they made to protect everyone's choice and comfort.

Facilitator Prompt

"Different emotions can share one space without becoming the same. Before adding a movement, ask whether it feels okay for its creator. How can your group make room for expression and for boundaries?"

Reflection Questions

What made the collective expression feel safe? How did the group respond when someone needed more space, a pause or a different role?

8.6 GROUNDING AND REFLECTION 10 MIN

Purpose

To settle after movement and identify practical ways to express emotions safely in everyday life.

Instructions

1. Lower the volume or play calm instrumental music. Invite participants to sit or stand in a comfortable circle.

2. Guide orientation to the room: notice the floor, chair and three neutral things nearby. Invite natural breathing rather than prescribed deep breaths.

3. Ask each person to select a grounding movement they can use when emotional intensity rises.

4. Offer optional reflection through speaking, writing or silence. Ask participants to identify one emotion they can express, one safe way to express it and one boundary or support they may need.

5. Invite sentence completions: “I can express my feelings safely by…”, “I know I need a pause when…”, “One way to respect another person’s emotions is…”, and “A movement I can take with me is…”.

6. Close by emphasising that safe expression can include speaking, moving, resting, asking for support or choosing not to share.

Facilitator Prompt

“You do not have to hide your feelings, and you do not have to show everything. What is one way you can express an emotion while respecting your own needs and the boundaries of others?”

Reflection Questions

What does expressing emotions safely mean to you now? Which movement, choice or boundary will you take into everyday life?

Facilitator Principles

• Choice and consent: All participation, disclosure, eye contact, touch and performance are optional.

• Emotional safety: Encourage manageable or symbolic emotions. Never ask participants to intensify distress or disclose personal histories.

• Boundaries: Model ways to say “pause,” “more space,” “slower” or “I prefer to observe.”

• Non-interpretation: Describe observed movement qualities without assigning an emotion or diagnosis.

• Accessibility: Offer seated, low-intensity, quiet and observing alternatives.

• Music sensitivity: Preview music and avoid sudden volume changes; allow participants to step away.

• Grounding and support: If distress occurs, stop the activity for that participant, offer orientation and access to appropriate support.

Facilitator Preparation and Music Guidance

Prepare a gentle opening track, moderate rhythmic exploration tracks and a calm closing track. Keep volume predictable. Before each activity, explain the right to pass and show how to pause. During reflection, connect the experience explicitly to safe emotional expression: personal choice, manageable intensity, respect for others and access to support.