Art4Wellbeing

SESSION 9

Emotional Awareness: Understanding Triggers and Needs

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

ART FORM USED Photography + Storytelling (with psychodrama-inspired role exploration)

TOTAL DURATION

90 minutes

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To enhance emotional awareness by helping participants recognise that the same visual stimulus can evoke different emotions and narratives, and to explore the triggers, interpretations and underlying needs connected to emotional responses.

SESSION PURPOSE

To move through a connected experiential sequence: noticing emotions in a photo gallery, creating individual stories from a shared image, identifying triggers and needs in a selected story, giving emotions and needs a voice, and revisiting the images with a new perspective.

Materials

15–20 diverse, ambiguous printed photographs; removable sticky notes (at least three per person); pens; soft instrumental music and speaker; story-writing sheets; emotion–trigger–need mapping sheets; two optional chairs; tape or floor space for displaying photographs.

Session at a Glance

NO.	ACTIVITY	TIME
9.1	Gallery of Emotions	20 min
9.2	One Photograph, Many Stories	25 min
9.3	Behind the Story: Triggers and Needs	20 min
9.4	Giving the Emotion a Voice	15 min
9.5	Closing: A New Perspective	10 min

Methodological Basis: Adapted from the experiential logic of Stage Your Confidence: warm-up → creative activity → reflection; voluntary sharing, symbolic distance, story ownership, and strength-based witnessing. Photography serves as a shared stimulus, not as a diagnostic or interpretive test.

9.1 GALLERY OF EMOTIONS 20 MIN

Purpose

To explore how photographs evoke different emotions and recognise that emotional responses are subjective and may be shaped by individual experiences and interpretations.

Instructions

1. Arrange 15–20 varied photographs around the room, on walls, tables or the floor. Choose images open to more than one interpretation.

2. Play soft instrumental music. Invite participants to walk silently through the gallery, noticing what catches their attention.

3. Give each participant at least three sticky notes. Ask them to leave one emotion word beside each of at least three different photographs. No explanation is required.

4. After everyone has contributed, invite participants to walk through the gallery a second time and read the emotion words left by others.

5. Gather in a circle and facilitate a short reflection without evaluating any responses.

Facilitator Prompt

“Walk through the images and notice what you feel. Leave an emotion word on at least three photographs. When you return, look at the words others left. There are no right or wrong emotional responses.”

Reflection Questions

1. What did you notice on your second walk through the gallery?

2. Which photographs carried very different emotions? Were there images with similar responses?

3. What surprised you about someone else’s emotion word?

4. Did another person’s word change how you saw an image?

5. Why might the same photograph evoke comfort for one person and sadness for another?

6. What might our different responses suggest about experiences, expectations and interpretations?

Transition: “We saw that one photograph can hold many emotions. What happens when we give the same photograph a story?”

9.2 ONE PHOTOGRAPH, MANY STORIES 25 MIN

Purpose

To experience how different people construct different emotional narratives from the same visual stimulus.

Instructions

1. The facilitator selects 3–4 photographs from the gallery, ideally those with the greatest variety of emotion words.

2. Form groups of 3–4. Give each group one of the selected photographs. Every member of a group works from the same image.

3. Allow about 8 minutes for each person to write an individual, fictional story from the perspective of a character in the image. Participants may write or draw a story map.

4. Invite group members to share their individual stories. Listeners do not analyse, correct or advise.

5. Each group chooses one story to share with the full group, with the storyteller's consent. Reading aloud is optional; a volunteer may read it.

6. After each reading, briefly notice similarities and differences in emotions and storylines.

Storytelling Prompts

Character: Who is the main character? Situation: What happened just before this moment?

Emotion: What is the character feeling? Trigger: What might have triggered the emotion?

Inner Voice: What is the character thinking but not saying? Need: What might the character need? Next Step: What could happen next?

Facilitator Prompt

"You are all looking at the same photograph, but each of you may discover a different character, emotion and story. Let your imagination explore what might be happening beyond the image."

Reflection Questions

1. How different were the stories created from the same photograph?

2. Did the characters experience similar or different emotions?

3. What different triggers or meanings appeared?

4. What does this tell us about how we interpret situations?

Transition: "Now let us explore one of these stories more closely. What may be happening underneath the character's emotional response?"

9.3 BEHIND THE STORY: TRIGGERS AND NEEDS 20 MIN

Purpose

To connect a character's situation and interpretation with an emotional response, possible trigger and underlying need.

Instructions

1. Each group returns to the story it chose to share in Activity 9.2.
2. Provide an Emotion–Trigger–Need Map and ask the group to explore the character's experience together.
3. Identify the situation, the meaning the character gives it, the emotion, and one or more possible needs.
4. Ask the group to propose one supportive response the character could try.
5. Invite groups to briefly share a possible need and supportive response, without claiming there is only one correct interpretation.

Emotion–Trigger–Need Map

Situation: What happened?

Interpretation / Trigger: What did the character notice or believe, and what may have activated the emotion?

Emotion: What did the character feel?

Need: What might the character need in that moment?

Supportive Response: What could help the character respond to that need?

Reflection Questions

1. Can two people experience the same situation but have different emotional triggers?
2. What needs might be connected to anger, sadness or fear?
3. How can recognising a need change the way we respond?
4. What is the difference between reacting immediately and pausing to understand our needs?

Facilitator Note: A trigger may involve an external event, an interpretation or a remembered association. An emotion does not always point to one single need. Treat all suggested needs as possibilities, not diagnoses.

Transition: "We have named a possible need. What if both the emotion and the need could speak?"

9.4 GIVING THE EMOTION A VOICE 15 MIN

Purpose

To deepen empathy and emotional understanding by personifying the character's emotion and possible underlying need.

Instructions

1. Each group chooses one emotion and one possible need from its story map.
2. Invite one volunteer to speak as the emotion and another to speak as the need. Two chairs may represent the roles.
3. Allow a short fictional dialogue between the emotion and the need. Participants can read from prepared lines if they prefer.
4. Invite the group to notice what changes when the need is given a voice.
5. Allow participants to observe or pass; avoid asking them to reenact personal distressing events.

Example Dialogue

Emotion: "I am anger. I appear when you feel ignored."

Need: "I am the need to be heard. I want you to express what matters to you."

Emotion: "I become louder when nobody listens."

Need: "Perhaps we can find a way to speak without hurting others."

Reflection Questions

1. What was the emotion trying to communicate?
2. What changed when the need had a voice?
3. Can we acknowledge an emotion without acting on every impulse?

9.5 CLOSING: A NEW PERSPECTIVE 10 MIN

Purpose

To integrate learning and recognise how curiosity about feelings can support emotional awareness.

Instructions

1. Return to the original gallery and invite participants to choose one photograph that speaks to them now.
2. Ask participants to write three short reflections: “At first, I saw…”; “Now, I notice…”; “One thing I learned about emotions is…”
3. Invite voluntary sharing of one sentence in the closing circle.
4. Close by acknowledging different experiences and the value of exploring needs without judgment.

Facilitator Prompt

“Today we discovered that one photograph can hold many emotions and one situation can inspire many stories. Behind our emotional responses, there may be different experiences, interpretations and needs. Emotional awareness begins with curiosity rather than judgment.”

Facilitator Principles

Voluntary participation and the right to pass; story ownership; fictional and symbolic distance; non-interpretive listening; cultural inclusion; permission before sharing someone’s story; respect for privacy in photography; grounding and safeguarding if strong emotions emerge.