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## **Applied improv toolkit for group mentor meetings - Maastricht University**

This document includes all methods of the applied improv toolkit for the group mentors' meetings, plus additional information on what to consider, how to teach these methods and debrief questions to link the exercises to the learning goals. It is an updated version with more focus on debrief/reflection and less methods for each session. If you have any questions, please send me an email at [mail@improveyourself-training.de](mailto:mail@improveyourself-training.de).

I wish you a lot of success and fun applying these methods. 😊

Fabian

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## Background information & Improv theatre

### Improviseational theatre

Improviseational theatre (short improv) is a form of theatre in which most or all of what is performed is created spontaneously and collaboratively by the performers without using a script. Improviseational theatre is based on two core principles:

- **Yes, and ...** (unconditional positive regard towards self and others)
- **Embracing failure** (learning that failing is something we can learn from!)

### Improviseational theatre at FPN

In the context of a teaching innovation project (“**Improv(e) your start at UM**”), FPN’s onboarding practices for first year students (i.e., the mentoring program) have been complemented by **four improv group sessions** and a **newly developed app** that further aim to enhance important life skills of students, such as the ability to reflect, to interact and connect with others and to give feedback and resilience.

Throughout the improv games, you will always reflect together with the students **WHY** you engaged in the exercise, that is, what **purpose** it had, and which of the skills have been trained through it. For example, by not knowing how a certain game will evolve, improv theatre lets students experience that they are capable to flexibly react to quickly changing circumstances, training their resilience. Or, because they have to be attentive to the things others say during play, they train their ability to interact and connect to others.

### Scientific evidence

So far, only a few universities worldwide, such as MIT Sloan or Stanford University, have integrated improv methods into their curriculum. By doing so, we not only want to provide first year students with a unique and important learning experience, but also want to promote improv theatre as valuable teaching tool in Dutch higher education. Experiential learning has been widely evidenced to promote students’ metacognitive abilities, self-directed learning, and their capacity to apply newly learned skills and knowledge to real-life problems (Kolb & Kolb, 2006). Research on improv theater specifically shows that it can reduce students’ stress levels and uncertainty tolerance and improve their affective well-being (Felsman et al., 2020; Seppänen et al., 2020). Furthermore, beneficial effects on students’ creativity, communication, and deep learning have been evidenced (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Felsman et al., 2020; Lavik, 2020; Toivanen et al., 2011; Watson, 2011). Improv theatre has also been used in organizations, showing that it may foster creativity and innovation in teams (Gibb, 2004; Kirsten & Du Preez, 2010; Vera & Crossan, 2005).

### The group meetings

In all exercises, an emphasis will be put on the two guiding principles of improv theatre, the “yes, and” principle and embracing failure, to establish a psychologically safe, constructive, and non-judgmental atmosphere in which students are enabled to leave their comfort zone and engage

with each other. This toolkit shall provide you with the needed information on how to guide students through the four group sessions.

The improv app

Together with the nordic tech company Kruso, we have created an app called “Improv(e) your start at UM”. It is available in both app stores for iOS and Android. **Students can sign up for the study in SONA**, download the app, and create an account with their SONA ID.

The app offers a range of so called “improv dailies”, short, easy and fun little games that are based on the principles of improvisational theater and are meant to complement the improv games in class. Those games have been co-created with first year students in order to link well to their “reality”. Students can choose between individual and partner+ improv games that belong to six distinct categories (be creative, get energy, let go, feel connected, have fun, be positive), depending on what they are up to in that very moment. In addition, the app provides students with five moments of reflection and allows them to track their personal development via five short surveys. For filling in the five brief surveys, students get **1 SONA credit**.

**! Please show students the app in one of the first mentor meetings, BEFORE the first improv meeting takes place!** The reason is that we want students to fill in a baseline survey (the first of five surveys) which assesses their baseline skills before they engage in any of the improv exercises. The **deadline** for the **baseline survey** is **22<sup>nd</sup> September**.

What you can say:

“In addition to the four improv group meetings that we will have soon, we have created an app for you which is called “**Improv(e) your start at UM**”. It is available in both app stores for iOS and Android. In the app, you can participate in five brief surveys which allow you to track your personal development in the next months. For filling in all five brief surveys, you get **1 SONA credit**.

The app also offers a range of so called “improv dailies”, short, easy and fun little games that complement the improv games that we will do in class. You can choose between individual and partner+ improv games that belong to six distinct categories (be creative, get energy, let go, feel connected, have fun, be positive), depending on what you are up to in that very moment.

You have to sign up for the study “**Improv(e) your start at UM**” in the SONA system, click on the URL provided there, which will lead you to the app stores, download the app and sign in with your SONA ID (= your user name).

You can create your own password; it needs to have

- at least one capital letter
- one special character (!, @, or any other of their choice)
- a minimum length of 8 characters

## Basic framework for teaching improv theatre methods

If you wish that your students feel empowered to leave their comfort zones and engage with each other, using improv theatre methods may help establishing a psychologically safe, constructive and non-judgemental atmosphere. I have been using these methods for more than ten years now. I applied them in a variety of contexts - with students, pupils, managers and teachers; so, I will provide you a framework which has proven to be very helpful in creating such a psychologically safe, constructive and non-judgmental atmosphere.

### Things to consider

Like sports, deploying improv methods need a **warm-up**. Therefore, it is vital to start each session with at least one or two methods/techniques where all participants are engaged at the same time. It has proven greatly beneficial to get the whole group moving (e.g., walking through the room or adding body movements to the exercise), as all warm-up methods provided in this toolkit. I will provide you with 3 simple warm up methods. Feel free to use all of them, however, if your student group really loves one of them, you can start all the sessions with the same one.

In order to allow **movement**, make sure the room allows movement, i.e., check whether you have enough **space**. It would be ideal to only use chairs and move the tables away. By organising the chairs in the form of a half-circle you create enough space to use techniques with movement and it might serve as a “stage” later on. Obviously, not having a table in front of you facilitates to standing up to participate in the exercises. It also might make sense to inform your students upfront that they should be wearing comfortable clothes.

Explaining the **purpose** and the **sequence** of an exercise beforehand motivates the students to engage with it, as you erase uncertainties of what is coming next. Knowing what is coming next generates the psychological safety they might need to join the activity. In this document, you will obtain information on the purpose of each method, as well as debrief questions to spark a discussion and reflection.

The **debrief** is important. Improv exercises are fun, and the debrief adds the value and learning for the students. Make sure you dedicate enough time for the debrief and approach the students with a curious mindset.

Each of the four sessions starts with a **simple** warm-up **method** (which you can choose freely), where all students will be engaged simultaneously. Only at the end of the (later) sessions, you will learn to apply more **complex** methods, where students might perform in front of peers. First, it is crucial to build up the safe space by engaging all participants at the same time and making sure everybody was active in the session. Only then you may move on to methods in which students will be exposed to others and might feel more insecure. This is reflected in the script you will be given before a session. Each session script is designed to ensure that students will feel safe engaging with the next level of more complex methods. They are classified by group form:

- 1) all together (all students together at the same time)
- 2) pairs (pairs of two, also at the same time)
- 3) groups of ... (several groups on their own)

4) stage (several students on stage, with the other students being the audience)

How to deal with students who are afraid or nervous

How can you deal with students who are **afraid or nervous** and do not want to participate in an exercise? This is very rarely the case; however, if this happens, this has proven helpful:

- Never force a student to join, only invite them.
- Instead, start exercises by asking for volunteers. To reduce uncertainty, if you are missing student volunteers at the beginning, explain how the method works.
- When you explain an exercise, ask one or two people to join you in front to show an example how the exercise works. It is perfectly fine to choose someone again who volunteered beforehand.
- If students make remarks which are against another student, speak up immediately.
- If you have the feeling students are “too cool”, you can say something in the line of
  - “It’s your choice - if you think it is boring or stupid, your experience will be boring or stupid. If you take it with a curious attitude, you will learn something new.”
  - “You know, you always have these 1 or 2 “too cool” students, who make the experience for all others worse. Do you want to be those people? If you experience someone being like that - how do you want to deal with it?”
- And most importantly: Reward the students who volunteer and actively take part by cheering for them (and asking the other students to cheer, e.g., “a round of applause for...”). Never ever make a negative comment about someone who does not dare to join or seems to be insecure.

If you do **not feel comfortable** with using an exercise, just leave it out. You can always repeat any exercise which worked well for your group.

If you have some students having **low energy**, e.g. after having a long day, it’s fine to have some people just watching. Most of the times, others will step up and enjoy doing an exercise with less people. Give the people not actively participating a role though – for example being the observer and then reporting on what they saw. If you feel tired and drained, my sure you are using exercises that are also fun for you!

If you have the feeling some **people are left** out when groups formed for the exercises, something in the line of “now all blond people find a partner for the next exercise” or “... find 3 more people to form groups of 4”.

If you want to create a nicer atmosphere, you can instruct your students about one of the most important improv principles: “**Let your partner shine**” and challenge them to keep that in mind while conducting the exercises. The method “What I like about that” is perfect to introduce and demonstrate this principle.

## Structure of the sessions & method description

Each of the four sessions comes with a script which provides you with a sequence of methods which are designed to establish a psychologically safe atmosphere, and which then contribute to the overall topic of the session. However, feel free to pick the methods and the order you like most – you can be as flexible as you want. Also repeating an exercise which worked well and students really liked can be a particularly good idea. In this case, asking in the debrief if anything new came up or if something was different might lead to interesting insights.

- Name
  - Name of the exercise
- Duration
  - Duration of the exercise
- Form of group
  - Form of the group (all together, in pairs, groups of ..., stage)
- Purpose
  - The purpose of the exercise and how it contributes to the overall topic of the session.
- Setup
  - The setup of the method
- Debrief questions
  - Debrief questions you can use to debrief the method, i.e., how to transfer the learnings or skills to their studies. This section has been updated and provides more specific debrief questions to choose from, linking the learning goals even closer to the improv exercises.
  - You can of course also ask more general debrief questions, such as just using thumbs (up, middle, down), asking how many tried something new today, who pushed their comfort zone, who was not as open to improv that day, how many learnt something new about themselves, ... and use them to ask further questions connected to their answers.
- What to consider
  - Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise.

## Warm up methods (suitable for all sessions)

These methods can be used for warm up. It is essential to start with one or two warm up methods in each session, like it is important to do a warmup in sports. Choose the one(s) you like most or feel comfortable with most. You can use the same method each session, or you can vary and use all of them in different sessions. Also, the "word chain" of session one can be used as a warmup method, but since it is also a good method for reflection, it is not listed in this section.

Method: Clapping circle

- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Form of group:** all together (circle)
- **Purpose: Warm-up.** Get all participants focused, get their attention, activate them.
- **Setup:** The participants form a circle. The tutor starts with clapping in the direction of one participant, who then claps to another participant. The faster the better!  
After a few minutes, say "yes" quite loud when you clap and make sure this is done by all the other participants as well.
- **Debrief questions (not necessarily needed, since the main purpose is warm up):**
  - What helped you to clap as fast as possible?
  - How do you feel right now?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Tell the participants to focus on pace. Sometimes, a certain "beat" emerges. If that happens, direct the participants' focus to the beat. It happens a lot in groups who get synchronized.

Method: 1-2-3

- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Form of group:** pairs
- **Purpose: Warm-up.** Get all participants focused, get their attention, activate them.
- **Setup:** The participants form pairs. In the first round, they count to three and start with 1 again when they finished:
  - A: "1"
  - B: "2"
  - A: "3"
  - B: "1" ...
 After one minute, the "1" is replaced by clapping:
  - A: clap
  - B: "2"
  - A: "3"
  - B: clap
 After about another minute, the "2" is replaced by raising up the arms and cheering. And after another 1-2 minutes, the 3 is replaced by turning around 360°. All numbers are replaced by movements now. In the final round, the participants can choose if they say the number or do the movement.
- **Debrief questions (not necessarily needed, since the main purpose is warm up):**
  - What was difficult for you?
  - How do you feel now?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Give an example together with one student how to do the counting - it is easier to show than to explain. Tell them to be

as quick as possible – this exercise is not about doing it perfect, but about being in the moment.

Method: Danish clapping

- **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Form of group:** pairs
- **Purpose: Warm-up.** Get all participants focused, activate them and respond to each other.
- **Setup:** The students form pairs. They will do movements at the same time and have three options:
  - Clap on their legs/thighs and swing their arms to the right.
  - Clap on their legs and swing the arm to the left.
  - Clap on their legs and move their hands above their head.

So, each movement starts the same: clapping on the lap and then each individual chooses one of three options (left, right, up). If everybody of the pair/ group does the move into the same direction (both up/ one left & one right / one right & one left), they clap on their legs again and then give each other a high five. When it flows, they should speed up. The exercise is explained here visually:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et56yUVpAIM>

- **Debrief questions (not necessarily needed, since the main purpose is warm up):**
  - How did it work out for you?
  - How did you feel during the exercise?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Pick one student to show how the exercise works. It might get quite loud thanks to all the clapping and laughter; this exercise is very energetic! 😊

## Session 1 (2 hours)

Since most students might have never gotten in touch with improv theater, it will be useful to explain to students what improv theater is and, equally important, why we are doing improv theater with them.

Background and infos on project

In the context of a teaching innovation project ("**Improv(e) your start at UM**") that aims to improve first year students' experiences in the first 100 days of their studies, we have integrated small, fun, and engaging improv theater exercises into our mentoring program and **developed an app** that together aim to enhance important life skills, such as the ability to reflect, to interact and connect with others and to give feedback and resilience.

Improvisational theatre (short improv) is a form of theatre in which most or all of what is performed is created spontaneously and collaboratively by the performers without using a script. Improvisational theatre is based on two core principles:

- **Yes, and ...** (unconditional positive regard towards self and others)
- **Embracing failure** (learning that failing is something we can learn from!)

For the mentoring program, we keep things easy-peasy, also for people who are not familiar with improv or not particularly fond of playing theater. The small and fun exercises and games that we will engage in, are based on the principles of improv, but typically do not involve playing a full scene (in front of an audience).

Throughout the improv games, we will always reflect together **WHY** we engaged in the exercise, that is, what **purpose** it had, and which of the skills have been trained through it. For example, by not knowing how a certain game will evolve, improv theatre lets you experience that you are capable to flexibly react to quickly changing circumstances, training your resilience. Or, because you have to be attentive to the things others say during play, you train your ability to interact and connect to others.

The improv app

(! Please provide this information now, if you haven't done so in any of the earlier meetings)

In addition to the four improv group meetings, we have created an app for you which is called "**Improv(e) your start at UM**" and is available in both app stores for iOS and Android.

You have to sign up for the study **Improv(e) your start at UM** in the SONA system, click on the URL provided there that leads you to the app stores, download the app and sign in with your SONA ID (= your user name).

You can create your own password; it needs to have

- at least one capital letter
- one special character (!, @, or any other of their choice)
- a minimum length of 8 characters

The app offers a range of so called “improv dailies”, short, easy and fun little games that complement the improv games in class. You can choose between individual and partner+ improv games that belong to six distinct categories (be creative, get energy, let go, feel connected, have fun, be positive), depending on what you are up to in that very moment.

In addition, the app provides you with five moments of reflection and allows you to track your personal development via five short surveys. For filling in all surveys, you get **1 SONA credit**.

Scientific evidence

Improv theater is great fun, but it is also important to mention that it is “**serious science**”! Its’ usefulness is backed up by empirical evidence showing that it can reduce students’ stress levels and uncertainty tolerance and improve their creativity, communication, affective well-being, and deep learning. The popularity of improv as a serious teaching method is also showcased by the fact that universities like Stanford University and organizations like google successfully use improv methods in their trainings for students and employees. Improv theater is particularly well suited as it mirrors real life challenges (i.e., dealing with uncertainty, collaborating with others) while creating a positive, playful, and socially oriented atmosphere, which allows to explore, embrace mistakes, learn and grow.

Method: Yes and!

- **Duration:** 20 minutes
- **Form of group:** pairs
- **Purpose:** **Interact – feedback** (learn how to respond in a helpful way) – **interpersonal responsiveness** (being able to react flexible) – **ability to connect – resilience** (flexibility)
- **Setup:** Tell the participants to plan something, e.g. a trip for the whole group. Person A starts with an offer and person B’s response must start with “Yes, but...”, followed by a reason why it is not a good idea, and another offer. Then person A responds with “Yes, but...” and so on. They will do this for 3-4 minutes. After that, ask them about their experience, but keep it short. Explain part two of the method: Now, each response starts with “Yes, and...” instead of “Yes, but...”, meaning the offer will be accepted and something is added on top.
- **Debrief questions (pick the ones that fit most for you):**
  - What was the difference between round one and round two?
  - In which situations do you say “Yes, but...” when it is not necessary?
  - What would be different if you say “Yes, and...” more often?
  - If you think of **interacting** with other people – come up with three specific situations where a yes-and-method is helpful.
  - How can a “Yes, and...”-attitude be helpful when you need to give **feedback** to others?
  - In which way can this attitude be helpful to **connect** with others in a better way?
  - “Yes, and...” might be helpful in a **therapy setting** – find examples, where exactly.
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** The “Yes, but...” can be much easier for some participants, since they are used to it. The “Yes, and...” involves taking a risk, since we cannot control where it is going to lead. A lot of times, a participant makes the objection that you cannot always respond with “Yes, and...” to each and every situation in life. My response to that is that this is also not necessary – the aim is rather

to have a look at the “Yes, but...”-situations which could better be a “Yes, and...” situation. It is more about the attitude (accepting the other person’s idea) than literally saying “Yes, and...” **The “Yes and” is one of the core pillars of improv theatre, reflecting the unconditional positive regard towards self and others.**

Method: Word chain

- **Duration:** 20 minutes
- **Form of group:** all together
- **Purpose:** **Warm up – interact – resilience** (deals with the fear of failure). It is a fun game which helps to create a positive atmosphere. At the same time, participants will be more aware of how they deal with **mistakes**. After they conducted the method, they deal with mistakes in a much more positive way. This method can be used to introduce the mindset of “not being too hard on yourself while trying out something new that does not work the very first time” – which might be the case with all the other improv methods as well.
- **Setup:** The participants form a circle. You start with pointing at one of the participants and at the same time saying a random word, e.g., “tree”. That participant points at another participant and says the first word, which comes to her mind, e.g. “leaf”, and so on. After demonstrating how it works for about 2 minutes, you add another rule: In case someone takes longer than one second to say a word, or forgets to point at someone, you count to 3 and all the participants raise their arms and shout “once again!”. (Practice the counting and “once again!” 2-3 times to have all participants join in, since this might feel a little uncomfortable for them doing it the first time). The person who did the “mistake” starts a new round with pointing at someone and saying a word.
- **Debrief questions:**
  - How did it feel to “fail” and what changed when you just went on playing?
  - Did the level of difficulty change over time?
  - What was easy, what was difficult?
  - Which situations in your life/during your studies felt like failing but looking back were not as bad?
  - How can the “once again” help with **self-regulation** in challenging times?
  - What is the link between a “once again”-attitude and **resilience**?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** It is important that during the game you are strict. If people try to justify why they could not come up with a word quick enough, e.g. they could not hear the other person. Stop that explanation and say “it does not matter, we just do it again.” The point of this method is that you just do it again if it did not work out.

I find it helpful to introduce the *one second rule* with “you are all very smart people! So, I would like to challenge you!”. Since such a competitive element raises the stakes, it makes the debrief even more powerful.

Method: What I like about that

- **Duration:** 20 minutes
- **Form of group:** groups of 4-6
- **Purpose:** **Interact** (first listen and second focus on positive aspects makes a conversation very effective) – **feedback** (listen deeply before giving a response) – **interpersonal**

**responsiveness** (focus on what is really said and not pre-formulated answers) – **ability to connect** (see the idea of the other person, collaboration, safety, vulnerability).

By the end of the exercise participants will have experienced collaborating with others in a climate in which all ideas are built upon. They have reflected on their own tendencies to actively listen and used their imaginations to expand on what is possible.

- **Setup:** Tell the participants that they are going to design a product together, such as a toaster, using a specific procedure:
  - a. One person adds a feature to the toaster (e.g. “I would like it to have six slots.”).
  - b. The next person will say “What I like about that is...” and finish this sentence based on something in their partner’s offer (e.g. “What I like about that is that my husband, my son, and I can all have toast at the same time.”). Then they add another feature to the same toaster (“And I would like the toaster to be blue.”).
  - c. The next person will say “What I like about that is...” and follows the structure as explained in b.

Instruct them that there are two additional variables: They have infinite resources and the laws of physics do not apply (i.e. the toaster could also fly). Demonstrate with 2-3 volunteering participants. Each group can choose its own product to design if they want to.

- **Debrief questions:**
  - What was easy/difficult about having to say, “What I like about that...”?
  - What surprised you?
  - What is the difference between accepting and agreement?
  - What did your group have to do to be successful?
  - How does this process compare to how you communicate at work/at university?
  - Which factors helped to **interact in an efficient way** in this method? (-> *listening before you answer, focus on the things you like, not the ones you do not like, knowing that you do not have to defend your idea makes it easy to be creative without fear*)
  - What would be different if you spent one day responding to everything you hear with “What I like about that is...”?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Demonstrate at least three “What I like about that”-exchanges before you send them into groups – participants tend to skip the “What I like about that” step and move straight to adding their own feature to the item. Be strict about always starting with “What I like about that”. In the debrief, when some individuals struggle with building on their partner’s idea, make sure that such behaviours are not characterised as bad or wrong – for some people, learning to actively listen is a challenge.

## Session 2 (1 hour)

Method: Active mirror

- **Duration:** 20 minutes
- **Form of group:** pairs
- **Purpose:** **Interact** (giving and taking space) – **reflect** (being aware of myself and others) – **interpersonal responsiveness** (being able to lead and follow depending on the context) – **ability to connect** (be in tune with the other person, collaboration).  
This method aims to connect the participants and makes them focus on each other in a very intense way. It also shows if someone prefers to take the lead or rather follow, and how helpful it is to being able to be flexible with that depending on the situation. Getting a good understanding of what is needed in a conversation – giving space or contributing – helps to have good interactions with other people and to connect with them.
- **Setup:** The students form couples and stand facing each other. At first, person A is in front of a mirror and person B is the mirror image (meaning person A leads the movements and person B follows). Then roles are changed. In the end, both are standing in front of a mirror and are the mirror image at the same time - it should not be visible who is leading and who is following. Each round takes about 3-4 minutes.
- **Debrief questions:**
  - Did you prefer to follow or to lead?
  - What made it easier for you to be synchronized?
  - What was helpful for you, what made it harder?
  - How **connected** did you feel to your partner? What contributed to feeling connected?
  - Was your focus more on your own movements, or the movements of your partner? Did that change over time?
  - Find situations in where it is helpful to have a good feeling for what is needed – giving space (listen) or contributing (talking).
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Tell the participants to be slow! Quite often, the leading participant moves extremely fast, giving the follower no chance to imitate the movements. Round 3 needs a detailed explanation, I mostly explain it by using both arms, saying “person A is moving the arm and person B is following that movement – while person B is forming a fist at the same time, which is followed by person A”. Part of the debrief can also reflect on how the relationships of the pairs developed. In some moments one may feel it easier to follow and other moments offer to take the lead. If both want to lead, there might be a conflict – if both want to follow, nothing will happen.

Method: I am a tree

- **Duration:** 20 minutes
- **Form of group:** all together (circle)
- **Purpose:** **Interact** – **reflect** (how did I judge my own ideas? Did I dare to just jump in? Did it have to be the perfect idea?) – **interpersonal responsiveness** (being able to respond to different situations) – **ability to connect** (see other’s perspectives, collaboration).  
This game helps adapting quickly to changing situations and finding ideas. At the same

time, it is about creating an image together. Hence, it aids finding a shared perspective - or to show that different perspectives on the same situation are possible.

- **Setup:** All participants stand in a circle. One participant goes into the middle and says, "I am a tree" and illustrates this through their body posture. Another participant joins and adds something to the image, e.g. "I am a branch" or "I am a bench, standing in front of the tree". A third participant joins in and completes the image, e.g. with "I am an old lady sitting on the bench". Then, the first participant leaves the image and says whom she/he/they are going to take out, e.g. "I take the old lady with me".

A new image will be displayed in the next round, starting with the participant who stayed in the circle, e.g. "I am a bench". The image following now should **not** be connected to the one seen before.

- **Debrief questions:**
  - What surprised you?
  - Did you jump in without having a clear idea, or did you have to have a clear idea first?
  - What made it easy/hard for you to join? Feel free to share the thoughts you had while watching/joining – were they rather critical or not? Find situations where it might be also the case that you hesitate to do something because your thoughts are extremely critical. How would you like to deal with these situations in future?
  - What did you think when you saw the ideas of the others? Did you judge them? Were you surprised? Or something else?
  - Did you have fun to react in such a spontaneous way – or did it rather stress you?

- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** The funniest images are mostly the ones that were most obvious - this is a wonderful way of showing that you do not need to be creative in improv.

When you explain the technique, be clear on the wording, e.g. each image should start with "I am ..." and an image should be finished with "I take ... with me". Also, the participant starting a new image - staying in the circle - should repeat what they are representing. This clear structure provides orientation and safety.

In case the exercise takes a "dark turn" (e.g. topics related to death or depression), you can direct the students to add elements which e.g. are "helpful when having a depression".

## Session 3 (1 hour)

Method: The strange neighbour

- **Duration:** 15 minutes
- **Form of group:** all together (circle)
- **Purpose: Reflect** (observe the feeling that comes up and deal with it/regulate) – **resilience** (self-regulation).  
This method enables students to react much calmer and more relaxed to stressful situations. The techniques show them that they have a choice on how to react to discomfort. They can reflect on the way they would normally react.
- **Setup:** All students stand in a circle. The student makes up something fictional about their neighbour, like an accessory or invents a part of the body. They then confront the neighbour with the feature they made up. Example: "Wow, you have huge antlers on your forehead!". The neighbour responds positively, without justifying nor defending it. The answer has to start with "Yes, you are right!", and in the case of the example can be followed by "... since I have these antlers on my forehead, I don't need to queue at the cloakroom at parties anymore. I can just hang my jacket on the antlers!". It can be a funny response, as long as it is not defensive nor negative, which is most important. You could do a second round, but this time you don't let the students make up fictional things, but rather use accusations which might happen in student or work life, e.g. "You always forget the attachments in emails you send me!". The answer could be "Yes, you are right! I just love sending you emails, and this way I can send you more emails, as I have to resend them with the attachment."
- **Debrief questions:**
  - What made it easier for you to react?
  - How do you feel about the answers given?
  - How can this exercise help you in another stressful situation?
  - Did you manage to observe your first impulse without having the need to directly react? In which other situations might it be helpful to first observe and then consciously decide how to react? Also think of your potential future job.
  - Where do you see links to being more **resilient**?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Be strict on the students not defending themselves – instead they should react positively. Please, do not blame them if they do, rather acknowledge that it is indeed hard to not fall into the negative defensive mode. Explain, that it is not about always agreeing and saying "Yes, you are right!", and it is about the attitude we react in a stressful situation.

Method: Problem solver

- **Duration:** 15-20 minutes
- **Form of group:** all together (circle) or in groups of 4-6
- **Purpose: Interpersonal responsiveness** (by reacting in an open, flexible way) – **resilience** (flexibility, out of the box thinking to find solutions)  
This method helps to think creatively and to focus on solutions, not problems. It helps to be creative and at the same time to take the first idea that comes to your mind, instead of being blocked by trying to be highly creative. This way of thinking might help future therapists to inspire their clients to think solution oriented.

- **Setup:** Let all participants paint an object on a paper (or write the word on a paper) – anything works. Tell them to not show it as of yet. Participant A describes a problem she has (“I never find a parking spot!”) and names one person to provide their object (or alternative, asks the neighbour in the circle). Participant B shows their object and praises it (“Oh, I have something for you. Look, I have this super amazing pen, which can draw perfect lines! This will help you to solve your problem.”). Participant A thanks participant B and describes how that will solve their problem („I can just draw my own parking lines on the street, great!”). So, the person producing a problem is also the one to solve the problem with the inspiration of the item provided by someone else.  
After a few rounds, you can ask for work/university-related problems to be solved.
- **Debrief questions:**
  - What surprised you?
  - How easy was it to produce a solution?
  - How can the solution you found inspire you to find a solution for your “real” problem?
  - How can this way of thinking be helpful in interactions with other people?  
(interpersonal responsiveness)
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Encourage the participants to exaggerate, this helps to find more creative solutions.

## Session 4 (2 hours)

Method: Expert interview

- **Duration:** 20 Minutes
- **Form of group:** groups of 3-4
- **Purpose: Reflect** (is the idea helpful or not?) – **interpersonal responsiveness** (react depending on what the other person said) – **talk to experts in field** (by practising the role of the moderator) – **resilience** (flexibility)  
Creating something together in a collaborative way and learning that it is good sometimes to drop your idea without trying to force it. This method is also about giving up control and trusting the process.
- **Setup:** Two students stand next to each other and face into the same direction. Like a TV-moderator, third person asks them questions, standing in front of them. The two facing the same way respond building full sentences by saying one word each, turn by turn. The answers can be introduced as an expert, e.g. the moderator can say “Lovely humans, a big welcome to our expert tonight! We are happy having you here in our TV studio. Please, tell us something about yourself – what is your name and what is your area of expertise?”
- **Debrief questions:**
  - What was hard for you?
  - What helped you to get going?
  - Did you have a clear direction in mind, where the story should lead to? How did you react/feel when that did not happen?
  - Which kind of questions of the moderator were helpful?
  - Did you try to help your partner, or did you maybe try to challenge him/her/them and make it harder?
  - If you think of the fact that even though nobody knew where the interview would be going, something interesting came out: In which other situations might it be helpful to go step by step instead of knowing the exact goal?
  - If you think of the role of the moderator: Which kind of questions might help you in your **interview with an expert in the field**?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:**
  - Give an example with two students, playing the moderator yourself. You can ask them about the weather for example. Be clear that it should only be one word and that they should not think for too long. One of the learning outcomes of this method is, that there will be an interesting/funny/good result, even though nobody knew where they were going. This means; while working together, it is much more important to **connect** with the other person than having a clear idea about the end result.

Method: Pantomime presents

- **Duration:** 15-20 minutes
- **Form of group:** all together (circle)
- **Purpose: Interact** – **interpersonal responsiveness** (by reacting in an open, flexible way) – **ability to connect** (appreciating the idea of the other person, collaboration) – **resilience** (flexibility)

Create a positive atmosphere as well as it makes participants aware of how hard it can be to let go of one's own perspective and just listen to and observe the other person instead – in other words, connect to that person. This method creates a nice, appreciating atmosphere. I use it regularly as the last method in a session.

- **Setup:** Each participant will give a present to another participant. Participant A does this in pantomime, without explaining what it is. She may say something like “here, I have something for you!” They do the move of giving something and with that can indicate how heavy or big the present may be. Participant B receives the present, looks at it and says, “Thank you for ...” (naming what he thinks it is), and in this way tells what the present is. Participant A has to accept that idea and explain shortly, why she chose exactly this present for participant B.
- **Debrief questions:**
  - How did it feel when the other person did not say what you expected?
  - How was it to respond?
  - How can this mindset be of help when you want to connect with other people?
  - Which aspects of this exercise help with collaboration?
- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** Be strict with the fact that participant A should not indicate anything about what the present might be, and that participant B should not explain why they like it.

Method: Freeze tag

- **Duration:** 15-30 minutes (depending on how many rounds you play)
  - **Form of group:** all together (half-circle), two people are playing.
  - **Purpose:** **Interpersonal responsiveness** (by reacting in an open, flexible way) – **ability to connect** (collaboration)
- This method challenges the students one by one to react in a very flexible way and at the same time be connected to the partner on stage. Also, shows them to trust their body and the moment and not necessarily have everything planned beforehand.
- **Setup:** Two players start a scene inspired by a suggestion of an action by the audience. At any time, the mentor claps. The first two players freeze right where they are. The next player in line (one end of the half circle, to be defined beforehand) tags one of them out, assumes their exact position, and starts a new scene inspired by that position. The new scene should have a completely different context with different characters/setting and is not linked to the first one.
  - **Easier version:** If you have the feeling it would be too much for the students, try this version: After the clap, all other students think of a new scene or activity that they could be doing based on the new pose they are in. A new player tags one of them out and starts that scene. This takes pressure off of the players to come up with the new scenes, since the group does it together.
  - **Debrief questions:**
    - What went on in your mind when you had to start a new scene – how did the dialogue look like?
    - How stressed were you when you started a scene? Why? Did that change over time, if you did more than one round?
    - How surprised were you by the ideas of the others?
    - How quickly were you connected to your fellow player? What helped?

- **Anything else to consider while conducting this exercise:** You can stress the fact that they do not have to have an idea of how the scene should move on when they tag someone else out. Tell them they can take their time and decide inspired by their body position. And tell the participants to change their body positions during the time they play, this makes it easier to switch the context for the next player.

## Overview of the proposed methods for each session

| Warmups         | Session 1                                       | Session 2                                       | Session 3                                       | Session 4                                       |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Clapping circle | <i>Warm up(s) of your choice – see column 1</i> | <i>Warm up(s) of your choice – see column 1</i> | <i>Warm up(s) of your choice – see column 1</i> | <i>Warm up(s) of your choice – see column 1</i> |
| 1-2-3           | Yes and!                                        | Active mirror                                   | The strange neighbour                           | Expert interview                                |
| Danish clapping | Word Chain                                      | I am a tree                                     | Problem solver                                  | Pantomime presents                              |
|                 | What I like about that                          |                                                 |                                                 | Freeze tag                                      |