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The handbook on the educational programme for long-term care caregivers

Work Package 5

DanceCARE Erasmus +

Dance Movement Therapy and Conscious Movement as innovative tools in emotional education
and support for long-term caregivers.

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HANDBOOK DEVELOPMENT TEAM

This handbook was developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ project DanceCARE.

The European Association of Dance Movement Therapy (EADMT) was responsible for the development and coordination of this deliverable.

Lead Author and Editorial Coordination

- Dr. Marloes Shami – van Houten (EADMT, Germany)

Contributing Authors

- Theodora Bareka (EADMT, Germany)
- Dr. Hanna Poikonen (Wise Motion, Finland)
- Flavia Galassi (National Institute of Health and Science on Ageing , INRCA, Italy)
- Panos Kassidakis (Aktios Elderly Care Units, Greece)
- Dr. Mirian Fernández-Salido (Polibenestar - Universitate de Valencia)

Editorial Support

- Aleksandra Chlipała (EADMT, Germany)

Layout, Formatting and Image Integration

- Andrea Tziorta (EADMT, Germany)

This handbook was developed on the basis of the DanceCARE training programme and the research conducted throughout the Erasmus+ DanceCARE project.

Final review prior to Erasmus+ submission was conducted by Dr. Rosa María Rodríguez-Jiménez (President of EADMT; Universidad Francisco de Vitoria) and Dr. Sara Santini (INRCA), coordinator of the DanceCARE project.



The story of a small seed

The following reflection was shared by a long-term caregiver who participated in the programme in Italy.

“At the beginning, each participant was like that tiny seed just placed into the earth: a little uncertain, self-contained, listening to her own inner space. The ground was unfamiliar, and silence was needed to sense whether it was fertile enough to allow oneself to grow.

Then, slowly, something began to move. Like a small plant finding the strength to make its way toward the light, the bodies also began to open, to breathe, to seek contact with the air, with one another, with the life surrounding them. Movement became more fluid, breathing deeper, and the space more fully inhabited.

At a certain point, the little plant realised it was not alone. Around it were other small plants, each different yet part of the same soil. From that encounter, a web of invisible roots emerged, woven through gazes, touches, smiles, and shared breaths.

And so, the group, like a small forest, took shape: alive, vibrant, capable of supporting and nourishing one another. Intertwined roots do not take away space; they give strength. And it is within this silent network that lightness, freedom, and tenderness found their place, leaving a profound mark of growth and belonging.”



Executive summary

The DanceCARE handbook provides a structured yet flexible framework for professionals to facilitate body-mind group sessions that promote well-being, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and peer support. Originally developed for caregivers of older adults, the programme is adaptable across age groups and care contexts, making it relevant for diverse populations.

Grounded in Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), psychodynamic and neuroscience-informed approaches (Wise Motion method), DanceCARE uses movement, creative expression, and reflective dialogue to support participants in developing awareness of bodily sensations, emotions, and relational patterns. The use of metaphor, imagery, and symbolic movement enables participants to access and express experiences that may be difficult to verbalise, fostering insight, creativity, and meaning-making.

The handbook is designed for trained facilitators with a background in therapeutic and embodied practices. It provides practical guidance for implementation, including how to establish a safe, inclusive, and non-judgmental environment. Each session follows a clear four-phase structure: check-in, warm-up, process, and closure/check-out, supporting both experiential engagement and reflective integration, while allowing flexibility to adapt to group needs.

The programme consists of seven progressive sessions focusing on key themes: self-awareness, self-confidence, mindfulness, empathy, emotional regulation, communication, and social interaction. Through movement-based and arts-based methods, participants develop practical tools for self-care, stress management, and interpersonal connection.

A central component of DanceCARE is the strengthening of peer support. In addition to facilitated sessions, the handbook includes detailed guidance for the activation and facilitation of self-help groups. These groups are designed to empower participants to continue meeting independently in a safe and supportive environment, fostering mutual learning, shared responsibility, and sustained personal growth beyond the formal programme.

The handbook also incorporates monitoring and reflection tools to support both participants and facilitators. These include instruments such as the Self-Observation Diary and Group Activity Reports, which help track individual experiences, group dynamics, and session outcomes. These tools contribute to ongoing evaluation, support the research design of the DanceCARE project, and ensure quality and consistency in programme delivery.

Overall, the DanceCARE handbook offers a comprehensive methodology that combines structured intervention, creative exploration, peer-led continuation, and reflective monitoring. It equips professionals with the tools needed to facilitate meaningful body-mind processes that enhance resilience, reduce isolation, and support long-term well-being.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The purpose of this guide and target audience

1.1.1 Purpose of this guide

This handbook is designed to support professionals in facilitating body–mind group sessions aimed at promoting well-being, self-awareness, and peer support. Although the programme was originally developed for caregivers of older adults, its structure and methods are intergenerationally applicable and can be adapted to different age groups and caregiving contexts. The exercises and principles presented here can therefore be used with a wider range of participants while maintaining the core focus on embodied awareness and supportive group processes.

The handbook is conceived as a continuous programme, with sessions building progressively on one another. This structure allows participants to deepen their experience over time and gradually develop greater confidence in expressive movement, reflection, and interpersonal exchange. At the same time, individual sessions or specific exercises can also be selected and used independently, depending on the needs of the group, the available time, or the professional context. This flexibility enables practitioners to adapt the material while preserving the overall approach. In the case that only parts of the program are implemented, the outcomes of the intervention may vary and the expected results may not be fully achieved.

The purpose of the training is to support participants in increasing awareness of their bodily sensations, emotions, and relational patterns. Through movement, reflection, and creative expression, participants are encouraged to develop sensitivity to their internal experiences and to recognise how these relate to their daily lives. The use of metaphorical and symbolic language plays an important role in this process, helping participants explore experiences that may be difficult to express directly. Working with imagery and embodied metaphors can foster creativity, insight, and meaning-making (Halprin 2003).

Another central aim of the programme is to strengthen peer support. The group setting offers a space where participants can share experiences, feel heard, and recognise common challenges. This can reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging. Within this supportive environment, participants are also introduced to practical tools for self-care, emotion regulation, and communication. These tools include grounding exercises, attention to posture and movement, and practices that support awareness and regulation of the breath.

Overall, the handbook aims to provide professionals with a structured yet flexible framework to facilitate body-mind sessions that encourage grounding, emotional regulation, interpersonal connection, and the development of sustainable self-care practices.



1.1.2 Target audience

The DanceCARE programme was originally designed to be implemented by certified and experienced Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) professionals. This remains the preferred model of facilitation, as DMT professionals are specifically trained to work safely with embodied processes, emotional expression, symbolic movement, and group dynamics. Their expertise supports the therapeutic depth of the programme and helps ensure participants' emotional and physical well-being throughout the sessions.

At the same time, this handbook was developed to increase accessibility and applicability across different professional contexts and countries, where access to certified DMT professionals may vary. In situations where a DMT professional cannot be included, the programme may be facilitated either by one professional who combines a background in therapy with experience in embodied and movement-based practices, or through co-facilitation by two professionals whose expertise complements each other. For example, one facilitator may contribute therapeutic or psychosocial expertise, while the other brings experience in embodied, artistic, or movement-based work.

In all cases, facilitators are encouraged to adapt the material carefully, remain within the boundaries of their professional competencies, and prioritise emotional and physical safety at all times. The handbook therefore offers practical guidance and a simplified session structure that can support implementation within interdisciplinary health, social care, community, educational, or artistic settings, while maintaining the programme's therapeutic and educational intentions.

1.2. The DanceCARE pilot project: objectives, methodology and programme structure

DanceCARE is an Erasmus+ project focused on adult education in the health and care sector. The project was developed in response to the emotional, physical, and social burden experienced by long-term caregivers (LTC) of older adults. Both informal caregivers, such as family members, and semi-formal caregivers, such as family care assistants, often experience chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, isolation, and limited opportunities for self-care (European Commission, 2021). Especially in countries where formal long-term care systems are underdeveloped, caregiving responsibilities can have a profound impact on caregivers' physical, emotional, and economic wellbeing.

Caregiver burden may manifest in many different ways, including sleep difficulties, anxiety, mood decline, concentration problems, irritability, somatic complaints, and feelings of isolation (Del-Pino-Casado et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2012; Lindt et al., 2020). DanceCARE was therefore developed from the understanding that supporting caregivers also requires attention to their emotional, embodied, and relational experiences. The programme aims to promote wellbeing, resilience, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and peer connection through body-mind and arts-based practices.



This perspective is connected to the concept of embodied cognition, which emphasises the central role of bodily processes in emotional experience, learning, and mental health (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). DanceCARE represents an embodied and relational approach to caregiver support, placing movement, creativity, somatic awareness, and social connection at the center of the educational process.

The programme combines principles from DMT and the Wise Motion (WM) approach. DMT is the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual (Payne, 1992). Grounded in the interconnectedness of body and mind, DMT uses movement and creative expression to support self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience. Research has shown that DMT can contribute to reducing psycho-emotional stress and symptoms of depression and anxiety, while enhancing wellbeing in clinical, caregiving and educational populations (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2016; Karkou et al., 2019; Pylvänäinen et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Jiménez et al., 2022).

The Wise Motion (WM) approach is grounded in neuroscientific understandings of body-brain interaction and combines movement, breath, creativity, and social engagement to support psychological wellbeing and self-awareness (Porges, 2009; Poikonen, 2024). Both DMT and WM emphasise the importance of embodiment, emotional awareness, creativity, and interpersonal connection in supporting resilience and mental health. Moreover, both approaches share the understanding that caregivers first need support in caring for themselves, recognizing their own emotions and limits, and developing sustainable coping strategies.

As literature suggests that multi-component interventions are particularly effective in reducing caregiver burden, DanceCARE combines body-mind education with peer support and opportunities for social connection (Wituk et al., 2000). For this reason, an innovative, flexible, and blended psycho-educational programme based mainly on DMT and the Wise Motion (WM) approach was developed and tested simultaneously in Italy, Spain, and Greece, with the aim of creating a transferable model that can be adapted across different cultural and professional contexts.

The programme consists of two complementary sections:

- **Body-Mind Education for Stress Relief**, including seven structured body-mind group sessions;
- **“What to Do If...” Self-Help Group Guidance**, designed to support peer exchange, mutual support, and continued reflection beyond the facilitated sessions.

In addition, the programme includes online resources, video materials, and reflective monitoring tools such as self-observation diaries and group activity reports. These materials support both participants and facilitators in deepening reflection, documenting experiences, and strengthening continuity between sessions.

The educational structure of DanceCARE was developed through literature review, consultation with European DMT experts, focus groups in the field of older people care, and pilot implementation in Italy, Spain, and Greece. Research on caregivers’ emotional needs and supportive soft skills formed the basis for the programme structure and session themes. Key emotional needs identified included wellbeing, self-confidence, resilience, emotional



regulation, and social connection. The programme also focuses on strengthening self-awareness, mindfulness, empathy, communication skills, and supportive interpersonal interaction.

The seven body–mind sessions were further informed by the contributions of 140 European DMT professionals, who shared their expertise regarding movement-based interventions for stress reduction and emotional support in caregiving contexts. Feedback gathered from participants and facilitators during the pilot phase was also integrated into the development of this handbook.

While DanceCARE offers a structured framework, the programme is intentionally designed to remain flexible and adaptable to different groups, cultural contexts, and professional settings. Through the integration of embodiment, creativity, reflection, and peer support, DanceCARE aims to contribute to more sustainable and human-centered approaches to caregiver wellbeing.

2. BASIC INSTRUCTIONS FOR USERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

2.1. Implementation guide for body-mind facilitators:

Body-mind facilitators should begin by introducing themselves and explaining the purpose of the workshops. This helps answer participants’ questions, such as why they are there and what the workshop is for. Facilitators should also create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel respected, valued, and able to contribute.

To support engagement, facilitators should clearly communicate the following:

- The schedule, including days and times of activities
- The resources and tools available
- The importance of punctuality and attending sessions (not missing more than two)
- Wearing comfortable clothing and participating without shoes
- No dance experience is required and there is no right or wrong movement
- Movements are not judged; participants are encouraged to explore individually and together
- The importance of listening and awareness
- The group is not psychotherapy, but a supportive space to reduce caregiving stress

Clear guidelines help create a sense of safety and reduce anxiety, allowing participants to express themselves more freely.

The facilitators’s attitude is also essential for building the group. Facilitators should:

- prepare themselves and focus on the present moment
- observe the group and adapt when needed
- follow the session schedule while remaining flexible and responsive



The programme is based on a psychodynamic approach that integrates DMT and the Wise Motion (WM) method. The psychodynamic DMT approach uses expressive movement to help participants access emotions, imagination, and symbolic meaning. It supports awareness of self and promotes emotional, cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual integration (McGuigan et al., 2024).

The WM method is grounded in neuroscience and enhances physical abilities, self-awareness, and social connection through music, movement, and breathing (Poikonen, 2024). Together, these approaches help participants better understand their experiences by combining subjective and objective knowledge.

Facilitators should embody presence and openness, observing participants without judgment. While they should follow the planned training sessions to support the goals, they may make small adjustments if important moments arise. Any changes must be reported in the Group Activity Report (Annex 2).

Facilitators are also encouraged to include cultural and aesthetic elements relevant to participants. In each session, they should introduce the topic with a short story, quote, or poem, and share a playlist of music that older adults enjoy.

2.1.1 The structure and timeframe of each body–mind session

A. The structure of each body–mind session

Originally, every body–mind session implemented by certified and experienced DMT professionals developed through five phases. These phases formed the structure recommended by DMT experts in the online questionnaire cited in the introduction. However, since this handbook now addresses a wider range of professionals and is more practical in focus, the training sessions are organised into four simplified phases: check-in, warming-up, process and closure & check-out.



Check-in

The check-in is the first phase of the session and focuses on grounding and entering the group space. During this moment, the body–mind therapist explores the initial emotional climate of the group. Sharing may be verbal, with attention to the body and mind in the here and now, or non-verbal, allowing participants to express themselves through artistic modalities and be seen without the need to speak. This helps the therapist meet individuals and the group where they are, while fostering connection and reducing isolation.

During the DanceCARE educational training, the check-in included a brief debriefing of the previous session and the use of an artistic modality, such as movement, drawing, or sound to express how participants arrive. In later sessions, participants are encouraged to choose their preferred mode of expression. The check-in therefore supports self-observation, therapist observation of posture and activation level, and the connection between inner experience and group interaction. Facilitators share a short story, quote, or poem to introduce participants to the central theme or emotional need of the session.



Warming-up

Similar to a warm-up in sports, which prepares the body for physical activity, the body–mind warm-up prepares participants for creative, expressive, and symbolic movement. A movement can become symbolic when it gains personal meaning and appears to emerge spontaneously, representing something significant for the individual (Meekums, 2002).

This phase can be more or less structured. The body–mind therapist guides the group through invitations and indications while maintaining flexibility and leaving space for exploration and play. Facilitators are encouraged to stay attentive to their own bodily state and to the needs emerging from the group. The warm-up typically awakens kinaesthetic awareness through improvisational exercises, encourages curiosity and a non-judgmental attitude, and may include imagery to support creativity. Props such as balls, cloths, or elastic bands can be used to facilitate exploration and contact between participants. Throughout this phase, participants are offered options so that individual needs can be respected.

Process

The process phase deepens the exploration of the session’s topic. Rather than prescribing specific movements, participants are encouraged to follow spontaneous impulses emerging from their inner world. The creative process is open-ended and invites exploration of the unknown. Movement improvisation may involve personal or group imagery and embodied metaphors, and themes that emerged earlier in the session can be explored symbolically.

Participants may intentionally experiment with different movement qualities, which can influence their sense of self — for example, exploring lighter use of weight or expanding movement in space. This phase may also include embodied exploration of different relational modes, such as receiving care from another participant during improvisation. Reconnecting with playfulness is important, with movement driven by curiosity, joy, and connection. Participants are encouraged to engage in individual, pair or small groups work to further develop self-awareness and relational interaction, following the structure of the programme, which is described in detail within the training session outlines.

Closure & Check-out

Expressive movement may activate implicit memories and bring forward new emotions. For this reason, the closure phase supports a gradual transition. The body–mind therapist usually signals a few minutes in advance that the movement is coming to an end, allowing participants to prepare emotionally and physically. Before verbal sharing, other forms of expression such as drawing or writing may be offered, helping participants anchor and elaborate bodily experiences that might otherwise remain unconscious.

This phase supports reactivation of the observing ego, encourages participants to bring more intentionality to their final movements, and invites them to return attention to themselves, for example through breathing, stillness, or self-touch. Participants are guided toward introspection and meaning-making.



During the check-out, participants are invited to share their experiences verbally, reflecting on their bodies and feelings. This verbal exchange facilitates the integration of the experience. The body–mind therapist models respectful and active listening and supports interpersonal learning and differentiation (Tennant & Butler, 2023). Questions such as “What happened here?” or “How can I take what I learned into my everyday life?” may help participants connect the session to their daily lives.

To facilitate the closure and check-out phases, the participants are provided with the tool of the SELF-OBSERVATION DIARY (Annex 1)

B. Timeframe of each body–mind session

The body–mind sessions are designed as 90-minute-long sessions. Within this timeframe, the duration of individual parts may vary slightly from session to session; for example, the check-in or specific exercises may occasionally be longer or shorter depending on the focus of the session. The programme is structured as a seven-week body–mind training, with one session per week taking place on a consistent day and time, supporting stability, rhythm, and continuity throughout the process.



2.1.2. How to prepare the environment

The environment is very important for the process of each educational training session. Below, we sum up the most important elements of the environment. In the description per session (Chapter 3) we will indicate if something specific needs to be arranged in terms of the environment, for that particular session.

SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENT	The setting is important for the participants to feel safe and comfortable , so that they can construct a secure bond with the facilitator and other participants, and engage in creative exploration through movement, which might be new for them.
PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE DMT SPACE	Preferably, the DMT space should be spacious enough , have adequate flooring to invite and facilitate different movements in a safe way. A place with no mirrors is preferred to minimize self-consciousness and distraction. Some thought should be given to the privacy of the space : aspects like visibility from outside and soundproofing (Meekums, 2002).
PREDICTABILITY	The DMT space to be perceived as reliable and safe , the facilitator as well as the institution should treat it with respect and care. For instance, avoiding last minute changes and cancellations, respecting the beginning and ending time of the session, and preventing any interruption to the sessions.
CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY	Participants should be given enough information about what to expect, so that they can participate consentingly . Confidentiality is of key importance . If any data will be used for research purposes, this should be clarified beforehand and the participants should give informed consent . The participants should be advised to respect confidentiality as well , for instance, if anyone shares sensitive information about themselves, the participants are expected not to share this outside of the group.



2.1.3. Use of the materials and music

The specific music and material suggestions for each activity are provided in Chapter 3. In general, when selecting artistic and creative materials, it is recommended to use simple and accessible options such as paper, drawing and writing tools, natural elements, clay, and recycled materials that can support the proposed activities.

Choosing music is a broad and complex topic, as sound vibrations can affect individuals differently. In some moments, it may be appropriate to use only voice guidance or silence, while in others instrumental music may be helpful. In general, music should be selected according to the emotional climate of the group and the development of the session's theme. For example, more activating music may support energising phases, while relaxing music may be more suitable during moments of concentration and creativity.

For the DanceCARE project sessions, external DMT experts with experience in long-term care suggested using music with lyrics when working with caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, as lyrics can evoke meaningful memories. They also recommended including music typical of a specific region or country. Dr. Richard Coaten, an expert in DMT in older people care, highlighted that folkloric music local to the area, region, or country can help participants connect with their culture and personal history (Pasiecznik Parsons & Coaten, 2025). For this reason, body–mind therapists are encouraged to include regional music in their playlists.

Some parts of the training sessions are recommended to take place in silence or with instrumental music; these indications are specified in Chapter 3. While guidance is provided, body–mind facilitators retain flexibility to use music with lyrics, instrumental music, nature sounds, sounds created by the group, or silence when the sound environment is not explicitly defined.

In all cases, it is important that the body–mind facilitator listens to the selected music several times before introducing it to the group.



3. A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO BODY-MIND EDUCATION FOR STRESS RELIEF: TABLES OF CONTENTS, VIDEOS, AND ART-BASED MATERIALS FOR EACH SESSION OF THE DANCECARE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME.

3.1 Self-awareness: Breathing, grounding and slowing down

Central issue: The first body–mind session aims to respond to an emotional need of well-being and assist in learning the soft skill of self-awareness. The key takeaway to highlight at the beginning and end of the session is: *through slow breathing, you can calm down your nervous system.*

Workshop Development: This session uses simple techniques to introduce body-based methods to participants who may be encountering them for the first time. Basic techniques such as breath awareness and grounding form the foundation, upon which a short and gentle creative movement exercise is built. Participants are encouraged to move in their own way—some may prefer faster or larger movements, while others may choose smaller or slower ones. Individual expression is encouraged throughout.

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 20 minutes.

- In a circle, each participant shares one word describing their emotional or physical state at the beginning of this first body–mind session. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.
- Facilitators introduce the objectives of the current session.
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.

Warming-up:

The warm-up focuses on grounding in the present moment and creating a safe space in the room and within ourselves. This part lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- Participants begin with *natural walking*, as if walking down the street. Gradually, they are invited to orient themselves to the space and to the other participants. Suggested instructions may include: “Notice the texture of the ceiling,” “Observe the details of a wall,” “Pay attention to the colours of another participant’s socks,” “Greet someone with a smile as you pass by.”
- Gradually, the *pace of walking slows*, allowing attention to shift inward. Facilitators invite participants to *focus on their breath* and on the sensation of their feet connecting with the ground—from heel to toe with each step. They may notice how slowing the breath supports slowing the movement. Walking and breathing continue to slow down until participants move in slow motion.



- From this very slow walking, participants are invited to *find a place in the room* where they feel comfortable to stop, maintaining a respectful distance from others. They come into a stable standing position, sensing the support of the floor, and are guided to imagine roots growing from their feet deep into the ground.
- Attention is then brought to the breath. Participants may place their hands on the chest and observe how the lungs and ribcage expand in three dimensions—up and down, front and back, and side to side.

Process:

This part lasts approximately 25 minutes, during which breath guides the movement.

[Gentle instrumental music begins]

- Facilitators invite participants to allow the movement of the breath to expand from the lungs and ribcage into the shoulders, arms, hands, and fingers. The arms may be experienced as an extension of the lungs, moving gently like wings.
- Participants are then invited to let the movement of the breath spread to the neck, head, back, and belly, engaging the entire upper body.
- Gradually, the movement of the breath extends further into the hips, legs, feet, and toes, allowing the whole body to be involved.
- With this full-body movement, participants are encouraged to explore variations in tempo and dynamics—moving faster, slower, or anywhere in between.
- Facilitators invite participants to find a partner and share the movement of breathing in a common rhythm, as if forming one organism together.
- With a smile, participants say goodbye to their partner and are invited to find a new partner to repeat the shared movement experience.
- After completing the partner work, participants return to their own light, full-body movement of breathing.
- Participants gradually slow down their full-body movement, allowing the breath-led movement to come to a gentle end.

[Music fades away]

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with closure and check-out to support both physical decompression and reflective integration. This part lasts approximately 30 minutes.

- Facilitators invite participants to come to stillness in a standing position, sensing their breath and the firm contact of their feet with the floor, while imagining roots extending deep into the ground. They are then invited to notice what has changed in their body since the beginning of the exercise in this same posture.
- Check-out takes place in the same circle in which the session began. Each participant shares one word describing their current emotional or physical state.



- Participants are invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:

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

“Can you find an image or colour that represents your takeaway and express it through drawing or creative writing?”

“Where do you sense or ‘store’ what you have learned in your body?”

Materials: In this session, only music is needed.

Music ideas: Calm instrumental music chosen by the facilitator starting from the phase 3: Process.

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

<https://youtu.be/871D8878tpU?si=VXqJ7yRjKphpjH4w>



3.2 Self-awareness: Self-confidence (body posture, mobility)

Central issue: This training module focuses on addressing participants' emotional need for self-confidence through the stimulation of self-awareness as a core soft skill. Throughout the process participants are guided to develop their self-awareness both on a physical and emotional level. Emphasis is placed on expanding their personal toolbox by introducing practical self-care techniques for selfcare. Processing information is facilitated by experimental methods: through improvising individual dance and encouraging them to develop their own choreography.

Workshop Development: Body Awareness techniques including self-massage practices, are introduced to support participants to connect with their bodies. Laban efforts are used to support the work with body dimension and space/time (Laban and Ullmann, 1971). Body mechanics are applied to work with body posture and mobility (Liederbach, 2010).

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 20 minutes.

- In the artistic check-in, each participant is invited to express their current emotional state through a chosen creative modality, such as movement, an image, song, or lyrics. For each session, facilitators select one artistic modality through which the check-in is conducted. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.
- Facilitators provide a brief recap of the previous session and introduce the objectives of the current session. The space is then opened to participants. Facilitators may invite reflection by asking questions such as: "How did you process the previous session?", "Have you had an opportunity to apply it in practice?"
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.

Warming-up:

The warm-up focuses on body awareness and a gradual transition into the "here and now" and it lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- The process begins with a self-massage. Facilitators invite participants to bring attention to different parts of the body, naming them while guiding tapping and gentle moulding practices. The exercise concludes with participants placing their hands on a calm area of the body and remaining still for approximately 2–3 minutes.
- Facilitators select music with or without lyrics, and participants are encouraged to connect with the rhythm and follow it organically, allowing a smooth transition from stillness into dynamic expression.



- Movement exploration then begins in space through Laban Efforts:

Space (Direct, Indirect/Flexible)

Weight (Strong/Heavy, Light)

Time (Sudden/Quick, Sustained)

Flow (Bound, Free)

Metaphors may be used to introduce the Laban Efforts, for example qualities of weight such as “light as a feather.”

- Facilitators introduce the topic of body image, encouraging participants to develop a caring and accepting relationship with their bodies while exploring movement and mobility.

Process:

The process focuses on bringing awareness to body posture and mobility. It lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- It begins with body mechanics techniques focusing on body boundaries and the centre of weight. Emphasis is placed on understanding physical aspects of movement, such as the centre of weight, allowing participants to shift their attention from the emotional level to a more mechanical and physical level of awareness.
- The process begins with participants working in pairs (person A and person B). With guidance from facilitators, one participant places their hand on the lower back of their partner, supporting awareness of their centre of weight. Partners experiment with shifting weight to notice how it affects their centre. They continue by exploring leaning or lifting to observe changes in weight distribution. Partners then change roles.
- Facilitators propose the “Choreography of Joy”: participants explore personal weight shifting, using counterpoints to stretch away. They move back and forth, developing their own choreography of joy while practising weight shifts with their partner.

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with a closure and check-out to support both physical decompression and reflective integration; it is conducted in a circle and lasts approximately 30 minutes.

- Guided by facilitators, participants are invited to return to themselves and reconnect with their bodies, allowing a gradual transition out of the process. Facilitators provide verbal cues supporting participants in bringing awareness to their heartbeat, breath,

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and overall bodily sensations.

- Participants are invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:

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

“Can you find an image or colour that represents your takeaway and express it through drawing or creative writing?”

“Where do you sense or ‘store’ what you have learned in your body?”

Materials: Art materials such as papers, pencils, rubbers, pens, colored pencils, markers etc.

Music

- **Check-in:** No music
- **Warm-Up:**

Les souvenirs et les emotions- Ludovico Einaudi:

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

Laban efforts:

Space:

Direct:

Clarinet Quintet – W. A. Mozart:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkUb0HKTU2w>

Indirect/Flexible:

Hungarian Dance No.5 – Johannes Brahms:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X9LvC9WkkQ>

Weight :

Strong/Heavy:

In the hall of the mountain king- Edvard Grieg:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLp_Hh6DKWc

Light:

Jeux d’ eau – Claude Debussy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnKFlp7CahY>

Time:

Sudden/Quick:

Flight of the Bumblebee – Rimsky-Korsakov:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYAJopwEYv8>

Sustained:

Adagio – Albinoni:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMbvcp480Y4>



Flow:

Bound:

Moonlight sonata – L.V. Beethoven:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-MT5zeY6CU>

Free:

Claire de lune – Claude Debussy:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvFH_6DNRCY

- **Process:**

Ερμής - Καλοκαίρι (Full Album Mixtape):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z7133wsl20>

- **Closure:**

Mirror lake - Angus MacRae:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtgC7njqNFs>

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dROA1H3SMc&list=PLaOW0sUyN1mWLRr6CR9-J-0MghMYJHNLC&index=7>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDPC-ecgAv0&list=PLaOW0sUyN1mWLRr6CR9-J-0MghMYJHNLC&index=6>



3.3 Mindfulness and the surroundings (stress-management)

Central issue: This session aims to respond to emotional needs related to resilience and to support the development of mindfulness as a soft skill. In this outdoor session, participants are invited to connect with their surroundings through different senses. The key takeaway of the session is that *being in nature, as well as imagining nature, can help release stress.*

Workshop Development: This module is preferably conducted outdoors, for example in a park, forest, or courtyard, rather than in a movement studio. The ground should be even and free of obstacles to ensure safe movement for all participants. Participants are invited to engage sensory awareness and to work in pairs through body-based movement. The session also includes the creation of a still-life installation using natural materials.

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- In the artistic check-in, each participant is invited to express their current emotional state through a chosen creative modality, such as movement, an image, song, or lyrics. For each session, facilitators select one artistic modality through which the check-in is conducted. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.
- Facilitators provide a brief recap of the previous session and introduce the objectives of the current session. The space is then opened to participants. Facilitators may invite reflection by asking questions such as: “How did you process the previous session?”, “Have you had an opportunity to apply it in practice?”
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.

Warming-up:

The warm-up lasts approximately 15 minutes and focuses on the question: “*What can we hear?*”

- Participants are invited to find a stable place to stand on even ground, with enough space to move their arms freely.
- Facilitators guide participants to turn their attention inward and bring awareness to their breath. With an exhalation, participants gently close their eyes.
- Facilitators guide participants to listen to the sounds within their body (e.g. heartbeat, breathing, blood flowing through the veins), asking themselves: “What can I hear inside me?”
- Participants are invited to shift their attention to the sounds in their immediate environment, within approximately 1–2 meters.
- Facilitators expand participants’ listening to the wider space, encouraging awareness of as many different sounds as possible.



- Awareness is then extended further to the periphery, exploring sounds that may come from a distance.
- Finally, attention is gradually brought back from the periphery to the surrounding space, the immediate environment, and internal sounds. Participants allow the sounds to gently shape their inner experience.

Process:

This part lasts approximately 20 minutes and focuses on movement meditation, one sense at a time.

- With eyes closed, participants are invited to allow the sounds around them and within them to guide their movement. Facilitators may ask questions such as: “How would your body move, for example, along to the sound of the wind in the leaves or a bird singing?” Participants locate a preferred sound and connect it to a calm area of the body.
- With eyes closed, participants shift attention to smell. Facilitators may ask questions such as: “How would they move our body?” Participants are invited to notice the smells around them and locate a preferred smell in a calm area of the body.
- Still with eyes closed, participants are invited to bring awareness to the sense of touch. Participants are invited to notice how clothing touches the skin, how air and wind touch the face and hands, and how the ground supports the feet. They may also explore sensations such as warmth or sun exposure. Facilitators may ask questions such as: “How would these sensations of touch move our body?”
- Participants are then gently invited to open their eyes and shift attention to sight. Facilitators may ask questions such as: “What can we see around us, in the details of the space, the natural elements, or our body parts?” Participants are invited to allow visual impressions to influence their movement.
- Participants explore one sense at a time, allowing each sensory modality to guide movement before shifting to the next. Sometimes the movement can be large and fast, sometimes very small and slow. Facilitators encourage participants to find their own way of moving.
- With a glance, participants choose a partner and engage in mirroring each other’s movements.
- Finally, with a friendly look, participants say goodbye to their partner.

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with a closure and check-out to support both physical decompression and reflective integration; it lasts approximately 40 minutes.

- Participants are invited to create a still-life installation using natural materials such as sticks, flowers, and stones. They are encouraged to take a photograph of their still-life and to choose an object they would like to keep with them.
- Facilitators invite participants to find a partner and share reflections on their still-life. One partner talks and the other one listens actively. Then, they change roles.



- Check-out takes place in the same circle in which the session began with a short movement expressing the current emotional or physical state.
- Participants are invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:

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

“Can you find an image or colour that represents your takeaway and express it through drawing or creative writing?”

“Where do you sense or ‘store’ what you have learned in your body?”

- Participants are invited to bring to the next session a personal object that connects them to someone dear to them (a person or an animal).

Materials: Natural materials collected spontaneously by each participant during the outdoor session. Access to a camera (e.g. a mobile phone camera) for each participant to photograph their still-life.

Music ideas: No music; only the natural sounds of the outdoor environment are used.

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

<https://youtu.be/X1FkjTzOZm4?si=vhkHEzEeHgOlFBJm>





3.4 Empathy (inwards and outwards empathy) and resilience (self-care practices)

Central issue: This training module focuses on the development of empathy both inward and outward and resilience through the cultivation of self-care practices. Throughout the process participants are guided to develop their empathy as a soft skill, emphasizing both self-attunement and their ability to connect with others. Emphasis is placed on the concept of attunement, which serves as a core element for empathy and effective communication.

Workshop Development: Body Awareness techniques and Mindfulness techniques (body scan exercises) are introduced to participants to support internal awareness and body activation. “Mirroring” technique is used to introduce and explore the idea of empathy, engaging participants to observe and reflect on each other’s movements. Two Kestenberg Movement Profile rhythms - Sucking and Snapping/Biting, are applied to further explore the internal and external empathy. The sucking rhythm is introduced as a way of exploring connection and bonding. The snapping/biting rhythm is introduced as a way of exploring boundaries, separation and, in a complex sense, for communication (Kestenberg-Amighi et al., 1999).

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 20 minutes.

- In the artistic check-in, each participant is invited to express their current emotional state through a chosen creative modality, such as movement, an image, song, or lyrics. For each session, facilitators select one artistic modality through which the check-in is conducted. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.



- Facilitators provide a brief recap of the previous session and introduce the objectives of the current session. The space is then opened to participants. Facilitators may invite reflection by asking questions such as: “How did you process the previous session?”, “Have you had an opportunity to apply it in practice?”
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.
- Participants present to the group the personal object they brought to the session that connects them to someone dear to them (a person or an animal).

Warming-up:

The warm-up focuses on body awareness and gradual transition into the “here and now”, it lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- It starts with a gradual activation of the body. Facilitators invite participants to bring awareness to different body parts from head to feet. The process is conducted in a slow rhythm, allowing sufficient time for attention and observation. Participants are encouraged to notice if there are any body parts that may require care or attention today.
- Facilitators select music with or without lyrics and participants are encouraged to connect with the rhythm and follow it organically, facilitating a smooth transition from stillness to dynamic expression.
- Participants are guided to move in the space, they pause and they greet a team member and share with him/her a compliment (ex. the t-shirt that you wear suits you, I like your hairstyle today etc.). This exchange is repeated 4-5 times promoting openness, positive communication, and the development of outward empathy within the group.

Process:

The process focuses on the development of attunement and it lasts approximately 30 minutes.

- The process begins with participants working in pairs (person A and person B). Facilitators introduce different forms of attunement, including visual, touch and sound attunement. Participants explore these forms of attunement in practice.
- Participants continue working in pairs through mirroring, drawing on a range of ideas and metaphors, such as: connection with someone or something, creating and maintaining bonds in a relationship, following a rhythmic heartbeat, moving with a soft, flexible, and malleable body, enjoyment of interaction, unity, trust, and symbiosis (Sucking rhythm). Participants are invited to focus on one metaphor that resonates with them. With guidance from facilitators, participant A begins to move, (with or without a personal object), while participant B observes in a gentle and attentive way. Roles are then exchanged, with participant B moving and participant A observing. Then participants are given 3–4 minutes to reflect individually on their experience after working with the above metaphors.
- The same process is then repeated using a different set of ideas and metaphors, including: exploring personal boundaries in relationships, separation from someone or



something meaningful, patting the ground in an even rhythm, individuation, sense of selfhood, self and other, holding apart and concentrating (Snapping/Biting rhythm).

- The process concludes with participants remaining in pairs to reflect on their experiences and share any significant differences they noticed in their movement, awareness, and/or sense of connection while moving with the two different metaphors.

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with closure and check-out to support both physical decompression and reflective integration. It is conducted in a circle lasting approximately 30 minutes.

- Guided by facilitators, participants are invited to return their attention to themselves and reconnect with their bodies, allowing a gradual transition out of the process. Facilitators support this phase through a guided self-massage, encouraging gentle reconnection and release of tension.
- If the group feels ready, this may extend to a partner-based massage exercise. Facilitators carefully frame this activity, emphasizing clear boundaries and the use of neutral, respectful touch—for example, placing hands on the shoulders or feet with gentle pressure, or one hand on the forehead and one on the back of the head.
- Participants are then invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:
 - “What do you take with you from this session?”
 - “Can you find an image or colour that represents your experience and express it through drawing or creative writing?”
 - “Where do you sense or ‘store’ what you have learned in your body?”

Materials: Art materials such as papers, pencils, rubbers, pens, colored pencils, markers etc. Personal objects of the participants.

Music:

- **Check-in:** No music
- **Warm-Up:**

Trip Song - Mimis Nikolopoulos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My3TUIIC-7qQ&list=PLH1csqncNzIYSGC1Lff5QnGTEuzG2BWwe>

or:

Meditationsmusik im Wald Step 3:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slskfMDzl_w



or:

“Moonlight Rumba” – Mimis Nikolopoulos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vVylZj3bvW&list=PLH1csqncNzIYSGC1Lff5QnGTEuzG2BWwe&index=5>

- **Process:**

Το βαλς των χαμένων ονείρων -Μάνος Χατζηδάκης:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q9H2cd36RU>

or:

Historiette No.5 – Fabrizio Paterlini:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGIo3UGjID8>

Sucking rhythm:

Moonlight Serenade - Glenn Miller & His Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ws6DdrDtyo>

Snapping/Biting rhythm:

Snap (Instrumental)– Alhanii:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KHbm8wSJxA>

- **Closure:**

Rolling Like A Ball – Ludovico Einaudi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9cbf9HC09Q>

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Au3Xolg33dw&list=PLaOW0sUyN1mWLRr6CR9-J-0MghMYJHNLc&index=4>





3.5 Emotional regulation (coping strategies)

Central issue: This module focuses on supporting participants' need for emotional regulation through the development of effective coping strategies. Throughout the process participants are guided to engage with "difficult moments" in an embodied way, allowing space for these experiences to be acknowledged and expressed rather than avoided, and try to deal with them through creativity. By giving form and expression to difficult experiences, participants are encouraged to strengthen their resilience and their emotional adaptability.

Workshop Development: Psycho-body awareness techniques are introduced to support participants to connect with their bodies and recognise needs that arise in the present moment. Dance Movement Techniques and Intermodal Expressive Arts Therapy techniques, particularly the use of clay, are used to introduce participants' different modes to work with their emotional regulation and to support them reflect on their own experiences (Knill et al. 2005; Van Houten, 2016).

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 20 minutes.

- In the artistic check-in, each participant is invited to express their current emotional state through a chosen creative modality, such as movement, an image, song, or lyrics. For each session, facilitators select one artistic modality through which the check-in is conducted. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.



- Facilitators provide a brief recap of the previous session and introduce the objectives of the current session. The space is then opened to participants. Facilitators may invite reflection by asking questions such as: “How did you process the previous session?”, “Have you had an opportunity to apply it in practice?”
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.

Warming-up:

The warm-up focuses on body awareness and gradual transition into the “here and now”, it lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- Facilitators invite participants to bring attention to different parts of the body, gradually moving from head to feet. Participants are free to “activate” each body part in a way that feels natural to them and suits them, supporting individual exploration and body awareness.
- Facilitators select music with or without lyrics and participants are encouraged to connect with the rhythm and follow it organically, facilitating a smooth transition from stillness to dynamic expression.
- Movement exploration begins in space through simple variations. Participants are invited to:

Start moving in space, then pause, and continue moving while exploring qualities of lightness.

Start moving in space, then pause, and continue moving while exploring qualities of heaviness.

Start moving in space, then pause, and continue moving while exploring very large movements.

Start moving in space, then pause, and continue moving, reducing movement to very small forms.

The sequence may be repeated if needed to support deeper physical engagement.

Process:

Process focuses on an Intermodal Expressive Arts Activity designed to support participants’ reflection on their experiences and it lasts approximately 45 minutes.

- The exercise begins with participants lying on their backs and bringing attention to their breath.
- Participants place a piece of clay on a protective layer (e.g. plastic) over their lower abdomen, near the lower chakras associated with existence, identity, and creativity.
- Facilitators guide participants through a meditation to explore their inner “body landscape” and to become aware of personal stories stored within the body. With eyes closed, participants are invited to bring this inner awareness to their fingertips and

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allow it to flow into their piece of clay. Participants are encouraged to let their bodies guide the shaping process, allowing form to emerge intuitively from the material.

- When the process is complete, participants gently come out of the meditation and resting position and are given time to observe their creation.
- Participants begin working in pairs (person A and person B). With guidance from facilitators, all sculptures created by participant A are placed in a line with space between them. Participant A stands approximately five large steps away from their sculpture. Participant B observes A in a gentle and attentive way. Participant A is invited to slowly walk towards their sculpture, allowing its essence or message to influence their movement and body. When participant B claps, participant A comes to stillness. From this state, without thinking, participant A allows the sculpture to “move” them. Participants A and B then engage in a brief dialogue to reflect on what participant A experienced and what participant B observed. Roles are then exchanged.
- All sculptures are then placed in the centre of the room. Participants are invited to take paper and pencils and observe the work created by others. They may respond aesthetically to each sculpture by leaving a poem, a short piece of creative writing, or a drawing to each sculpture. Participants are then given time to read the responses left by others.

Follow up:

- The process concludes with a guided reflection on participants’ experiences. Participants are invited to explore their work with clay, considering what emerged, what surprised them, and how it relates to previously explored qualities such as lightness, heaviness, feeling big, and feeling small.
- In pairs or small groups, participants are invited to talk about situations in which they may feel too big or too small, light or heavy (e.g. feeling so small that they are not noticed, or so small that details are overlooked; feeling so big that others may perceive their stress; feeling so heavy that it is difficult to manage; or so light that it brings energy). Participants are also invited to connect these insights to real-life situations, particularly in their roles as caregivers, reflecting on moments in which they may feel too big or too small, too heavy or light. This supports the integration of embodied experience with personal awareness.

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with a check-out to support reflective integration. No formal closure is required in this module. The check-out is conducted in a circle and lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- Participants are invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:
 “What do you take with you from this session?”
 “Can you find an image or colour that represents your experience and express it through drawing or creative writing?”
 “Where do you sense or ‘store’ what you have learned in your body?”



Materials: Art materials such as papers, pencils, rubbers, pens, colored pencils, markers etc. Clay, a protective layer (e.g. plastic) for the clay exercise.

Music idea

- **Check-in:** No music
- **Warm-Up:**

Luminous – Ludovico Einaudi

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgS-Lq_pUGk

or

Sent- Lambert:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWE-KE4VnSk>

November – Lambert:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr9tBjTrg_g

- **Process:** No music
- **Closure:** No music

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAjyrBgcb4&list=PLaOW0sUyN1mWLRr6CR9-J-0MghMYJHNLC&index=3>



3.6 Communication skills, expression and listening (embodied, non-verbal and verbal communication)

Central issue: This module aims to strengthen participants' ability to connect and engage with others in meaningful and constructive ways through the development of communication skills. It encourages the cultivation of trust, cooperation and openness to creativity. Through shared experiences and collaborative activities, participants are supported to achieve greater emotional awareness and new forms of personal and social expression.

Workshop Development: Body awareness techniques, dance techniques and movement-based games are introduced to support participants to connect with their bodies, activate their bodies and strengthen group engagement. Intermodal Expressive Arts Therapy techniques, such as storytelling, drawing and dancing, are incorporated to provide participants multiple forms to explore and communicate their thoughts, emotions and experiences in both verbal and non-verbal ways. At the same time, through the integration of movement and artistic practices, participants are encouraged to reflect on their experiences while developing greater openness and confidence in interpersonal communication.

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 20 minutes.

- In the artistic check-in, each participant is invited to express their current emotional state through a chosen creative modality, such as movement, an image, song, or lyrics.
- For each session, facilitators select one artistic modality through which the check-in is conducted. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.
- Facilitators provide a brief recap of the previous session and introduce the objectives of the current session. The space is then opened to participants. Facilitators may invite reflection by asking questions such as: "How did you process the previous session?", "Have you had an opportunity to apply it in practice?"
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.

Warming-up:

The warm-up focuses on body awareness and gradual transition into the "here and now", it lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- Facilitators invite participants to bring attention to different parts of the body, gradually moving from head to feet. Participants are encouraged to engage actively in the process and, if comfortable, may suggest movements to activate specific body parts. This collaborative approach supports participation, creativity, and group engagement.



- Flocking-based movement exercise. One participant leads the movement of the whole group and, after turning a corner, another participant takes over the lead. Participants move together in synchrony, following a leader and fluidly taking over leadership while collectively organising movement through non-verbal communication. Through this exercise, participants develop cooperation and non-verbal communication skills while strengthening their sense of connection and responsiveness to others.

Process:

The process phase focuses on creative communication and collaborative expression, it lasts approximately 30 minutes.

- Participants work in groups of three (partner A, B and C) to create a short story related to communication and long-term caregiving (e.g. “Do you sometimes lose your patience?” or “Is your communication always gentle and full of love?”). With guidance from facilitators, each group is given time to develop and write their story.
- Participants then decide which roles they would like to take in the representation of their story. e.g. participant A may express the story through movement, participant B through drawing, and participant C through singing or reading the story aloud.
- The final presentation combines these artistic approaches, allowing the story to be expressed through multiple modes of communication.
- Throughout the process, facilitators move between groups to provide guidance, clarification, and support where needed.
- Each group presents its work to the others as an aesthetic response, an approach inspired by Intermodal Expressive Arts Therapy. This method emphasises creative reflection and shared witnessing to support deeper emotional understanding and group connection through artistic expression (Knill, Barba and Fuchs, 2004).

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with closure and check-out to support reflective integration, it is conducted in a circle lasting approximately 30 minutes.

- Focus group: participants engage in a group discussion reflecting on their experiences throughout the process and sharing thoughts on different ways of communication.
- Participants are invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:
 - “What do you take with you from this session?”
 - “Can you find an image or colour that represents your experience and express it through drawing or creative writing?”
 - “Where do you sense or ‘store’ what you have learned in your body?”

Materials: Art materials such as papers, pencils, rubbers, pens, colored pencils, markers etc. Fabrics, hats, and other items that may support participants in creating and presenting their stories.



Music idea

- **Check-in:** No music
- **Warm-Up:**

Tempelhof - Yann Tiersen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTlykINcn80>

or:

Everloving – Moby:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMNB8BqAJdY>

- **Process:**

Σύννεφο - Ερμής (Cloud- Ermis):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmEICEbY9_U&t=48s

Οιούσσεσ - Ermis:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM_96lwFndM&list=RDEMYTQzL07_wsURU0AoPVXv-A&index=2

Ψίθυροι – Ερμής (Whispers – Ermis):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTS6xzd0MTQ>

Lemonia – Ermis:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7Qqcqtgfo>

In the lifetime – DSADS:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LDiINBeoM4>

- **Closure:** No music

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNVsq0-BjMw&list=PLaOW0sUyN1mWLRr6CR9-J-0MghM>

[YJHNLc&index=2](#)



3.7 Social interaction and creativity

Central issue: This final body–mind session addresses emotional needs related to social relationships and aims to support the development of communication as a soft skill. The movement exercise combines mental imagery with individual and group-synchronised movement. The key takeaway of the session is: *You can create a connection and a pleasant shared experience with someone you are caring for through drawing, singing, or dancing together.*

Workshop Development: The session begins with creative movement, starting from activating imagination in stillness and gradually moving into embodied expression of mental images. During the process, the group gradually comes together, and their embodied collaboration is guided towards a shared creative task of drawing on a large sheet of paper.

Check-in:

The session starts with a structured check-in to support participants' focus on the present moment, it is conducted in a circle and it lasts approximately 15 minutes.

- In the artistic check-in, each participant is invited to express their current emotional state through a chosen creative modality, such as movement, an image, song, or lyrics. For each session, facilitators select one artistic modality through which the check-in is conducted. The facilitator begins by offering a simple example.
- Facilitators provide a brief recap of the previous session and introduce the objectives of the current session. The space is then opened to participants. Facilitators may invite reflection by asking questions such as: “How did you process the previous session?”, “Have you had an opportunity to apply it in practice?”
- Facilitators share a short story, quote, poem, or similar stimulus to introduce the central issue and emotional focus of the session.

Warming-up:

The warm-up lasts approximately 20 minutes and focuses on the imagination of two natural elements: cloud and wind.

- Playful group exercise (approx. 10 min): Participants create different cloud formations together as a group allowing the “cloud” to move gently with the wind.
- Participants are then guided into individual exploration (approx. 10 min). They are invited to find a comfortable place on the floor to stop. With an exhalation, they gently close their eyes.
- Participants begin by imagining a gentle wind on the face, chest, arms and hands, back, belly, hips, legs, and feet. They may also imagine a stronger wind surrounding the whole body.
- As the wind slowly quiets, participants are invited to imagine a thick cloud forming around their body—around the legs, back and front, arms, between the fingers, as well as around the head, face, and the entire body.



Process:

This part lasts approximately 25 minutes.

[Gentle instrumental music starts]

- With eyes closed, participants begin by drawing into the imagined cloud using the right index finger in a precise way. Participants are invited to visualise clearly, in their mind's eye, the lines they are drawing. The left index finger is then added, followed by all ten fingers. The drawing expands to include elbows, shoulders, and the top of the head, then hips, knees, and toes. Participants choose freely which body part they wish to use to draw into the cloud.
- The wind gradually pushes the cloud away, and participants' bodies begin to be moved by a gentle breeze. As the wind becomes stronger, movement becomes more spontaneous. Participants are not invited to plan or decide their movement, but to follow the wind and release control, allowing it to guide them. Participants gently open their eyes while still imagining the wind around the body.
- As a group, participants are invited to find a shared sway, as if moved by a gentle wind. The wind gradually increases, and the collective movement expands. As the wind slowly quiets, participants begin to imagine a large, dense cloud surrounding the group.
- Together, participants draw into the shared imagined cloud.
- Participants conclude by drawing together as a group on a large sheet of real paper.
- Participants find a closure to their communal artwork.
[Music fades out]

Closure & Check-out:

The session concludes with a closure and check-out to support both physical decompression and reflective integration. This part lasts approximately 25 minutes.

- Participants gently close their eyes and observe all the details of the collective artwork. A moment of appreciation arises.
- Check-out takes place in a circle. Participants are invited to reflect on their experience. Facilitators may ask questions such as:
 "What do you take with you from this session?"
 "Can you find an image or colour that represents your experience and express it through drawing or creative writing?"
 "Where do you sense or 'store' what you have learned in your body?"

Materials: A large sheet of paper and coloured pens for participants to draw together on a shared surface.

Music ideas: Instrumental music from phase 2 (Warm-up) onwards, to allow more space for imagination, as lyrics may be too directive.

YouTube video link that outlines the main objective of the session:

https://youtu.be/QMV_QFO7xAQ?si=PtP1CyFXWoubgTQB





4. “WHAT TO DO IF” SECTION: GUIDANCE FOR ACTIVATING SELF-HELP GROUPS

As part of a multidimensional approach, and particularly to address the need to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation, the DanceCARE programme also included a “What to Do If” section. This consisted of the launch of self-help groups (SHGs) as a community-based intervention and form of peer support following the conclusion of the body–mind sessions. Wituk et al. (2000) state that “self-help groups consist of individuals who share the same problem or concern. Participants provide emotional support to one another, learn ways to cope, discover strategies for improving their condition, and help others while helping themselves” (p. 157).

The groups are generally composed of eight to ten people and meet regularly, usually on a weekly basis. Regarding the setting, a spacious room with chairs arranged in a circle was needed to encourage discussion and support the continuation of the initiative after the project concludes.

4.1. Basic instructions for self-help groups facilitators

Within the original DanceCARE pilot project, the self-help groups (SHGs) were facilitated by a trained psychologist. For future implementations of the programme, it is recommended that the groups be facilitated, ideally, by psychologists or by professionals with relevant training and experience in mental health, psychosocial support, counselling, or group facilitation. This supports emotional safety, ethical awareness, and appropriate responsiveness to group processes and individual needs that may emerge during the sessions.



The role of the facilitator of a self-help group is to create a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental environment in which participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and exploring personal challenges. Each meeting should begin with clear guidelines regarding privacy and respectful interaction, ensuring that all participants understand the importance of confidentiality and attentive listening. The facilitator supports the flow of conversation by encouraging open communication and using thoughtful, open-ended questions that invite participants to reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. It is important to remember that the role of the facilitator is not to provide answers or professional advice. Rather, the purpose of the self-help group is to support participants in finding their own ways of coping, recognising their inner strengths, and gaining insight through shared experiences. An inclusive group dynamic may be supported by ensuring that each participant has an opportunity to contribute, with particular attention to those who may be more hesitant to share. At the same time, participants who tend to dominate the conversation may be gently moderated in order to maintain a balanced exchange. Challenging emotions should be met with empathy and compassion, while maintaining awareness of the group's boundaries and of situations in which it may be appropriate to suggest professional support for a participant in need.

Participants are encouraged to identify and take manageable steps towards their personal objectives, such as improving stress management, expanding their support network, or making other life changes, while gently acknowledging that each person's path to progress is different. Each meeting may be wrapped up by briefly recapping the main points discussed, expressing appreciation for everyone's contributions, and fostering a positive outlook for the following session.

At its core, the role of the facilitator is to support a shared process of peer-led reflection, connection, and personal development, while allowing space for the group's own dynamics, needs, and direction to emerge. Although the group's topic is encouraged to emerge organically from participants' experiences and exchanges, the DanceCARE programme also offers guidance for three suggested self-help group sessions to assist facilitators in structuring and guiding the process, see 4.2 Structure and guiding themes for three self-help group sessions.



4.2 Structure and guiding themes for three self-help group sessions

Self-help group session title	Objectives of the session	Sample questions the facilitator may use
1. How to manage stress if you feel overwhelmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To encourage participants to reflect on and identify specific situations that lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and how these situations affect them physically, mentally, and emotionally. ● To foster awareness of the unique physical and emotional signs of feeling overwhelmed, so that participants can recognise these signs early and take proactive steps to manage their stress before it escalates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What does being "overwhelmed" feel like to you personally? Can you describe the physical and emotional signs? ● When you recognise that you're feeling overwhelmed, what is the first thing you try to do to manage it? ● Are there any coping strategies that have worked for you in the past? ● What role do support systems (friends, family, etc.) play in helping you manage stress when you feel overwhelmed? ● Have you noticed any patterns in your behaviour or thinking when you're approaching burnout or experiencing overwhelming stress? ● How do you set boundaries or prioritise tasks when you're feeling overwhelmed by too many responsibilities?



<p>2. How to build support if you feel isolated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To encourage participants to reflect on and articulate the emotions and thought patterns they experience when feeling isolated. ● To help participants explore the importance of building a support system and identify the type of support they feel they need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When you feel isolated, what emotions or thoughts do you experience, and how do they affect your daily life? ● What steps, if any, have you taken in the past to reach out for support when feeling isolated, and were they effective? ● How do you think building a support system could help you when you're feeling isolated, and what type of support do you think you need most? ● What barriers stop you from reaching out to others when you feel alone or disconnected? ● Have you ever found yourself feeling isolated even when surrounded by people? How did you deal with it? ● What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with isolation but finds it difficult to ask for help?
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<p>3. How to create change when feeling stuck</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To encourage participants to reflect on and share specific situations in which they have felt stuck, helping them better understand the circumstances that trigger this feeling. ● To help participants explore what feeling “stuck” means to them personally, and identify how it manifests in different areas of their lives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can you describe a time when you felt stuck in life? What were the circumstances, and how did it affect you? ● What does “feeling stuck” mean to you personally, and how does it show up in different areas of your life (work, relationships, personal growth, etc.)? ● What obstacles or barriers keep you from moving forward when you feel stuck, and how do you typically respond to them? ● What small steps have you taken in the past to create change, even when it felt difficult, and what did you learn from that experience? ● How do you deal with fear or uncertainty when you're trying to make a change but feel stuck? ● What habits, routines, or mindsets contribute to feeling stuck, and how do you think changing them could help? ● How do you track your progress when trying to make changes in your life, and what strategies do you use to stay motivated?
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5. MONITORING AND REFLECTION TOOLS

This chapter presents the monitoring, reflection, assessment, and observation tools developed and used within the DanceCARE educational programme. These resources support both the practical implementation of the sessions and the research framework through which the programme was piloted and evaluated in Italy, Spain, and Greece.

Monitoring the effects of the DanceCARE programme is important in order to provide scientific evidence for it. Administering questionnaires containing psychometric scales and conducting face-to-face interviews on two occasions – that is, before and after the educational intervention – requires the work of researchers and psychologists, who are not always part of the staff. With this in mind, monitoring is recommended but not mandatory and should not discourage the adoption and implementation of the DanceCARE method.

The DanceCARE methodology combines psychological assessment, qualitative inquiry, embodied observation, and arts-based reflection in order to better understand caregivers' experiences throughout the programme. Together, these approaches aim to capture not only measurable changes related to stress, burden, and wellbeing, but also participants' lived, relational, embodied, and creative experiences.

The following sections introduce:

- psychological assessment and interview tools;
- embodied and art-based reflective methodologies;
- observation, reporting, and experiential documentation tools used throughout the programme.

Full versions of the forms, observation grids, diaries, surveys, and supporting materials can be found in the annexes.

5.1. Psychological assessment and reflective interview tools

The DanceCARE pilot study, first conducted in 2025 in Italy, Spain, and Greece, adopted a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative, qualitative, and art-based/embodied methodologies (Rodríguez-Jiménez & Carmona, 2020). Within this broader framework, the present section focuses on the psychological assessment and interview tools used to investigate caregivers' experiences of stress, burden, depression, social isolation, and perceived wellbeing. The art-based and embodied dimensions of the research process are discussed in greater detail in Subchapter 5.2.

To assess the feasibility and potential impact of the DanceCARE body–mind programme, a pre–post intervention experimental design was employed, using validated psychometric scales, semi-structured interviews, and process evaluation tools administered before and after participation in the seven body–mind group sessions.

The main research question guiding this part of the study was:



To what extent, and in what ways, can the DanceCARE intervention influence the perceived burden and levels of depression among semi-formal and informal caregivers of older adults with long-term care needs?

Additional research questions explored whether participation in the programme could help reduce caregivers' feelings of loneliness and social isolation, improve the perceived quality of life of the older care recipient, and whether the blended format of the programme, including the use of online video support, was experienced as useful and accessible by participants.

To respond to these research questions, the following validated psychometric instruments were administered before and after participation in the seven body–mind group sessions:

- Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI), also known as the Zarit Scale of Caregiver Burden, is one of the most widely used instruments for assessing caregiver burden. Originally developed as a 29-item instrument and later reduced to 22 items, it explores areas such as psychological distress, guilt, financial difficulties, social and family challenges, and the impact of caregiving on quality of life (Schreiner et al., 2006).
- Caregiver Burden Inventory (CBI) is a multidimensional self-report instrument originally developed for caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The 24-item questionnaire assesses five dimensions of burden: objective, psychological, physical, social, and emotional burden. The CBI enables a more differentiated understanding of caregivers' stress patterns and changes over time (McGlothlin and Lewis, 2014; Salas et al., 2021).
- Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Novak and Guest, 1989) was used as a screening tool to assess depressive symptoms and the severity of depression. The BDI consists of 21 self-report items and has been widely validated internationally.

Midway through the programme, a short evaluation survey was also administered to both participants and facilitators in order to monitor the process and identify possible adjustments during implementation.

In addition, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted before and after the intervention to further explore participants' caregiving experiences. These interviews combined the collection of brief background information with open-ended questions related to caregiving responsibilities, emotional experiences, relational dynamics, feelings of isolation, and reflections on the programme. Participants were also invited to reflect on possible changes in burden, wellbeing, coping strategies, and daily life throughout the intervention process.

As part of the blended educational approach, remote monitoring of the digital components was also conducted, including data such as platform logins and the most frequently accessed modules and sections.

The full versions of the psychometric tools, interview guidelines, surveys, and monitoring materials are included in the annexes.



5.2 Art-based and embodied observation and reflection tools

The DanceCARE educational programme adopts an art-based and embodied approach that recognises caregiving as a physical, emotional, relational, and symbolic experience. Stress, fatigue, isolation, resilience, empathy, and emotional regulation are often carried and communicated through bodily and creative processes before they can be fully verbalised. For this reason, the programme integrates embodied awareness, creative expression, and reflective observation into both the educational activities and the research methodology.

Embodied and arts-based approaches have increasingly been recognised within health, care, and educational contexts as valuable ways of accessing dimensions of lived experience that may remain difficult to capture through conventional verbal or quantitative methods alone (Leavy, 2009; Tantia, 2021). Through movement, sensory awareness, metaphor, drawing, writing, and other creative modalities, participants are invited to explore experiences in ways that support emotional expression, meaning-making, and relational understanding (Hervey, 2000; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2015; Leavy, 2020).

Within the DanceCARE pilot study, these methodologies were particularly important for addressing research questions related to psycho-body awareness, experiences of isolation and connection, emotional expression, symbolic meaning-making, and the perceived usefulness of artistic modalities in supporting coping and wellbeing. While section 5.1 focused primarily on measurable changes related to burden, stress, and depression, the embodied and observational methodologies aimed to explore how participants experienced the programme on bodily, relational, emotional, and symbolic levels.

A significant part of the qualitative and embodied data collection was carried out both by the group facilitators (who in the original pilot project were certified DMT professionals) and by observers, including professionals and students in the field of body–mind studies recruited through collaboration with associated project partners. Facilitators and observers attended the sessions and documented embodied, relational, emotional, and interpersonal aspects of the group process using observation and reflection tools developed within the project. These observations contributed to the exploration of psycho-body awareness, group dynamics, emotional expression, and participants' experiences of the programme beyond verbal communication alone.

In some cases, references to movement analysis frameworks such as Laban's dimensions of flow, weight, time, and space (Laban, 1971) supported facilitators and observers in noticing and documenting embodied aspects of participants' experiences.

To support these observational and reflective processes, several practical tools were developed and are included in the annexes.



Self-Observation Diary (Annex 1)

The Self-Observation Diary was provided to participating caregivers to support awareness of the movements, experiences, and emotional states emerging throughout the sessions. The diary primarily functions as a personal reflective tool, and participants are free to decide whether or not to share its contents with facilitators or other group members.

The aim of this tool is to encourage regular self-observation and support participants in developing greater self-awareness, recognising personal needs, and reflecting on emotional and bodily experiences throughout the programme. Participants are invited to reflect on topics such as their feelings at the beginning and end of sessions, interactions with peers and facilitators, emotional challenges, coping strategies, and experiences related to movement, creativity, and communication. They are also encouraged to explore whether and how they integrate elements of the programme into their everyday caregiving lives.

In addition, participants may respond creatively through drawing, short texts, metaphors, or movement sequences, depending on their preferred mode of expression. If participants find the tool useful, they are encouraged to continue using reflective self-observation practices beyond the programme.

Group Activity Report (Annex 2)

The Group Activity Report was completed by group facilitators after each session and served as a tool for documenting group dynamics, emotional climate, embodied interactions, and themes emerging throughout the process. Facilitators documented observations related to participation, relational dynamics, movement qualities, emotional expression, and significant moments within the sessions.

The report also invited facilitators to reflect on the usefulness of the training structure, possible programme adaptations, and observations related to participants' responses and engagement. References to movement analysis frameworks such as Laban's dimensions of flow, weight, time, and space (Laban, 1971) could support the documentation of embodied processes and changes observed throughout the programme.

Guided Observation (Annex 3)

The Guided Observation tool was developed for observers. Based on the psycho-corporeal methodologies adopted within the programme, this tool supports the observation of emotional atmosphere, embodied interactions, movement qualities, relational dynamics, and significant moments emerging during the sessions.

Observers are encouraged to document not only verbal content, but also non-verbal communication, affective resonance, symbolic expression, sensory impressions, and their own felt sense during the sessions (Rappaport, 2013). They may also describe the process through metaphors, drawings, movement descriptions, and reflective notes in order to deepen experiential understanding of the group dynamics and participants' embodied experiences.



Such observations contribute to a richer understanding of participants' experiences beyond verbal communication alone and support the investigation of embodied, relational, and symbolic dimensions of the DanceCARE programme that cannot be fully captured through psychometric assessment tools alone.

Mid-term evaluation and blended monitoring

Additional monitoring tools were developed to support reflection on the implementation and blended components of the DanceCARE programme. Mid-term evaluation forms were distributed to the participants and group facilitators to gather feedback regarding the perceived usefulness, accessibility, and emotional impact of the programme.

As part of the blended educational format, remote monitoring of the digital tools was also conducted, including metrics such as platform logins and the most frequently accessed modules and sections. These materials contributed to ongoing evaluation and supported reflection on how digital resources complemented the live body–mind sessions.

Together, the embodied, art-based, observational, and reflective methodologies adopted within DanceCARE aimed to support a more holistic understanding of caregivers' experiences by integrating verbal reflection, bodily awareness, movement observation, creative expression, and interpersonal processes.

The full versions of the self-observation diary, observation forms, facilitator reports, and supporting materials are included in the annexes.



6. LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DANCECARE PILOT PROGRAMMES

This chapter presents practical lessons learned and recommendations emerging from the implementation of the DanceCARE pilot programmes in Italy, Spain, and Greece. The reflections presented here are based on an integrated analysis of facilitator reports, participant feedback, observation materials, interviews, and embodied/art-based documentation collected throughout the project.

The aim of this chapter is to support future facilitators and organisations in adapting and implementing the DanceCARE programme in different professional and cultural contexts, while remaining attentive to emotional safety, group dynamics, continuity, accessibility, and participants' lived experiences.

6.1 Recruitment and introduction of participants

The way the DanceCARE programme is introduced to potential participants plays an important role in accessibility and engagement. During the pilot programmes, it became clear that the wording used to describe the sessions can strongly influence whether caregivers feel the programme is suitable for them. When the programme is presented primarily as "dance," some participants may assume they need dance experience, rhythm, flexibility, or the ability to follow choreography, which may create insecurity or discourage participation.

For this reason, it is recommended to use more accessible and inclusive language when introducing the programme, such as **body–mind sessions, gentle movement, creative movement**, or pleasant individual and group-based movement experiences. It is important to clearly communicate that no previous experience in dance or any specific movement style is required and that the focus is placed on personal experience, wellbeing, creativity, and self-expression rather than performance.

The recruitment process itself also requires sufficient time and attention. Long-term caregivers often live within highly demanding and unpredictable schedules, balancing caregiving responsibilities, work, family life, and emotional stress. During the pilot implementations, it became evident that caregivers may need time not only to organise practical participation, but also to reflect on whether joining the programme feels appropriate and manageable within their current life situation. It is therefore important that organisers and facilitators reserve sufficient time for dialogue during the recruitment phase, allowing potential participants to discuss expectations, capacities, emotional readiness, and possible practical limitations. This supports a more ethical, responsive, and participant-centred approach to recruitment and participation.

It is also recommended to encourage participants to attend the programme as continuously as possible in order to reduce excessive changes within the group throughout the process. Greater continuity in participation was found to support emotional safety, trust-building, and the development of group cohesion and peer connection.



6.2 Preparing and organising the environment

One of the important lessons emerging from the pilot implementations was the strong influence of the physical environment on participants' sense of safety, orientation, and engagement within the group process. Calm, familiar, and minimally disruptive environments appeared to support concentration, emotional regulation, bodily awareness, and participants' willingness to engage in reflective and creative processes.

Where possible, it is recommended to use the same space consistently throughout the body–mind programme (with the exception of the outdoor session) and, similarly, to maintain continuity in the location used for the self-help groups. Familiarity with the environment appeared to support trust-building, orientation, and emotional comfort within the group process.

For the body–mind sessions, participants benefited from spaces that allowed sufficient freedom of movement and physical comfort over the duration of the 90 minute sessions. During the pilot programmes, spaces with softer flooring, such as wooden floors or dance studio flooring, were generally experienced as more supportive than hard concrete or tiled surfaces, which could create physical discomfort during longer periods of standing or movement.

It was also found to be important that the space was not immediately needed by another group directly before or after the session. Allowing sufficient time for preparation, set-up, arrival, closure, and leaving the space without feeling rushed contributed to a calmer transition into and out of the sessions. This appeared to support emotional grounding and helped maintain a sense of containment and continuity within the group process.

In some cases, practical aspects of the environment also required additional attention. For example, dance or movement studios often contain mirrors, which some participants experienced as distracting or uncomfortable during reflective and body-oriented exercises. In these situations, facilitators found it helpful to prepare the environment in advance, for example by covering mirrors when appropriate.

Finally, practical preparation of the space, including access to music playback, internet connection when needed, and sufficient materials for creative activities, contributed to smoother facilitation and continuity within the sessions.



6.3 Facilitation and lessons learned within the body–mind sessions

The pilot implementations in Italy, Greece, and Spain highlighted the importance of flexibility, collaboration, and responsiveness to group needs throughout the body–mind sessions. Although the DanceCARE training guide offered an important structure and framework for the programme, DMT facilitators often adapted the sessions in response to participants' physical capacities, emotional readiness, communication styles, and group dynamics.

Across several pilot implementations, DMT facilitators described the training guide as supportive and valuable, particularly as a framework for the overall process. At the same time, the DMT facilitator who had not participated in the embodied training for facilitators in person (due to sickness) sometimes required additional clarification and support in understanding and applying the materials, especially the more movement-and theory-based components such as the Kestenberg-inspired sessions. Ongoing dialogue between facilitators appeared important in supporting confidence, reflection, and adaptation throughout the implementation process.

One of the strongest recurring themes across the pilots was the importance of grounding, pacing, repetition, and emotional containment within the group process. Several DMT facilitators observed that participants often needed more time than anticipated to feel comfortable with movement-based work and embodied exploration. In some groups, verbal sharing and relational connection initially took a more central role than movement itself. Facilitators therefore adapted the balance between movement, verbal reflection, grounding, and creative exploration according to the evolving needs of the group.

Participants across countries frequently expressed appreciation for moments of playfulness, emotional expression, peer connection, touch-based exercises, breathing techniques, and embodied self-regulation practices. Sessions involving symbolic or personally meaningful elements, such as bringing personal objects or working outdoors, were often experienced as especially meaningful and emotionally engaging. In several groups, participants also began applying simple breathing, grounding, or touch-based exercises within their caregiving relationships and daily lives.

At the same time, the pilot implementations highlighted the importance of maintaining continuity and stability within the group process. In some implementations, time pressure and recruitment challenges resulted in participants joining groups later in the programme or moving between groups. Although the DMT facilitators adapted carefully to these situations, they observed that changes in group composition could affect trust-building, group cohesion, and emotional safety, especially during later phases of the programme.

The pilot groups also revealed considerable diversity among participants. Groups included caregivers of older people with long-term care needs i.e. parents (in-law), spouses, grandparents mainly, some of them living with dementia. In Spain, for example, one of the groups contained wide age ranges and intergenerational dynamics, which participants often experienced positively. Facilitators highlighted the value of peer exchange between different caregiving experiences, while also emphasizing the importance of adapting exercises to participants' physical capacities and emotional needs.



Several DMT facilitators expressed the need for a longer programme duration, more repetition of core themes, and additional space for emerging group processes. Some suggested increasing the number of sessions or allowing more cyclical revisiting of grounding, embodiment, and self-regulation practices in order to support deeper integration. There was also a recurring reflection on the importance of clearer ritual structures and continuity between sessions, particularly regarding openings, closures, and the transition toward the end of the programme.

Another important lesson learned concerned the role of collaboration and communication between DMT facilitators, psychologist-facilitators, local partner organisations, observers, and coordinating teams. DMT facilitators who experienced ongoing communication, peer exchange, or reflective support during the implementation process often described feeling more supported and connected. Conversely, time pressure, organisational challenges, or limited opportunities for exchange sometimes contributed to feelings of isolation among facilitators themselves.

Overall, the pilot implementations suggested that the body–mind sessions were experienced by many participants as supportive spaces for stress relief, emotional expression, bodily awareness, social connection, and self-care. At the same time, the experiences across countries highlighted the importance of flexibility, careful pacing, stable group processes, sufficient preparation time, and ongoing facilitator support when implementing embodied and arts-based programmes within caregiving contexts.

6.4 Transitioning from body–mind sessions to self-help groups

One of the themes that emerged during the pilot implementations was the importance of carefully considering how continuity and transition are facilitated between the body–mind sessions and the self-help groups. Participants often experienced these two components of the DanceCARE programme as connected yet distinct forms of support: one focusing more strongly on embodied and creative exploration, and the other on verbal reflection and peer exchange.

During the pilot programmes, different approaches to this transition were explored. In some cases, continuity between the two components appeared supportive for participants. For example, it could be helpful if the DMT facilitator of the body–mind sessions joined the first self-help group session in order to support familiarity and continuity within the group process. Similarly, the self-help group facilitator could be introduced to participants during the beginning of the body–mind programme. In some implementations, the first self-help group session was jointly opened by both facilitators, which appeared to support integration between the two parts of the programme and create a greater sense of coherence for participants.

In Italy, the two components of the DanceCARE programme were already explained in detail during the recruitment phase and during face-to-face interviews conducted by the psychologist who later facilitated the self-help groups. The psychologist-facilitator was also present at the beginning of the body–mind sessions, which appeared to support familiarity and trust-building.



An additional lesson learned was that the body–mind sessions and the self-help groups can also function as complementary yet relatively independent interventions. Depending on the local context, it may not always be necessary or possible to organise both components together. For example, participants completing the body–mind programme could be referred to existing caregiver self-help groups within the community, or facilitators of existing self-help groups could refer participants to body–mind workshops when appropriate.

These experiences highlighted the importance of flexibility and contextual adaptation when designing transitions between the different components of the DanceCARE programme.

6.5 Facilitation and participant experiences within the self-help groups

A. Facilitation process and lessons learned

During the pilot implementations, self-help group facilitators (psychologists) appeared to play an important role in supporting a safe, respectful, and non-judgmental atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable sharing experiences and vulnerabilities. At the beginning of sessions, it was often helpful to revisit shared agreements such as confidentiality, active listening, mutual respect, and balanced participation.

Self-help group facilitators generally supported open dialogue through open-ended questions and invitations for participants to speak from personal experience. Rather than focusing on giving advice or solutions, participants appeared to benefit most when facilitators encouraged reflection on personal strengths, coping strategies, emotional responses, and possible ways of navigating difficult situations. Allowing space for the group process to develop organically often supported a stronger sense of ownership, mutual recognition, and empowerment within the discussions.

Group conversations frequently touched on common caregiving experiences such as feeling overwhelmed, isolated, emotionally exhausted, or stuck. Participants reflected not only on emotional experiences, but also on bodily signs of stress, support systems, coping strategies, and small, realistic steps toward self-care and change. Beyond discussing difficulties, the groups also appeared to support emotional validation, resilience, mutual learning, and reduced feelings of isolation.

An additional lesson learned concerned the importance of balanced participation within the group process. Self-help group facilitators sometimes needed to gently support quieter participants in entering the conversation, while also ensuring that stronger voices did not unintentionally dominate the group space. A flexible and attentive facilitation style appeared to support a greater sense of inclusion and shared ownership within the discussions.

During several pilot implementations, observers accompanied the self-help group facilitator and documented aspects such as group dynamics, emotional atmosphere, levels of participation, non-verbal communication, significant moments, and emerging themes within the sessions.



These observation notes supported later reflection, evaluation, and a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the development of the group process over time.

At the end of the sessions, self-help group facilitators often briefly summarised important themes emerging within the discussion and acknowledged participants' openness and contributions. Participants appeared to benefit from ending the meetings in a calm and supportive way, helping them leave with a sense of recognition, connection, and encouragement toward continued self-care and peer support.

B. Participant experiences and feedback

Following the self-help groups, participants were invited to reflect on whether they experienced the groups as useful and whether they wished to continue participating or remain in contact with other participants. Across the pilot implementations, many participants described the self-help groups as a meaningful aspect of the programme. Recurring themes in the feedback included feeling less isolated, experiencing emotional recognition and mutual understanding, gaining strength through shared experiences, and appreciating the opportunity to speak openly about caregiving challenges with others in similar situations.

Several participants expressed a desire for the groups to continue beyond the programme or to remain in contact with group members afterwards. Participants described the groups as spaces of mutual listening, emotional support, and shared understanding that were often difficult to find within their everyday environments.

As one participant reflected:

“The feeling of entering a space where you know you will meet people with common experiences, where what you express is understood, was like a big hug.”
(GR13)

Another participant described:

“Sharing experiences with other carers helps a great deal emotionally and socially. You feel understood and less alone.” (SP22)

Other participants highlighted the importance of recognising that they were “not the only one in this situation” (SP29), experiencing a sense of “communion” through shared listening and exchange (IT14_T2), and gaining “strength, useful advice, and feeling less alone” through conversations with people who understood the realities of caring for someone with dementia (GR01). Participants also described learning from different experiences shared within the group and discovering insights that were useful both personally and within daily caregiving life (GR06).

Overall, the feedback gathered throughout the pilot programmes suggested that the self-help groups contributed not only to emotional support and reduced isolation, but also to a greater sense of connection, recognition, and collective resilience among participants.



6.6 Sustaining practices beyond the programme

One of the important lessons emerging from the pilot implementations was the value of supporting continuity beyond the formal duration of the programme. At the end of the DanceCARE process, participants appeared to benefit from being encouraged to reflect on which practices, exercises, or moments of the programme felt most supportive or meaningful for them personally, and how these could be adapted and integrated into their everyday lives.

Participants were encouraged to continue using simple body–mind tools explored during the sessions, such as grounding, breathing awareness, movement, self-observation, creative reflection, or communication practices, in ways that suited their own caregiving situations and personal needs. Emphasis was placed not on repeating the programme exactly, but on supporting participants in developing sustainable and personally meaningful self-care practices.

Maintaining informal peer contact or continuing participation in self-help groups may also support an ongoing sense of connection and mutual support beyond the structured sessions.

To further support continuity and accessibility, participants could continue engaging with the body–mind practices through the DanceCARE video materials available on the DanceCARE website and YouTube channel. These materials offered participants the possibility to revisit exercises and adapt the practices within their own daily rhythms and environments.



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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 SELF OBSERVATION DIARY

[for participants]

This diary is a self-observation tool that will keep you company during the workshops and activities of the DanceCARE project.

We thought it would be useful to give you suggestions for reflection and creativity that you can use during and after each meeting.

BREATHING and BEING IN RELATION with yourself

1. When you came to the session, how did you feel about your body and your breathing (body stiff or loose, body cold or warm, skin itchy, tight or soft, body aching and where, breathing fast/slow, high in the chest or low in the belly, etc.)? Did you observe any changes at the end?

CREATING

1. Can you draw a picture that reflects the process? Or find a song that describes your feelings?
2. After that, can you connect words (creative writing) to this process? You do not necessarily have to write a logical story, but you can describe your feelings referring to colours, animals, and elements of nature.
3. Which of the creative methods: somatic exercises, self-massage, breathing, choreography, drawing, etc. helped you to get in touch with yourself? What feelings emerge when thinking back to that specific method?
4. What kinds of challenges or difficulties could be addressed by paying attention to your body?



BEING IN RELATION with the others

5. What is the movement you have done or seen another person do that you liked the most? Can you do it again? What do you like so much about it?
6. How was the interaction with the others (facilitators and participants)?
7. Did you find it enjoyable to cooperate together (as a duo or in a larger group)? Was there a moment when you found it challenging or difficult to interact with the other participants? Can you describe how you experienced the facilitator of this session?
8. What impressed you about today's topic? Did you learn something new?



ANNEX 2 - GROUP ACTIVITY REPORT (for body-mind facilitators)

Body-mind facilitator's Name and Surname	
Training location	
Number of participants	
Training session no.	
Title of the session	
Objectives	
Materials used	
Equipment	
Music chosen (if any)	
Description of the activities	
<p>Themes</p> <p>Which is/are the important theme(s) that emerged during the process?</p>	
<p>Movement</p> <p>Observations made regarding the movement of the participants today (any kind of notation about flow, effort, shape, space and time)?</p>	
<p>Group dynamics</p> <p>Any observations on the group dynamics?</p> <p>How was the interaction between the participants? (tense/comfortable, people went out of their comfort zone to make contact, people took risks while partnering, deeper connections were</p>	



made)	
Shift Was there a moment during the session you felt had a deep impact on a participant (or several participants) and could be described	
Usefulness training guide 1. In what ways did the guidelines assist/ hinder session preparation? 2. Assist/hinder intervention delivery and 3. Assist/hinder session evaluation	
Program adaptations Changes you considered needed during the training session compared to the set up in the training guide. How did you go about the need for change you sensed? Any more structural challenges that need to be addressed in the upcoming sessions?	

ANNEX 3 - GUIDED OBSERVATION OF MOVEMENTS AND EMOTIONS

[for trainees/observers]

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Preparing to observe:

Before starting the observation session it is necessary to be in a state of state of awareness (embodiment), which consists of centering, with a regular and deep breath, and good rooting. Being in the here and now allows the observer to listen, to have a space inside himself to welcome the other, the gestures, the movements and the state of the group.



Below you find a guided observation grid. We understand it is not possible to pay attention to all the aspects of the different phases. That is ok, we are not expecting you to. Use your intuition, and see what draws your attention. The grid is developed to support you as an observer, in finding structure in your observations.

We suggest you pay attention to group rhythm, flow, qualities, and use of space especially at the beginning and end of each session.

Under the observation grid, you find other open questions, and artistic assignments to capture your observation in a more embodied way, through a drawing, song, a story etcetera.

SHORT EXPLANATION OF GRID TERMS

SPACE: Planes of space (vertical, horizontal, sagittal)

Levels (high, medium, low)

Kinesphere (proximal, medium, wide)

The use of TIME can be PROLONGED or URGENT. It connects to the sagittal plane of space and is the factor that expresses intuition and decision.

FLOW can be FREE or TENSE/HOLDED. It is the emotional and most important factor behind movement and expression

EFFORT: How does the group move? What is the intention and the expressive manifestation of the movement? WEIGHT can be STRONG or LIGHT. It connects to the plane of vertical space and is the factor that expresses the intention of the movement.

In real life these factors do not appear separately, but are in combination with each other and give rise to all expressive and functional movements.

ANNEX 3 - GUIDED OBSERVATION GRID (for observers) - DanceCARE		
Date of the session		
FULL NAME OF THE OBSERVER		
PHASES OF THE WORKSHOP	What and how to observe?	



1- check-in	A) Use of the SPACE (personal and general)	
	9. TIME and rhythm of the group	
	10. How is the FLOW?	
	11. EFFORT/QUALITY	
	12. How do I feel while the group is moving? Can I write down 1 feeling/word for this phase?	
2- warming-up	A) Use of the SPACE (personal and general)	
	B) TIME and rhythm of the group	
	C) How is the FLOW?	
	D) EFFORT/QUALITY	
	E) How do I feel while the group is moving? Can I write down 1 feeling/word for this phase?	
3- process	A) Use of the SPACE (personal and general)	
	B) TIME and rhythm of the group	
	C) How is the FLOW?	
	D) EFFORT/QUALITY	
	E) How do I feel while the group is moving? Can I write	



	down 1 feeling/word for this phase?	
4- closure	A) Use of the SPACE (personal and general)	
	B) TIME and rhythm of the group	
	C) How is the FLOW?	
	EFFORT/QUALITY	
	How do I feel while the group is moving? Can I write down 1 feeling/word for this phase?	
5- Check out	A) Use of the SPACE (personal and general)	
	D) TIME and rhythm of the group	
	E) How is the FLOW?	
	EFFORT/QUALITY	
	How do I feel while the group is moving? Can I write down 1 feeling/word for this phase?	

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR OBSERVERS

(to be completed immediately after the end of each session)

5- What is your general impression(s) of the session?

6- Which is/are the important theme(s) that emerged during the process?



7- Was there a moment during the session that touched you and you felt had a deep impact on a participant (or several participants)?

Art based assignment after the observation

8- Can you describe the whole process of the session in metaphor or a movement (sequence)? If you choose for the movement (sequence) we ask you to record yourself?

9- Please, take some minutes to draw what you take away from this session.

