



"ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE: THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING"

Welcome to Module 5:
Communication and Socio-emotional Skills Development for
Implementing Theatre Activities with Older Persons

Developed by RightChallenge



lecompagniemalviste



RightChallenge



The aim of
module 5
is to ...

Objectives and learning outcomes

Address:

- a) Caregivers, social and mental health professionals, working in the field of care and support services for aging adults (65+),
- b) Artists and cultural operators working with older adults,
- c) Individuals who want to learn more about skills needed regarding the implementation of theatre activities with older persons.

Improve Skills:

Explore ways to improve and develop effective **verbal and non-verbal communication** techniques.

Enhance **socio-emotional skills** to netter engage participants in theatrical activities.

Provide guidance on facilitating group discussions, promoting teamwork, and **encouraging the active participation** of older adults.

Provide Knowledge:

Definitions and key concepts of verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and socio-emotional skills.

Provide **activities and exercises** to improve verbal and non-verbal communication skills, as well as socio-emotional skills, in both group settings and for individual practice at home.



Why are communication and social-emotional skills crucial in theater interventions with older adults?

Theatre-based interventions are a mean of reducing social isolation and loneliness, facilitating successful aging, and strengthening social cognition in older adults (McDonald et al., 2024). At the same time, active theatre participation significantly improves participants' empathic abilities, social communication, tolerance, and social interactions (Lewandowska & Węziak-Białowolska, 2023).

But what about the people conducting theatre-based interventions? To achieve this positive impact on older adults, it's important for educators, theatre enthusiasts, and other professionals to develop their own communication and social-emotional skills. This module will help you learn more about both verbal and non-verbal communication and explore activities you can practise at home or in a group setting!





Why are communication and social-emotional skills crucial in theater interventions with older adults?

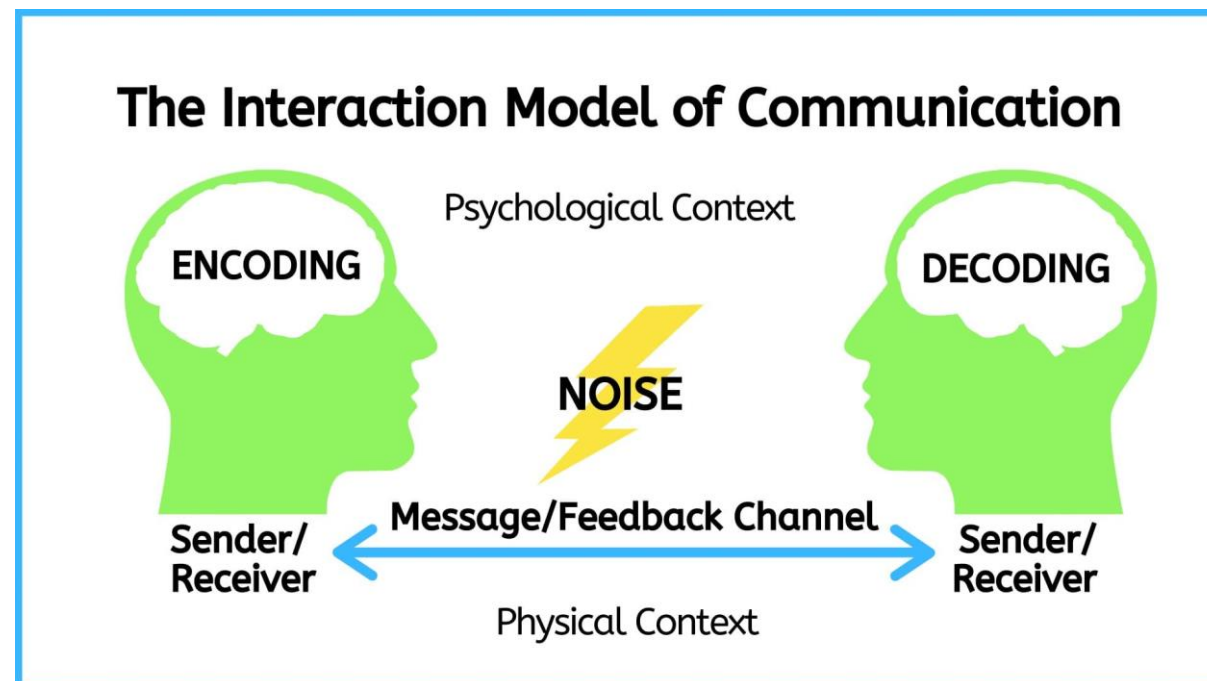
Building trust and comfort, supporting emotional expression and adapting to the diverse needs and abilities of older adults is crucial to engage them successfully in theatre activities. With some simple tricks you can learn to enhance the social connection in a group or empower your own self-confidence in front of others. Module 5 of the AGE_THEA training programme aims to promote a safe and comfortable environment and provide some strategies and skills for everyone who is conducting theatre-based activities.

Building on the AGE_THEA focus group results, the effectiveness of training programmes for professionals who interact with diverse older adults through theatrical activities depends largely on their ability to transmit essential communication skills (e.g. active listening, intensive interaction), including humour, as well as emotional management skills. Without these essential skills, professionals may find it difficult to connect and interact effectively with older adults, especially those with dementia-Alzheimer's or other cognitive impairments.



Part I

Verbal Communication Skills



When we first think about communication, it is likely that we think of verbal communication: listening to a friend, phoning a family member or talking to a colleague. Verbal communication skills form the foundation for engaging participants in theater activities and achieving positive outcomes. In the following sections, we will present their definition, techniques, and some related exercises.



Definition & Key Concepts of Verbal Communication

Definition

"Human interaction through the use of *words*, or *messages* in linguistic form. Colloquial usage refers to speech (*oral communication*), especially face-to-face, but academic usage includes mediated forms, *written* communication, and sometimes *sign language*."

(Oxford Reference)

- Clarity
- Tone & Sounds
- Pace
- Meaning
- Expression of Thoughts & Ideas & Feelings or Needs
- Symbols
- Relationship between Sender & Receiver
- Adaptability in communication with older adults



Examples



Definition & Key Concepts of Verbal Communication

Definition

Following this definition, verbal communication refers to human interaction expressed by **words or written messages**. Clarity is important, ensuring that our **language is clear and easy to understand**. The **spoken tone** can add an emotional context, affecting how messages are received and interpreted by the other person, while especially the **pace of us speaking** can influence comprehension, especially when communicating with older adults. Ensure you understand who you are speaking with and how well they can hear and comprehend the language you are using, especially when expressing certain thoughts, feelings, or needs. The **relationship between the sender and receiver** is central, as successful communication depends on both parties' ability to connect and understand each other's intentions to not create misunderstandings.



Key Concept



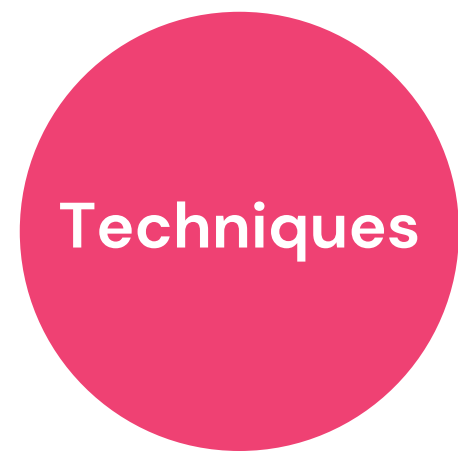
Empathy & Patience in Verbal Interactions with Older Adults



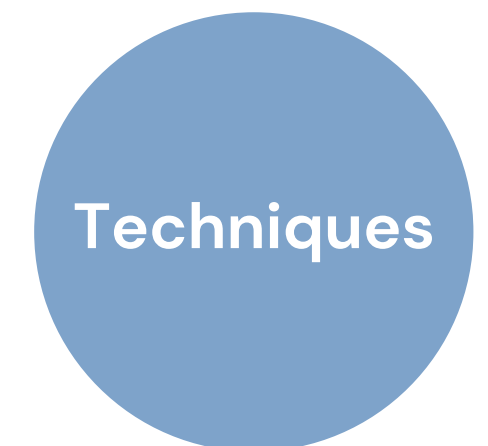
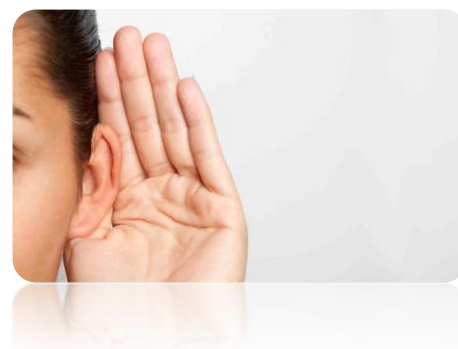
Working with older adults, adaptability is crucial, as adjustments in tone, speed, and simplicity can influence their understanding and engagement in theatre activities. Empathy and patience are essential in creating a supportive, respectful, and inclusive environment where participants feel respected, understood, and fully included in interactions, which enhances their participation, enjoyment, and overall well-being.



Techniques for Effective Verbal Communication in Theatre Settings



Listen actively and summarise. Pay attention by focusing on the speaker and clarify what has been said by paraphrasing key points.	Ask open questions and if responding critical, provide constructive feedback.
Listen to verbal communication messages with an open mind and withhold judgement.	Use simple and clear language.





Small Exercises for Developing Verbal Communication Skills

Solo at home

Reading Aloud with Emphasis

Select a passage from a book or article and read it aloud, experimenting with different tones, paces, and volumes. Try to emphasise different words or phrases to change the emotion expressed. This exercise builds vocal variety and helps in practicing clear enunciation and expressive communication, essential skills for engaging others verbally.

Reflection Out Loud

Choose a topic—like a favorite memory or a recent experience—and talk about it out loud for five minutes. Focus on organising thoughts clearly and using a variety of descriptive words to express details. This practice builds clarity and confidence in verbal expression, which is helpful for communicating effectively in group settings.





#1 The Story Circle

Active Learning Activity (Group Setting)

In a circle, each participant takes turns adding a line to a collective story. The objective of this activity is to listen carefully, connect ideas, and build on each person's contribution. This activity improves listening skills, encourages clear articulation, and promotes creative storytelling, which is very beneficial in theater contexts. Get inspired by the video!

Learn more in the Learning Activity section
below and print out the handout cards!





Part II

Non-verbal Communication Skills

Besides words and messages, non-verbal signals are very powerful in improving communication and understanding, especially when working with older individuals. In this age group, some individuals could face specific challenges, including hearing loss or cognitive difficulties that impact verbal communication. In this second part, we will learn more about the definitions of non-verbal communication and how its techniques can enhance communication and understanding!





Definition & Key Concepts of Non-verbal Communication

Definition

“Nonverbal communication, transfer of information from one person to another **without the use of words or spoken language**. Nonverbal communication can occur in a variety of ways, including through **facial expressions, gestures, and body posture or position.**”

(Encyclopaedia Britannica)

- Laughing
- Crying
- Coughing
- Gestures
- Body Language
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Personal space
- Tactile signals
- Olfactory signals
- Tone or screams
- Dramatic pauses ...



Examples





Definition & Key Concepts of Non-verbal Communication

Definition

Non-verbal communication refers to human interaction expressed through **gestures, facial expressions, body language, or tone**. Clear non-verbal signals can reinforce meaning and reduce misunderstandings. Facial expressions lead to **emotions**, allowing us to perceive the intent behind an action, while body language can show **openness, encouragement, or support**, which can be especially impactful in engaging older adults in theater activities. Just as with words, it's essential **to be mindful** of who you are communicating with and how well they can interpret non-verbal cues. For instance, older adults or **those with cognitive impairments may rely more on visual cues for understanding**, making non-verbal clarity especially important when expressing thoughts, emotions, or intentions. Rich non-verbal communication can help to ensure that intentions are correctly understood, enhance engagement and prevent miscommunication.

Key Concept



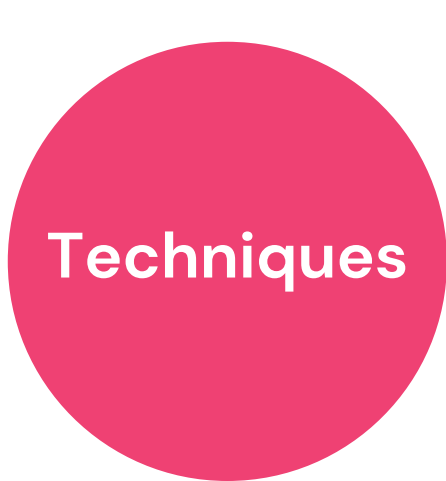
Mirroring emotions & demonstrating openness



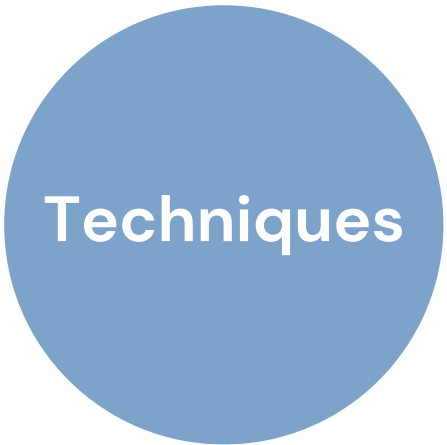
In theater activities non-verbal strategies like mirroring emotions and demonstrating openness are essential to connect and engage with the participants. Mirroring emotions helps to validate their feelings, creating a sense of empathy and encouragement. Demonstrating openness through relaxed body language and gentle eye contact creates a safe and inviting environment and help to build trust and empower older people to participate more freely in creative expression.



Techniques for Effective Non-verbal Communication in Theatre Settings



Use gestures and facial expressions to reinforce verbal instructions and understanding (especially regarding participants with hear impairments).	Adapt your posture and body language to convey openness and try to maintain gentle eye contact . Use mirroring to reflect emotions / gestures from participants.
Adjust distance and personal space to participants to comfort levels of older adults. Use pauses or moments of silence effectively to give participants time to reflect and respond.	Be mindful of the pacing of movements and gestures . Slow, movements can help older adults process information more effectively, while varying the tempo can add engagement to exercises.





Small Exercises for Developing Non-verbal Communication Skills

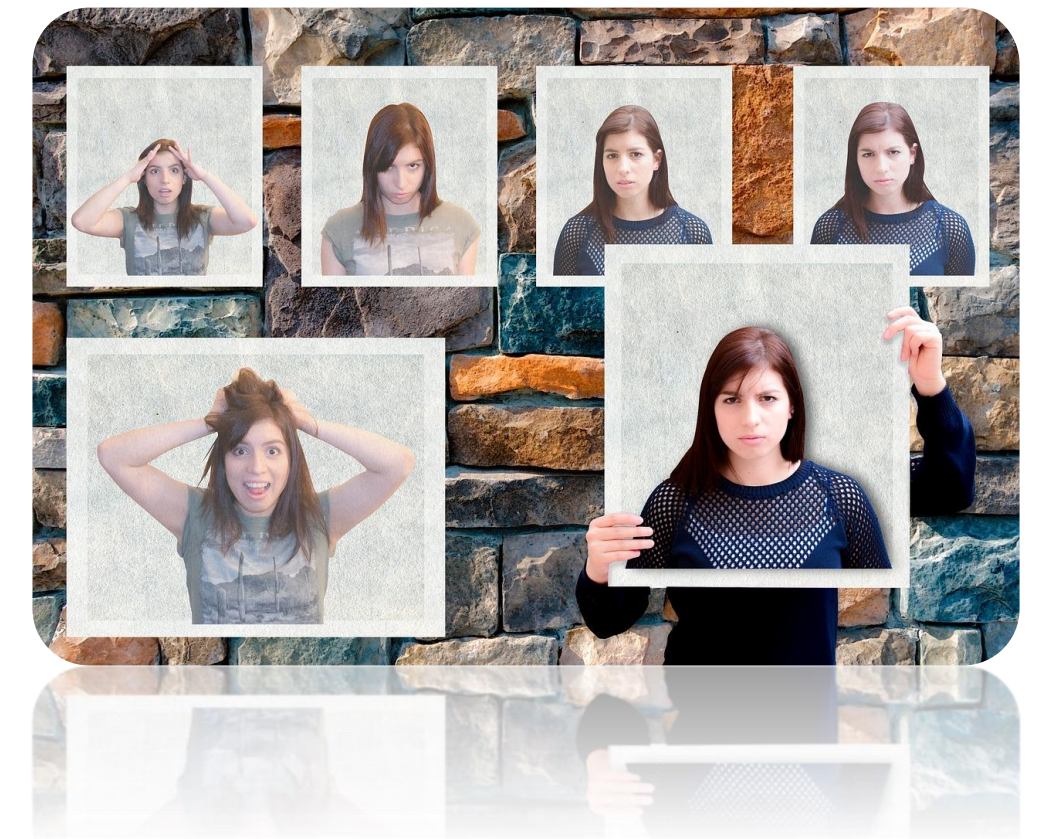
Solo at home

Facial Expression Practice

Stand in front of a mirror and practice expressing various emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, surprise, anger) using only facial expressions. Spend a minute on each emotion, noticing the subtle changes in your features. This exercise helps enhance awareness of facial cues and improves the ability to express emotions without words.

Body Language Journal

Keep a journal for one week, noting daily interactions and focusing on the non-verbal cues observed in yourself and others. Reflect on how body language, gestures, and facial expressions influenced those interactions. This practice encourages mindfulness of non-verbal communication and helps develop a deeper understanding of its impact on social interactions.





#2 The Mirroring Game

Active Learning Activity (Group Setting)

In pairs, one participant takes the lead while the other mirrors their movements and expressions. The leader can use gestures, facial expressions, and body language to convey emotions or actions. After a few minutes, switch roles. This exercise helps participants become more aware of non-verbal cues and enhances their ability to express emotions through body language. Get inspired by the video!

Learn more in the Learning Activity section
below and print out the handout cards!

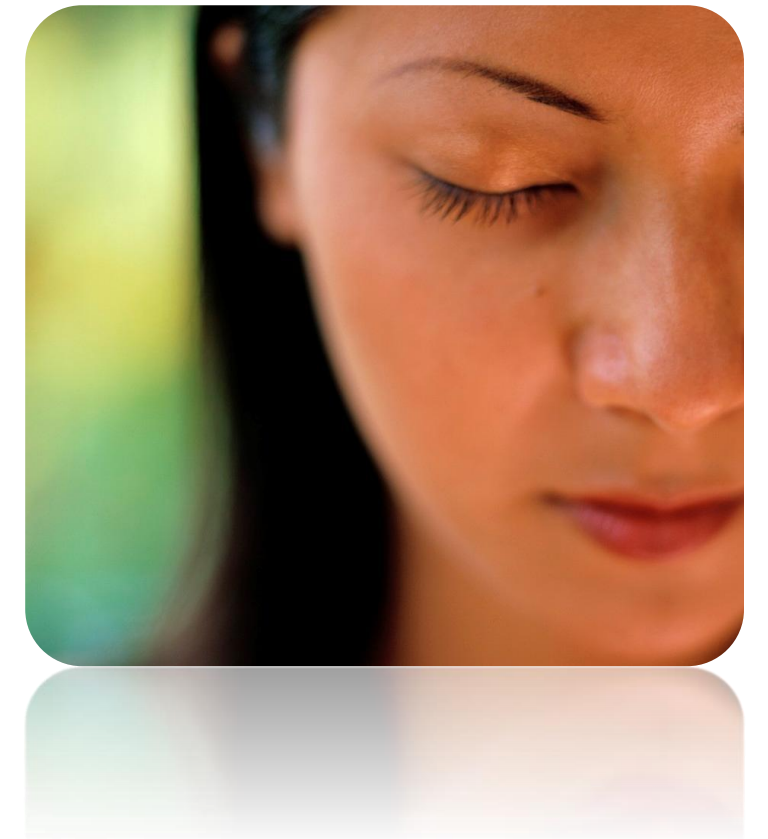




Part III

Socio-emotional Skills Development

Social-emotional skills play an important role for the interactions in theatre activities and they promote the overall well-being of participants, especially older individuals. These skills include the ability to understand and manage one's emotions, show empathy for others, and build healthy relationships. In this third section, we will explore the definitions of social-emotional skills, their importance in theater settings, and provide some practical techniques that can help to improve emotional connections and positive experiences for all participants.





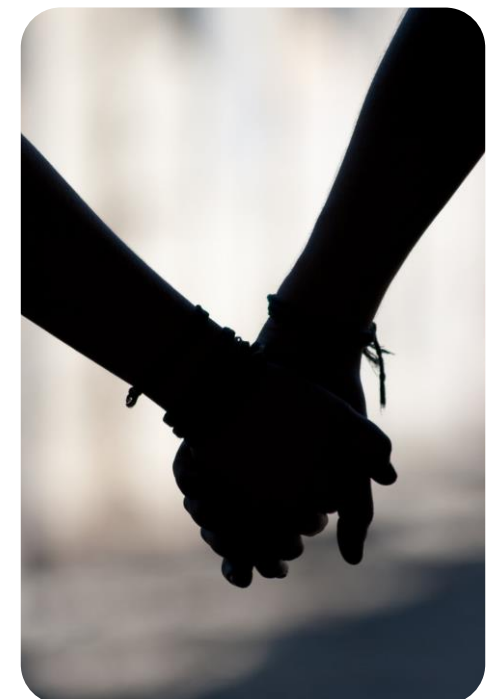
Definition & Key Concepts of Socio-emotional Skills

Definition

“Socio-emotional skills – also referred to as socio-emotional competencies – are an umbrella term to describe a broad range of social skills (e.g., the ability to cooperate with others), motivational and self-regulatory skills (e.g., values, interests, or self-control, and personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness, emotional stability).”

(Frontiers in Psychology)

- Confidence
- Conflict resolution
- Verbal communication
- Empathy & Understanding others’ emotions
- Building healthy relationships
- Integrity
- Self-awareness & recognizing your own thoughts and feelings
- Emotional self-regulation
- Patience & Encouragement
- Leadership skills



Examples



Definition & Key Concepts of Socio-emotional Skills

Definition

Following this definition, socio-emotional skills or competencies include a different abilities that support **emotional intelligence**, **social interaction**, and **self-regulation**. These include social skills such as cooperation and empathy, motivational and self-regulatory qualities like self-control, resilience, and confidence, and personality traits such as emotional stability. Socio-emotional skills are essential for **building positive relationships**, navigating conflicts, and building an inclusive, supportive environment in theater activities, especially with older adults. For example, qualities like patience, empathy, and understanding others' emotions help facilitators and participants to connect with each other, while self-awareness allows individuals to recognise and manage their thoughts and feelings effectively. All these skills help to **establish trust**, **encourage engagement**, and create a **safe space for self-expression and creativity in theater**.



Key Concept



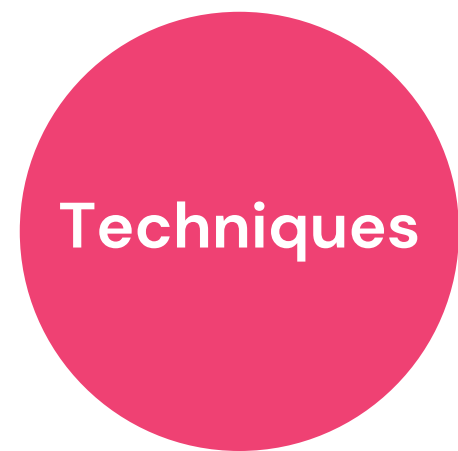
Specific challenges older individuals may face with emotional regulation and self-expression



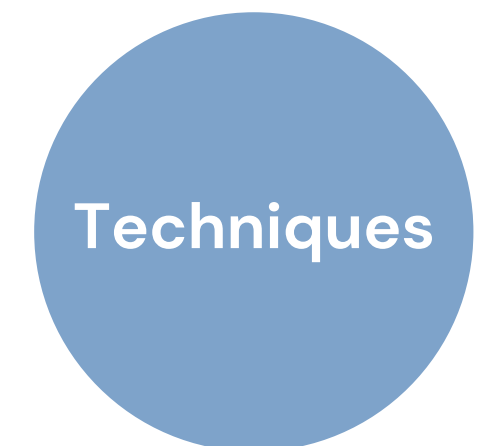
Older individuals may face unique challenges with emotional self-expression due to age-related cognitive changes, sensory impairments, or physical health limitations. These factors, combined with psychological challenges like grief, social isolation, and changes in independence, can make it harder for them to process and communicate their emotions. In theater settings, recognising these challenges is essential to create a supportive environment that encourages open self-expression and emotional well-being.



Techniques for Effective Socio-emotional Skills in Theatre Settings



Show empathy towards participants, and provide space for them to experience, manage and express emotions freely.	Remain flexible and adapt to the emotional needs of participants throughout activities.
Discuss potential strategies for handling challenging emotions that may arise during activities.	Encourage participants to recognise and acknowledge their emotions, promoting a safe environment for expression and sharing with others.





Small Exercises for Developing Socio-emotional Skills

Solo at home

Gratitude Journal

Keep a gratitude journal where you write down one or two things you are thankful for each day. Along with each entry, reflect on why you appreciate these aspects and **how they make you feel.**

This practice improves self-awareness and emotional regulation by encouraging positive thinking and understanding of personal emotions.

Mindfulness Meditation

Spend 10 to 15 minutes daily practicing a mindfulness meditation. Focus on your breath, notice your thoughts, and acknowledge your feelings without judgment. This exercise improves self-awareness, emotional regulation, and patience, helping you to better understand your feelings and emotional reactions. This music can help you with it:





#3

Emotional
Role-Playing
Scenarios

Active Learning Activity (Group Setting)

Divide participants into small groups or pick volunteers and assign a scenario that involves a conflict or emotional challenge (e.g., a disagreement between friends, giving feedback on social behaviour). Each group or the volunteers role-play the scenario, focusing on using empathy and effective communication to resolve the situation. During or afterwards, discuss the feelings and responses observed during the role-play, reinforcing conflict resolution and emotional understanding. Get inspired by the video!

Learn more in the Learning Activity section
below and print out the handout cards!





Key
Takeaways
of Module 5

Summary



Module 5 focuses on introducing and developing important communication and socio-emotional skills for implementing theater activities with older adults. Key takeaways from this module include understanding the significance of **verbal and non-verbal communication in creating an inclusive and supportive theater environment**. Techniques were introduced for clear, empathetic verbal interaction, as well as effective non-verbal signals like gestures and facial expressions, which are particularly helpful for those with cognitive or sensory challenges. Additionally, the module emphasises the importance of **socio-emotional skills, such as empathy, patience, and adaptability**, to better respond to the unique needs of older adults, promoting their emotional expression, social engagement, and sense of connection. We hope we equipped you well with some practical skills and activity ideas to enhance the well-being and active involvement of older individuals through theater activities!



Well-Being

Applications of Communication and Socio-Emotional Skills & Well-Being



Theatrical activities can create supportive environments, promote a sense of community and collaboration, allowing older adults to engage in group performances that **improve teamwork and empathy**. They can reinforce social bonds and **boost self-esteem**. At the same time, the development of socio-emotional skills is helpful for **improving mental health**, as these skills help individuals better understand and manage their emotions. This can lead to the **reduction of anxiety and stress** and by learning to express feelings better, participants can learn to build **healthier relationships**, which is essential for emotional well-being. This connection is particularly important for older adults, who may face isolation or loneliness. Furthermore, engaging in theatrical exercises can stimulate cognitive function and creativity.



Practical Tips

Integrating Communication and Socio-emotional Skills into Regular Practice



To integrate communication and socio-emotional skills into theatrical activities, here are some key tips summed up for you:

- Establish an environment that creates a **comfortable atmosphere**, openness and acceptance, where participants feel safe expressing themselves without fear of judgment. Encourage **sharing and validate emotions** to promote trust among group members.
- Incorporate exercises of **active listening**, such as discussions in pairs or group reflections. Remind participants to listen attentively.
- Use **role-playing scenarios** to help participants practice communication and socio-emotional skills in realistic situations. This can prepare them for real-life interactions while allowing them to explore different emotional responses in a supportive setting.
- Introduce **mindfulness exercises** before or during theatre activities to help participants become more aware of their emotions and promote emotional regulation. Mindfulness can improve focus and enhance emotional clarity, benefiting overall engagement.
- **Celebrate individual and group achievements**, no matter how small. Positive feedback can boost confidence and encourage.
- Include **physical exercises** that promote non-verbal communication, such as movement improvisation or expressive dance. This not only enhances body awareness but also encourages participants to connect with their emotions physically.
- After activities, hold **discussions to reflect on experiences and feelings**. Encourage participants to express how they felt during the exercises, reinforcing emotional understanding and communication.



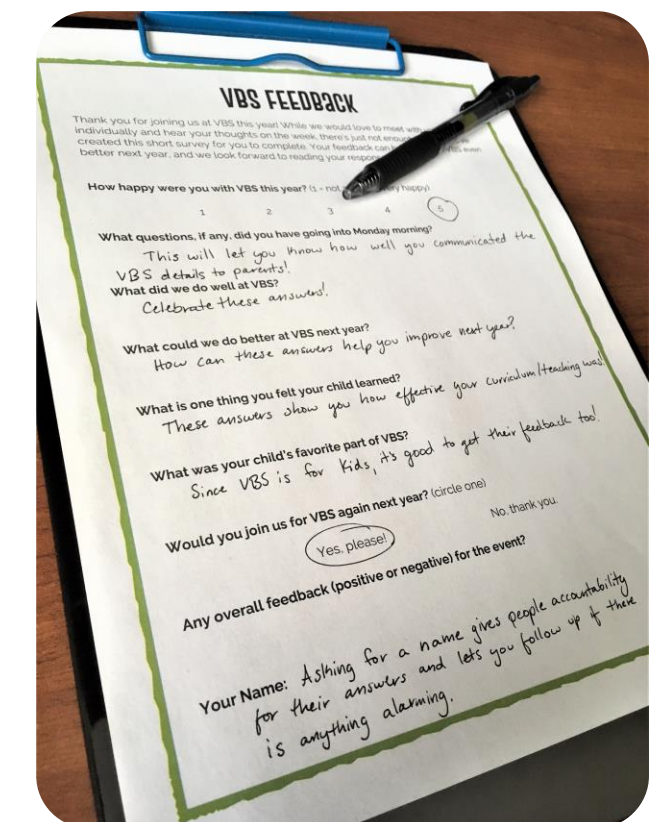
Ongoing
Learning

Evaluation & Feedback



After all this information, tips, and exercise ideas, we want to share one last recommendation with you. To determine if social and personal skills have improved, there are several tools available. **Regular check-ins, feedback forms or discussions, and informal observations** can give important insights into participants' emotional and cognitive growth. Using these reflective practices can help facilitators **assess their teaching methods and adjust activities** based on how participants respond and engage.

The importance of receiving this feedback from participants allows us to **continuously improve our methods and better support older adults**. In this way, it is possible to ensure that each participant gets the encouragement and resources they need, which ultimately **enhances the effectiveness of theatrical activities and promotes well-being**.





Thank you!

"ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE:
THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING"

PROJECT WEBSITE:
<https://age-thea.eu/>



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