

# FROM FIRST CONTACT TO INTIMACY

This activity was developed by Élan interculturel



## LEARNING CONTEXT

This activity can be done offline with social distancing or with physical contact.

### DURATION



30 min

### PARTICIPANTS



Adaptable for 10-20 participants

### MATERIALS



Space, possibly background music and sound system

## OBJECTIVES



- Highlighting the moment of the first contact
- Understand the dynamics of reciprocity, the necessary entry point to creating intimacy

## INSTRUCTIONS STEP BY STEP



The following session has two parts: we start with a short sequence of introductory warm-up activities that help participants tune into non-verbal activities, switch their focus towards their “embodied self-awareness” (see references below) and “relaxing into the context”. The second part consists of a sequence of activities more specifically targeting first contacts and reciprocity

### INTRODUCTION ACTIVITIES

The following instructions focus on different ways of “arriving” to the non-verbal movement activities. Instructions should alternate fairly quickly, as most of the activities don’t require much time (between 2 to 5 minutes). The most important is to keep your senses open and perceive how the participants respond to the activities. Feel free to adapt these instructions to your style:

- **Getting familiar with the space:** “Start walking in the room, slowly let go of thoughts about the past and what’s coming in the future, just let yourself sink in this very simple action of walking. Allow yourself to put all your roles and identities on hold. Just breathe and walk. Feel the weight of your feet on the ground. Feel how you are pulled upwards. Feel your breathing, notice whether it is deep or light, slow or fast. As you walk, let yourself be curious and explore all corners, go to places you haven’t been to before, explore borders. Try different walking styles, slower and faster, check what feels comfortable for you in this moment.”
- **Occupy space collectively:** “Try to spread out as much as possible, occupy the room as fully as possible.” To check whether participants have really spread out, you can clap your hands and ask them to stop and check whether they think they are occupying as much space as possible. If not, ask them to make the necessary

# FROM FIRST CONTACT TO INTIMACY



adjustments. You can also try the instruction: “Always go where there is an empty space.” The next step is to invite participants to: “Go where there is as little space as possible.” Given such an instruction, participants will possibly congregate in the centre of the room. Ask them to keep moving, even when they are very close to each other (skip this second step in a pandemic situation).

- **Place attention on the other people:** “When one person stops, everyone should stop. When one person starts walking again, everyone should start walking.”
- “Please choose someone, without telling or showing them. This will be your person ‘A’. Then choose someone else as your person ‘B’, again without telling them. Now position yourself so that you are always at exactly the same distance from A and from B.” Note: here participants may feel that the objective is to find an equilibrium point where this condition will be satisfied for everyone at once. This is not the objective. Instead, and insofar as the activity does have an aim, it is to show that equilibrium in social contexts are necessarily dynamic: new adjustments always trigger the need for further adjustments.

By the end of this sequence, participants should have gotten acquainted with the physical space and slowed down. However, if you feel there is need for more, feel free to include more activities of this type.



## FIRST CONTACT

As in the previous sequence, for each instruction we identify what the focus / objective is. As before, these too are short activities, please keep your senses open to check always how long each instruction should be maintained. Depending on whether the number of participants is odd or even, the facilitator joins if necessary to ensure that everyone has a partner for work in pairs.

- **Eye contact – first time:** “Walk in the room, breathe, feel the weight of your feet on the ground. When you make eye contact with someone, stop for three seconds, while you look at each other. Then let each other go and walk on.” After a while you can introduce this version: “Walk, then stop when you make eye contact with someone for three seconds. Let each other go. After three steps you can look back at the other, then go on.”
- **Choosing, following:** “Walk in the space, at your own pace, make whatever movement that you feel like, choose whatever walking style you feel like. Then choose someone that you will walk with, accompany them for a while, then let this person go. Walk a little bit on your own. When you feel that the time is right, again

# FROM FIRST CONTACT TO INTIMACY



choose someone else to walk with.”

- **Choosing and getting closer:** “Walk again, being fully present, walk and make any movement that you feel like. Let your eyes scan the people who are further away from you and identify someone who is interesting for you in this moment, who’ll be your queen or your king. Don’t give the other any sign, don’t try to make eye contact. Just continue walking and without getting closer to the person, try to let their presence “sink” in you. Try to “tune in” to this person: tuning into to their rhythm, gestures, and movements. Now get closer to them, 5 meters away, then 3 meters, then 2 meters, then 1 meter. Stop. Check whether or not you chose each other. Become aware of any feelings that may emerge. Register the sensation, then let it go, and walk again.”
- “Start to walk again. Find a new “queen / king”, without eye contact, without letting them know. Without intruding, see if you can adjust your movements to theirs. While getting closer, check if the same person has chosen you. How can you check whether it is a mutual choice without speaking, and without eye contact? Check again whether or not you chose each other, take note of the feeling, then let it go.”
- “Start to walk again. Through eye contact, chose your queen / king. Check if they have also chosen you. Keep your partner for the following activity.”
- **Getting closer - convergence:** “Stay in pairs. Find some space for your partner, spread at a good distance from the others. One of you will be a mirror, the other a subject. The mirror will always do what the subject does. You’ll both try out both roles, we’ll tell you when to change. Try to slow down and be so precise that an external viewer could not see who’s leading and who’s mirroring.” After about one minute, ask participants to change roles.
- “With a new partner, continue the same activity but now there is focus on the subjects: make the movements and gestures that reflect what you would like others to see in you. The mirrors continue to be mirrors.” After about one minute, ask participants to exchange roles, ask participants to thank their partner and let them go.
- “With a new partner, we’ll continue the mirror activity. But this time the subjects’ movements should reflect what they appreciate in the other person. The subjects can move in a way that they like to show appreciation of someone. The mirrors continue as mirrors.” After about one minute, ask participants to switch roles, ask participants to thank their partner and let them go.



# FROM FIRST CONTACT TO INTIMACY



## DISCUSSIONS AND DEBRIEFING



Collect the different sensations participants had during the session. “Where did you have positive emotions, where did you have more negative emotions?” In a first round, invite participants to focus on sensations, without analysis. For instance: “I felt apprehensive that no one would walk with me”. In a second round you can discuss the thoughts, interpretations and evaluations. Help participants not to make judgements about themselves and the others, as judgements would close instead of creating openness and curiosity. You can collect the reflections according to the different types of activities: introductory warm-up activities, then proximity activities and then the mirror series.

## TIPS AND HINTS



If you suspect that the participants would be reluctant to share their feelings and thoughts in plenary, you can first make small groups of 2-3 participants and invite to them to share taking turns, each person speaking for two minutes while the others listen without interrupting.

It could be interesting to use these activities to tackle “reciprocity”, a key notion connected to first contact and communication, and also to intimacy. “Reciprocity”, expresses mutuality, i.e., that both parties are involved in a gesture or a ritual. Reciprocity is a necessary ingredient to develop any kind of relationship and breaks of reciprocity are often perceived as very unpleasant incidents. Intimacy could be understood as a continuous reciprocal process of self-disclosure that partners welcome and allow to deepen.

## THEORY



The concept of “embodied self-awareness” is proposed by Alan Fogel (“The psychophysiology of self-awareness: Rediscovering the lost art of body sense” (2009) as an alternative to conceptual self-awareness. This latter is based on our thoughts of who we are, while embodied self-awareness is based on the bodily sensations we experience. According to Fogel, our contemporary way of life puts disproportionate emphasis on conceptual self-awareness, and we are much less used to be attentive to our “embodied self-awareness”, even if this would be very beneficial for our well-being. We believe that when it comes to intimacy, it is essential to train ourselves in being able to focus on embodied self-awareness as a more reliable indicator of how we really experience different intimate situations, as opposed to “conceptual self-awareness”, which may be excessively guided by what we think we should feel or wish we would feel (e.g., “I should feel excited about a sexual experience that is being offered to me”).

*“I think intimacy is when you dare to be yourself. It is not always nice, rather the contrary; in intimacy I dare to go deep, to my fears, to my shame. Sometimes it’s easier with strangers...”*  
Laura, 25, Barcelona