

## TRANSLATING RELATIONAL CARING INTO RELATIONAL ARTS

### Key Principles of Relational Caring:

- Compassionate relationships are at the core of human wellness
- Human beings learn, grow and thrive best in mutual relationships that support deep connection, *interdependence*, and collaboration
- All human beings have relational capacity for connection – to be in relationship with and support others
- A wide range of relationships shape experiences in the world (e.g., relationships with people, other living/non-living things, space, time, our bodies, valued objects, etc.)
- Relationships exist within complex webs of connections among individuals and broader social, cultural, political, and environmental forces (e.g., stigma, policies) at multiple levels (e.g., family, organization, community, and culture), and play an important role in supporting or limiting opportunities to flourish



Artwork above co-created and graciously shared by members of The Bitove Method community

Relational caring is not...	Relational caring is...
Feeding someone	Sharing a meal with someone
Doing care for a person	Being present with a person
Clothing a body	Dressing for the day
Standing over	Sitting beside
Talking over or about	Speaking with
Being controlled	Being free to be
Putting on music for others	Singing, playing and dancing together
Telling someone what to do	Supporting someone in what they want to do

### Relational Caring Involves:

- *Attending to humanity/humanness*
  - supporting each other in: feeling safe; feeling like we belong; feeling accepted; having purpose and meaning in life; feeling a sense of continuity while also evolving; feeling capable; having a sense of achievement; feeling valued
  - tackling injustice and inequities not only by addressing barriers (e.g., implementing anti-oppressive policies and practices) but also by providing opportunities for self-expression, compassionate relationships, and flourishing
- *Focusing intentionally on relationships*
  - having curiosity in one another; having fun/sharing laughs together; meeting each other with authenticity and bringing one's most authentic self; asking the person about their life and sharing aspects of our lives with others; being open to mutual vulnerability, being emotionally present, and sharing emotions and feelings (including joy, happiness, loneliness, fear, sadness, powerlessness, anger, boredom); being open to mutual influence and discovery and sharing with others what we have learned from them; asking for and accepting help and support; listening actively and carefully and repeating words or phrases the person has used
- *Reflecting on what is occurring in the moment*
  - being flexible and spontaneous to others' perspectives, rhythms, and desires; providing verbal affirmations to others; embracing silence; following rather than leading/controlling; being attuned to what our bodies might be communicating; recognizing how others express themselves and share information through their bodies

- *Creating a safe(r) space*
  - being attentive to the level of energy needed and the energy reflected by others; slowing down; being flexible; meeting someone without judgement; respecting everyone; explaining what we are doing and why
- *Collaborating/working with each other*
  - working in authentic partnerships with others by actively engaging and creating together; learning from and with each other
- *Being self-aware, reflective, and advocates for change*
  - learning about oneself in the process of relating; Being aware of and attentive to oneself, others, and relationships
  - recognizing how relationships are influenced by social structures and striving to remove harmful and inequitable language, approaches, practices, and policies that stigmatize, oppress, and discriminate

### **Tips and Strategies for Translating Relational Caring into Relational Arts**

- including and embracing the diverse ways people engage with the arts (e.g., with words, our bodily movements, facial expressions, and physical touch)
- using the body, dance and movement to support expressions of connection and important aspects of the self and experiences
- including everyone in the art-making process; simply performing for others is not a collaborative experience (e.g., members who are no longer vocal can contribute to developing the rhythms and percussion in collaborative music-making sessions)
- using arts to explore what relationships mean for people, and to get to know each other and nurture relationships
- being intentional in integrating meaningful aspects of our lives into the art-making experience (e.g., people and objects that are personally meaningful)
- respecting and being able to "go with" the person's realities (e.g., writing poems or songs reflecting "in the moment" experiences; being open to different or unexpected paths for the art-making to go; following rather than controlling the process)
- knowing and respecting individual talents, preferences, biographies, and histories, and weaving them into art-making
- supporting the different ways that members want to engage in art-making (e.g., some may prefer collaborative art-making while other members may want to create their own art)
- showing what you are doing and how contributions are incorporated and inviting questions
- being open to introducing new techniques and resisting the urge to simplify the art form (e.g., new song styles or arts mediums); failure free environments limit opportunities for growth
- using repetition and humour
- taking time for regular critical reflection, asking: Who is included and who is not? How am I and the art-making process supporting the mutual relations of everyone in the group?
- resisting the urge to hurry the process; creating the music and lyrics can be a lengthy process and that is okay

### **Sources**

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