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For more information about the First Aid Arts Responder Manual & Toolkit or if you have questions about implementation, please contact:

Ruth Yeo-Peterman
Vice President of Program Development and Training
ryepeterman@firstaidarts.org
First Aid Arts

FIRST AID FOR THE HEART

FIRST AID FOR THE HEART
Beautiful Healing Through the Arts

FIRST AID ARTS EDITORIAL TEAM

Author and Editor
Ruth Yeo-Peterman, MA, LMHC

Contributing Writers And Copy Editors
Alyssa Griskiewicz, MA, LMHCA, ATR-BC
Matthew Smith, MA, LMHCA
Michael Zuch
Francesca Betancourt

Creative Design
Kirsten Musgrave

CONTACT US
info@firstaidarts.org

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ADVISORY COUNCIL

Dan B. Allender, PhD
Founder, The Allender Center

Becky Allender, MACI
Contributing Author, The Allender Center

Danielle Bossert, MA
Refugee Resettlement Manager, Nationalities Service Center

Carlene J. Brown, PhD, MT-BC
Director, Seattle Pacific University Music Therapy Program

Patti Catalano, MT-BC, Neurologic Music Therapist Fellow
Music Therapist and Program Manager, Music Works Northwest

Amber E. L. Gray, PhD, DMT
Founder, Restorative Resources and Trauma Resources International

Dean Hirsch, Dr.(h.c.)
President & CEO, World Vision

Mike Hogan, MBA
National Director, International Justice Mission

Kirsten Hutchison, MT-BC, Certified Neurologic Music Therapist
Music Therapist, Music Works Northwest

Mindy Kalee, LMHC, RYT
Mental Health Therapist, C.O.E.U.R. Yoga and Therapy

David Knott, MT-BC
Music Therapist, Seattle Children’s Hospital

Odelya Gertel Kraybill, PhD
Founder, Expressive Trauma Integration

Edita Lintl, Dipl. art therapist
Art Therapist and Trauma Counselor, Hemayat (Vienna, Austria)

Steffanie Lorig
Founder and former CEO, Art with Heart

Christina Mallie, MS
Co-Founder, Colors of Connection

Cathy Malchiodi, Ph.D., ATR-BC, REAT
Founder, Trauma-Informed Practices & Expressive Arts Institute

Laurie Mowry-Hesler, MA, MFT, ATR-BC
Art Therapy Program Faculty, George Washington University Columbian College of Arts & Sciences

Amanda Root
CEO and Founder, Talitha Arts (UK)

Jonathan Nambu, DMin
Executive Director, Samaritana Transformation Ministries (Manila, Philippines)

Thelma Nambu,
Co-Founder, Samaritana Transformation Ministries (Manila, Philippines)

Nisha Sajnani, PhD, RDT-BC
NYU Drama Therapy Director, Harvard Refugee Trauma Project

Karin Stevens, MFA
Founder, Karin Stevens Dance

Renee St. Jacques, MA, LMHCA
Dancer and Psychologist

Nancy Stillger, MA
Program Manager, Art with Heart

Kathy Stout-Labauve, MSW
Former Vice President of Aftercare, International Justice Mission

Amber Walker
Artist and Survivor Leader

Tsegaba Woldehaimanot, MSW
Social Worker and Commissioner, Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission
First Aid Arts founded

Advisory Council forms

Seattle School research partnership

Philippines pilot

Mexico City & Seattle pilots

Healing Arts Toolkit Program launch

8 trainings & first Level II Training

8 trainings, Level II Training, Refugee Adaptation Pilot
BEAUTY & HEALING THROUGH THE ARTS

We live in a beautiful world, but it’s also a world of tragedy and trauma. In the wake of wars, natural disasters, and human abuses, there are simply not enough doctors, hospitals, or professional counselors. Medical first aid saves lives by equipping lay care providers to stop the bleeding and stabilize survivors. But physical survival is just the tip of the iceberg - the deeper unseen wounds of the heart and mind remain.

As musicians partnering with human rights organizations, my wife and I kept hearing inspiring stories of how art, music, and movement were helping survivors of trauma begin to find mental and emotional healing—even when nothing else seemed to help. But there simply are not enough expressive arts therapists to serve the millions of trauma survivors in our world. We need to support and equip those serving on the ground who provide care in their own communities and cultures. This is how the idea for First Aid Arts was born, seizing the opportunity to equip lay care providers to offer “first aid for the heart and mind using the arts.”

In 2010 we formed an expert advisory council to create a safe and effective trauma-informed, arts-based program. In 2012 we piloted our First Aid Arts Toolkit program in the Philippines, Mexico, and the United States. To date we’ve trained 600+ care providers from 250+ organizations working in 30+ countries. We continue to grow and learn in relationship with you, our First Aid Arts community. We look forward to hearing feedback about your experience with the First Aid Arts Toolkit and stories of its impact on your life, and the lives of those you serve.

The universal language of the arts speaks gently and powerfully to the hearts of children, women, and men of every culture. Beauty is a disarming and inviting lifeline for connection to self and others. There is joy in the arts, and joy is a mighty medicine.

With deep joy, gratitude, and hope for those we partner to serve,

Curtis & Grace Romjue
First Aid Arts Co-Founders
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220 Addendum A
We are designed to react to threats to our safety. Post-traumatic responses are the body’s best attempt to cope with the overwhelming experience of trauma. In the face of danger, these adaptive responses save our lives by shutting down non critical bodily functions and focusing on immediate physical safety. If unresolved, these responses can leave people with ongoing longer-term symptoms. Understanding what happens inside a person experiencing post-traumatic stress helps us to know how to respond.

Everybody responds to traumatic events differently. A person can become “traumatized” when the intensity of the experience overwhelm their ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience, and they are unable to re-establish an internal sense of safety and balance. Each person experiencing the same situation may have different outcomes ranging from short-term to long-term post-traumatic impacts or to increased resilience and post-traumatic growth depending on their context and inner and outer resources.

What happens in our brains when we experience a traumatic event? And how does this manifest in our bodies?

To help us understand the effects of traumatic stress, we will start by looking at what happens in our brains and bodies on a day-to-day basis when responding to normal amounts of stress, starting with the nervous system.

THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

We receive sensory information from our surroundings on a moment-to-moment basis that informs how we feel. This information is sent to our Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) which helps us to respond and to regulate. The ANS is constantly at work as we flow naturally between positive and negative experiences throughout the day.

A healthy Autonomic Nervous System keeps us balanced and helps us to cope with moments that may be more stressful than others by moving naturally and evenly between states of higher and lower activation. Most of the time, we are not even aware that this is happening!

Our Autonomic Nervous System is made up of two systems: the sympathetic (accelerator) and the parasympathetic (brake). The Sympathetic Nervous System and Parasympathetic Nervous System are connected to the organs of our body and we can see what happens in our bodies when either the accelerator or the brake is applied.
THE BRAKE
The **Parasympathetic** Nervous System helps us to rest, digest and recover. The Parasympathetic Nervous System should be in control most of the time since this is our “at rest” state of being.

- **Eyes**
  - Constrict Pupil
- **Salivary Glands**
  - Stimulates Salivation
- **Heart**
  - Slows Heartbeat
- **Lungs**
  - Constrict Bronchi
- **Stomach**
  - Stimulates Digestion
- **Liver**
  - Stimulates Bile Release
- **Intestines**
  - Stimulate Peristalsis & Secretion
- **Bladder**
  - Contracts Bladder

THE ACCELERATOR
The **Sympathetic** Nervous System mobilizes us and acts as our body’s accelerator.

- **Eyes**
  - Dilate Pupil
- **Salivary Glands**
  - Inhibit Salivation
- **Heart**
  - Accelerates Heartbeat
- **Lungs**
  - Dilate Bronchi
- **Stomach**
  - Inhibits Digestion
- **Liver**
  - Stimulates Glucose Release
- **Intestines**
  - Stimulate Epinephrin & Norepinephrin Release
- **Bladder**
  - Releases Bladder

A simple example of how we move naturally between these two systems:
Whenever we take a deep breath in, we are activating the Sympathetic Nervous System and our heart speeds up. Exhaling activates the Parasympathetic Nervous System and our heart slows down.
CREATE A NAME TAG

SET UP

Warm Up Type: Name  
Age group: 6 +  
Time required: 10-15 minutes  
Space: Area to place the materials and surface for participants to work on  
Materials required: Colored paper for name tags, scissors, magazines, crayons, markers, any other materials for decoration, glue, string  
Preparation: Lay out all the materials. If possible, create a name tag for yourself beforehand so that participants have an idea of how to get started

INTRODUCE THE ACTIVITY

We are going to create name tags to wear during our time together. You can express yourself in any way you like, with colors or symbols or pictures. Remember that there is no right or wrong, as long as we are being respectful. Even writing your name with a black pen is still a form of expression.

ACTIVITY

- Use your own name tag as an example. Have each participant write their name and decorate their name tag in whatever way they want. Encourage them to think about what colors, images, textures, or font styles represent their personalities or make them feel good.

- Once everyone is finished, have everyone hold up their name tag in a circle, go around and have each group member say their name. Everyone repeats their name and “gives love.”

ADAPTATIONS

- To reduce overwhelm, you can start by handing out pre-cut name tags so that everyone has the same size name tag.

- Materials accessible to you may vary. Get creative with what’s available!

- If you are in an English-speaking setting and are working with group members from other cultures or who have first languages besides English, you can encourage them to use both sides of their name tags to write their names in English and in their native language. Encourage them to share what that their name looks like in both languages, if they would like to.

- If it is something the group wants, you can play music while you work. Instrumental is best.

AREAS FOR CAUTION

- Creating something that represents self can be intimidating. Remind the group that there is no right or wrong and that they have the freedom to express their name in whatever way feels good to them.
LISTENING
Regulating, Resourcing

SET UP

**Age group:** 10 +  
**Time required:** 30 minutes  
**Space:** Enough room to sit in a circle  
**Materials required:** Laptop and speakers/Boombox, Playlist of music (A sample playlist is provided on the First Aid Arts Community Hub site)  
**Preparation:** Prepare the playlist and make sure that the laptop and speakers or boombox work

OBJECTIVES

**Emotion regulation**
Supports the ability to identify and shift emotions through music

**Interpersonal skills**
Supports expression of emotion in a group and increases an expanded understanding of cultural and personal differences

**Self awareness**
Provides insight into the participant’s inner world and frame of reference, creates awareness on how music impacts thoughts and emotions.

INTRODUCE THE ACTIVITY

Have you ever listened to a piece of music or song that made you cry or feel really happy? How do you use music? Do you ever use it to calm down or to get yourself pumped up? How is music used in this culture? (Entertainment, ceremonies, rites of passage, relaxation, energizing/exciting/calming people, storytelling, expressing emotions). How might other cultures use music that is similar or different?
ACTIVITY
(Aproximately 25 minutes)

- Invite participants to close their eyes or to gaze softly at the floor. Tell them that you will be playing short clips (30-45 seconds) from different songs. Ask them to pay attention to what they notice about the songs, what images come to mind, or how they feel when they listen to the songs.

- Play short clips from about 5 different instrumental songs. Choose songs that are varied in sound, pace, instrumentation, and emotion. You might want to consider using songs that will be unfamiliar to the participants so that they hear it with “fresh ears”.

- After each song clip, invite participants to reflect on what they heard, the images they saw, and how they felt. Additional questions may include:
  - What is different about how you feel listening to this song from how you felt listening to the previous song?
  - How is this song similar to music in your culture or music that you are familiar with? How is it different?
  - How might this song express feelings for people within the culture it comes from?
  - Does this song express feelings you connect to, even though it may be different from your culture?
  - Ask the group if they noticed how the different images and emotions associated with the various songs could usually be traced to an experience or association that someone had with those kinds of beats, instruments, or music. Reflect with the group that the same song may make one person feel very differently from how it makes another person feel. It shows how different we all are and that we all see the world in different and unique ways.

REFLECTION
(Aproximately 10 minutes)

- Did you notice a difference in how you felt after the activity?
- What did you learn about yourself during this activity?
- What was surprising about what others experienced during this activity? What were some of the similarities? What were some of the differences?

TAKE AWAY

- Music can be a powerful tool to help us shift how we feel and to bring up images or memories that are positive for us. What kind of music would you listen to if you wanted to change how you feel?

ADAPTATIONS:

- Find clips from popular music in your culture and use the same discussion questions above. You could use soundtracks from popular TV shows, movie tracks, seasonal music, or different musical genres. Avoid music that may be triggering (inappropriate lyrics) where possible.
- Take participants to different live music performances and use the discussion questions to talk about how music expresses emotions.
- Choose one song to focus on. Read the lyrics with participants and ask them to notice whether
they connect to the sound and feel of the song. Ask participants if they think that the singer or musician was trying to convey a specific message or emotion.

- Invite participants to respond to different kinds of music through dance and movement. Talk about how the different songs make them want to dance differently.

**Suggested Warming Up Activity:**
Responding to Music / Sing or Hum a Song

### AREAS FOR CAUTION

- Sometimes, music can be a trigger for people because it holds traumatic memories. Careful selection of music is important but also know that it is impossible to completely avoid all the songs or types of music that might possibly trigger someone. If possible, avoid music that has inappropriate lyrics or content, loudly dissonant, jarring, or startling tones, or anything that is generally unpleasant or unstable.

- Be aware that some types of music may be generally considered comforting or “happy” music (e.g. marimba music) but that even if most of the group feels this way, there is the possibility that this is not true for someone in the group. Provide space for differing opinions and feelings. Be careful of placing your own judgment on a specific style or genre of music.
YOU MAKE THE WORLD MORE BEAUTIFUL.