



## FAQ for Participating in Conscious Dance and Art Sessions @ SMARTLab

*What is the purpose of these groups?*

It is well known that engaging in creativity through various forms of art can enhance positive emotions for a wide variety of people, even if they would not usually consider themselves artistic. This four-week group is being made available to students to support their well-being during this difficult time of isolation and online learning during the global pandemic.

The groups are broadly based around the work of Dr. Steven Perry, specifically, his “Neurosequential Model”. As applied to art, this model proposes that integrating movement/rhythm, artistic expression (e.g., through painting, drawing, modeling), and language (e.g., through writing) provide a form of ‘brain integration’, particularly under conditions of high stress. Additional work from Dr. Steven Porges on the Polyvagal Theory suggests that activities that move people through different states of nervous system arousal, in a safe and contained way, help people connect with one another and build positive interpersonal experiences. Therefore, in these art groups we have three aims:

- (1) To allow people to have fun and tap into their natural creativity
- (2) To alleviate stress and allow them to ‘metabolize’ their experiences, and
- (3) To promote connection and community with a set group of students over the 4 weeks.

*Who will lead the groups?*

The groups are designed and will be led by Dr. Colette Smart, Psychology Professor and Registered Psychologist. She is trained as a conscious dance outreach facilitator and also as a therapeutic arts practitioner.

The discussion part of the group will be led by 2 graduate students (Pat Nicoll and Ashleigh Parker) and 2 undergraduate students (Sarah York and Andrea Kasian). Pat and Ashleigh are clinical psychology graduate students, and Sarah and Andrea are trained peer facilitators/peer counselors. The discussion is not meant to be “therapy”, but rather simply a way to connect with one another and discuss what experiences you have had during the art-making process. Given that Dr. Smart is an instructor at UVic, and may have (had) students in classes, she will step out of the discussion part (go into a different Zoom “room”) so that students can speak freely.

*Do I need to be a trained dancer to participate?*

Not at all! If you have a body that moves, you can do conscious dance. Even if you have different abilities impacting your mobility (e.g., use of a wheelchair), you can still participate moving the parts of your body that are free to move. Even visualizing movement can have positive effects! So every *body* is welcome!



*Do I need to be physically fit to participate?*

Not at all! Aside from gentle guidance from Dr. Smart, the movement is completely self-led. So, you are free to go at your own pace. The main principle of this type of movement is that you move in a way that feels good to you and your body.

*Do I need a special dance space?*

Not really. Dance classes have been going on for months during the pandemic, and people have been finding creative ways to move at home. All you need is a little bit of free space, even if it's in your kitchen! But be sure to clear sharp objects or furniture out of the way, or anything you might trip over, so that you do not have an accident while dancing.

*Do I have to be on camera the whole time?*

As students have shared in the short film on our website, people tend to be absorbed in their own experience for the most part, so you don't have to feel self-conscious about other people watching you. You can dance on camera, or if you really want to let loose and don't want to be seen, you can move off to the side and away from the camera.

We do ask that you keep your camera on, though, for three reasons: one, so that we can build a sense of community by seeing people's environments, even if they decide to dance off camera for a song or two. Conversely, if you are on camera and really want to connect with other people, it will feel very isolating if you only see a sea of black video screens on Zoom. Finally, part of the guidance from Dr. Smart comes from seeing people's response to the music in real time, and this will be very difficult to do if she cannot see the participants. Note that we have a policy that people must agree to, that they will not record video, video stills, or audio from any session as part of the confidentiality/participation agreement.

*What if I try dancing and decide I don't like it?*

You can stop at any time! Just as if you were at a party or a club, you can simply stop dancing if you want to. However, given that the groups will contain art and peer discussion as well as dance, we recommend you stick around, and jump back in for this part of the groups.

If for some reason you really have to leave early, you should send Dr. Smart or one of the co-facilitators a message so that we can make sure to check in and follow-up with you after group, if needed.



*Do I have to be 'artistic' to do this group?*

People often think that you have to have 'talent' to be an artist. Expressive arts is not about being a "good artist", but rather about using artistic media to express the natural creativity that all beings have. You will not have to show your art work to anyone else in the group, unless you would like to, of course. The most important thing is your freedom to express yourself using the media suggested by Dr. Smart in the group.

*Do I have to go out and buy a bunch of art supplies?*

We realize that not everyone will have lots of art supplies, and that these may take money to buy and not be easy to get if you are isolating at home. We will try to keep the materials as simple as possible and will provide a suggested list of art materials before the group. If you have concerns about having access to certain supplies, you can get in touch with Dr. Smart or the other group facilitators and she can brainstorm a solution with you.