

Love, Relationships (Past Lives 2023)

The purpose of this material is to support the professional preparation for helping conversations in the frame of “Filmteràpiàs Filmklub” (Film-therapy - Filmclub). Its main goal is to help professionals start sensitisation, psycho-educational and self-reflective conversations with adolescents and young adults alongside the topics occurring in this film. The aim of these interactive sessions is to examine the experiences, dilemmas and expectations of the target group in connection with love, intimacy and relationships alongside the 2023 film Past Lives. Talking about the film creates an opportunity for adolescents and young adults to think about the specific age-related challenges of relationships and love, the balance between attachment and autonomy and the difficulties of intimate relationships in the age of digital technology. The aim is to help students express their own feelings and thoughts, develop greater awareness of the resources and challenges present in their relationships and develop their self-reflection and emotional competence. The processing dialogue creates an opportunity not only for improving self-awareness and social skills but also for fostering sensitisation within peers. This material offers thematic aspects and questions for conversations. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the boundaries between these topics might be blurred, therefore it is not necessary to stick to the given structure, but to adapt it to the needs and dynamics of the group.

1. Tuning in - First Impressions and Emotional Resonance

The main purpose of the tuning in phase is to create a safe and open environment for the participants to share their experiences. After watching ‘Past Lives’ (2023) it is important to give students the chance to express their first impressions and emotions about it. Such sharing helps not only with individual reflection but also creates the basis for more in-depth discussions in the future. The purpose is not the intellectual analysis of the film but to make inner, subjective experiences explicit. It is personal maturity that allows the development of authentic conversations. This phase is particularly important because adolescents’ and young adults’ abilities to recognise and regulate their emotions are still developing. Recognising, identifying and verbalising emotions can be a huge step towards the development of self-awareness. The participants can experience that their emotions are valid and that there are similar and also different reactions to the same situation. This contributes to the development of empathy and strengthens the group cohesion, since personal sharing often leads to realisations and mutual understanding among the participants. It is beneficial to work with open, non-judgmental questions that do not require deep analysis but create an opportunity for everyone to join in the conversation at their own pace. The method of free association can also be used, for instance, participants can be requested to express the atmosphere of the film with one word, movement or colour. These are simple but meaningful entry points. It is particularly important that the feelings and thoughts expressed there are received by the group facilitator with understanding and acknowledgment, as they provide the emotional foundation for further processing.

Conversation Starter Questions

- What feelings did the film leave you with? Which scenes affected you the most?

- If you had to describe the atmosphere or message of the film with one word, what would it be?
- What memory, life situation or emotion came to your mind while watching the film?

2. Characters and Plot - Processing the Film Experience, Seeking Points of Identification

This phase of the processing focuses on the characters and the narratives. The aim is not only to interpret the events but to map out the deeper psychological processes underlying the decisions, relationships and dilemmas of the characters. The characters of 'Past Lives' are extremely nuanced and complex. They are simultaneously likeable, vulnerable and profoundly human. The film shows perfectly what difficulties arise when life paths, personal desires and available possibilities do not align perfectly. The main characteristic of adolescence and young adulthood is identity exploration and the increased significance of peer and romantic relationship experiences. A film that has no "good" or "bad" character, only different aspects, decisions and desires creates an opportunity for the participants to take the perspectives of others from a safe distance. While analysing the decisions of the characters, the students can reflect on their own dilemmas without being exposed to the risks of direct self-disclosure. Through verbalising a character's feelings and situation, students often express their own emotions and experiences. In addition, connecting with the story naturally brings up themes like confrontation with loss, adaptation to change and the question of "what if". These are all questions that are highly significant for personal development, decision making and autonomy at this stage of life. In this phase the group leader's role as facilitator is crucial. The aim is not to find an universal truth, but to encourage participants to articulate their own perspectives freely and reflectively. It is important for all the answers to be validated since the story is rich precisely because it can be interpreted in multiple ways.

Activities:

- Statue Game: in small groups the students create a living statue of the relationship of the three main characters (posture, distance and facial expressions).
- Telling the story from a character's point of view: there are three small groups, each group gets a character (Nora, Hae Sung, Arthur) and they tell the story from their point of view. At the end they compare how the perspectives differ.
- Inner Monologue: the participants get a situation from the film and verbalise the character's inner monologue (what could they feel or think in that moment).

Conversation Starter Questions

- What traits would you use to describe each character?
- Was there a character you could identify with? Why?
- Was there anyone who you could not identify with at all? Why?
- The characters in the film could have chosen multiple different paths. What factors do you think affected their decisions?
- What would you have done differently in the place of Nora, Hae Sung or Arthur?

- The question of “what if” appears in the film. What is your opinion about this? Do you think it makes it easier or more difficult to move on?
- In what way was Nora’s relationship with Hae Sung and Arthur different? How is it possible that both of them were important?
- What do you think remains unspoken between the characters?
- What feelings arose in you at the end of the film? Why?
- What differences can you observe between the film’s portrayal of relationships and those commonly presented in the media?

3. The Unique Aspects of Romantic Relationships during Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Adolescence and young adulthood are particularly important in terms of romantic relationships. At this stage of life, young people gradually discover their own needs, learn to establish a balance between intimacy and autonomy, practice expressing their feelings and resolving conflicts. Romantic relationships not only mean emotional experiences but also are the most important settings for forming identity and developing social skills. This is why it is extremely important and useful for adolescents and young adults to talk about the characteristics and challenges of this particular developmental stage in terms of romantic relationship behaviours. The aim of these interactive sessions is to help young people reflect on the fundamental human need for love and attachment, and clarify those subjective and interpersonal factors that identify the way love is expressed. The dialogue supports the development of self-awareness and contributes to strengthening emotional and relational competences. It also helps young people form their romantic relationships with greater awareness and responsibility. It is important to make the participants aware of their age-related challenges. For adolescents, for instance, peer expectations represent a bigger pressure, while young adults are struggling with finding the balance between commitment and autonomy. It can also be beneficial to draw attention to the changes in relationships over time, since love and attachment are not at all static experiences, but rather evolve with age, experiences and life circumstances. During the conversations the characteristics of a healthy and supportive relationship are addressed. Being aware of these helps young people identify constructive and toxic relational patterns and prevent the development of abusive or unequal relationships. Themes such as jealousy, trust or the difficulty of ending a relationship are extremely important because young people are often not equipped with the appropriate communication and emotion regulation skills to resolve conflicts. The awareness of early experiences, family and social factors and the impact of patterns portrayed in the media creates an opportunity for young people to recognise that their own relationships are not independent of past experiences and cultural environments. It also helps them create new, healthier patterns.

Conversation Starter Questions

- Why do people want to find a partner?
- How do you think it is different to be in a relationship now than 20-30 years ago?
- Do you think relationships at a young age are different from adult relationships? If yes, how?

- How old do you think someone usually is when they experience their first meaningful romantic relationship? What makes them feel it is the one?
- What makes a good relationship?
- How do you think love and relationships change throughout time?
- What are the characteristics of a constructive and supportive relationship and how do you know if it is not one?
- What is the healthy balance between “us” and “me” in a relationship like?
- How can jealousy and insecurity be dealt with in a healthy way?
- What effect can the end of a relationship have on self-confidence and future relationships?
- Which is more difficult: to admit that you like someone or to admit that the relationship does not work anymore?
- How do early experiences of relationships affect the attitude towards future relationships?
- What factors influence how we think about romantic relationships?

4. Love in the Digital World

The digital world fundamentally changed the possibilities of forming and maintaining a relationship. Online space is embedded in the everyday lives of adolescents and young adults, creating new forms of interaction, from dating to communication and relationship maintenance. This digital space however not only offers new opportunities but also creates new risks and challenges. Being online all the time, the over idealised selves presented in social media, the digital jealousy and the controlling behaviour are all phenomena that fundamentally affects the relationship experiences and emotional security of young people. The online space can bring people closer together, create intimacy and encourage them to connect, however at the same time it can intensify insecurities, vulnerabilities and anxiety. For this reason it is extremely useful to think about these topics together. During the conversations the participants have an opportunity to acknowledge their own experiences, to reflect on the new risks and resources, and to build strategies that help them in developing and maintaining safer and healthier relationship patterns in the digital era.

Conversation Starter Questions

- How do you think it is different to meet people online and in real life?
- Why would online dating be more attractive for some people than real life experience?
- In the film the main characters are maintaining their relationship online for a long time. How real and long-lasting can a relationship be if it is maintained mostly online?
- How does the dynamic of a relationship change when the partners are constantly available for each other?
- In what way does social media affect the trust and jealousy in a relationship? What do you think “online loyalty” means?
- What is your opinion about stalking (eg.: checking on the partner’s profile and online activity)? Is it healthy curiosity or harmful control?
- Do you think it is easier or harder to express our affection online than in real life?
- What potential risks do you see in seeking a partner online (eg.: fake profiles, idealised self-representation, overcontrol)? How can it be recognised?

- What is your opinion: does social media bring people closer together or rather creates tension?

5. Closing Round

This round helps with integration and closes the emotionally demanding process. It plays a key role in both the safety of the students and the follow -up. The discussed themes can be emotionally moving for the participants, especially if they are personally affected. That is why it is crucial to take enough time for reflection and create an opportunity for them to share their thoughts and experience about the session. They should be given time to articulate the lessons they learned, to connect to their feelings in order to close the session successfully. This closure supports psychological integration and emotional security. The moderator must inform the participants about further possibilities to get help if it is needed (school psychologist, trusted adult, etc).

Conversation Starter Questions:

- What was the most memorable thing you heard today?
- What feelings arouse during the day?
- What is it that you take with you from today's session?