



## iMOtion

Framing Informal Moments  
(IM)  
in Trainings

Informal moments spontaneously developed by participants.

**How to create the right atmosphere to support and develop participants' spontaneity and autonomy during informal moments.**

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In this article, the author shares her experience about informal moments during different residential courses and reflects on the importance of the atmosphere that allows the participants to lead and choose spontaneously how to live their informal moments.

- **Spontaneous informal moments** developed by participants.
- The impact of a welcoming and non-judgmental **atmosphere** that facilitates the active participation of participants.
- How the **needs** of the participants influence the framing of the informal moments.
- Why provide different locations, and a variety of food and drinks to create spaces dedicated to relaxation, entertainment, and socializing.

During various training courses in which I have participated, I noticed that very often, the informal moments most beneficial to the learning process of the participants are those which, thanks to adequate preparation of time slots and spaces, arise spontaneously and are proposed by the participants themselves.

The informal moment allows participants to get to know each other better and share their characteristics and interests sincerely, free from excessive structures.



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At the same time, the framing created by the organizers offers a safe space, sometimes cheerful, sometimes relaxing, to respond to personal or group needs.

Some aspects can help trainers to support the development of such moments. One of the most important is the atmosphere of the course. Whether it's a residential course or even a one-day, indoors, outdoors, or online, it is essential, as trainers, to create a welcoming, friendly, and non-judgmental atmosphere in which participants can feel free to propose how to live the informal moments of the course.

Working on the atmosphere means making available to the participants everything that can help them find their comfort zone and respond to their needs, including the need to socialize and explore in a new environment: spaces dedicated to activities and spaces dedicated to leisure time, where you can find helpful tools for relaxation or entertainment. You can provide something such as board games, loud speakers for music, sofas or areas dedicated to rest, flyers or other tools that show the possibilities offered by the structure or the surrounding natural environments, such as museums, parks, beaches, nature trails and much more.

Organize everything you need to recharge your energy, relax or have fun, not to forget the space dedicated to drinks and snacks, perhaps taking inspiration from the places where you are: it can be very stimulating to taste typical local food or beverages, adding to the coffee break some exciting information on the different culinary traditions of the countries involved in the course, or in the one where the course takes place.

Socializing and having fun are human needs. Just as we need to drink, eat, move our bodies, rest, or breathe, as humans, as Aristotle said, we also need to socialize. At the same time, our body's hormone levels vary daily, and it is important to consider them. For example, when we have fun, the level of dopamine in our body rises. When we are stressed, the same happens for cortisol; on the contrary, relaxation is accompanied by an increase in the GABA hormone.

The aspect that we must consider about the atmosphere that we want to attribute to our training course is that to develop well-being, the different



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hormones in our body must be in balance with each other for their specific importance.

Informal moments can be the right occasion to restore the level of these hormones, which, perhaps during the activities or sessions of the course, has been modified by the experiences lived by participants. The participants' spontaneity in taking the initiative to carry out their informal moments within the course is strongly linked to their needs. Some may need rest for their body after a strenuous outdoor activity such as a group trekking; others may need to calm their mind due to the hard work done while listening and understanding a frontal lesson; others may need socializing and sharing after spending time alone.

During a residential training course in Italy, where the climatic conditions were particularly cold, most of the informal moments experienced by the participants were linked to finding a warm place where to heat. In fact most of the informal moments were held around a fireplace. I remember many laughs, new acquaintances, board games, and naps around that fireplace! In that case, the trainers and the organizers had chosen a location for the course that had a fireplace. Moreover, as it was an outdoor experiential course and the temperature was quite chilly, they offered participants the possibility to return to indoor spaces in case of need.

Moreover, the owners of the location were offering a wide choice of biscuits, cold cuts, cheeses, fruit, vegetables, and different types of hot drinks such as coffee and tea. Most of the provided food came from the garden present in the location or had been chosen based on the different culinary needs concerning the diverse origins of the participants. All this contributed to creating a comfortable atmosphere for everyone.

Furthermore, spontaneous informal moments during a training course allow participants to respond to their need for freedom, for choice, and to be agents of their own time. This is why as a trainer you need to be aware of participants' needs, such as being welcomed and involved. Other times they need to be able to act and interact with the other participants in total autonomy and, therefore, in the absence of the trainer.



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