



Neighbours | The Stolpersteine Project

Gunter Demnig



I'm marking
Holocaust Memorial Day



#HolocaustMemorialDay / 27 January



ABOUT THIS PACK

Neighbours has been created as a free sensory heritage resource to support Holocaust Memorial Day.

Finding appropriate and ethical routes into Holocaust education for people with learning disabilities can be complex, but it is also essential. Some of the first victims of Nazi persecution were people the regime described as “life unworthy of life” (Lebensunwertes Leben), a concept articulated by Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche in 1920. This thinking laid the ideological groundwork for the Nazi T4 programme, which targeted disabled people, including people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities, and people who would now be recognised as autistic.

This history belongs to disabled people too. It must not be excluded in the name of protection, nor simplified into abstraction.

This pack offers one carefully considered pathway.

It is inspired by the Stolpersteine Project created by Gunter Demnig, a long-running act of remembrance that restores the names of Holocaust victims to the streets where they once lived. Small engraved metal plaques are set into pavements outside former homes, marking the last place a person lived freely before they were taken away. Stolpersteine embed memory into everyday life rather than isolating it within designated memorial spaces.

Holocaust scholars have noted that remembrance involves not only mourning what was lost, but also grieving the lives, relationships, and futures that were never allowed to unfold. Writers such as Marianne Hirsch, in her work on postmemory, and Dominick LaCapra, in his distinction between loss and absence, have emphasised the importance of attending to these irretrievable gaps. Stolpersteine respond to this by restoring presence through individual names, even while acknowledging that what was destroyed cannot be made whole again.

Encountering a Stolperstein is often a moment of recognition and shock: this happened here; this person lived here; then they were taken away; and now, in this small but profound way, they have returned. Living alongside these names becomes an ongoing responsibility. We do not walk around the past. We live with it.

This sensory story takes that idea of re-neighbouring as its core structure. It does not aim to recreate suffering or overwhelm participants. Instead, it focuses on absence, return, care, and sustained remembrance. Sensory elements such as touch, weather, movement, stillness, and shared action allow participants to encounter history through the body rather than through abstract explanation alone.

While some Holocaust resources already exist for people with learning disabilities, there can never be too many. Choice matters. Range matters. Just as mainstream educators differentiate their teaching for different classes, practitioners working with people with learning disabilities need multiple routes into difficult subjects in order to make thoughtful, tailored decisions for the people they support.

This session has been designed using a trauma-informed approach. It includes careful preparation, pacing, and a clear closing phase so that no one is left in a place of unresolved distress. It is intended to be delivered by trusted adults who know their group well and can adapt the experience responsively.

At a time when antisemitism is rising again, and when Holocaust survivors are leaving us so quickly, remembrance matters more than ever. Remembering is not only about the past. It is about how we live now, who we notice, and whose names we continue to speak.

This pack is offered in that spirit: as an act of care, responsibility, and neighbourliness.

January 27th 2026

#SensoryHeritage #HMD2026 #HolocaustMemorialDay2026

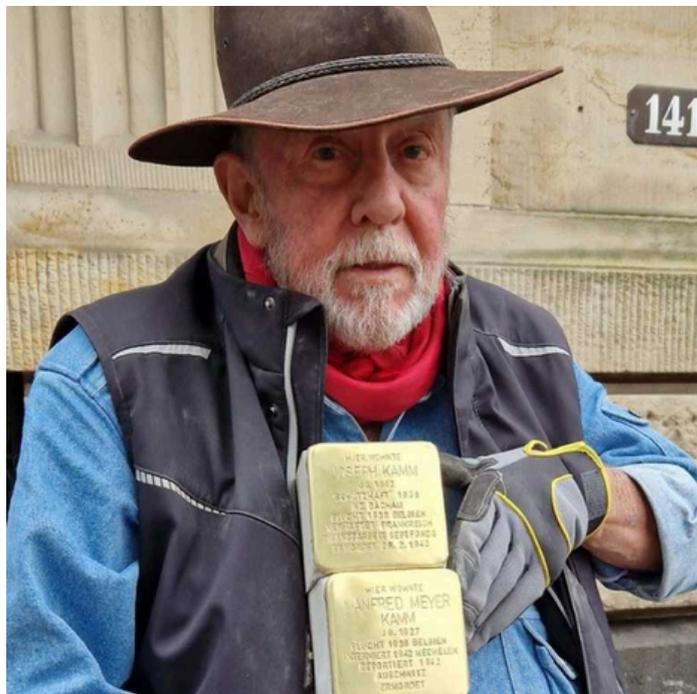
GUNTER DEMNIG & THE STOLPERSTEINE PROJECT

Gunter Demnig is a German artist who has spent many years thinking about how we remember people, and where that remembering should live. He is the artist behind the Stolpersteine Project, which places small engraved plaques into pavements outside the homes of people who were persecuted and murdered by the Nazis.

A really important part of Demnig's work is care and accuracy. Each Stolperstein only exists because time has been taken to research a real person, their life, and the exact place they lived before they were taken away. This involves careful archival research, looking through records and documents, and often working with local historians or family members. The names and locations are not symbolic or approximate. They are specific, intentional, and grounded in real lives.

The stones are installed slowly and thoughtfully. Watching a Stolperstein being put into the ground is part of the experience. It is a quiet, physical act that brings memory back into the everyday spaces we move through without thinking.

Demnig's project doesn't try to explain the Holocaust through big monuments or grand statements. Instead, it asks us to notice one person at a time. One name. One home. One street. In doing this, it reconnects the past with the present and invites us to live alongside that history, rather than keeping it at a distance.



Visit the [Stolpersteine Website](#) to find out more about Gunter's work.

NEIGHBOURS

A sensory session based on Gunter Demnig's Stolpersteine Project

Setting the Scene

Creating the right conditions for remembrance

Before beginning the sensory story, it is important to intentionally down-regulate participants and create a shared tone. This session is not designed to be lively, playful, or energising. While many sensory stories quite rightly centre joy, curiosity, and pleasure, sensory approaches are not limited to these states.

Sensory experiences provide a framework for shared communication and engagement, particularly for people who may not rely on spoken language. That framework can hold many kinds of human experience, including seriousness, sadness, absence, and remembrance. Not all sensory experiences are comfortable or delightful, and that does not make them inappropriate. What matters is how carefully they are held.

For this reason, time spent preparing the emotional and sensory environment is essential. Moving too quickly into the story, or keeping the tone too bright or busy, risks undermining the purpose of the session and overwhelming participants.

Sound: setting the atmosphere

Playing the music used as the opening theme for the BBC documentary series *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005); available from YouTube.

The music is taken from *Symphony No. 3 (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs)* by Henryk Górecki.

This piece has been chosen deliberately for:

- its slow pace
- its sustained, legato sound
- its restrained emotional range
- the atmosphere of gravity and stillness it creates without drama or shock

The aim is not to perform or analyse the music, but to allow it to signal a shift. It tells bodies, before words do, that this is a different kind of space. It is a scene-setting moment.

Light and environment

Consider dimming the lights so the room feels noticeably different from everyday classroom conditions. If appropriate for your setting, LED candles can be introduced to soften the environment and mark this as a reflective space. Avoid flickering effects or strong visual stimulation.

The goal is not to create a memorial aesthetic, but to gently reduce sensory intensity and invite attention inward.

Adult regulation and modelling

Staff play a crucial role in co-regulation during this opening phase:

- Slow your movements intentionally
- Make actions smooth and continuous (legato rather than staccato)
- Lower the volume of your voice and use a deeper, steadier tone
- Breathe slowly and deeply, allowing pauses

Nervous systems take cues from the people around them. By changing your own pace and presence, you help signal that this is a moment to slow down, settle, and attend.

This preparation phase should not be rushed. A few minutes spent establishing calm, shared rhythm will support participants to engage with the story safely and meaningfully.

Once the room feels quieter, slower, and more settled, you are ready to begin.

NEIGHBOURS

A sensory session based on Gunter Demnig's Solpersteine Project

We met our neighbours today.
But we did not know they had left.

They did not arrive with suitcases.
Theirs are long gone.

They did not arrive with greetings,
busy hands unpacking familiar things,
turning bare rooms into a home.

We did not wave or smile.
Instead, a sudden sucker-punch of horror.

Our neighbours returned
in the quiet of a drizzling morning.
A chisel tip through the cobbles,
lifting years of passing feet.

Feet that were pulled away
suddenly, without warning.
Feet that stood still
and did not, or could not, help.
Boots that marched.
Voices that barked orders
and broke our neighbours apart.

Our neighbours can no longer come inside.
They live now, etched on cold metal squares,
set carefully into the ground.

Names and dates.
Levelling with the earth.

The artist brought them back.
First, through the archive.
Then, through hands at work.
Memory in motion.

We will welcome our neighbours back.
We will brush away leaves, dust, and dirt
when the seasons try to hide them.

We will offer a quiet blessing
when sunlight sparks on them after rain.

They belong here again.

Our neighbours came home.

And we remember.

RESOURCES

Ground and place

Used to establish everyday life, streets, and presence. Here are some ideas:

- Shallow trays or low boxes
- Cobbles, pebbles, or smooth stones (natural or garden-store)
- Non-slip mats for trays if used on floors
- Pebble mats used for mosaic - these have a lovely flexible backing and can be draped over wrists, thighs, shoulders, or rippled in a serpentine way for a visual and auditory sensation

Absence and departure

Used to signal sudden leaving without reenactment:

- Medium-sized suitcase (preferably old or plain)
- Familiar household items to pack briefly (mug, scarf, book, photo frame, shoes - things that may be relevant to your participants)
- Empty suitcase (used later, visibly lighter)

Tip: Weight matters. A suitcase that feels heavier communicates more than words.

Time passing and weather

Used to show years moving on:

- Fine water spray bottle (set to mist, not jet)
- Dried real leaves, silk leaves, or leaf shapes cut from thin paper
- Handheld paper or silk fan
- Warm light source or sunlight through a window
- Paper flakes to suggest snow

Return and restoration

Used for Stolpersteine moments and naming.

- Metal squares or tiles (brass-coloured if possible) - foil-wrapped cardboard squares can work, but real metal is better for weight, smell, tactile quality, and sound
- Cool storage beforehand so metal feels cold to touch
- A chisel, metal hammer, or other metal object that can be used to make sound against stones

Care and neighbourliness

Used to enact ongoing responsibility and remembrance:

- Soft brushes (make-up brushes, shoe brushes, paintbrushes)
- Cloths or dusters

PROMPTS

Use Makaton wherever you can.

We met our neighbours today.
But we did not know they had left.

They did not arrive with suitcases.
Theirs are long gone.

They did not arrive with greetings,
busy hands unpacking familiar things,
turning bare rooms into a home.

We did not wave or smile.
Instead, a sudden sucker-punch of
horror.

Our neighbours returned
in the quiet of a drizzling morning.
A chisel tip through the cobbles,
lifting years of passing feet.

Feet that were pulled away
suddenly, without warning.

Open the suitcase, explore and pack items into it. Set the weight on participants' laps if safe to do so.

Cuing carefully to build anticipation and readiness, slam the suitcase shut and push it away.

Sign 'sad' and 'surprise'.

Spray a gentle spritz of water over your participants head to feel a light drizzle.

Explore the trays or mats of pebbles.

Use the chisel or metal tool to tap gently on the stones to create sound and vibration.

Hold participants' feet or switch from exploring the pebbles with hands to exploring with feet.

Pull gently on participants' feet, cuing with a countdown of two gentle pulls, building to one quick one.

Feet that stood still
and did not, or could not, help.
Boots that marched.
Voices that barked orders
and broke our neighbours apart.

Our neighbours can no longer come
inside.
They live now, etched on cold metal
squares,
set carefully into the ground.

Names and dates.
Levelling with the earth.

The artist brought them back.
First, through the archive.
Then, through hands at work.
Memory in motion.

We will welcome our neighbours back.
We will brush away leaves, dust, and
dirt
when the seasons try to hide them.

**Hold participants' feet in your
palms, take some low, slow
breaths, and squeeze gently.**

**March participants' feet up and
down, if exploring pebbles with
feet then invite participants to
push them around and stomp.**

Explore the cool metal squares.

**When ready, place them into the
tray of pebbles or on the pebble
mat.**

**Tap the square into place with
the chisel or metal tool to set it.**

**Sprinkle leaves on to the metal
square in its resting place.**

**Create seasonal moments first
with the fan, then snow, then rain
with the water spray again.**

We will offer a quiet blessing
when sunlight sparks on them after
rain.

They belong here again.

Our neighbours came home.

And we remember.

**Illuminate the wet metal square
with a light or with sunlight
through the window.**

**Use a soft cloth to wipe the metal
square fully dry and clean with
care and kindness, like a
conservator.**

Breathe low and slow.

Exit Activity

This final activity is an essential part of the session. It provides closure, regulation, and release, ensuring that no one leaves the space holding heaviness without support. Just as we intentionally slowed bodies and senses at the beginning, we now intentionally bring people back into the present, together.

This is not about erasing what has been felt. It is about re-grounding, restoring safety, and returning to everyday rhythm.

Sound: shifting the emotional tone

Choose a piece of music that feels calm, steady, and hopeful, without being triumphant or overly emotional. Wordless music works best here, allowing bodies to settle without needing to process language.

Suitable qualities to look for:

- Slow to moderate tempo
- Repetition and predictability
- Warm instrumentation (strings, piano, gentle ambient sound)
- A sense of openness rather than intensity
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The music should feel like breathing space. Something that supports release and reassurance, rather than performance or drama.

Begin the music quietly and allow it to continue as other actions unfold.

Light and environment

Gradually increase the lighting level in the room. This should be slow and noticeable, but not sudden. The aim is to signal a return to the present moment and everyday space.

If LED candles were used, turn them off gently rather than all at once. This helps mark a transition without a sharp break.

Tidying together

Invite participants to help return objects to baskets or trays. This shared action is an important part of the process.

- Move slowly at first
- Offer clear, simple choices
- Acknowledge each action calmly
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Tidying together reinforces:

- shared responsibility
- completion
- care for the space and one another

It also helps bodies shift from stillness into gentle movement.

Adult modelling and co-regulation

As practitioners, begin to up-regulate gradually:

- Let movements become a little larger
- Allow voices to rise slightly in volume
- Maintain warmth and steadiness in tone
- Encourage deeper, fuller breaths

Avoid sudden changes. The nervous system needs cues that it is safe to re-engage.

Repetition

Repetition helps build participants ability to anticipate, make choices, and express preferences. Therefore, repeating this session a few times is important - avoid doing it once just 'on the day', but as a build up towards Holocaust Memorial Day 2027.

Repetition enables participants to build confidence in the sequence and to get used to coming in and out of the session's tone. With practice, you may be able to run a 'final' session as part of an assembly or with invited guests as part of a collective remembrance opportunity.



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