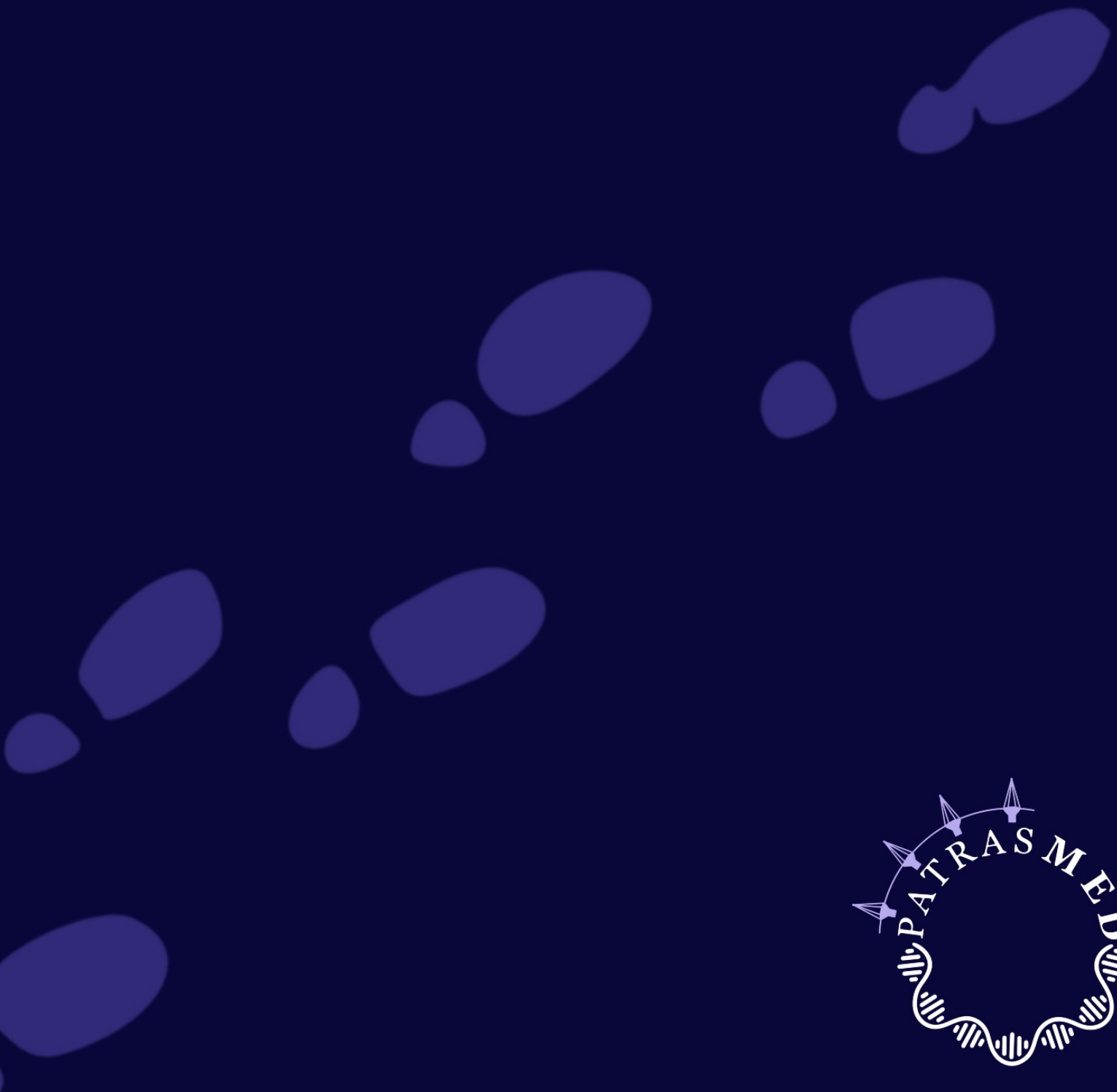
THE TRACES WE LEAVE BEHIND



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PRACTICAL FIELD GUIDE - Patras Medicine iGEM 2026

THE TRACES WE LEAVE BEHIND

An inclusive care-home activity linking memory, synthetic biology and a social culture of Safety and Security

AUDIENCE	Older adults in care-home settings, particularly individuals with little or no prior knowledge of synthetic biology.
FORMAT	Conversation, categorisation activity and collective artwork.
DURATION	60 - 90 minutes, adaptable to participants' needs.
CORE PRINCIPLE	Participation is voluntary, accessible, respectful and free from pressure.

Guide purpose: This guide supports teams introducing synthetic biology and Safety and Security to older adults through familiar experiences rather than technical instruction. It treats safety as both a scientific responsibility and a social practice grounded in prevention, care, dignity, inclusion and trust.

1. Safety and Security Objectives

- Make synthetic biology understandable without requiring prior scientific knowledge.
- Create a psychologically and physically comfortable environment for participation.
- Connect biosafety and biosecurity with prevention, responsibility, protection and public trust.
- Include older adults in conversations from which they may otherwise be excluded.
- Protect participants' dignity, privacy, autonomy and right not to participate.

2. Prepare Responsibly

Coordinate with the care home

- Confirm the group size, duration, room layout and available staff support.
- Ask staff about accessibility, hearing, vision, mobility and communication needs without requesting unnecessary medical details.
- Agree on how consent will be communicated and whether photographs, names or written contributions may be retained.
- Identify a quiet area where anyone may pause or withdraw comfortably.

Materials

PROMPT CARDS	Large print, plain language and high contrast
SHARED BOARD	Three areas: traces in memory, the body and society

CONCEPT CARDS	Care, trust, stress, illness, prevention, science, family and safety
COLLECTIVE ARTWORK	Large paper or canvas, markers, sticky notes and simple drawing materials
OPTIONAL SUPPORTS	Clipboards, thick markers and staff-approved sanitising supplies

3. Facilitation Principles

- **Voluntary participation:** Invite and never pressure. Silence, observation and short answers are valid forms of participation.
- **Accessible communication, respect and dignity:** Use short sentences, explain one idea at a time and avoid confusing speech. Repeat or rephrase patiently when needed. Address participants directly, avoid infantilising language, recognise their knowledge as a meaningful contribution.
- **Emotional safety.** Do not push for personal memories. Acknowledge emotions, offer a pause and follow staff guidance if discomfort arises.
- **Privacy and biosecurity awareness.** Do not collect health information, full names, photographs or identifiable stories unless there is clear permission and a defined purpose.
- **Adaptation.** Offer verbal, written, visual and assisted options so that different abilities do not become barriers.

4. Activity Flow

Part A: The Personal Trace

Invite each participant to select a prompt card. They may answer aloud, offer one word, tell a short story, draw, or pass. Useful prompts include: “What does care mean to you?”, “What helps a person feel safe and respected?”, “Which value should future generations preserve?”, “What lesson or wish would you like to share?”.

Avoid prompts that assume family contact, good health or positive memories. Let the participant decide how much to share.

Part B: What Leaves a Trace?

Present three categories: traces in memory, traces in the body and traces in society. Provide participants with concept cards containing words such as love, family, friendship, music and kindness for memory; stress, illness, heat, pain and care for the body; and solidarity, trust, science, prevention and safety for society. Participants place each card where they believe it fits. More than one placement can be valid, since some concepts may leave traces in several categories. Use each choice to discuss how experiences, environments and relationships affect both individuals and communities.

Part C: A Message for the Future

Invite participants to add a word, wish, drawing, symbol or short message to a shared artwork. A team member may write down a spoken response only with permission. Ask before adding a name, signature or handprint. Agree with the care home where the artwork will remain and who may view it.

5. Closing and Follow-up

Conclude the activity by thanking participants and summarizing the connection between human experiences, cellular memory, prevention and responsible innovation. Store or share the collective artwork only as agreed and record anonymous observations to improve future sessions.

6. Contribution to Safety and Security

This activity contributes to biosafety and biosecurity by building a wider culture of responsible science. It makes prevention, risk awareness, care and accountability understandable beyond the laboratory and includes people who may not otherwise encounter synthetic biology. Its contribution is social as well as educational: it strengthens trust, respects autonomy, protects personal information and demonstrates that responsible innovation depends on meaningful public participation. The activity does not replace technical biosafety or biosecurity training. It complements them by connecting scientific responsibility with everyday human values.