

Sometimes it's hard to know where to start when making art. Here are some art starting points you can try in order to get to know yourself better, express emotions & thoughts, and to give a voice to what's going on. You may be surprised at what comes up and might want to talk to an Art Therapist about it! Remember-there's no right or wrong way to express yourself through art.

Focus more on the process more than on the final product.

### **Self-Soothing Image Book**

- Write down or think of things that stimulate your senses in a way that you like, not limited to nature landscapes, music, sounds, scents, tastes, textures, visual experiences, etc. that make you feel content, peaceful, or happy. You don't have to have experienced them to like them!
- Find images that represent these soothing experiences in magazines, newspapers, old books, etc. (FYI- libraries often give away old issues of magazines that are no longer circulating.) Or, draw/paint these images yourself!
- Glue these images to paper of your choice. You can categorize them or just work intuitively.
- Create a cover using paper, cardboard, cardstock, etc. (Sometimes places like Michaels, AC Moore, or other framing specialty shops have cardstock scraps they are going to throw away and are happy to donate them to you) Punch holes and bind the pages using string, a binder, or look on Pinterest for ideas on making books. Some are more simple than you may think.
- Write down some notes on your process. Did you like some images much more than others? Why? Did they remind you of anything or anyone?
- Add to this book at any time and look through it when you're having a rough day or need a perspective shift. Look through it when you're having a great day, for that matter.

### **Feeling Map (Inspired by John Goff Jones)**

- Choose a different color to represent the following emotions: anger, joy, sadness, fear, love of others, and self love. Imagine what size, shape, color, texture, etc. each of the emotions would have and draw this image. Challenge- don't use smiley/frown faces or stick figures to express this.
- Consider the following: Are any connected? How do they relate to each other? Do they have anything to say? Were any of them easier or more difficult to create visually? Do any have common shapes or lines? How do they compare in size? Which did you spend the most time on? Was there one where you did not want to spend time on?

### **Family Island**

- Working together with your family (or other significant group of people), draw yourselves living on a remote island on a big piece of paper. Try to do this in silence and see how that goes. After you finished, step back from the image and take a good look.
- What do you see? How has each person depicted themselves? How much space is in between each person? Is anyone close or far from the others? What did each person include? What was it like to work together using this shared space?

### **Creative Genogram**

- Looking at our family history and connections can be a powerful tool in identifying patterns, understanding where we came from, and for many more reasons. Traditionally Family Therapists use a traditional method to create a genogram. Why not create your own method?
- Identify as many members of your family as possible and seek out older family members who may be able to identify prior generations. Create an image with symbols, colors, images, or words to depict the relationship between these people. Create a symbol for yourself and others. If you don't know someone, create a way to express that. You can draw, paint, collage, or sculpt this.

### **Dyad Drawings**

- Ask a family member, friend, or someone else to do this with you. You'll be working together to draw in the same space. Create a picture without talking or signaling to each other.
- You can start with a very simple image, such as a shape, or something more familiar, such as a house.
- Discuss what the experience was like for you. Did the images connect at all? Did any feelings, frustration, or difficulties arise? What do you think of the image? Did you feel overpowered or overly dominant at any time? Does the other person agree? Do you notice a pattern in "everyday" interactions as compared to your observations when making this drawing? Might you need to compromise more or be less judgemental? Might you need to make your needs/desires known more frequently?

### **Safe Space**

- If you are having a difficult time regulating emotions, are upset, scared, or just in a funk, create a safe space.
- You don't need special supplies. Maybe find an old shoebox and make a diorama, go to the dollar store and purchase plasteline clay, cardboard and tape are great for sculpting and building, use digital programs on your computer, or you can just use a paper and pencil.
- What is important to include in this space? What textures, scents, colors, people, animals, objects, etc. Would you like to include/exclude? What would make you feel safe, held, comfortable, etc?

- Create a self-symbol to place inside of this space.
- Take some deep breaths and imagine/visualize yourself inside of this space.

### **Blocked Creativity Buster**

- Scribble with your non-dominant hand. Go into this knowing you are NOT trying to create a perfect image. Use different colors and try to let your critical mind shut off. Let your hand move freely and it's ok to now know what is going to come up.
- Set a timer and dedicate this time to free associate. Write whatever comes to mind without stopping. It doesn't have to make sense. It doesn't have to be grammatically correct or full sentences. Just don't stop until the timer goes off or until you feel finished.

### **Spontaneous Images**

If you consider yourself a non-artist, you may be surprised at how much you like these.

#### **String Art**

- Get playful and unstuck. Cover your working space and pour acrylic or tempera paint into a paper/styrofoam plate or other vessel. Cut a piece of yarn or string about 18 inches and dip it into the paint. Experiment with the string on the paper by dragging, poking, dotting, or slapping it onto the paper to create shapes, textures, and marks. If you choose to go further, let it dry and rotate the paper to see if you "see" anything in the image and further develop it using any medium.

#### **Paint Blots**

- Similar to the Rorschach test, you will see some pretty interesting images with this experiment. Fold a piece of paper in half the long way (hot dog) and generously apply blobs or shapes of paint near the crease or wherever you want. You can overlap color or keep them separate. Fold the paper in half and gently smooth it and then open the paper up. What do you see? Give it a title.

### **Self-Symbol**

- Imagine a symbol that represents yourself. It could be abstract, a logo, may include something recognizable such as an animal, building, etc. If you are doing this with family or others, create a collage out of these images. What is it like to decide where these images go? Who was the "leader"? What other roles were present?
- To take this further, create a symbol for another person.

### **My Life**

- Create a timeline of where you have been, where you are, and where you are going.
- This may include collage images, drawings, words, important events, goals, fears, and other things that are important to you.

### **Build a City**

- Working with family, friends, or another group of people, build a city. It can be drawn, painted, or created using cardboard, or any other materials.
- Think of what is important when creating a city. What does it need to be successful? What would it be like to be a resident of this city? What is the best part of this city? Any dangers? Who lives there?

Some of these ideas were adapted from or inspired by The Art Therapy Sourcebook by Cathy Malchiodi, MA, ATR, LPAT, LPCC, The Expressive Arts Activity Book by S. Darley and W. Heath.