



# CREATIVITY IN COUNSELING

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# INTRODUCTION

There are as many ways to be creative as there are humans on earth!

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDEBOOK

- There are an infinite number of possibilities of how to engage with creativity! Within this guidebook are a selection of activities that could be helpful in counseling settings.
- Who is this for:**
  - Helping Professionals (e.g., Counselors, Psychologists, Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, etc.)
- Choose which creative option resonates with you in the moment, and feel free to adapt in any way for your particular situation. You may find these ideas are useful for self-care, connecting and/or for program development.

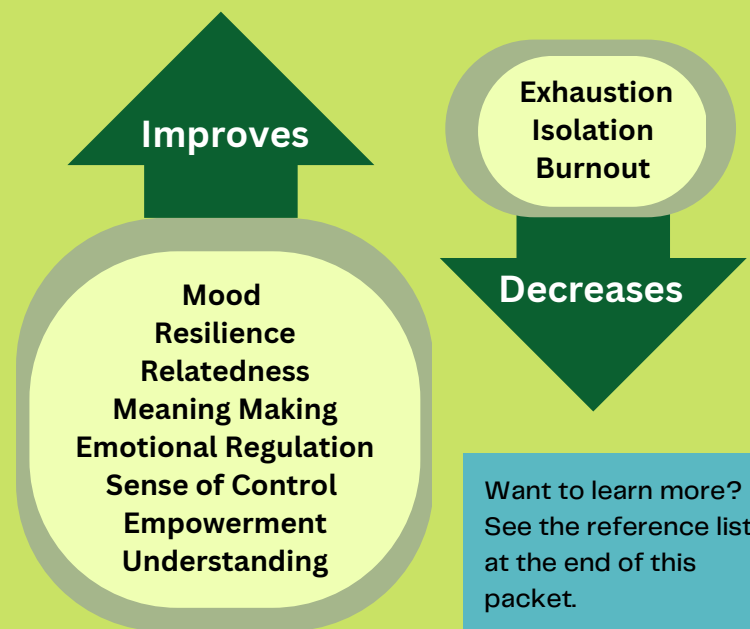
## WHEN MAY CREATIVITY BE HELPFUL?

- You or your client(s) are struggling to understand an experience
- You or your client are craving moments of peace or connection
- You or your client(s) are feeling difficult emotions
- You or your client(s) and having trouble finding the words about a challenging situation
- To celebrate small successes and victories (e.g., you made it through a really hard day, you were a comfort to someone who was suffering)
- In countless circumstances.... **Right Now** may be a good time!

## SOME DIFFICULT EMOTIONS WHEN CREATIVITY COULD HELP

- Stress/Exhaustion
- Fear/Scared
- Vulnerable/Tender
- Anxiety/Worry
- Guilt/Shame
- Loss of Control/Helplessness
- Grief/Loss
- Moral Injury/Vicarious Trauma
- Confusion/Uncertainty
- Overwhelm/Burnt out
- Overextended/Beyond Capacity

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS?



# 5 CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

## Engage with Music

Create or access a playlist. Play an Instrument! Sing!

1



2



## Decorate a Quote

Illustrate a meaningful message with photography, drawings or digital images

3



## Write/Read Poetry

Write an acrostic poem or metaphoric sentences

4



## Paint

Distract yourself, or deepen your connection and understanding of what is happening

5



## Mindful Communication

Notice and name your experience in the moment. Talk with a loved one, counselor, or support group

# 1 MUSIC



**Improves**

Well-being  
Self-esteem  
Grief Coping  
Group cohesion  
Communication  
Engagement  
Attention  
Present-Moment Awareness  
Emotional Connection

Anxiety  
Stress  
Pain  
Cortisol

**Decreases**



(Lenes, Swank, & Nash, 2015; Nakai, 2020)

## Ideas:

- Search for free music on Youtube.com (e.g. "anxiety reduction, stress relief")
- Find or create playlists on your favorite music player (e.g. Spotify, Tidal, Pandora)
- Sing soothing songs, or hum to yourself



# 2

# DECORATE A QUOTE

## Instructions:

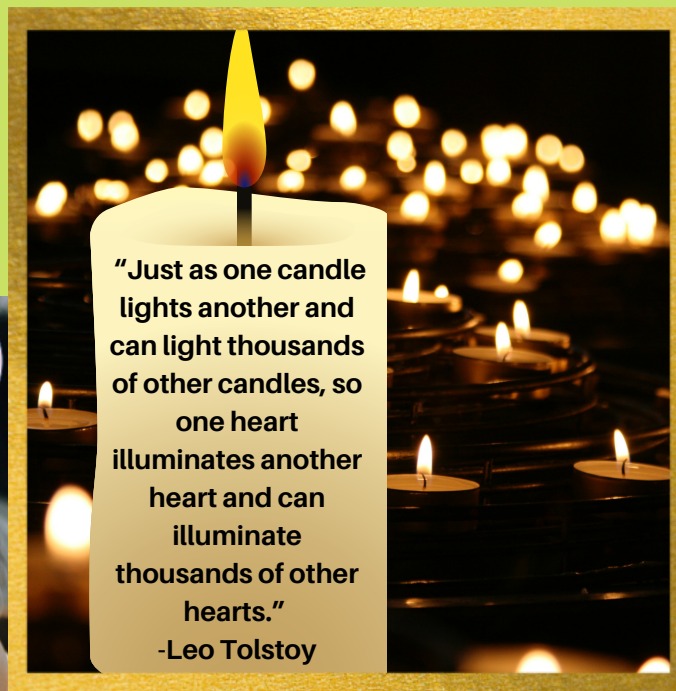
1) First, find or write a quote that feels inspirational to you. You can put this quote on any type of material (e.g. paper, cardboard, canvas, etc.) or even online (e.g. Google Docs, Powerpoint, Canva, Slidesgo, etc.)

2) Next, illustrate your quote with images (e.g. drawings, cut-outs from magazines, photographs, online images, etc.)

## Examples:

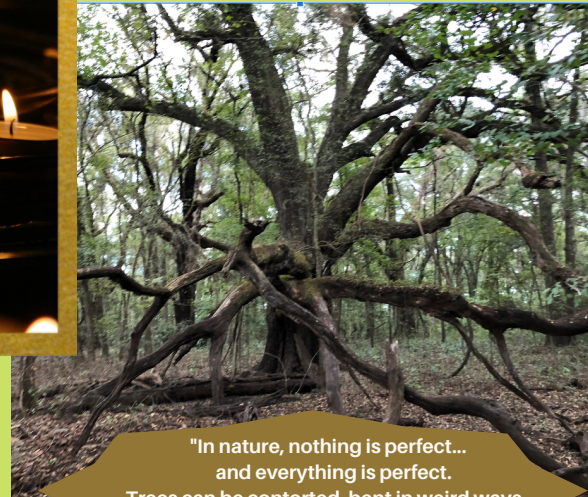
"Big journeys start with tiny steps."

-Chinese Proverb



"Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."


- Mother Teresa



"Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously"  
-Prentis Hemphill

"In nature, nothing is perfect... and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they're still beautiful." - Alice Walker.

There are many ways poetry can inspire and comfort us. Here are three ideas -- Feel free to come up with your own!



**Idea #1.** Find a poem online and share or journal about it!

### Idea #2 Acrostic Poetry

Start with any word (e.g. a person's name, a word you like, etc.) Include each letter of that word inside a sentence, or pick adjectives that include each letter.

**L** - Listening  
**O** - Open-Heart  
**V** - Vivacious  
**E** - Endearing

### Idea # 3 - Create poetic sentences.

**Step 1** For each of the words below, write down the first associated word that comes mind. **Step 2** Create a short paragraph of 3-6 sentences using as many words as you can from your list.

- Color
- Animal
- Feeling
- Blanket
- Musical Instrument
- Piece of furniture
- Hat
- Natural Phenomenon
- Tool
- Time of Day
- Flavor
- Food

# 4

# PAINT

How deep do you want to go with painting?

## Distract me!

Calm the Nervous System by engaging with colors, shapes, designs, etc.

## Supply Ideas

- Canvas (cardboard, construction paper, google drawing, seed paper, etc.)
- Paint (watercolor, acrylics, etc.)
- Paintbrushes
- Cups with water
- Paper towels
- Plate to hold different colors

## Help me make sense of this!

Gain more clarity by accessing a different part of our brain.

Coloring Book

Mandala

Paint by Numbers

**Paint any nature scene** (e.g. river, ocean, mountains, forest). Then **answer any/all of these prompts** in a journal or with a trusted person, related to the scene you painted:

- What would you title your painting?
- What does [a piece of the painting] mean?
- What stands out to you?
- What do you notice has the most power/energy/ action? The least?
- If something about this painting could speak, what would it say?
- If an aspect could do something, what might it do?
- Now that you've explored this, what might be the subtitle?

# 5 MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

## Purpose of mindful communication:

- **Connect** internally & interpersonally
- Engage **Curiosity & Compassion**
- **Communicate** your needs
- Helps shift the brain's **Center of Activation** from our amygdala (our self-protective emotion center) to our prefrontal cortex (where we access higher understanding and insight)

## Layers of Noticing and Naming

Journal your responses with words and/or images, and/or discuss them with a trusted person.



### Right Here & Now...

- My Body is Experiencing...
  - See Somatic Language examples on next page
- My Heart is Feeling...
  - See Emotion examples on the next page wheel below
- My Mind is Thinking...
- My Intuition Knows...







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# WANT MORE IDEAS?



- Register for a **free** online course - **Healing with the Arts**:
  - <https://www.healingwiththearts.com/programs/#freecourse>
- **Hack Your Nervous System** card deck that helps alleviate anxiety, reduce stress and increase awareness of mind-body experience:  
<https://www.etsy.com/listing/1102479298/hack-your-nervous-system-card-deck>
- **Collage** a box or furniture with magazine cut-outs, scrabble pieces, fabric
- Make designs out of **nature** items (e.g., rocks, sticks, shells, leaves, pebbles)
- Listen to a guided imagery and let your **imagination** soar
- Dance, stretch, body movement, or **yoga**
  - Move in the privacy of your own home, or attend a **dance** class that interests you
- **Cook** or bake something delicious
- Sew, knit, or **crochet**
- **Sing** in the shower
- Give a **presentation** on a topic of interest, at a conference, at a local school, etc.
- **Write** a letter or card to a loved one
- Do a jigsaw **puzzle**
- Make a **video** montage of your favorite photos and images
- Write a blog post or short **story**
- Play a musical **instrument**
- Create a **vision board**
- Start a **garden**
- Play with **clay** or attend a pottery class
- Create a **mosaic**
- Possibilities are **infinite!**



*"Art offers sanctuary to everyone willing to open their Hearts as well as their Eyes."*

*-Nikki Giovanni*



Free guidebook:  
[drlenes.com/creativity](http://drlenes.com/creativity)