

Art Projects and Activities at the KIDZARK Art & Drama Center.

Post Card Project

1. Print out the postcard by simply creating a postcard-style template to use. One side can be completely blank for drawing, and one side can be laid out with some lines for writing.
2. Ask participants to reflect on a situation or person they feel or felt frustrated, angry, upset, or sad about. Spend a moment simply thinking about and reflecting on what happened, how it felt, and what they would like to let the person know about how the experience made them feel.
3. On the blank side of the postcard, ask participants to draw or create a visual representation of how they felt or still feel about the experience. Explain that there is total freedom with this, and they can create anything they like with any materials.
4. On the lined side of the postcard, participants can write what they would like to say if they could.
5. Use what they draw and write to explore their emotions further and discuss how they might begin to work toward a healing resolution.

3. Softness project

Humans are all tactile creatures, but children especially are touchers, explorers, and curious feelers. Utilizing touch is a way for them to learn about the world and to find comfort.

The activity below is a form of art therapy that focuses on using comforting textures and allowing for a manageable exploration of uncomfortable emotions. It is a particularly useful activity with younger children.

This activity can be carried out with a group or one-to-one.

Here's how to conduct the activity:

You will need:

- Various pieces of different fabric, textured materials, and soft textiles
- Cardboard or thick paper for the base
- Scissors and glue

Process:

1. Start the session by asking participants about their sense of touch. Invite them to share their ideas around things that feel good, things that don't feel right, and why. What are some of the things they enjoy touching? What materials do they find comforting and nurturing?
2. Explain that touch is an important sensory experience, and we can use it to create things that bring us comfort and a sense of calm.
3. Allow participants to explore the box of different materials and take their time selecting pieces they enjoy.
4. Next, they can create a soft collage, sticking, sewing, or tying the pieces of fabric together on the cardboard or thick paper base. Encourage them to think carefully when selecting the materials and build the collage up as much as they like, creating a pillow-like sculpture.
5. If using this activity with an older group, you could give more direct instructions such as using the materials to depict an event that is painful for them, a person with whom they have painful conflict, or a part of themselves they're unhappy with.

With this project, participants are softened by the act of collage, rendering painful things into pleasant things.

In a group with young children, we recommend using materials like glue sticks and having pre-cut pieces of material ready.

4. Build a safe place

This is an activity that's adaptable for all age groups, but may be a sensitive project for kids and young adults who often have little control of their environments and struggle to ever feel safe.

This project may help a child or teen reflect on ways to find a safe space or may simply help them feel like they have some control over their environment. It can be conducted one-to-one or in small groups.

Here's how to carry out the activity.

You will need:

- Safe building materials such as cardboard boxes of different shapes and sizes, popsicle sticks, colored cardboard, pipe-cleaners, markers or colored pencils, glitter, and sequins
- Scissors and glue

You can tailor the materials you use depending on the age group you are working with. The idea is to provide them with as much as possible so they can get creative.

Process:

1. Ask participants to think about a space that makes them feel safe. Then ask them to reflect on what it is about this particular space that makes them feel that way. Is it bright and sunny or dark and calming? How does it smell? What can they see, hear, and touch when they are in their safe space? If they don't have one or can't think of one, ask them similar questions but geared toward what they think would make them feel safe.
2. Next, ask participants to take a mindful minute. Have them close their eyes and focus on their breathing. Then bring to mind their safe space, real or imagined, and visualize what this looks like. How does it feel to be in their safe space? What emotions can they sense?
3. When participants are comfortable, ask them to explore the various materials and to recreate their safe space. This could be in any format they like, whether a flat drawing or a sculpture; give them as much creative freedom as possible.
4. When they have finished and if they feel comfortable, ask them to share their creations with the group, describing the different parts of their safe space. These can be used to create an ongoing dialogue about safe environments and how they might create something like this in real life.

Art Activities with Scriptures

1. Psalm 30:5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. (NLV)

Activity: Image of Joy the word - fill it with colors and images that bring joy, dancing, laughing, family, friends, sunshine

2. Song of Solomon 2:4 Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love. (NIV)

Activity: Kids create their own banner of Love - what belongs in a banner of love - images, emotions, colors, words. The banner will be long paper with poles on each end so that they can hang up in a

room over a bed under a bunk bed, etc. so they remember that God loves them and has put His banner of Love over them always

3. Matthew 11:28 Then Jesus said, **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.**

1 Peter 5:7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Activity: Using a box of some kind, students will decorate the inside with images and colors representing their worries and anxieties and cares. On the outside, they will decorate it with colors and images of God’s rest - the light Yoke of Jesus. They will put scripture on the outside to remind them of Christ’s promise to carry their burdens and give them joy and peace and patience and calmness and laughter and love.

4. Isaiah 49:16 See, I have inscribed you on the palms *of My hands*; Your walls are continually before Me. (NKJV)

Isaiah 41:13 For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you. (NKJV)

Activity: Images of a hand and or a hand in a hand, in the palm of the hand students will write their name and surround it with images of love. They can also do one where they put the name of someone they love and draw all around it images of love and protection.

5. Isaiah 61:3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (NIV).

Activity: Students choose either a crown, a garment, or an oak tree. They decorate it with images and colors of joy, praise, splendor. They attach their name to it

Selfie-Talk



Materials: Paper, scissors, drawing supplies

Directions: Use the paper to create an image of yourself. The image can be your full body or just your head and shoulders. When you have completed your “selfie” write down what critical things you think or say about yourself on the left side of the paper. On the right side of the paper, write down positive things that you think about yourself and positive words others say about you.

Exploration:

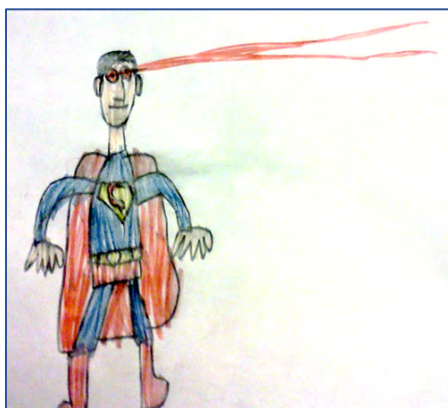
Were your internal words mostly positive or negative?

Were the words on the right side mostly your thoughts or what others say about you?

Overall, were there more positive or critical words on the page?

If you had a friend who said critical things about themselves like this, what might you say to them?

Superpower



Materials: Paper, drawing supplies

Directions: Imagine you woke up tomorrow morning and found out you had a superpower. Draw an image of you using your superpower.

Exploration:

What superpower did you choose and why would that power be helpful?

What would you be doing, thinking and feeling to let you know that you have this superpower?

Would imagining you had this superpower be helpful at times, why or why not?

Intention Stick



Materials: Tree branch, paint, ribbons or yarn, scissors, glue, embellishments, paintbrushes

Directions: An intention is often described as a goal, purpose, or plan. Add words, images, symbols and colors to the intention stick to help you remember your goal.

Exploration:

What is your intention and why is it important to you?

What would it feel like if you achieved your goal?

What thoughts and actions will get you closer to your goal?

What obstacles might you encounter and how would you handle them?

Affirmations Card Deck



Materials: Index cards or slips of paper, drawing supplies, magazines, scissors, glue.

Directions: Write down positive statements and draw images or symbols that help you remember positive thoughts.

Exploration:

When, throughout the day, might you need a positive reminder?

Are there places, like your backpack, where you might want to leave a card?

Is there someone you would like to give a card to; if so, , who and which card?

How did it feel to write down positive affirmation to uplift yourself?

Confidence Companion



Materials: Paper, drawing supplies

Directions: Draw a character that is confident and able to handle difficult challenges. Add any special powers they might have or inspirations quotes to help you when you are feeling challenged.

Exploration:

What does this companion use to help them with challenges?

How might they act and think when you are face with a challenge?

How are you similar to or different from this character?

What might happen if you acted or thought like this character?

Tetiana's list of Activities

1. Painting

kids are allowed to paint using their fingers/hands and feet on a large piece of paper. They can step on paint and be free to express what they want and like.

FUN ideas: try to use cotton swabs/q tips to paint rather than brushes
Play soft music in the background.

2. write a letter to anyone you want in the world. Be creative and expressive as you want: you can write, draw, do applications etc.

3. Give kids a heart and ask them to paint inside. Do NOT even give them instructions on what to do and observe what they will do with it.

4. Drawing in the dark.

Ask kids to draw without seeing what they are drawing and not to worry about what they draw. Ask them that they can only look UP and cannot look DOWN.

FUN idea: pair the kids and ask them to look at each other and draw a portrait of their partner without looking at what they are drawing.

5. Art work.

Take a walk outside if there is nature outside and ask them to collect some items from nature: small stones, sticks, flowers, leaves, etc. After they come back, ask them to create some art with the material they picked up. For example, if they collected sticks, they can glue a picture frame.

6. Collages.

Give them magazines and scissors to cut things out and create a collage as free expression of how they feel or where they would like to see themselves etc.

7. Game

Take a tape and create squares on the floor so that a person can stand inside the square. make sure that there is one square less than participants. One participant stands in the middle and says something like that:

- everyone with brown hair switch
- all boys switch
- everyone with green eyes/pony tail/ t-shirt etc switch

While participants change their spots, the person in the middle needs to get a spot too. The one who cannot get a square needs to go into the center and order a switch.

You can end the game whenever you want. Variation: break kids into teams to play this game to make sure they speak the same language.

8. Mapping your brain - works better with older kids.

write down your thoughts and see how they are connected.

I often dream about

I hope....

some thoughts from the past

I often think about X when I think Y (spiral thinking)

analyze how these thoughts are connected and how a human mind works. This activity raises awareness about what we think and how what we think can impact us.

9. Imagination games

DRAW (with younger kids) or THINK (with older kids)

a box that represents you. Box is YOU.

Then place items inside your box that you VALUE MOST.

Stop and check what kids hold close to their hearts.

Then GIFT one thing to someone in the circle and tell what this gift represents to you and why you choose to gift it.

For example, the rainbow represents sunshine and God's love to me and I want to gift it to you so that you can always remember that God loves you.

10. Drama. Provide kids with some dresses/clothes and some items to use for acting out.

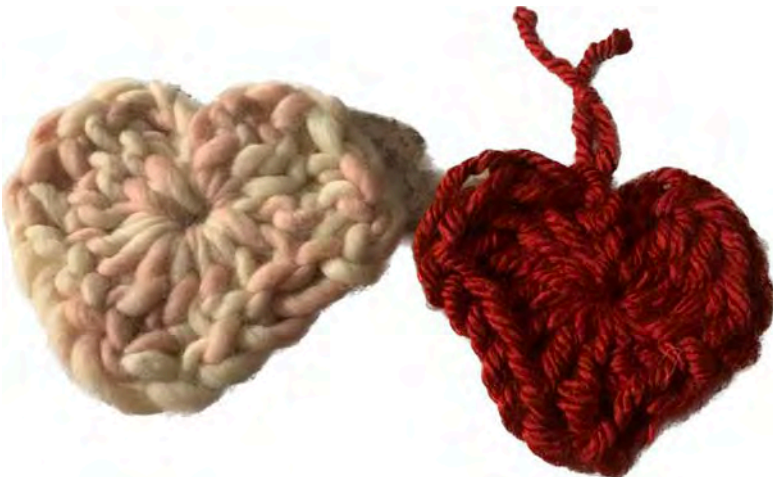
Give open ended topics/small scenarios and let them come up with script/roles and act it out. Works well with puppets.

For example, you are getting ready for school and you spill milk and now you are late for school.

Tissue Paper Flowers



Easy to make - layers of tissue paper that you fold like an accordion, trim the edges, and fasten together with a pipe cleaner. Then open up the layers of tissue paper. We placed them in a gift bag and used them As centerpieces on the tables for the tea. The kids can make a bouquet for their mamma!! ❤️🌸



Butterfly Art

Coffee Filter Craft Idea



Materials:

- Coffee Filters
- Washable Markers
- Chenille Stems (pipe cleaners)
- Beads that will fit on pipe cleaner
- Spray Bottle filled with water

Step One:

Flatten out a coffee filter. Draw random designs on the coffee filter with a variety of colors. Remember that color combinations next to each other on the color wheel will become muddy once blended – red and green; blue and orange; yellow and purple.



Step Two

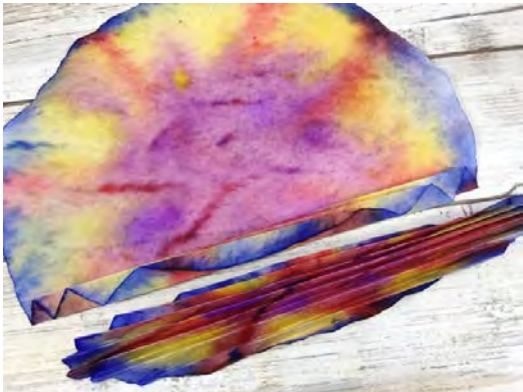
Mist coffee filter with water from a spray bottle and then let dry completely. Set aside to dry but it's fun to watch the colors mix & blend!

Step Three

Create two tie-dyed coffee filters for each butterfly.

Step Four

Fan fold two coffee filters to create each butterfly.



Step Five

Stack fan folded coffee filters on top of each other, as pictured.



Step Six

Fold chenille stem in half and place coffee filters one-third from base. Twist the bottom loop of the chenille stem. Twist once above the folded coffee filters, creating a tight section.



Step Seven

Leave a 1/2" loop and twist again to create the butterfly head. Leave the antennae straight.



Step Eight

Open and fluff out the wings of the butterfly. Pinch at the ends to retain the folds.

Step Nine

Thread a pony bead on the end of each antennae and curl into a swirl.

De-Stress Scribble Unscramble

Materials: Drawing paper (any paper) drawing utensils (colored pencils, markers, crayons or paint).

1. Invite the children to scribble out their feelings on paper. Remind younger children to stay on the paper while encouraging them to scribble as or big as their feelings.
2. When the children are done, let them know they are going to use their creative brain to unscramble their scribble.
3. Ask the children to search for pictures, patterns or shapes in their scribbles. It's like looking for pictures in the clouds! Ask, "What do you see?"
4. Encourage the children to add details and color to bring the picture to life.
5. If they can't find a picture in their scribble, that's OK. They can fill in shapes with colors or patterns instead.
6. Talk about what they created. Ask them to give it a title.

Emoji Mash-Up

Materials: Drawing paper, drawing utensils, (colored pencils, markers, crayons)

1. Show the children a selection of emojis for inspiration. Search online for "emoji chart".
2. Explain how we can feel many emotions at the same time. Give an example. Point to the emoji chart, showing two, three or four emotions you've experienced simultaneously.
3. Invite the children to draw a circle (or many circles for many emoji mash-ups).
4. Guide them to add emoji-inspired details and features from two of more different emojis to create an original emoji.
5. Discuss unique names for each emoji mash-up. Combine feelings and words based on its features such as, sad + mad =smad

3 Draw

Materials: One large piece of paper, drawing utensils

1. Invite 3 children to sit around one piece of paper
2. Provide the rules:
 - a. Work together to make an unexpected drawing emerge
 - b. Each child adds one to three shapes before passing the paper to the next person
 - c. No talking and no planning
3. Check for understanding and clarify any questions.
4. Pick the person to start. They can draw one, two or three shapes and can use any color before passing the paper to the next person.
5. Continue passing the paper and you will start to see people, animals houses and other things emerge.
6. Stop once everyone agrees the drawing is complete
7. Talk again to decide a title for this drawing.

Celebration Art

Materials: Drawing paper (any paper works) drawing utensils (colored pencils, markers, crayons).

1. Invite your child to write and decorate their name in the center of the paper however they like to.
2. Encourage the children to fill the paper with different shapes, like circles, squares, hearts and balloons. Make shapes large enough to write one word inside each (this comes in step 4).
3. Ask, "What did you do well today? What would (friends, parents, teachers siblings) say you did that was good or helpful" Write one response beneath each shape, such as, "raised hand" or "played with me."
4. Next, ask the child, "What strengths inside you helped you do that?" Give examples: helpful, flexible, thoughtful, independent, imaginative, funny, playful, hardworking.
5. Invite the children to write one strength inside each shape, corresponding to their responses in step 3. Assist as needed.

5 Fun Art Therapy Ideas and Activities for Children and Teens (+PDFs)



Art as a means for healing and communication is highly relevant for children and teens.

Young children often rely on their limited language skills to express complex thoughts and emotions. That barrier can be breached with methods of expression they understand a little better, like drawing and coloring.

Teens can also benefit from a pressure-free, consequence-free medium for their thoughts and feelings.

Below are five possible art therapy activities and exercises for children of all ages.

1. Art therapy postcard activity

Most people would probably agree that it's easier to express or recognize hurts and regrets when there's the distance between yourself and the problem. This is why the postcard activity can be a good self-discovery exercise that helps answer the question, *"What would I say to someone if I didn't have to do it face-to-face?"*

This activity can be used in one-to-one or group therapy sessions. Here's how to conduct the activity:

1. Print out the postcard by following the link above or simply create a postcard-style template to use. One side can be completely blank for drawing, and one side can be laid out with some lines for writing.
2. Ask participants to reflect on a situation or person they feel or felt frustrated, angry, upset, or sad about. Spend a moment simply thinking about and reflecting on what happened, how it felt, and

what they would like to let the person know about how the experience made them feel.

3. On the blank side of the postcard, ask participants to draw or create a visual representation of how they felt or still feel about the experience. Explain that there is total freedom with this, and they can create anything they like with any materials.
4. On the lined side of the postcard, participants can write what they would like to say if they could.
5. Use what they draw and write to explore their emotions further and discuss how they might begin to work toward a healing resolution.

2. Words to live by collage



Teens can be vulnerable to harsh, judgmental environments where they don't feel they can be themselves.

They may suppress their real character to avoid censure from their peers; this is why it's essential for teens to identify their core values and identify who they think they are.

It's crucial when working with teens to create coping strategies that they can come back over to time and let them know that their ideas, feelings, and values will change with experience.

The Words to Live By activity helps teens to visualize their core values through creative collage. Here's how to teach this activity:

You will need:

- Old magazines, newspapers, picture books, and scrap paper
- Markers and colored pencils

- Scissors and glue
- Cardboard or thick paper for the base of the collage
- This activity can be carried out with a group or one-to-one

Process:

1. Asking participants to take a moment to reflect on their core values. For younger teens, you may want to discuss what we mean by values by asking them what some of the things they feel strongly about are. What do they feel good about when they practice certain behaviors or see others behave?
2. Once participants have a good idea of their values, invite them to take a mindful minute. Start by asking them to close their eyes and turn their focus to their breath. Now ask them to let the words associated with their values freely flow into their thoughts. What are these words? What are the related images, colors, and shapes that feel connected to these words?
3. Once participants feel ready, invite them to begin selecting images, words, phrases, or colors from the magazines and newspapers. They will use these to compile a collage that they feel reflects their words to live by. This can be image based or entirely abstract; it's all about how their words make them feel.
4. If they feel comfortable, save some time at the end of the session for them to present their collages and share with the group what they have created and what it means to them.

3. Softness project

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The activity below is a form of art therapy that focuses on using comforting textures and allowing for a manageable exploration of uncomfortable emotions. It is a particularly useful activity with younger children.

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4. When they have finished and if they feel comfortable, ask them to share their creations with the group, describing the different parts of their safe space. These can be used to create an ongoing dialogue about safe environments and how they might create something like this in real life.

5. Color your feelings

This set of three worksheets includes exercises for children to express their emotions or define the things they care about. It's a very quick and easy exercise that can help participants create helpful visual representations of the things they value.

The worksheets include an empty outline of a heart.

Here's how to use it.

You will need:

- The printed worksheets
- Markers and colored pencils
- Glitter, sequins, and glue (if desired)

Process:

1. Ask participants to take a moment to reflect on the things that make their heart happy. What things make them feel good? What words would they use to describe these things? What images and colors come to mind when they think about these things?
2. Provide participants with the worksheets and ask them to fill the heart with what they have just been thinking and talking about. They can create these in any way they like, focusing on one thing or filling the heart with as many things as they want.
3. Use what they create as a discussion point to help them better understand the things that make their heart happy. How often do these things happen for them? How can they and you work together to create more of these happy moments?

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20 Art Therapy Prompts for Kids

Posted in [Homeschool View](#) on Tuesday, June 8, 2021



Allowing our brains the freedom for free expression, even by doodling, can have a wonderful impact on how we process, retain, and share information. Art therapy for kids can be used to help a child cope with a major life event. It can also help children who struggle with low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, learning disabilities, and behavioral issues, as well as developmental delays like autism and ADHD. Help your kids deal with their emotions in a healthy way through these helpful art therapy prompts.

1. Paint or color while listening to music.
2. Paint a picture with your fingers.
3. Draw with your eyes closed.
4. Make a collage of things you love.
5. Create a past, present, and future self-portrait.
6. Draw yourself as a superhero.
7. Make art with your fingerprints.

8. Draw a comic strip.
 9. Create a family tree.
 10. Draw one of your dreams.
 11. Make art out of recycled items.
 12. Draw a relaxing scene or landscape.
 13. Draw an imaginary creature.
 14. Paint a rainbow.
 15. Scribble mindlessly.
 16. Draw with white charcoal on black paper.
 17. Draw your favorite animal.
 18. Draw a waterfall.
 19. Paint on a t-shirt.
 20. Create a tie-dye paper using water, markers, and aluminum foil.
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2. Picture your emotions

One of Reinhardt-Ruprecht's favorite activities with clients is creating Anger Monsters. She asks her client to picture in their head, and then draw on paper, what their anger looks like. As a result, says Reinhardt-Ruprecht, "Anger gets to have its own identity. We can bring the anger out—look at it, how ugly it is—and then we can find out what it needs."

5. Piece things together



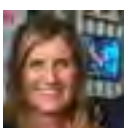
Creating collages is a very therapeutic activity with a two-fold benefit. The physical sensation of handling different materials and textures—soft, scratchy, rigid—is very comforting. And the creative process of putting things together in a new and different way helps organize and calm your brain.

For more collage inspiration, check out [Collage Art: 50+ Ideas](#).

TOPIC: [Arts, Social Emotional Learning](#)
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8 Art Therapy Activities To Help Kids Identify and Manage Their Feelings

“Art tells the truth.” —art therapist Edith Kramer



[Elizabeth Mulvahill](#) on May 6, 2020



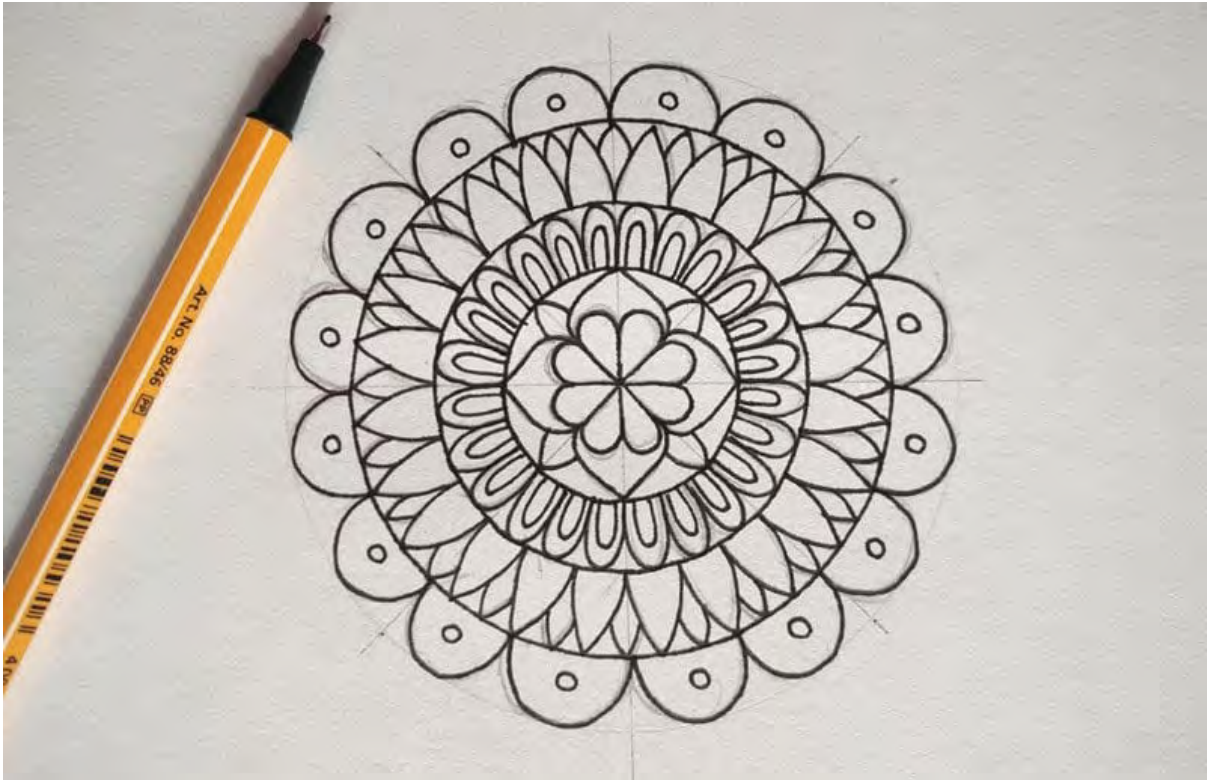
Your kids may be having a serious case of the feels these days—from sadness and anxiety to feeling disconnected, lonely, and bored. And no wonder! While most of us are not certified art therapists, we can still incorporate a few art therapy activities to help them identify and manage their emotions.

What is art therapy?

Art therapy is a therapeutic process that integrates psychotherapy and art. It can help kids explore their emotions, improve self-esteem, relieve stress, and ease anxiety and depression.

Krista Reinhardt-Ruprecht, a registered psychotherapist, explains how art therapy works. “When we’re stuck in feeling states,” she says, “we are in the right hemisphere, low in the brain, and it’s hard to climb out of that. When we use our hands to make art, we trigger our left hemisphere to come back online. Meanwhile, we are making an internal emotion into an external piece of art, which can help us by looking at it as separate from who we are.” Here are a few simple art therapy activities that will help your kids identify and manage their feelings.

1. Create mandalas

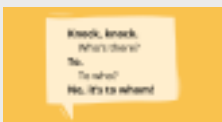


Drawing figures with repeated patterns, like [mandalas](#), is good for regulating emotions and the nervous system. It can help kids focus their attention and calm down. After drawing them, they can color them in!

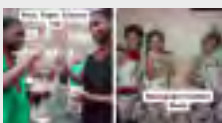
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More tips on helping kids express their feelings through art from [Psychology Today](#).

3. Make art from nature



Working with natural materials is soothing and helps ground us. Plus, you can find beautiful materials to work with by just taking a walk outside. Make nature bracelets, sun-catchers, or create beautiful weavings with natural materials. For more ideas, check out [25 Fun and Easy Nature Crafts and Activities](#).

4. Transform something

Reinhardt-Ruprecht recently helped a patient who was struggling with our current world state of affairs. Together, they sat down and made a list of all the terrible things about COVID-19. Then they tore the list up and used the pieces to create a piece of art, turning something ugly into something beautiful.

5. Piece things together



Creating collages is a very therapeutic activity with a two-fold benefit. The physical sensation of handling different materials and textures—soft, scratchy, rigid—is very comforting. And the creative process of putting things together in a new and different way helps organize and calm your brain.

For more collage inspiration, check out [Collage Art: 50+ Ideas](#).

6. Create a magazine photo mashup

[Dr. Cathy Malchiodi](#) explains the process of magazine photo collage as “using images to create a visual narrative that enhances the dialogue between client and therapist.”

A simple way to do this at home is to have your child cut out images from magazines that catch their eye. Then give them a piece of paper and glue and have them arrange the images in a collection. If they are willing, ask them to narrate their process as they go.

7. Make masks

In art therapy, creating or [decorating a mask](#) often leads to exploring different aspects of our personality. Sometimes we can create a mask that reveals feelings that are hard to express. Give your child a pre-formed mask or make one out of paper and give them free rein to embellish it however they'd like. When they are finished, ask them to tell you the story of the mask.

8. Family sculpture

One of Dr. Malchiodi's recommended activities as an art therapist is to encourage kids to [create a family sculpture](#) out of clay. The size, shape, and arrangement of family members invites conversations about the important people and relationships in their life.

22 Art Therapy Activities for Kids

[Tree of Strength Art Directive](#) | Creativity in Therapy

[Body Tracing Affirmation Exercise](#) | The Chaos and the Clutter

[Feelings Journal](#) | Teachers Pay Teachers

[Worry Group Art Activity: Controlled Breathing Waves](#) | Counselor Keri

[Mandala Social Emotional Learning Activities](#) | Teachers Pay Teachers

[DIY Worry Stones](#) | Coffee Cups and Crayons

[Raising Leaders Self-Esteem Activity for Kids](#) | A Mom's Take

[Art Therapy Healing Scars & Grief Activity](#) | Creative Counseling 101

[Positive Affirmation Bottle](#) | Art of Social Work

[Me Tree Self-Esteem Character Building Arts and Crafts Project](#) | Kids Play and Create

[Anger Management Foldable Activities](#) | Teachers Pay Teachers

[Grief Expression Play Dough Activity](#) | Creative Social Worker

[Coping Strategies Fortune Teller](#) | Teachers Pay Teachers

[What Can I Control? Visible Activity](#) | Counselor Keri

[Drawing Your Breath Mindful Art Activity](#) | Creativity in Therapy

[Inspiration Stones](#) | Creativity in Therapy

[Positive Self-Talk Flower Craft](#) | Teachers Pay Teachers

[The Gratitude Game](#) | Counselor Keri

[Make Your Own Coping Strategies Wheel](#) | Teachers Pay Teachers
[The Worry Worms](#) | Utah Play Therapy
[Remembering Ornament Grief Activity](#) | What's Your Grief
[Postcard From Your Future Self](#) | Creativity in Therapy

25 Ways to Incorporate Art Therapy in the Classroom



April 1, 2022// by [Sharayah Lynn Grattan](#)

We all need a little encouragement and a proper outlet to express ourselves and release our emotions creatively. This is even more important in the classroom where students are experiencing a wide variety of stressors and strain on their mental capacity. Incorporating art therapy techniques into your lesson plans can help reduce anxiety, and allow students to process and visualize what they are feeling to better understand it and share/feel more connected with their peers.

Here are 25 of our most creative and expressive art therapy activities for you to try with your students in your next class.

1. Self Esteem Mirror



This idea involves your students in the entire process. Appearance and body image are a huge concern for children and teenagers, so a self-esteem mirror can help students be reminded of their positive attributes and what's really important when they look into the mirror. Have your students pick what words and images to decorate the class mirror with.

Learn more: [Mosswood Connections](#)

2. Paint and Color Therapy



This art project is one of those messy creative therapies that require lots of paint and a little clean-up. Get some planting pots and place them face down on a cardboard base. Let your students squeeze paint onto the pots and watch the colors blend and drip. This artistic experience can feel expressive and students can convey their emotions with colors.

Learn more: [Sunshine Whispers](#)

3. Rice Art



Time for some [sensory play](#) with this art therapy exercise using colored rice to form a visual representation of whatever your brain can imagine. Get a container and fill it with colored rice, then ask your students to move and shape the rice into comforting objects or expressive images they see in their minds.

Learn more: [Mama Smiles](#)

4. Finger Painting Clay Project



Now let's work on our fine motor skills with the artistic medium of artistic clay. You can use modeling clay for this creative experience because it spreads easily. Make sure your students have at least 3 to 4 colors and a flat surface to create their clay representation. Show them how to use their fingers to push, spread, and mix the clay to form designs.

Learn more: [Best Toys for Toddlers](#)

5. Sweet Smelling Paints



Pick a natural scent your students will find relaxing (lavender, rose, orange) and mix it with washable paint. Give your students brushes or they can dig right in with their fingers and create aromatic works of art.

Learn more: [The Preschool Toolbox](#)

6. Body Tracing Affirmations



This collaborative and empowering approach to therapy is useful for a wide range of student insecurities. You can ask a volunteer to lay down for the tracing or be the body yourself. Ask each student to write positive words on the body about themselves and hang them in class.

Learn more: [The Chaos and the Clutter](#)

7. Colorful Salt Painting



Incorporating different mediums into a project is a great use of creative expression you students can manipulate and experiment with. Provide some designs or give your students full artistic freedom to draw something with glue then pour salt on it. Then they can drip paint onto the salt to bring their picture to life!

Learn more: [Fun with Mama](#)

8. Music Therapy



Music can be used in a variety of ways for an art therapy session. One way to get your kids thinking creatively is to have them make instruments out of objects found in the classroom. Make a basic beat with your hands and feet and have them join in by hitting their desks, closing books, moving chairs, or whatever they can think of!

Learn more: [Very Well Family](#)

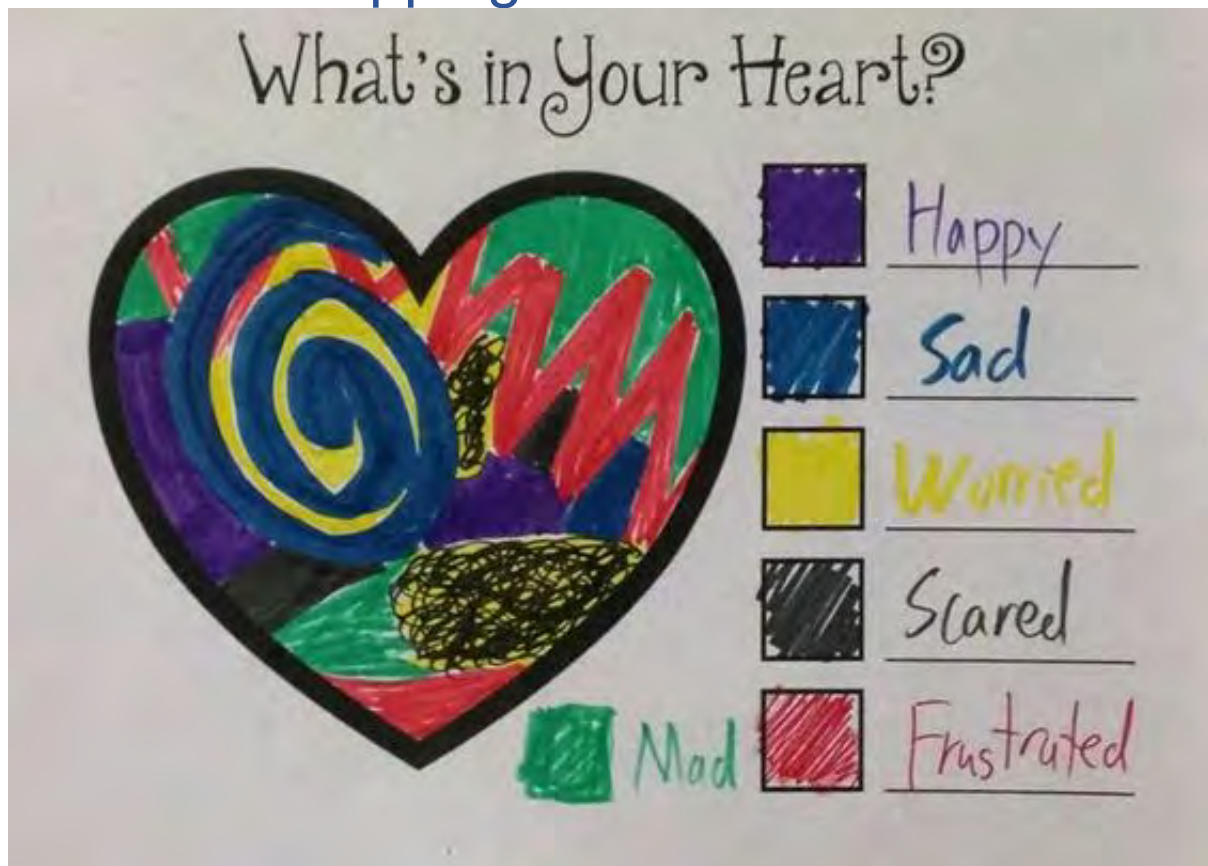
9. Postcard From Future You



This helpful exercise allows you to peer into your future and see hope and possibilities beyond today. Writing from the perspective of the future is a great way to discover your core values and what you want to achieve so you can begin the process of reaching your goals.

Learn more: [Creativity in Therapy](#)

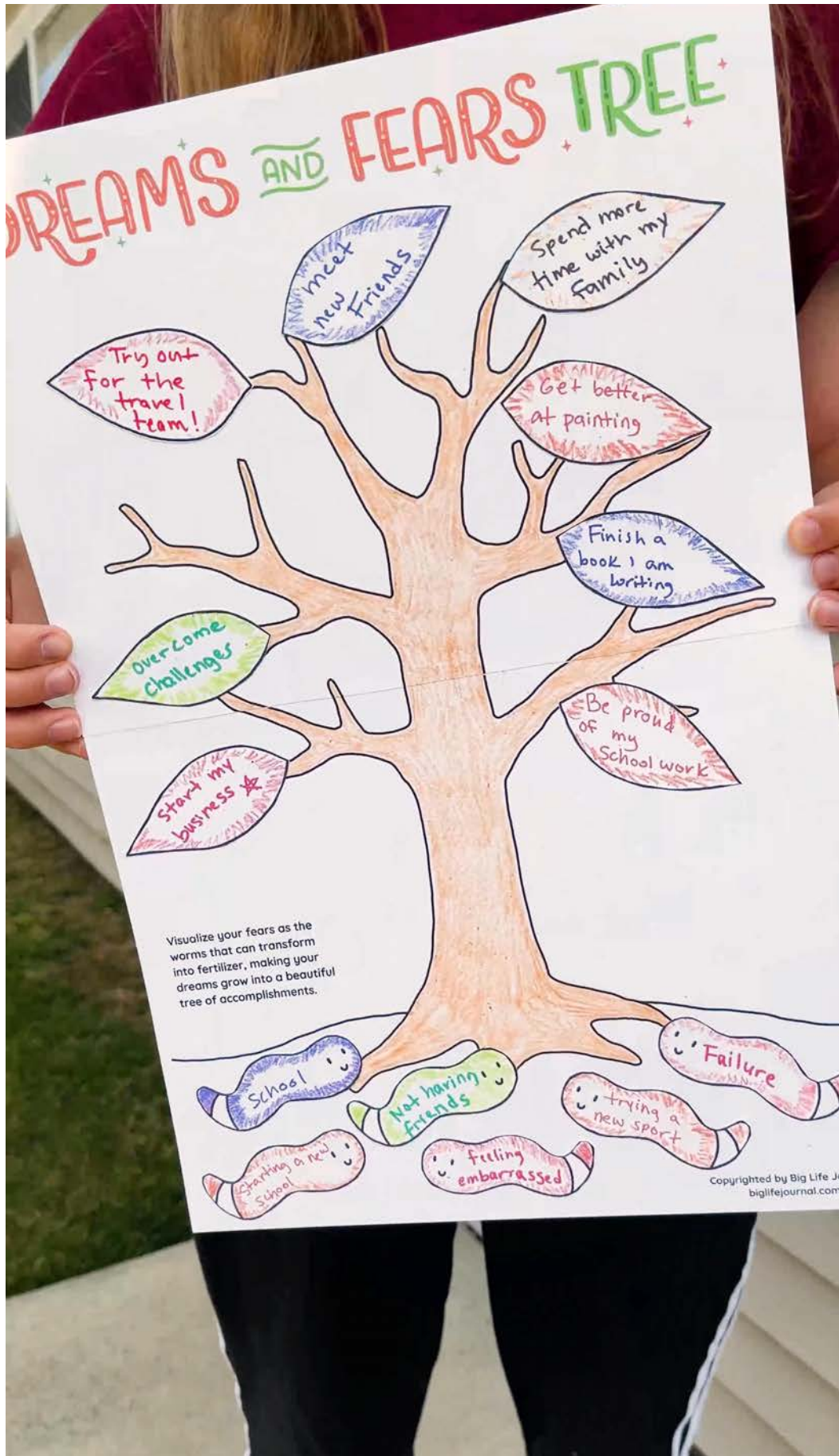
10. Heart Mapping



This mood art therapy idea takes the basic aspects of breaking down your emotions into visual representations you can process. When children can express themselves through these color blocks they can see the negative space but also all the positive mixed in and work on nurturing that.

Learn more: [Pinterest](#)

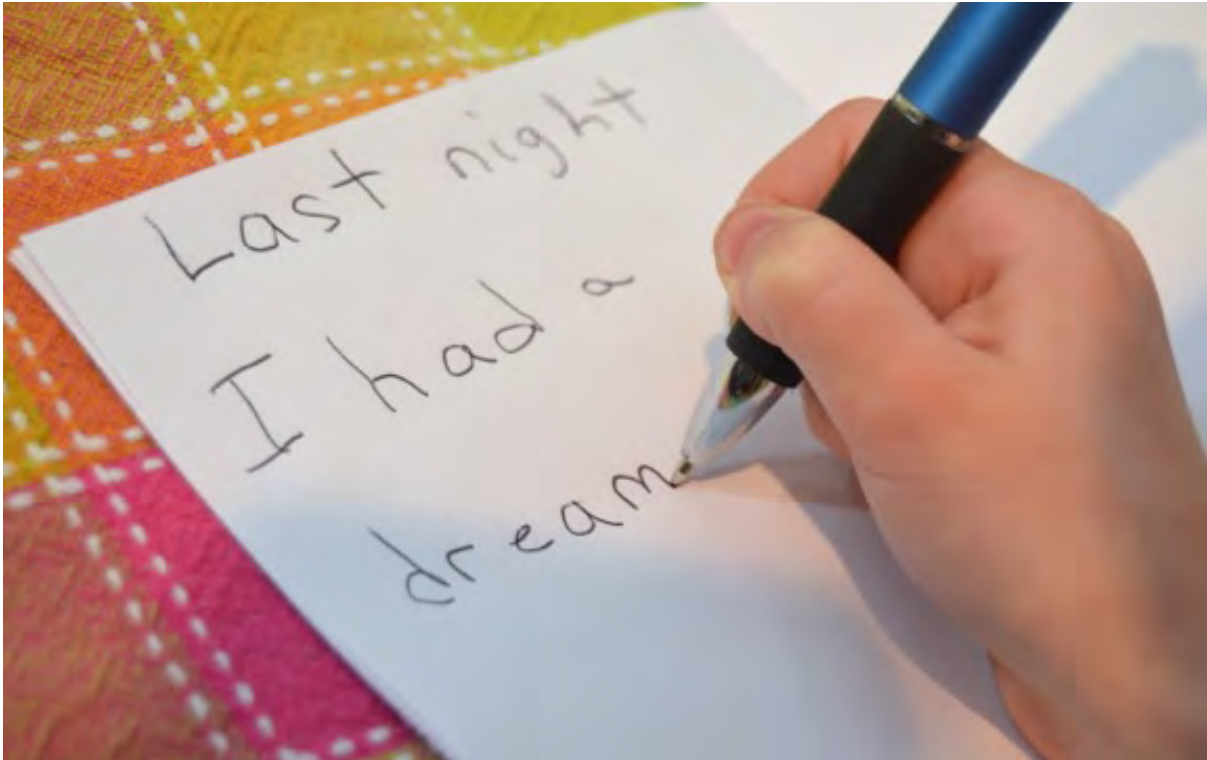
11. Dreams and Fears Tree



Another creative process we can use to express our inner thoughts and emotions is a Dreams and Fears tree. This art therapy activity can act as a visual and motivational collage showing you what you want and what is holding you back. Great for students to fill in and use as encouragement, so hang them up in your classroom!

Learn more: [Big Life Journal](#)

12. Dream Journal



Now, this can be writing only, or your students can feel free to express their dreams through art and coloring as well. Ask them to leave their dream journal by their bed so they can record good and bad dreams as soon as they wake up and keep them for reflection.

Learn more: [Inner Child Fun](#)

13. Positive Affirmation Bottle



Grab your art materials and a clear bottle for this creative therapy to [help students focus on gratitude](#) and happy moments. This artistic tool for [mental health awareness](#) can use pom poms, glitter, toys, or whatever art supplies your kids will feel inspired by. The point is when they are feeling down for them to look into the bottle, count the objects floating inside, and say one thing they are grateful for each.

Learn more: [Kristian Marcelli](#)

14. What Can I Control?



We can control things that are in our hands, such as our actions and reactions to the things that happen in our lives. Give your students a sheet of paper and ask them to trace their hands on it. Then advise them to write things inside their hand they can control.

Learn more: [Counselor Keri](#)

15. DIY Emoji Origami Craft

Kids love emojis, and now they can express their feelings while also improving their motor and social skills. Get some yellow origami paper and help them fold their faces into different expressions they can use as prompts to share how they are feeling.

Learn more: [Maison ZiZou](#)

16. Paper Plate Self-Portraits



Figuring out who you are and how you feel is all part of the expressive and creative process we call mental health. Help your students make their emotions a physical object they can see and hold with self-portraits. Give them plates and drawing materials and tell them to color what they see and feel when they look in the mirror.

Learn more: [DIY Projects](#)

17. Wish Box



A wish box is a safe space for students to write down things they want or wish were better/different. Decorate an empty tissue box and encourage your students to write and add to the wish box whenever they are feeling stressed or really wish for something.

Learn more: [Confident Counselors](#)

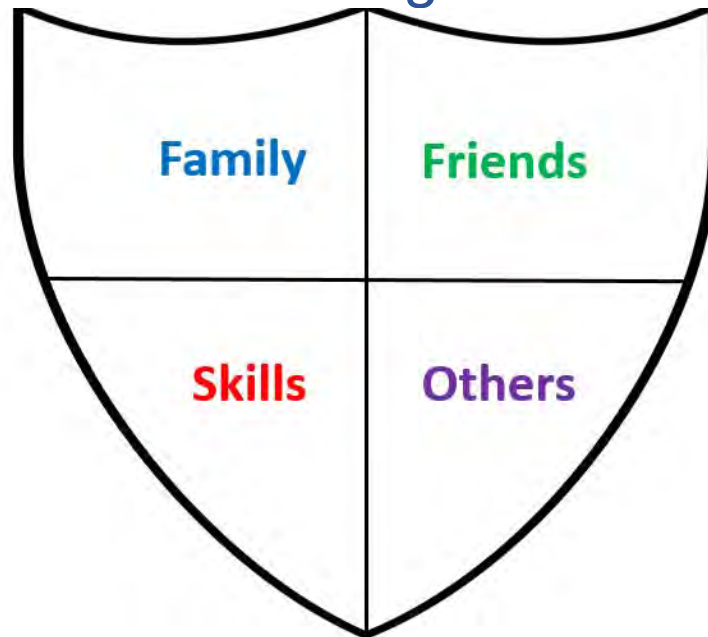
18. Worry Worms



This paper art therapy idea allows students to share their fears and worries in a creative and safe way. Cut out some worm shapes from a sheet of paper and ask your students to write down things they worry about in school or at home. You can make this activity anonymous by having them put their worms in a box.

Learn more: [Utah Play Therapy](#)

19. The Shield of Strength



We all need to be reminded that we are not alone sometimes. We have things, people, and abilities that help us through our lives. On cardboard or a large colored paper, draw a shield outline with 4 sections for family, friends, skills, and others. Ask your students to come up and fill in the sections with what brings them strength.

Learn more: [Hope 4 Hurting Kids](#)

20. Hands Past and Present



There are lots of variations for this paint therapy idea depending on your students' age and mental health. The main idea is to trace two hands, paint, write, and fill the first hand with things from your past you have let go of or overcame, then fill in your second hand with things you have and happy experiences in the present.

Learn more: [Michelle Morgan Art](#)

21. Mixed Emotions Paper Chain



A paper chain is a physical object we can use as a creative activity when making it, and as a constant reminder if we hang it somewhere we can see daily. Grab your paper supplies and ask your students to write situations and emotions on each slip of paper that make them feel mixed emotions.

Learn more: [Alice and Lois](#)

22. Daily Joy Journal



Practicing gratitude and noticing the small things can bring a little joy and begin to [improve your mental well-being](#) over time. Encourage your students to keep a joy journal and write or draw pictures of things each day that bring them joy (big or small!).

Learn more: [Ramble on Designs](#)

23. Group Emotions Mandala



This beautiful form of collective and creative expression can be an art installation in your classroom your students can enjoy all year! Draw the circular outline and encourage all forms of artistic technique using pictures, natural materials, nostalgic objects, or whatever ideas your students are inspired by.

Learn more: [Art Therapy Reflections](#)

24. Circle Weaving

This art therapy [uses yarn](#) and beads to express gratitude in a hands-on and sensory way. The process of weaving these circles is individual and students can choose their own colors of yarn and beads for making their circles. For each bead in the circle, they will think of something they are grateful for each time they hold or look at it.

Learn more: [Instructables](#)

25. Classroom Art Gallery



Every student wants to feel like a professional artist and show off their work sometimes. Celebrate art appreciation by turning your classroom into a gallery for a week. Each student can make a piece they feel describes who they are at this moment in their lives. Give them total freedom for the form of art they use (canvas, weaving, folding, dance, words).

Tree Tracing

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

The more we observe our surroundings, the quieter our thoughts become. This is helpful when we want our children to worry less, stop mind-wandering, or feel less overwhelmed. Use this thought-clearing, observation-boosting activity with your child while they're looking at any object in their environment. Keep in mind that the added benefits of observing nature are undeniable. Weekly doses of nature are known to reduce stress, improve health, and increase self-esteem.

Materials: Drawing paper or sketchbook, pencil, a hard surface (clipboard, cardboard, or hardcover book)

1. Sit comfortably outside, viewing trees or plants together. Alternatively, look through a window or search indoors for nature.
2. Invite your child to select a tree, plant, or other natural object to draw.
3. Explain that you'll each draw the outside shape of your chosen object, using one continuous line. Continue the line inside the shape to add details.
4. While drawing, ask your child to keep their eyes on the object. Remind them to avoid looking at their paper. Guide them to keep their pencil on the paper the entire time without lifting it.
5. Prompt your child to follow the edges of the object, moving their hand in one unbroken line. If the object curves, they curve their hand. If they see a straight line up, they move the pencil straight up.
6. Reveal your drawings to each other once finished.

HELPFUL TIP: This activity works on the go without any supplies. A finger is a pencil, the air is the paper. Use this activity anywhere, any time you or your children need to reset.

Helping Hands

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Symbolism is an artistic tool that helps us make sense of meaningful experiences. Symbols use familiar objects to represent hard-to-explain ideas and feelings. Hands, for example, can signify connection, helping, giving, receiving, or letting go. In this activity, your child will trace their hands to explore another concept: gratitude. Gratitude, or thankfulness, is a mindset that makes us happier and improves our ability to bounce back from difficulties.

Materials: Drawing paper (any paper works), drawing utensils (colored pencils, markers, or crayons)

1. Invite your child to trace one or both hands on a piece of paper.
2. Discuss ways your child gives to others. This could include giving a smile or helping with dishes.
3. Inside the hands, invite your child to add symbols, words, or colors to represent ways they give to others, communities, and the environment.
4. Discuss how giving makes your child feel. Discuss how giving likely makes others feel. All feelings are okay. Helping with dishes might make your child feel unhappy and the parent feel grateful.
5. Outside the hands, invite your child to add symbols, words, or colors to represent people, places, and things they are grateful for. They might appreciate their teacher's attention or a park's grass for playing.
6. Discuss how receiving makes them feel.

HELPFUL TIP: For added bonding benefits, trace your hand and your child's hand on the same paper. Involve siblings or others. Discuss whether hands should touch, overlap, or have space between them.

Ugly Paint

Time Needed: 15 Minutes

Taking risks can be, well, risky. But there's a big payoff for those who learn to take chances. Risk-taking helps children learn what works, teaches them to push themselves, and offers opportunities to grow from mistakes. Art is a safe place to try something new, mess up, and go with the flow. This activity can be especially helpful for kids who stress about being perfect.

Materials: Nontoxic washable paints (primary colors and white), brushes, mixing trays (or foil), heavyweight paper (e.g., painting paper, construction paper, or cardboard), stable cup or bowl with water

1. Prepare your painting space. Protect surfaces or set up outside.
2. If your child is unfamiliar with painting, demonstrate ways to mix colors on the tray or foil. Show how to rinse brushes.
3. Introduce this activity as a challenge to paint the ugliest painting possible.
4. If your child needs more encouragement, invite them to start with one color, close their eyes, and begin painting.
5. Invite your child to rotate the piece of paper and continue painting.
6. Optionally, allow the paint to dry. Return to the activity later or tomorrow, so your child can add a new layer of paint.
7. Discuss the difference between safe and unsafe risk-taking. Ask about times your child holds back and when they challenge themselves to take safe risks.

HELPFUL TIP: Paint's looseness can trigger bigger experimentation. To rein it in, place paper inside a cardboard box, slide a larger paper beneath the painting paper, or draw a frame around the edge.

Calm Color Combos

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Colors can affect our emotions and energy level. Visualizing soothing colors can help us relax. Looking at energizing colors can give us a boost. But no color works the same for everyone. In this activity, your child will mix colors to create their very own calming colors. They'll discover which will help them feel quiet and content.

Materials: Heavyweight paper (e.g., painting paper, construction paper, or cardboard), pencil, nontoxic washable paints (primary colors and white), brushes, mixing trays (or foil), stable cup or bowl with water

1. Create a simple 2-inch-by-3-inch grid on a piece of paper by drawing one horizontal line and two equally spaced vertical lines. You'll have six rectangles.
2. Show your child how to mix colors to create new colors. Demonstrate how white lightens colors. Practice rinsing brushes before mixing new colors.
3. Allow experimentation and painting on a practice paper. Ask your child what the colors remind them of. How do the colors make them feel?
4. Now, invite your child to mix color combos that feel calming to them.
5. Invite your child to paint each rectangle with a different calming color of their creation. Discuss what the colors remind them of.
6. Suggest naming each calming color. Help your child label colors with a unique name.

HELPFUL TIP: Invite your child to select a calm color from their chart when feeling antsy or stressed. Help them imagine breathing that color into their whole body.

Mad Mail

Time Needed: 5 Minutes

Kids love receiving mail. It piques their curiosity and makes them feel special. When your child shuts themselves away in a room or hides under the bed, try this activity to reconnect. It will help them maintain comfortable distance while communicating their feelings and thoughts.

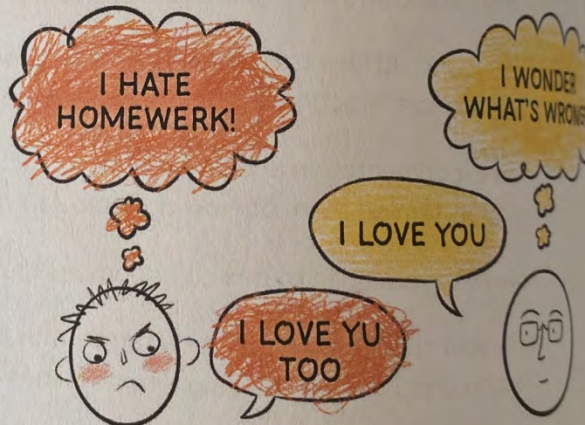
Materials: Drawing paper (any paper works), drawing utensils (regular pencil or pen, colored pencils, markers, or crayons)

1. Draw two circles on a piece of paper. These will be faces—one for you and one for your child to complete.

2. Add a thought bubble and a speech balloon to each circle, like in a comic.

3. Draw a simple face in one circle that expresses your emotion, such as love, concern, or sadness.

4. Add a message inside your face's speech balloon that fits the situation: "I love you." "I'm sorry." "Where's [child's name]?"



5. Add a thought: "I wonder what's wrong." "I hope they'll see this note." Leave the other circle, thought bubble, and speech balloon blank for your child to complete.

6. Slide the paper and a pen under the door. Let your child know they've got mail.

HELPFUL TIP: If your child isn't a reader or writer yet, stick to images. Use symbols like a question mark instead of writing "What's wrong?" or a heart to say, "I love you."

Brain Stretch

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Scientists don't just make potions. They seek to understand the world by challenging assumptions, making educated guesses, collecting information, and refining ideas. From academic studies to resolving conflicts and thinking before acting, learning the scientific approach helps in everyday life. Use this activity to stretch your child's brain in a scientific manner.

Materials: Found objects (e.g., sticks, toy cars, marbles), nontoxic washable paints, heavyweight paper (e.g., painting paper, construction paper, or cardboard), stable cup or bowl with water

1. Invite your child to collect various objects to use as painting utensils: sticks, forks, feathers, sponges, etc.
2. Help choose alternatives if any items might get messy. Ask, "What soft objects can you use instead of stuffed animals?"
3. Invite your child to guess which painting approach might be most effective: dipping objects in paint or squirting paint directly on the paper, then moving it around with objects?
4. Ask your child to guess what types of marks each object will make. Invite hypotheses about how easy or difficult it will be to paint with each object.
5. Encourage experimenting with different objects and approaches.
6. Discuss what they discovered. Prompt your child with questions like "Which objects were easiest and hardest to paint with? How were objects more or less useful than expected?"

HELPFUL TIP: For added brain-bending benefits, encourage children to set challenges for themselves such as painting the entire paper or creating a nature scene using only natural items to paint with.

Mindful Mountains

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

When we're mindful, we aren't thinking about what's happening. We're observing it, like when carefully drawing a vase of flowers or watching a bird with interest. We might momentarily get distracted by a noise or thought, and then return to what we're observing. This is being mindful. Mindfulness is a mindset kids can develop by paying attention with curiosity to whatever is happening moment by moment.

Mindfulness exercises can be traced back to ancient India and China. Because of its many benefits, today, people all over the world practice mindfulness. It improves focus, decreases distracting thoughts, and calms reactive impulses. Remarkably, when kids regularly shift into observing mode, they actually grow a part of the brain that helps them slow down, calm their emotions, and make good choices. Although changing the brain takes time and practice, kids can immediately use this activity to experience the calming effects of mindfulness today.

Materials: Drawing paper (any paper works), tape (or stapler), drawing utensils (colored pencils, markers, crayons, or paint)

1. Tape two or three pieces of paper together to create one longer piece of paper.
2. Explain that your child will draw a mountain range, using their breath to guide how tall each mountain becomes.
3. When they breathe in, they will move their drawing utensil up diagonally, creating one side of a mountain. As they breathe out, they will move it down diagonally, drawing the other side of the mountain. The longer the breath, the taller the mountain.
4. The next inhale begins the next mountain's incline. Continue the up-and-down process until the drawing reaches the end of the page.
5. Guide your child to notice how long or short each inhale and exhale is naturally, and to notice if their breath changes. Experiment with different breath lengths.

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5. Guide your child to notice how long or short each inhale and exhale is naturally, and to notice if their breath changes. Experiment with different breath lengths.

6. Optionally, invite your child to add a second row of Mindful Mountains lower down.
7. Finally, ask them to add details to complete their mountain scene.
8. Explain that we can draw mindful mountains in our imagination, too. When feeling stressed or preparing for sleep, they can imagine mountains forming in their mind with each breath.

HELPFUL TIP: Talk with children about how their feelings or energy changed. Invite children to decorate their scene with weather or other details that reflect their feelings, whether snowy, sunny, or breezy.

Discussion Questions

- ☀ What did you notice during this activity?
- ☀ Was it easy or difficult to let your breath decide how big or small your mountains would be?
- ☀ I wonder, were you able to stay focused on what your breath was doing? Or did your mind get distracted?
- ☀ How did your body feel after the activity? Did you feel more relaxed, energized, or the same?

Meaningful Paintings

Time Needed: 25 Minutes

By appreciating art from many cultures, we learn what others consider meaningful. We're also inspired to uncover what is meaningful to us. Meaningfulness is different from happiness. Meaningfulness is discovering and expressing who you are and what's important to you. It includes groups we belong to, like family and culture, and what we find beautiful in the world. When we connect with what is important to us, and share this with others, we are healthier inside and out.

This activity invites kids to think about, express, and discuss what's meaningful to them. It's inspired by Nahua and Otomi tribe bark paintings. Amate, a paper made from mulberry and fig bark, was used in pre-Columbian Mexico for communication, record keeping, clothing, and more. Today, Indigenous groups paint brightly colored paintings on Amate, depicting birds, plants, animals, and scenes of daily life. These are meaningful to them. What is meaningful to your child?

Materials: Brown kraft paper or paper bag, pencil, black marker or crayon, nontoxic washable paint (bright colors plus white), stable cup or bowl with water

1. Prepare the painting space by protecting surfaces. If using a brown paper bag, cut out a large rectangle.
2. Invite your child to crumple and uncrumple the paper several times, until the paper looks wrinkly. Smooth out the paper to make it flat.
3. Together, look at examples of Amate paintings online. (You can easily find these by searching for "Amate paintings.") Discuss what subjects are in the paintings. Ask, "What do you notice is meaningful or pleasing to the Amate painters?"
4. Help your child select a subject for their own painting, focusing on people, places, or things they value. For example, they may choose a special animal or a scene of their family doing something meaningful together.



5. Some Amate paintings include a painted frame. Give your child the option to draw a frame or not.
6. Encourage your child to draw in pencil, using simple representations, bold outlines, and shapes. Suggest they add background details, like plants or animals.
7. Invite your child to go over final lines with a black marker.
8. Now it's time to paint. Encourage your child to add fun, bright colors.

HELPFUL TIP: When discussing your child's art, minimize value-based judgments like "good" and "pretty." Instead, inspire deeper self-reflection by asking open-ended questions and using phrases like "I wonder" and "I notice."

Discussion Questions

- ✧ Tell me about your painting.
- ✧ In what ways are your images pleasing or meaningful to you? How are they similar to or different from what's important to the Nahua and Otomi Amate painters?
- ✧ I wonder, what feeling does your painting convey? What colors or details do you see that give it that feeling?
- ✧ I wonder, what might someone learn about what's meaningful to you, just by looking at your painting?

Feeling Friends

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Emotions are often experienced as body sensations, thoughts, and impulses. By giving emotions a form through color, texture, and shape, we transform them into something we can actually see and interact with. Add a face and personality of its own and suddenly emotions (even unpleasant ones) can become our friends.

It's important to be friendly with feelings, including challenging ones. All feelings are part of being human and will visit us off and on throughout our lives. The sooner children learn how to befriend feelings, the easier a time they'll have managing them. Being friendly gives children perspective so they can both listen to and influence their feelings. Being friendly toward feelings also helps children practice kindness toward themselves.

Use this activity with your child in an emotionally charged moment, when their persistent feelings won't let up, or after a meltdown to help them get distance from their feelings and regain control over themselves again.

Materials: Drawing paper (any paper works), drawing utensils (colored pencils, markers, or crayons)

1. Educate children that all emotions are part of being human. Even though some emotions are desirable and others challenging, avoid labeling emotions as "good" or "bad." Instead, practice talking about feelings as friends or visitors.
2. Notice a feeling your child has had recently. Say, "I notice a big feeling is visiting you right now. I wonder what it would look like." Or ask, "Do you remember when worry was visiting before school this morning? What color do you think worry would be? What shape?"
3. Invite your child to use colors, lines, and shapes to draw their emotion. Provide options such as drawing a character, animal, blob, simple shape, or scribble.

4. Ask your child if they'd like to add a face, arms, or legs if they haven't already done so. It's okay if they don't.
5. Say, "Let's get to know your Feeling Friend." Suggest drawing environmental details like speech balloons or thought bubbles, where it lives, what it eats, and other Feeling Friends it likes to hang out with.

HELPFUL TIP: Anger isn't necessarily a monster or volcano. Happiness isn't always a rainbow or sunshine. Avoid the common mistake of guiding children toward frequently recommended metaphors. Allow children to create their own.

Discussion Questions

- ☀ I wonder what your Feeling Friend would say to you. What might your Feeling Friend need?
- ☀ What would your Feeling Friend rather be doing if they weren't working so hard at getting your attention?
- ☀ I wonder, what would you say to your Feeling Friend? What advice or reassurance can you give them?
- ☀ Where can you ask your Feeling Friend to wait for now, so you're free to do other things?

Matchbox Wishes

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

When others are mean or dismissive, it's easy to get trapped in feelings of anger and hurt. Developing a kinder mindset toward the offender helps us feel better and move on. Secretly sending wishes for happiness, health, and peace increases pleasant emotions, fosters forgiveness, and makes us more accepting of ourselves. After a difficult encounter, use this activity to cultivate kind feelings in children toward others and themselves.

Materials: An emptied matchbox or other tiny box (e.g., jewelry, mints), colorful paper, scissors, glue (hot glue works best), miscellaneous trinkets, paper, pen

1. Discuss how making good wishes for a difficult person can counter negativity (even when keeping a physical distance is necessary). Identify times it's helpful to offer kind wishes to ourselves.
2. Assist with cutting pieces of colorful paper to glue outside and inside the matchbox. Scraps from paper bags or newsprint work.
3. Invite your child to select trinkets (like beads, buttons, a spare key) to glue onto their box or put inside.
4. Discuss kind wishes your child would like to add, like "May you be happy, safe, peaceful, and healthy."
5. Write wishes small enough that your child can cut them out, roll them up, and place them inside their matchbox.
6. Gift Matchbox Wishes to spread joy or keep nearby as a reminder to counter negativity with kindness.

HELPFUL TIP: Practice sending kind wishes before bed. Ask, "Who could use some kind wishes today?" Invite your child to think of that person while you, or they, read their Matchbox Wishes.



Armored Animals

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

When we help others feel protected, it empowers us to feel safer and more confident, too. When your child imagines that their stuffed animals or dolls feel scared, sad, or helpless, how does your child support them? This activity puts your child in the expert role to help their stuffed friends through tough or vulnerable times by making armor needed to deal with fears, loneliness, or other struggles. Your child will benefit as well.

Materials: Stuffed animal or doll, "armor" materials (paper bag, cardboard, aluminum foil), string, tape, scissors

1. Invite your child to select a stuffed animal that feels vulnerable and needs your child's help. Perhaps it's an animal that misses them when they go to school or one that's afraid of the dark.
2. Discuss what the animal needs to feel safe, like a breastplate, shin guards, a helmet, or shield. How will each item help?
3. Brainstorm with your child ways to create stuffed animal armor. For example, cut holes in a paper bag for the head and arms, cut two cardboard squares and then attach them with string to the torso, or wrap aluminum foil around the legs and arms.
4. Let your child experiment and problem-solve. Assist as needed.
5. Talk about how the stuffed animal or doll feels about the situation and their protector (your child) now that they're protected.

HELPFUL TIP: Children often work through personal feelings by projecting them onto playthings and creative outlets. Although it's okay to inquire about your child's own vulnerable feelings, it may not be necessary.

Imagination Clay

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Nowadays, time is often structured for kids. Even play has become instructed. From school to sports and video games, kids are told what to do and how to do it. Making something out of nothing, meandering, and experimenting help exercise innovation and problem-solving skills. In this activity, it's time for caregivers to step back and marvel at what kids can do on their own.

Materials: Soft clay material (Play-Doh, Plasticine, or homemade salt dough works), sculpting tools (toothpicks, fork, rolling pin, cookie cutters)

1. Protect surfaces with paper bags, waxed paper, or a paper plate.
 2. Explain that your child can use the clay and tools however they want. There are no instructions.
 3. Take a moment to consider your long-term parenting goals. What skills or characteristics do you want your child to develop: self-sufficiency, confidence, persistence, creativity, flexibility, kindness, willingness to learn from mistakes?
 4. Watch your child's creative process. In what ways do you see your child exercising these skills or characteristics already? Do they dive right in? Confidence. Do they work hard at sticking two pieces together? Persistence. Do they make something for you? Kindness.
- Highlight your child's strengths by making observations aloud, like "I see you working hard to roll that out. You don't give up!"

HELPFUL TIP: Avoid giving suggestions when kids get stuck. Instead, model the process of working through creative blocks: "I don't know what to do either. I just start rolling and see what happens."

Tiny Worlds

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Although we can't control every outcome in life, we can certainly influence them. Our actions have consequences, some pleasant and others unpleasant. Knowing that our choices matter increases our motivation to choose wisely. It also helps us realize our effect on others. Use this activity to help children exercise their power to shape the world around them. They'll enjoy how that ability can positively impact others and themselves.

Materials: Natural objects (e.g., rocks, sticks, bark, leaves, flowers, pine cones, dirt, grass, water)

1. Invite your child to discover signs of insect life outside. If they can't locate roly-polies, ants, or other creatures, invite your child to use their imagination. Guide your child to respect nature by using observation only and leaving beings in their natural environment.
2. Encourage your child to build a Tiny World for insects, squirrels, fairies, or other creatures using natural objects.
3. Their world may resemble buildings, ponds, and roads, or it may not look like anything recognizable.
4. Ask your child to talk through their ideas and explore their thoughts about what the creatures need and how they're meeting those needs.
5. Comment on choices that make a positive impact like being patient or gentle. Ask your child how their actions impact creatures' needs and feelings.
6. Reflect on destructive or rough actions. Ask about the impact of roughness on creatures. Wonder, "What outcome would you prefer?"

HELPFUL TIP: If children act excessively destructive or rough, comment that it looks like a breaking day, not a building day. Suggest alternatives like stacking and knocking over boxes or smooshing clay.

Friendly Forts

Time Needed: 20 Minutes

Fort building is a common kid pastime, yet few families realize its usefulness as a self-regulation strategy. Forts help kids rehearse balancing connection and time alone. Forts help kids feel protected from overstimulation and a sometimes chaotic world. They also help kids practice letting people in, how much, and when. Read on to learn how to maximize the benefits of building forts.

Materials: Large cardboard box (or furniture), blankets, sheets, pillows, paper, coloring utensils, paper towel roll, shoebox

1. When your child comes home agitated or is having an off day, suggest building a fort. Explain that forts help keep out stuff we need a break from and let in what makes us feel better.
2. Help your child make a fort using furniture, boxes, and sheets. Fill it with feel-good items like books, pillows, stuffed animals, or drawing supplies.
3. Ask what your child would like to keep out. It can be literal (no parents, no homework) or conceptual (no bad vibes). What will they allow in (e.g., snacks and love)?
4. Invite your child to make, decorate, and post "welcome" and "not welcome" signs.
5. Offer supplies to make a telescope out of a paper towel roll to watch for intruders and a shoebox mailbox to invite friendly exchanges.

HELPFUL TIP: Be a friendly visitor or leave mail to help your child reengage with daily tasks. Make homework a "special delivery" package or put a formal invite to dinner in their mailbox.

Apology Paths

Time Needed: 15 Minutes

Apologizing after a disagreement isn't about admitting guilt; it's about making repairs and reconnecting. Yet, sincere apologies can be difficult to give, especially when we feel angry or guilty. The next time your child has an argument, use this activity to help them walk the path of apologies.

Materials: "Stepping-stones" (blocks, pillows, or blankets), paper, writing utensil

1. Explain that repairing a relationship can be as tricky as moving across the room without touching the floor. It requires problem solving, flexibility, and courage.
2. Together, build a stepping-stone path using pillows, blankets, or cardboard.
3. Ask your child to reflect on a recent conflict and consider how difficult this Apology Path will be. Invite your child to incorporate the difficulty level in their setup.
4. Write the following phrases on different pieces of paper as prompts:
 - ☀ How to say, "I'm sorry."
 - ☀ What I did.
 - ☀ How the other person might feel.
 - ☀ How to make it better.
5. Invite your child to place prompts along the path in any order. Give examples of answers.
6. Challenge your child to carefully complete their path, answering each prompt when they arrive at it.

HELPFUL TIP: Arguing siblings can work together, starting on opposite ends of the room and joining paths somewhere in the middle.

Confident Coil Pots

Time Needed: 25 Minutes

Bodies come in many shapes, sizes, abilities, and colors. Sometimes we like the body we have. Other times we forget to appreciate all that it allows us to do. In this activity, you'll guide your child in thinking about ways their own body may frustrate or disappoint them at times, and how that same body can make them feel happy, strong, and confident.

Materials: Soft clay material (Play-Doh, Plasticine, or homemade salt dough works), paper plate (or cardboard)

1. Demonstrate rolling clay into long, snake-like pieces.
2. Encourage your child to roll snakes of different thicknesses. Coil some into small, snail-like spirals. Roll different-size balls.
3. Place a flat, circular piece of clay on the paper plate. This is the base. Demonstrate coiling a snake around it.
4. Invite your child to work layer by layer, building up walls by adding coils.
5. Invite your child to arrange a layer of balls or snail spirals. Attach a coil on top. Continue layering.
6. Discuss how different shapes and sizes make the pot interesting. Draw parallels to differences in people. Use building blunders as an entry point to discuss how people may feel when their bodies don't work or look how they want.

HELPFUL TIP: Consider using a score-and-slip technique to help layers stick. First, make scratches in surfaces that resist sticking. Then, glue the layers together with a water-clay mixture.

Favorite Stuff Still Life

Time Needed: 15 Minutes

We might not realize it, but we're surrounded by stuff that can help us cope with stress. Soothing scents, textures, sounds, and tastes signal the brain that we're okay, even if things feel tough. With this activity, your child will develop a menu of self-soothing items to call upon in distressing times, as an alternative to bothering siblings or as a fun way to bust boredom.

Materials: Paper, writing utensil, wooden blocks or cardboard boxes (optional), camera

1. Explain that a still life is a drawing or photograph of everyday objects. Your child will gather special and soothing items for their still life.
2. Together, write a scavenger hunt list. Add items related to the senses, e.g., things that sound nice, smell good, feel soft, taste yummy, look beautiful.
3. Add items that evoke pleasant feelings, e.g., things that make your child smile and feel relaxed, playful, comfy.
4. Challenge your child to collect all items. Some delight at racing a timer. Others prefer to take their time.
5. Invite your child to arrange the items artistically for photographing. Optionally, use blocks or boxes to create levels, shelves, or frames for items.
6. Provide a camera for your child to photograph their still life composition.



HELPFUL TIP: For children who struggle with transitions, do a quick, one-item scavenger hunt between activities or before heading out the door. The chosen soothing item can accompany them to the next task.

Lasting Impressions

Time Needed: 15 Minutes

We can feel connected to loved ones, even when we're apart. That's because we make impressions on each other. It's like a shell leaving a fossil imprint on a rock. The rock is changed forever by that shell's presence, even after the shell is gone. In this activity, your child will make their own impressions so they can feel close to loved ones, even when they're not together.

Materials: Textured materials (leaves, coins, shells), soft clay material (Play-Doh, Plasticine, or homemade salt dough works), rolling pin (optional), cookie cutters

1. Invite your child to gather natural and household objects to make clay impressions.
2. Together, roll or pat clay into flat pancakes of different sizes. Give your child the option to cut out hearts or other shapes.
3. Invite them to gently, yet firmly, press different objects into the flattened clay like a stamp. Lift the object up to observe the impression.
4. Discuss ways people leave impressions on each other: memories, sayings, shared values, ways they've inspired us, lessons we've learned from them, how they make us feel about ourselves.
5. With permission, experiment with making impressions on each other's clay with an object or thumbprint.
6. Create lasting impressions with baked salt dough or air-dry clay. Optionally, invite children to paint their impressions once hardened.

HELPFUL TIP: Children who struggle with separation can benefit from keeping a coin-sized impression of your thumb with them. They can rub their thumb in your imprint, feeling your connection when you're apart.

Messy Emotion Metamorphosis

Time Needed: 15 Minutes

Clay offers lots of ways to work through emotions. It changes shape! Kids can move and stretch clay in ways that mimic how emotions feel in their bodies. Clay holds form, giving kids a way to create symbols and learn more about their emotions. Clay is reworkable. As feelings change, so can clay-play. In this activity, your child will experience each of these benefits while watching the metamorphosis of their own emotions.

Materials: Soft clay material (Play-Doh, Plasticine, or homemade salt dough work), toothpicks

1. Protect surfaces with paper bags, waxed paper, or a paper plate.
2. Discuss safety expectations when kids have big feelings: No throwing. Clay stays on the table or in hands. Invite your child to experiment.
3. Say, "I wonder what your emotion *feels* like? Does it squeeze, stretch, pound, or smooch?" Invite your child to demonstrate. Mirror movements with your own clay.
4. Ask, "What does your emotion *look* like? An animal, creature, blob, or shape?" Toothpicks can sculpt details or be added to the figure.
5. Ask if your child is ready to transform their figure. If so, say, "Metamorphosis!" and return to step 3.
6. Guide your child to repeat steps 3 to 5 as many times as desired: Smooch, roll, pound. Sculpt. Metamorphosis! Squeeze, twist, fold. Sculpt. Metamorphosis!

HELPFUL TIP: If your active child throws clay, offer safe gross-motor alternatives. Go outside. Provide a box to throw clay into. Or remove clay and turn to chapter 4 for movement activities.