Art Therapy Activities

Self-Care: Simple Prompts to Express Your Feelings

Art therapy activities use drawing, painting, collage and other art making to help you notice and express what you feel. The American Art Therapy Association describes art therapy as a mental health profession in which art making happens within a relationship with a trained art therapist. These simple prompts borrow that idea for use at home. They are not a substitute for working with an art therapist. You do not need any art skill, and there is no wrong way to do them.

1 Before you start

- **Use what you have.** Plain paper, pencils, crayons, markers, old magazines and glue are enough.
- **Set a time.** Ten to twenty minutes is plenty for one prompt.
- **Focus on making it, not on how it looks.** Nobody needs to see it unless you want them to.
- **Go gently.** If a prompt brings up too much, stop and choose a calmer one.

2 Six prompts to try

Prompt	What to do
Feelings in color	Choose a color, line or shape for each feeling you have today, and fill the page with them.
Scribble and find	Draw a loose scribble with your eyes closed. Then look for a shape or picture in it and color it in.
A safe place	Draw a place, real or imagined, where you feel calm and safe. Add what you would see, hear and smell there.
Where I feel it	Draw a simple outline of a body and color the places where you feel stress, calm or other feelings.
The bridge	Draw a bridge from where you are now to where you want to be. What is on each side, and what is underneath?
What matters to me	Cut pictures and words from old magazines that show what matters to you, and glue them into a collage.

Why does this work? *Art gives a feeling a shape when words are hard to find, and looking at what you made can make it easier to talk about. In one small study of 39 adults, 45 minutes of art making lowered the stress hormone cortisol in about three out of four people, whatever their art experience.*

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 **Make your own**

The prompt I chose:

Draw, color or glue here

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4 Look back at your art

What do you notice first when you look at it?

What feelings or memories came up while you made it?

If your art could speak, what would it say?

One thing I want to remember from this:

Art can stir up strong feelings. If it brings up memories that feel too big, take a break and talk to someone you trust. A credentialed art therapist (look for ATR or ATR-BC after their name) can guide this work safely. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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