

# MINDFULNESS



## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

- Reacting vs. Responding – Increasing awareness to provide choice in the next step.<sup>2</sup>
- Regulating to the nervous system<sup>2</sup> which effects emotional and physical symptoms.
- Often involves breath awareness or regulation (helping balance parasympathetic & sympathetic nervous system).<sup>1, 2</sup>
- Practices focus & attention (gets stronger over time).<sup>1, 2</sup>

## HELPFUL LITERATURE

1. Lyman, G. H., Greenlee, H., Bohlke, K., Bao, T., DeMichele, A. M., Deng, G. E., Fouladbakhsh, J. M., Gil, B., Hershman, D. L., Mansfield, S., Mussallem, D. M., Mustian, K. M., Price, E., Rafte, S., & Cohen, L. (2018). Integrative therapies during and after breast cancer treatment: ASCO endorsement of the SIO clinical practice Guideline. *Journal of Clinical Oncology: official journal of the American Society of Clinical Oncology*, 36(25), 2647–2655. <https://doi.org/10.1200/JCO.2018.79.2721>
2. Pieczynski, J. (2021). How Mindfulness Meditation Can Help Cancer Survivors Cope with Stress. American Institute for Cancer Research. Accessed 5/18/21 <https://www.aicr.org/news/how-mindfulness-meditation-can-help-cancer-survivors-cope-with-stress/>
3. Kwekkeboom, K. L., Cherwin, C. H., Lee, J. W. & Wanta, B. (2010). Mind-body treatments for the pain-fatigue-sleep disturbance symptom cluster in persons with cancer. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 39(1), 126–138. doi:10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2009.05.022

## TIPS & TRICKS

- Help set realistic expectations for participants to build confidence and success:
  - There is no wrong or right way to practice meditation and mindfulness.
  - The goal of meditation/mindfulness is to be present, non-judgmentally. This is hard!
  - Focus on just noticing; while change is not the goal, it is often the outcome.
  - An empty mind is impossible; distractions are expected – they are part of the practice.
  - These are skills to practice and cultivate – they can be helpful with strong emotions/crisis, but most effective when practiced in times of calm.
- Encourage eyes closed or a soft gaze based on comfort. The intention is to turn the focus inward.
- Encourage grounded posture – Feet flat on the ground; head, neck and spine aligned and supported by chair – laying down may also be appropriate.
- Participant comfort is priority – give permission to alter any suggestions or instructions you provide that feel bad or painful for the participant.

## FACILITATION NOTES

- **Overall:** Be aware of your own physical and emotional experience as you prepare. Invite yourself to settle in before you begin. Allow there to be a soothing rise and fall to the intonation to your voice, with variations in the tone to keep the audience engaged. Pacing should be slow. Practice cueing or offering a sentence of the script, then pausing to allow yourself to settle back into your own body. The more you practice, the easier this back and forth will become.
- **Individual Intervention:** These interventions can be offered in brief clinic interactions or in traditional counseling sessions. You can also provide recordings/links for individuals to be used in clinic/infusion or at home.
- **Group Intervention:** All of these interventions can be facilitated in a small or large group setting. They are a great way to open or close a group as well (i.e., noticing the thoughts, emotions, sensations, and/or the breath).

# MINDFULNESS



## INTERVENTION IDEAS

### 5 Finger Breathing

A simple and accessible way to ground by practicing mindfulness and breathwork.

- **Instructions:** Hold one hand out. With your other hand, trace each finger up as you breathe in and trace each finger down as you breathe out. Repeat by going in reverse on the same hand.
  - **Variations:**
    - If you have a hard time with breathing this can be done without syncing the breath and just by focusing on the sensation of tracing the hand.
    - For hand neuropathy or skin sensitivities, visually trace your fingers slowly as you breathe.
    - For deeper practice work toward lengthening the exhale (for example, breathe in for a count of 4 and out for a count of 6 or 8).

### Loving Kindness Meditation

Allows one to foster and connect with unconditional kindness toward all. Literature supports that loving-kindness meditations (7–20 min) can decrease anxiety, pain, and improve self-compassion. \*Full script available: <https://www.lifewithcancer.org/aosw-2023-io-handouts/>\*

- **Instructions:** Begin by sending love and caring toward yourself and move outward from there to practice cultivating loving-kindness and attention toward the subject of focus.
  - **Base components:** With eyes closed, focus your attention on the heart. You can also place a hand there if it helps. Hold yourself in your heart and send yourself loving-kindness by repeating “May I be well, may I be content, may I be peaceful” three times.
  - Repeat this process by holding in your heart and send loving-kindness to each of the following:
    - Expand your awareness and hold in your heart, someone you care for deeply: “May you be well, may you be happy, may you be peaceful.” x 3
    - Expand your awareness and hold in your heart, a neutral person you know: “May you be well, may you be happy, may you be peaceful.” x 3
    - Expand your awareness and hold in your heart, somebody you’re having difficulties with at the moment: “May you be well, may you be happy, may you be peaceful.” x 3
    - Expand your awareness and hold in your heart, all life forms across the world “May we be well, may we be content, may we be peaceful.” x 3
  - Slowly bring your awareness back to your breath and your surroundings, and then slowly blink your eyes open.
  - **Variations:** Following the above structure this short script can be adapted using a variety of people or phrases that specifically apply to your client/patient. Choosing the phrases can be done collaboratively.
    - Suggestions of people to hold: neighborhood, state, country, continent, the universe/all life.
    - Suggestions for phrases: May I/you be healthy, whole, well, light, happy, contented, peaceful, strong, safe, protected, free from inner and outer harm, experience well-being and ease.

### Box Breathing

A simple, accessible and grounding breathing technique.

- **Instructions:**
  1. Breathe out slowly, releasing all the air from your lungs.
  2. Breathe in through your nose as you slowly count to four in your head.
  3. Hold your breath for a count of four.
  4. Exhale for another count of four.
  5. Hold your breath again for a count of four.
  6. Repeat for three to four rounds.

# MINDFULNESS



## INTERVENTION IDEAS

### Extended Exhalation

This breathing technique emphasizes the exhale portion of the breath, where the body naturally relaxes, therefore it can be a relaxing breath. Longer exhales send the message to the brain that it is safe to relax and triggers the physiological process to facilitate this.

- **Instructions:** Breathe in and out slowly, gradually extending your exhale as you feel comfortable until it gets twice as long as your inhale. Start with breathing in for a count of 4 and out for a count of 5, once this feels comfortable after a few breathes, extend your exhale to a count of 6. Continue with 4 – 6 breathing and then deepen your breathing to a count of 4 on the inhale and a count on 7 on the exhale as you feel comfortable. Continue this as you attempt to reach a count of 8 on the exhale. It is important to slowly increase the length of your exhale, particularly if you are a beginner. If you feel you need to gasp for air, you've gone too far. Just go back one step and stay there. It is okay if you can't do a full 8 count exhale when you first try – over time you can work toward expanding your exhale.

### Just Noticing – 5-4-3-2-1

This mindfulness technique is good to help connect to the present – particularly if you have trouble with guided meditation or breathing exercises, or have ruminating thoughts. Be mindful of using in potentially triggering settings.

- **Instructions:** Guide the participant to non-judgmentally acknowledge:
  - FIVE things you see around you.
  - FOUR things you can touch around you.
  - THREE things you hear.
  - TWO things you can smell.
  - ONE thing you can taste.

## RESOURCES

### Mindfulness Apps:

- *Healthy Minds* (free): <https://hminnovations.org/meditation-app>
- *Insight Timer* (free): <https://insighttimer.com/>
- *Headspace* (paid): <https://www.headspace.com/>
- *Calm* (paid): <https://www.calm.com/>

### Free Meditation Recordings:

- *UCSD Center for Mindfulness* (extensive library of free guided meditations) – <https://cih.ucsd.edu/mindfulness/guided-audio-video>
- *UM Rogel Cancer Center* (library of guided meditations sorted by need/symptom) – <https://www.rogelcancercenter.org/podcasts/guided-imagery-podcasts>
- *Inova Life with Cancer* (small library of meditations) – <https://www.lifewithcancer.org/category/audios/>

### Free Virtual Programs:

- *Smith Center for Healing and the Arts* – [www.smithcenter.org](http://www.smithcenter.org)
- *Inova Life With Cancer* – [www.lifewithcancer.org](http://www.lifewithcancer.org)
- Check out your local cancer center or support organization

# EXPRESSIVE WRITING



## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

- Practices focus and attention (like mindfulness) with regular journal practice.<sup>1</sup>
- Developing the observational part of the brain (observer vs. actor).<sup>1</sup>
  - Neuroplasticity/Experience Dependent – the ability of the brain to change its structure in response to experience/accumulated experience.<sup>1</sup>
  - Neuroplasticity is bivalent – what do you want to reinforce considering the brain's inherent negativity bias?<sup>1</sup>
- Interpersonal neurobiology – making meaning of your story.<sup>1</sup>
- Benefits: improves physical health, general functioning, and reduces anxiety & depression.<sup>3</sup>

## HELPFUL LITERATURE

1. Expressive Writing: Counseling and Healthcare, Edited by Kate Thompson and Kathleen Adams, 2015
2. Journal to the Self: Twenty –Two Paths to Personal Growth, Kathleen Adams (1st edition 1990, most recent addition 2021)
3. Magsamen, S., & Ross, I. (2023). Your brain on art: How the arts transform us. New York: Random House.

## TIPS & TRICKS

- Create a container: Set a defined time to write for each prompt.
- Flip out rule: Encourage participants to check in and if they feel they are going to flip out while writing, stop and put the pen down.
- Size matters: Participants can use a small piece of paper if feeling overwhelmed or bigger if they want to be more expansive.
- Neuropathy: Consider purchasing pens that easily flows across the page (ex: friction pens).
- Consider structure: Lined paper provides structure if participant feels out of control; unlined paper allows for more freedom and less restriction.
- No Judgement: Encourage participants to just write without editing – do not worry about spelling, grammar, punctuation, or clarity/content of thought.

## FACILITATION NOTES

### Overall:

- You are encouraged to add a reflection write to the end of writing prompts to strengthen the skill of being an observer and changing neural pathways. After participants finish the main write, give the writer 2 additional minutes to write about what they noticed about their initial write.
- A brief mindfulness exercise can be added before writing (i.e., noticing the thoughts, emotions, sensations, and/or the breath, or guided imagery) to enhance the experience.

### Individual Intervention Notes:

- In a counseling session writing exercises can be used as an opening or closing, or in an effort to illicit insight. They can also be offered as “homework” between sessions.
- In a clinic setting you can offer this as a grounding exercise, you can provide paper and a clipboard, or you can bring a small journal. It can also be something that they do in between visits that you discuss when they are back in clinic.

# EXPRESSIVE WRITING



## FACILITATION NOTES

### Group Intervention Notes:

- All of these interventions can be facilitated in a small or large group setting.
- After writing, you can facilitate group sharing/processing. We encourage the following ground rules:
  - This is a safe place where all can share personal experiences and feelings. Please keep everything shared in this group confidential.
  - Respect each other's unique experiences and do not judge them or their writing.
  - Share from your own personal experience.
  - Participate to the level that we are comfortable. All sharing is voluntary.
  - **GROUP SHARING RULES:**
    - For sharers: Voluntary sharing only – only a line or two.
    - For listeners: Practice compassionate listening and focus response on your experience of hearing the reader's words: How did X's writing resonate with you?

## INTERVENTION IDEAS

### Captured Moments

- **Instructions:** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Choose a moment you don't want to forget and write about it in full detail. Immerse yourself in the memory of the moment and try to capture the full sensory experience; describe every aspect of the moment in as much detail as possible. Why is it meaningful? Why this memory? If facilitating this process, you can support it with a guided imagery meditation or start that brings awareness to all five senses.

### Cluster Writing

- **Instructions:** Set a timer for 5 minutes. Pick a meaningful topic that you want to explore: cancer, values, strengths, wellness, etc. Write this topic in the center of a piece of paper and allow any associated topics or ideas that come up to spread out across the page in any direction. You can also go back and branch out to more central topics. Work outward until it feels that possibilities are exhausted or the words are not feeling as random. Then begin to write about the ideas generated in the cluster. Oftentimes clarity and insight follow.

### Sprint Writes

- **Instructions:** Pick one prompt (options below) and set a timer for 3 to 5 min for writing. The goal is to write fast and continuously so that you don't think about grammar, mistakes or editing while writing.
  - **Sprint Write Prompt Ideas:**
    - How is the weather inside me today?
    - Pick a favorite quote, song lyric or poem.
    - Write in four words only (Give time between each of the below prompts):
      - Your ideal spot for recharging
      - A happy time
      - What's most important to you
    - ***Holding Both:*** Increase awareness that nothing is black or white, all good or all bad. Every situation has positive and negative components. Prompt:  
*I embrace my shadow self. Shadows give depth and dimension to my life. I believe in embracing my duality, in learning to let darkness and light, peacefully co-exist, as illumination.* – Jaeda Dewalt

# EXPRESSIVE WRITING



## INTERVENTION IDEAS

### Sprint Writes (*continued*)

- *Courage*: It often takes courage to do both big and small things each day. Prompt:  
Courage doesn't always roar.  
Sometimes courage is the little voice  
At the end of the day that says;  
I'll try again tomorrow.  
– Mary Anne Radmacher
- *What Really Matters*: Brings awareness to what matters most and clarifying how one wishes to live life by focusing on values-based decision making. Prompt:  
You can't simultaneously  
Do it all and  
Do it well.  
But you can choose to  
Cultivate what matters  
Right where you are.
- *Another Path*: The lives we are living may be working perfectly for us, and at times, they may not. When we find ourselves living lives – or moments – that don't align with who we are, our mental health suffers, sometimes so does our physical health. Prompt:  
“I can't see a way through,”  
Said the boy.  
“Can you see your next step?”  
“Yes.”  
“Just take that,” said the horse.  
– Charlie Mackesy
- *Problem Solving*: People face problems—usually, multiple problems—throughout each day. The ability to solve problems is a basic life skill and is essential to our lives. Prompt:  
I am only one; but still I am one.  
I cannot do everything; but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything,  
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.  
– Edward Hale

## RESOURCES

### Books:

- *Expressive Writing: Counseling and Healthcare*, Edited by Kate Thompson and Kathleen Adams, 2015
- *Journal to the Self: Twenty –Two Paths to Personal Growth*, Kathleen Adams (1st edition 1990, most recent addition 2021)

### Free Virtual Programs:

- *Smith Center for Healing and the Arts* – [www.smithcenter.org](http://www.smithcenter.org)
- *Inova Life With Cancer* – [www.lifewithcancer.org](http://www.lifewithcancer.org)
- Check out your local cancer center or support organization

# CREATIVITY



## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

- Goal: Offer a space to use a different side of the brain and come into the present moment.<sup>3</sup>
- Benefit to both structured and unstructured art activities. You do not need any specialized skills or previous experience in the art to reap benefits.<sup>3</sup>
- Fosters a meditative state to help self-regulate physiology and offers a pathway to emotions that support neuroplasticity.<sup>3</sup>
- Reduces stress, anxiety and depression, fatigue, improves quality of life and coping, aids emotional processing and construction of new narratives. Leads to physiological changes, including decreases in blood pressure and heart rate, decreases in stress hormones, increases in immune activity and reductions in inflammation.<sup>1, 3</sup>

## HELPFUL LITERATURE

1. World Health Organization. (2019). Health evidence network synthesis report: What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review.  
<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.pdf>
2. Puig, A., Lee, S. M., Goodwin, L., & Sherrard, P. A. D. (2006). The efficacy of creative arts therapies to enhance emotional expression, spirituality, and psychological well-being of newly diagnosed Stage I and Stage II breast cancer patients: A preliminary study. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 33(3), 218–228.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2006.02.004>
3. Magsamen, S., & Ross, I. (2023). *Your brain on art: How the arts transform us*. New York: Random House.

## TIPS & TRICKS

- It is not about having something to hang on your wall (a product); it is about the process.
- Prepare materials in advance. You don't need fancy supplies for most interventions. Often a simple piece of paper and pen/pencil will work, though having basic supplies like markers, crayons, colored pencils and glue sticks/tape may allow for expanded creativity and invite a sense of play.
- This is not Art Therapy; we are utilizing art as a tool to focus, to encourage play and curiosity, and to provide a space for reflection and perspective taking.

## FACILITATION NOTES

- A brief mindfulness exercise can be added before writing (i.e., noticing the thoughts, emotions, sensations, and/or the breath, or guided imagery) to enhance the experience.
- You could add a reflection write to the end any exercise to strengthen neuroplasticity. After participants finish, give them 2 min to write about what they noticed about the experience/product.
- Engage in a conversation about the process of creating the project and ask open-ended questions to further reflection and insight. Be sure to ensure you are speaking from a non-judgmental (negative or positive), exploratory place. This can be harder than it seems!
- Invite participants to make an intentional choice about what they want to do with their creation. Do they want to take it with them; leave it in the room; throw it away; ball it up; rip it up? Facilitate a brief discussion about why they made this choice if appropriate.

### Individual Intervention Notes

- In a counseling session, creativity exercises can be used as an opening or closing, or in an effort to illicit insight. They can also be offered as “homework” between sessions.
- In a clinic setting you can offer this as a grounding exercise. You can provide the materials and a clipboard. It can also be offered as a self-directed intervention.



# CREATIVITY



## FACILITATION NOTES

### Group Intervention Notes

- All of these interventions can be facilitated in a small or large group setting.
- In a group setting, you can invite participants to share what they created or to reflect on what they created with the group. We encourage utilizing the following ground rules:
  - This is a safe place where all can share personal experiences and feelings. Please keep everything shared in this group confidential.
  - Respect each other's unique experiences and do not judge them or what they have created.
  - Share from your own personal experience.
  - Participate to the level that we are comfortable. All sharing is voluntary.
  - **GROUP SHARING RULES:**
    - For sharers: You may choose to share any aspect of what you created if you want to.
    - For listeners: Practice compassionate listening and focus response on your experience of hearing/seeing what the creator shared: How did what X shared resonate with you or touch your own experience?

## INTERVENTION IDEAS

### Mandala for Self-Awareness

Mandalas can be considered a container of safety. They are a visual form of meditation and can help you to focus inward. You may find insight, healing, and self-expression in a circular design which reflects your wholeness as a person (*exercise adapted from Ashmi Sheth*).

- **Instructions:** Print a large outline of a circle on a piece of paper or draw a large circle on a blank piece of paper using a compass, bowl, or freehand. Grab any drawing materials available to you (pens, pencils, crayons, markers). Find a comfortable sitting position and pay attention to your body posture. Take a moment to notice your breathing and aim to find a restful breath. Visually trace the outline of the circle and then gradually turn your focus to the center of the mandala. Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes and begin creating a mandala that illustrates a personal path or a road. You can start with a clear path in mind or let the path unfold as you go. (**Facilitator note:** *If people feel stuck, offer suggestions: as a person, in a specific role, as a professional, in relation to your health, etc...*).
- Once time is up or you have completed your mandala, look at it for a few seconds. Ask yourself some questions:
  - What made you draw what you have drawn?
  - Are you satisfied with your journey? (Not the quality of the drawing, but the content of it).
  - Does your drawing elicit positive or negative emotions?
  - If given a chance, what would you like to change in the drawing?
  - **OPTIONAL:** Now that you've explored this path, take 2 minutes to write down any observations that you have. You can write down sentences or simply note down "topics" or "words" that most closely represent a specific idea or quality.

### Emotion Wheel

This exercise encourages you to notice and name your feelings while exploring how they manifest and what you associate with each.

- **Instructions:** Draw a circle with 6 pie wedges on a piece of paper. Name 6 emotions you have felt in the last day or hour and write one in each wedge. Assign a color, symbol and/or drawing to each.





# CREATIVITY



## INTERVENTION IDEAS

### Drawing without Sight

This exercise allows you to tap into play and get out of structure/judgement. It is a good warm up exercise and can be meditative. It encourages you to get out of fight/flight or worry and to move to a more present playful space.

- **Instructions:** Grab a piece of paper and something to draw with. Play an instrumental song that is fairly well known or neutral (i.e., classical, nature/meditative, instrumental cover) and is approximately 3–4 minutes in length. Instruct participants to close their eyes and draw in any way they want while the music is playing. The goal is to keep the pen moving and to not look. **(Facilitator Note:** *Music may trigger associations, so it's possible someone may have a strong negative reaction to a song you choose. Encourage participants to stop if things feel too intense while drawing. When facilitating this exercise with an individual, you can offer them a choice of music).*

### New Perspective

This exercise encourages participants to shift their perspective and look at problems in a new way. It also illustrates that no problem is static or permanent in nature. Something new, interesting, or even beautiful can be created from a problematic situation.

- **Instructions:** Get two pieces of paper, pen/pencil or other drawing supplies, and a glue stick or tape. Use one piece of paper to create a drawing representing a worry that you have or a problem you are trying to solve. Set a time for 10 minutes to work on the drawing. When time is up, rip it up and repurpose it into a collage utilizing the second sheet of paper and glue/tape to give you a new perspective.

### Let Go/Hold On

This exercise encourages participants to actively think about their values and make decisions about what is important to keep in their life and what they want to begin to release.

- **Instructions:** Get 1–2 sheets of paper and something to write with. Trace your right hand on one sheet of paper and your left on the other sheet (or front and back of one sheet of paper). On one hand list or draw five things (on each finger) that you want to hold on to and on the other list or draw five things you want to let go of.

## RESOURCES

### Books:

- Magsamen, Susan; Ross, Ivy. *Your Brain on Art*. Random House Publishing Group.

### Free Virtual Programs:

- *Smith Center for Healing and the Arts* – [www.smithcenter.org](http://www.smithcenter.org)
- Check out your local cancer center or support organization

### Art Therapy:

- *AATA Art Therapist Locator* – <https://arttherapy.org/art-therapist-locator/>