

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan –Exploring Renewal & Personal Growth

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Photo by L. Fleming, S. Cray, M. Kirby, Project Gutenberg & Trust for the National Mall

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will explore plants & plant metaphors, relating them to their life experiences, personal renewal & growth.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Express thoughts re personal growth during session; use creative expression selecting plants as symbols for personal experiences (positive or negative)

Physical: Strengthen standing/walking endurance extending time in garden from previous outings

Psychological/Emotional: Explore ways for understanding & undertaking personal growth in the face of adversity or challenging life experiences

Sensory: Use self-expression discussing life's journey as a strategy for healing & coping

Social: Discuss life's unpredictability, adversities & resiliency with group

Materials

Plants – crocuses, daffodils, pussy willows, forsythia
Soil, containers, bulbs
Wipes, water



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials, plants & ideas. Determine setting for session – in garden or tabletop.
2. Facilitator begins session. For a garden location, the activity includes walking through the green space & stopping at specific spots to observe, touch, smell & discuss plant metaphors for springtime, renewal & rebirth looking for early season bloomers like daffodils, crocuses, tulips, and forsythia referencing (respectively) new beginnings, youthful gladness, declaration of love and anticipation (Difffenbaugh, 2011). Other metaphors can be shared & discussed using plants in the garden – warrior plants that rebound from bad weather, aloe's connection to healing, lavender meaning virtue.
3. For tabletop sessions, plants, cut & live (in containers) can substitute for the garden setting. Taking time to look & touch each plant, participants can explore plant metaphors sharing their life's experiences & looking for plants that resonate or symbolize hope, disadvantages, displeasure (upside down bouquet), or new life symbolized by cherry blossoms.
4. In either setting, planting a bulb in a container as a hands-on activity will allow participants to nurture a plant, promote the cycle of life (plant & human), identify something from the session that resonates with them, particularly rebirth & renewal.

5. Discussion, time for reflection & sharing their stories will allow participants an opportunity to express their journey - positive & not so positive (like real life), be in a safe space to share, build community with others who may have shared similar challenges of addiction, trafficking or bereavement. Participants should be encouraged to share their thoughts & feelings of renewal & possible personal growth inspired from the therapeutic session if they are willing.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Combining talk therapy and hands-on therapeutic horticulture activity can be effective for people who have experienced adversity in life - trauma, disadvantages, mental health or behavioral issues. The efficacy of these spring plant activities for interventions relating to emotional/behavioral/mental health domain particularly resonate when partnered with strategies for nurturing positive behaviors, embracing second chances, re-setting mood, or practicing positive horticultural leisure activities. Particularly meaningful in springtime, the activity can be delivered throughout the year with plants brought inside, forcing plants into bloom, walking through gardens at different times of the year identifying resiliency and for example, dormancy as periods before intensive growth. Many plant metaphors can be aligned with human behaviors.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Check for participant allergies or sensitivities to plants used in programs, avoiding toxic plants or ones that have thorns or sap (though these may be symbolic & appropriate for some populations).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Other plant-based activities can reinforce renewal and personal growth and be incorporated into the session: making daisy tiaras, forcing flowering of spring pussy willows, celebrating the season by decorating cookies with nasturtium blossoms, or developing an individualized flower language exploring their current feelings and hopes for the future (refer to *Old Farmer's Almanac*, 2019). Meanings attributed to plants can spark discussion: the ability to adapt (birch tree), justice (black-eyed Susan), enthusiasm (orange rose), friendship (ivy), appreciation for music (oats), fascination (asparagus foliage), or profit (cabbage).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Diffenbaugh, V. (2011). *The Language of Flowers*. New York: Ballantinebooks.

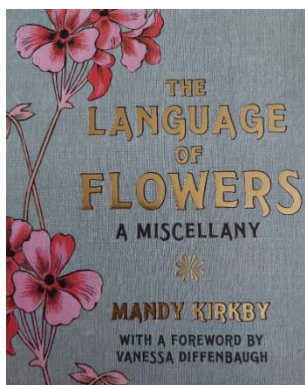
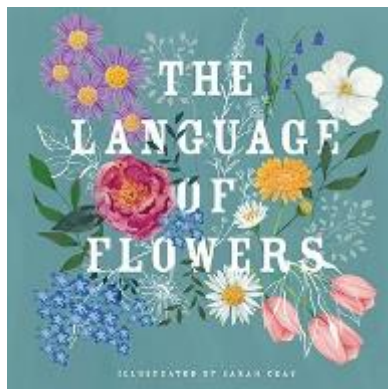
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Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.