

Activity: Herbs Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Meditation with Essential Oils

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Practicing meditation using plant-based essential oils or fragrances from plant materials.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn relaxation skills; identify plants that provide scents appropriate for calming

Physical: Calm body & mind through meditation & smelling of plant-based fragrances

Psychological/Emotional: Practice stress management technique; calm an anxious brain

Sensory: Practice sensory integration reacting appropriately to olfactory, auditory (music & verbal prompts) & other stimuli

Social: Practice appropriate (quiet) behavior in group setting

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

Materials

tissue or cloth pieces
essential oils:
relaxing-bergamot,
lavender, sandalwood,
geranium
refreshing-lemon, orange,
rosewood, geranium
stimulating-lemon,
lavender, peppermint,
rosemary
plant material substitutions:
rosemary, basil, thyme,
lemon balm, roses

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Select & set up quiet zone (room free of distractions).
2. Facilitator begins by demonstrating how to prepare cloth/tissues for participants placing 1-2 drops of essential oils on each with several separate fragrances for each person.
3. Moving through the different essential oil scented cloth samples, have participants sit in a comfortable position (floor, chairs, at tables) and guide them through smelling each sample. Begin with the lightest fragrance sample moving through to the strongest fragrance. Or create a rhythm from relaxing, refreshing, stimulating & concluding with relaxing again. Include time to sit quietly and inhale scents, with time between scents to breath the air without scents. Participants should be prompted to close their eyes, listen to soft music, and soft voice prompts to promote relaxation.
4. The use of meditation & guided imagery along with inhaling the scents can have a calming, relaxing effect. Explaining meditation & self-care strategies using natural scents as experienced in the session can inform participants for their personal use at home. Consider guided imagery suggestions like being outside on a sunny day, visiting the ocean, sitting in a canoe, or prepared scripts (Highstein, 2027).
5. Prompts like “relax your muscles, take deep breathes, shrug shoulders then relax, tighten facial muscles & release”, use parts of the body one at a time-tightening then releasing over a 15-12 minute duration will allow participants to relax, calm and smell different essential oil fragrances.
6. Conclude the session, getting up slowly, followed by a sharing period with questions like: “do you feel relaxed, what scent did you like best, would you do this on your own & should we include this in future sessions?”

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This therapeutic horticulture activity is appropriate for most populations where essential oils are allowed into facility. Most populations can benefit from learning relaxation techniques, this being one method involving scents from herbs. Conducting the meditation session in nature, outside can provide additional benefits. People who have experienced trauma may respond differently where relaxation, meditation, guided imagery and aromatherapy are used. Some sessions with this population may be better served by involving health professionals with specialized training (to prevent or anticipate re-triggering). Wellness populations find this activity calming, used as an opening, closing or primary TH activity. Combining meditation with scent can be effective for people with sensory processing challenges and where sensory integration of the 5 primary senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch) can be stimulated using various sensory prompts. As noted in the sampling of therapeutic goals listed above, treatment goals with people with sensory processing challenges – military and veterans, people with autism disorder, ADHD, OCD, learning disabilities— can be addressed across health domains during this type of activity.

A more focused use of sensory integration delivered by qualified occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists may be appropriate for participants.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Essential oils should be kept out of reach of participants other than the prepared scented tissue/cloth. Prior to activity, pre-determination of participant reaction to essential oils is recommended. Check with each facility; some facilities will not allow essential oils due to the possibility of them being ingested.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: If scent is too strong, dilute with water prior to application on cloth, dipping cloth into scented water. If using plant material, release scents by pressing/squeezing leaves. Use of music, especially nature themed music, can aid in relaxation. If attention span is limited, reduce the amount of time spent sitting/smelling quietly.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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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.

