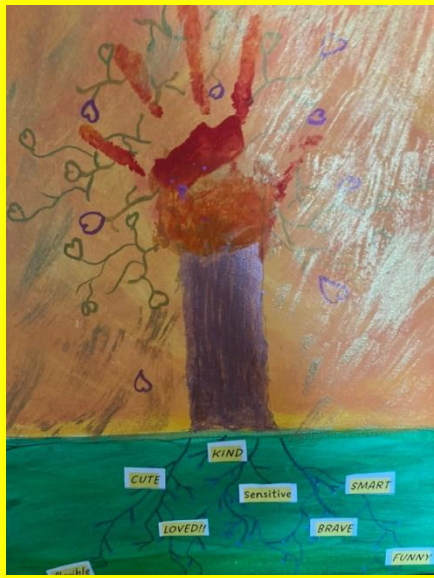


Activity: Creative Expression & Planting Goal: Cognitive Populations: Children/Youth

TH Activity Plan – Roots & Resiliency

Text by Christina G. Wilson, MSW, RSW

Photo by C. Wilson



Materials

Canvas, paints, brushes
Apron, gloves, wipes
Live sapling or shrub

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will paint 2 pieces of art where a tree symbolizes their roots.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Self-identify “roots” that grounds them for understanding this as a coping mechanism

Physical: Paint artwork of a tree

Psychological/Emotional: identify who loves and supports them across households and what makes them resilient

Sensory: Color and paint artwork using texture choices for visual & tactile experience

Social: Make 2 finished pieces of art– one for each home

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by ensuring that client is resonating/understanding the concept of grounding via their “roots” or personal strengths.
3. Client chooses a 11x7 canvas and paint options as part of process for feeling in control. Having a live hardy bush or tree sapling on hand can provide visual & psychological inspiration.
4. Facilitator uses guided visualization of the client’s tree. “If you could be a tree that weathers the storms of life what kind of tree would you be? How deep would your roots go? What kind of ground would you grow in? What would your branches look like? Where would your tree grow most healthy and happy (conditions). What would it take for your tree to stay strong and heal if a storm (big stressors) blows in”. Using a big screen tv mounted in the facilitator’s office for HD videos of trees and nature with birds singing and aromatherapy such a sweet grass will help engage the senses. To be most effective this guided visualization needs to be personalized to the client’s situation and works best as an activity woven into individual therapy work after the client has built comfort, trust, and familiarity with therapy.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Art therapy meets horticulture therapy can build resiliency awareness. This therapeutic activity was developed by clinician Christina G. Wilson, MSW, RSW to address and treat children and youth dealing with circumstances and challenges of living in two households. Discussing and painting a tree

symbolizing the individual's roots, sense of belonging and their reality of living in two households combines talk therapy with hands-on plant-themed experiential activity, these two techniques reinforcing each other.

Discussion of what is resiliency, how to foster resiliency and the possibility of life cycles and tree decline after planting can provide an opportunity to consider unexpected outcomes, changes clients may experience in their family relationships, disappointments about family ties, along with stresses experienced by all living things – plant and human. The importance of fostering resiliency is reviewed beautifully in Dr. Michael Ungar's work on his website and book (referenced below).

This therapeutic horticulture activity can be used with other populations who may be experiencing challenges related to family connections such as adoption, loss of family, breach of family relationships, foster care, newly combined families due to divorce/re-marriage or other. It has applications for others particularly for people who identify with the concept of being rooted in their personal strengths and supported by loved ones symbolized by tree branches. This activity has been powerfully healing for a range of people and circumstances.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitator can suggest families plant a live tree. If actual planting may occur post session, planting and care directions should be provided to families, along with encouragement for family supervision and support to help the new planting thrive. If the plant does not survive, this topic can be explored in a subsequent therapeutic session discussing and acknowledging that people can only do their best to work with nature and that death/disease is part of life.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Other options to extend this activity could include actual planting of a tree at the facility site. Suggesting families plant trees or shrubs at the client's home(s) may also be an option. Therapist/social worker participation of this at client's homes raises potential ethical issues, informed consent, confidentiality concerns and is not recommended.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Fleming, L. (2022). Guided imagery: A therapeutic technique. *Digging In* 8(2).

Pile, V., Williamson, G., Saunders, A., Holmes, EA., & Lau, JYF. (2021). Using imagery rescripting as an early intervention for depression in young people. *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 8(9): 836-852.

Ungar, M. (2019). *Change your world: The science of resilience and the true path to success*. Sutherland House Publishing.

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.