

Mindful Observation and Awareness

PROCEDURE: Chose an object or scene and imagine that you are viewing it for the very first time. Draw every aspect of it in detail, including how it makes you feel and how it arouses your senses. For example, you may choose to draw a flower, an orange, snow, a wooded forest, a lush park or garden, or the seashore.

BENEFITS: This exercise helps to facilitate relaxation, enhance concentration, and increase awareness of your surroundings and the beauty in our environment. It helps us look at the world with an attitude of openness, newness, and awe.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which details did you observe that you might have missed if you weren't fully engaged in this exercise?
2. Were you able to focus solely on the object or scene you were drawing?
3. How can mindfulness help you appreciate life and increase gratitude?
4. What is one way you can use your senses to make mundane chores and responsibilities less taxing?

The Sun as Imagery for Serenity

PROCEDURE: *Read the following guided imagery to group members while they sit in a comfortable position with their eyes closed. Then, ask clients to draw any feelings derived from the guided imagery experience, such as the sensations of healing, peace, or the warmth of the sun.*

“Imagine you are reclining in a soft hammock in a lush, lovely garden. It’s a warm, beautiful day, and you are feeling at peace. The birds are softly chirping, and there is a slight breeze. The fragrance of wild flowers and roses permeates the air. As you begin to drift into a light slumber, you can feel the soothing warmth of the sun emitting its rays down on you. The rays are slowly spreading through all parts of your body: your forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, neck, shoulders, back, arms, hands, fingers, chest, stomach, legs, feet, and toes. Feel the healing warmth and soothing comfort the sun provides. It envelops you in a cocoon of love and serenity. You can feel yourself healing and at peace with the world. Take a few more minutes to relax and take in this scenery, and when you are ready, you can come back to the room, open your eyes, and take a few deep breaths.”

BENEFITS: This guided imagery promotes stress reduction and self-soothing by allowing your mind to go to a place of comfort and healing. It is one of many relaxation techniques you can use to lessen anxiety and heal the psyche and soul.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How does your artwork depict the feelings you experienced while listening to the imagery?
2. Were you able to focus on what was being said or did you find yourself distracted?
3. Which part of the imagery did you find most soothing?
4. Do you think you will be able to use images in your artwork as visual cues to help reduce stress at home?

Spiritual Journey

PROCEDURE: Draw your spiritual journey. You may interpret your spiritual journey in any way you wish. Spirituality itself can involve a strong connection you have with nature, art, religion, or anything very special that brings you meaning and creates a special place in your heart and soul. In essence, it involves a sense of connection to something bigger than yourself and is a universal aspect of the human experience.¹²

You can symbolize your spiritual journey by depicting your life path, inner and outer self, or quest for understanding and awakening to the “real you.” It can also include a representation of the various beliefs you have or are contemplating, ways in which you are growing emotionally, problems and obstacles you are encountering, the process of understanding yourself and your environment, or your quest to find inner solace and peace with the world.

BENEFITS: Developing a connection with something larger than yourself can help bring you a sense of peace, hope, and acceptance, particularly in times of difficulty. By becoming acquainted with the beliefs that give you meaning, you can widen your view of yourself and the world and gain a greater understanding regarding the importance of perspective. It can also help you realize that you have the power of choice, which can motivate you to engage in actions that align with your beliefs.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What does your journey look like?
2. What message is your journey relaying to you?
3. What do you notice on your journey that is positive and/or negative?
4. How have you or will you cope with any bumps or roadblocks on your journey?
5. Is your journey long and drawn out? Is it a lifelong process?
6. What responsibility are you taking on this quest?
7. Will you accept help if needed?
8. Are you looking to transform yourself or your way of thinking in any way?
9. Are you gaining wisdom and knowledge?

Mindful Coloring Design

PROCEDURE: Create a coloring outline of a serene scene or comforting object that you can use as a coloring page. For example, you may choose to draw the outline of a beach scene, a flower, ocean waves, or any other tranquil scene that comes to mind. *The group leader will make copies of the outlines and put together a booklet containing all of the group members' work, which will be distributed during the next session. Each client will receive their own coloring book that they can use to use to reduce stress, focus, and be mindful.*

BENEFITS: Many people greatly enjoy filling in coloring outlines. They find it pleasant, relaxing, and it helps them distract from worries. Designing your own outlines makes the experience more creative and meaningful, and it aids in problem solving and abstract thinking as you work to develop your own designs. This exercise also enhances self-esteem as you are able to watch others relax and benefit from filling in *your own* unique outlines.

QUESTION FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How does your artwork convey a feeling of peace?
2. How do you feel about sharing your art with others?
3. How might focusing on your outline help you and/or others feel more tranquil?
4. In addition to engaging in art, what are some other ways you can achieve serenity (e.g., deep breathing, yoga)?

CLIENT RESPONSE:

Clients seemed to enjoy this project, and they were particularly pleased with the coloring pamphlet created and distributed to group members. Although filling in coloring outlines is not considered art therapy, the creative process that went into designing the outlines themselves is very healing and therapeutic. Many participants designed at least two outlines and wanted to work on more at home. The clients appeared gratified that they were being acknowledged for their artwork and contributing to other group members' enjoyment and well-being.

Sketching a Prayer

PROCEDURE: Draw a personal prayer that you find inspiring and comforting. It may be a prayer related to health, hope, love, family, or change. It does not need to be religious at all in nature, and it can be a prayer to a higher power, the earth, the universe, a loved one, or yourself. Think about colors, design, and meaning as you draw. Words and phrases may be added as well.

BENEFITS: Praying provides us with a sense of hope, support, solace, and control by allowing us to put into words that which we desire, wish for, or need. Some people feel that they have more power by praying, as they believe that their prayers will be answered in some way by a superior power or being, or the universe.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What is special about your personal prayer? What part of your imagery strikes you the most?
2. Did you find it helpful to illustrate your prayer? Did it help clarify your thoughts? Was it soothing?
3. How might prayer help you in times of trouble, stress, illness, or sadness?
4. Do you believe that your prayers have ever been answered in some way? Have you ever been instrumental in answering your own or someone else's prayers?

Brushing Away Negative Thoughts

PROCEDURE: *Group leaders should read the following guided imagery to clients while they sit in a comfortable position with their eyes closed:*

“Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Make yourself comfortable, relax your body, and sit so that your feet are planted firmly on the floor. Imagine that you are in a safe, peaceful place. It can be a place you have visited before or someplace new. It can be real or imaginary. All that matters is that you feel peaceful and safe there.

Listen thoughtfully to any sounds in this new environment, such as birds tweeting, leaves rustling in the breeze, a cricket chirping, or perhaps a cicada buzzing somewhere nearby. Visualize the sights, colors, forms, and shapes. Do you see a rainbow in the air, a deep blue sea, a winding river, puffy white clouds gently floating overhead, or perhaps a vast garden filled with multicolored blooms? Feel the breeze in the air and the sun’s nourishing rays sending luxurious warmth on and within you. Inhale the freshness of country air, or maybe the salty sea air near an expanse of a picturesque beach, or perhaps the luscious scents of a field filled with wildflowers.

Allow your body to relax and be at one with this special place. Let any negative or stressful thoughts gently drift away. Now visualize a large paintbrush and choose the most soothing color in your artist palette. Is it a light pastel pink, a soothing seafoam green, or maybe a deep-sea blue? Fill your brush with a generous amount of your chosen color, and begin painting on an imaginary canvas, brushing away all annoying, stressful, and unhealthy thoughts so that you are covering them up one by one, brushing away all fear, worry, and anxiety. When your mental canvas is clear, and only composed of the one soothing color, sit with it for a few minutes. Your mind is now a blank canvas, so relaxing, so relaxing.

Next, you are going to create a new canvas. A canvas that *you* will control; you will be the artist of your thoughts. Visualize, once again, a pleasing, serene place. Think about the colors, scenery, landscape, and people or animals that may be included there. Enjoy designing the setting and visualize yourself there. Re-create the scene as needed until you feel perfectly at ease in this new environment, attentively viewing it and enjoying it.

Now open your eyes, take a few deep, cleansing breaths, stretch, and come back to the room, allowing yourself to acclimate for a few minutes. Next, draw this soothing place in any way you please. Just allow your hands and heart to lead the way. Please do not judge your work; focus on freely expressing yourself and remaining mindful of the experience.”

BENEFITS: This guided imagery reminds you to be the artist of your life canvas. You have the ability to choose much of what happens in your environment, and you have the ability to choose how you react to life events. By coming to this recognition, you can better cultivate an attitude of mindfulness in your everyday life, which will reduce feelings of stress and increase feelings of control.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of place did you choose to draw? Is it realistic or imaginary?
2. How would you feel, or how would things be different, if you were there now? For example, would your mood be different? Would your life or relationships change in some way?
3. What stressful or unhealthy things did you “brush over”? Was it something in particular, such as a specific event? Was it a mood, feeling, person, place, thing, or illness?
4. How did you feel when you brushed over your stress? Was it freeing and cathartic? Or did it produce some anxiety or apprehension?

Inner Peace Collagette

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS: Construction paper, scissors, glue, and various collage materials (e.g., magazines, pom-poms, feathers, sequins, a variety of textiles, glitter).

PROCEDURE: Take a few deep breaths, close your eyes, and listen to tranquil music for a few minutes. *Group leaders should play a soothing musical track for this exercise, such as "Tranquil Guitar CD - Soothing Music For Relaxation, Meditation and Sleep" by Ryan Judd - Board Certified Music Therapist (sold by: The Rhythm Tree), or "50 Classics For Relaxation (2 CD)" (sold by: ThriftTaco).* As you listen to the music, relax your body and try to free your mind from all other thoughts. Once the song(s) is finished playing, create a collagette that represents the peace you felt while listening to the music.

BENEFITS: This self-soothing exercise reduces stress and promotes peaceful thoughts and feelings, which are further reinforced through the symbolism that is represented in the collagette. You can return to this feeling of peace and serenity whenever you want by looking back at your collagette.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What did you visualize while engaging in the exercise?
2. How relaxed did you feel? How does your art reflect your feelings of tranquility?
3. What are your other self-soothing techniques? Which ones are most effective?

Mindful, Mindfull, or Mindless

PROCEDURE: Divide your paper into thirds. In the first section, draw a figure or image who appears mindful (e.g., in the present moment, conscious, aware). In the second section, draw a figure or image whose mind is full (e.g., lots of thoughts occurring at one time). In the third section, draw a figure or image who appears mindless (e.g., unaware, thoughtless).

BENEFITS: When you are self-aware of the way you relate to others and approach life, you are able to develop stronger relationships, increase peace and tranquility, reduce stress, and lead a life filled with gratitude and appreciation. Being in touch with your feelings and emotions allows you to take a step back, assess where you are in the moment, and take emotional and physical breaks, especially when your body and mind are telling you to slow down and relax. It allows you to show yourself kindness and true self-compassion, which can help you stay healthier and more energized.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which of the three categories of mindfulness do you currently relate to the most?
2. What types of figures and symbols did you choose to represent the categories of awareness?
3. Did the way you depict the groupings relate to the way you communicate or approach life?
4. How can focusing on mindfulness transform some of your attitudes and behaviors?
5. Which mindfulness practice would you consider continuing or beginning in the near future (e.g., meditation, yoga, guided imagery, designing mandalas)?

Mini-Intuitive Sculpture

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS: Self-hardening clay, such as Model Magic®.

PROCEDURE: *Group leaders should provide clients with a ball of clay about the size of a small fist and play a soothing musical track for this exercise, such as “Most Relaxing Piano Album in the World Ever” (sold by: The Book Hive, LLC) or “Meditation and Relaxation: Soothing Piano Music with Ocean Waves for Meditation, Focus, Mindfulness, Spa, Yoga & Stress Relief Meditation Music Assembly” (sold on Amazon.com).* Using the ball of clay in front of you, create an unplanned sculpture by just allowing your hands to lead the way as you listen to soft, soothing music. Try to refrain from judging your work. Allow yourself to be spontaneous and see what evolves.

BENEFITS: Participating in this exercise helps you get in touch with your intuition, as opposed to relying on reason or observation. There is no thought process that goes into creating your artwork; rather, it comes from a place that is heart-centered, or what is called the “collective unconscious.”^{13,14} By tapping into your intuition, you can slow down, relax, quiet your mind, gain clarity, and develop the freedom to be spontaneous.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Were you able to work without planning what you would be creating?
2. Were you able to refrain from judging your work or comparing your work to others?
3. Do you notice any significant meaning or messages conveyed in your completed sculpture?
4. Do you allow yourself to be lighthearted and experiment with creativity in your daily life?
5. Do you allow yourself unstructured time to unwind, be playful, and relax? How does that feel?
6. How can a focus on the creative arts (e.g., music, poetry, art, movement, acting) improve your self-awareness, self-esteem, and motivation?

Upstairs, Downstairs

PROCEDURE: Draw a picture of a two-story house with one door on each story. The door on the second floor represents your future, and the downstairs door represents your past. Next, draw what you might see when you open the doors. Examples may include a relative, an antique piece of furniture, a special possession, emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, regret), hopes and goals, or something more mysterious or abstract.

BENEFITS: Although living in the present is key, it is sometimes also important to examine your goals, wants, and needs for the future and to make peace with the past. Reconciling your past and present, and looking toward future objectives, can help you feel calmer, more at peace, and more motivated to continue your life journey in a positive manner.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What did you draw behind the doors?
2. What is your reaction to what you placed there?
3. Are you currently focused more on the past, present, or future?
4. How does your focus affect your attitude, mood, and behavior? For example, if you feel stuck in the past, does it increase the likelihood of low self-esteem and depression?

Focusing on Mindfulness

PROCEDURE: Think about the phrase “focus on here, not there.” It can be considered an affirmation encouraging you to be in the moment. Fold a piece of paper in half and, on one side of the page, draw what is “here” (e.g., what is in your reality, your environment, or your line of sight right now). On the other side of the page, create an abstract drawing of what is “there” (e.g., the unattainable, the future, or your thoughts about the past).

BENEFITS: This directive reminds you to be mindful and not allow your thoughts to wander too far. What’s “here” is concrete and real, whereas what’s “there” is generally in the future or past. It’s something that is abstract and unattainable. You don’t know what the future holds so focusing on what’s “there” usually causes frustration, anxiety, and panic.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which images symbolize what is in your immediate environment and which images symbolize wandering thoughts?
2. How can your mindful affirmation and the associated images you drew help you stay in the here-and-now?
3. Which coping techniques can you use to bring yourself back to “here” when you find yourself “there”?

chapter **three**

stress & anxiety

Stress and anxiety are a universal aspect of the human condition, as we all experience times of illness, frustration, loss, and interpersonal conflict. However, anxiety can become overwhelming in frequency or degree when you fall into erroneous thinking patterns that perpetuate anxiety, such as catastrophizing (e.g., “This is the end of the world”), overgeneralizing (e.g., “I always mess up”), and labeling (e.g., “I’m a failure”). Part of overcoming anxiety involves identifying and challenging these faulty beliefs, which can be accomplished through thought-stopping, positive self-talk, and identifying realistic and unrealistic fears. Doing so can help you understand the importance that attitude and motivation play in reducing stress, and it can also help you to focus on the positive aspects of your life instead of dwelling on the negative.

You can also reduce stress and anxiety by developing an awareness of your “wise mind.” In contrast to “rational mind” and “emotional mind,” wise mind involves a deep connection to your intuition. It is a place of intuitive knowing where reason and emotion meet. Importantly, the most effective way to get into wise mind is to practice mindfulness techniques (e.g., deep breathing, focusing on the senses, guided imagery), which can help you find a sense of calm, inner peace, and balance. These practices help you learn how to take it one day at a time, take tiny steps forward, and not allow yourself to be overwhelmed by adversity. In turn, mindfulness can enhance your mood, increase self-confidence, and promote self-acceptance. Some research even shows that mindful meditation may improve immune system functioning, allergies, asthma, cancer, depression, fatigue, heart disease, sleep problems, and high blood pressure.

Additionally, coping with stress and anxiety involves developing an awareness of the harmful roles that you may take on in the context of interpersonal relationships, such as being the victim or scapegoat in the family. You must learn to identify how these negative patterns permeate your relationships and your life, and then try to change or improve them. You can focus on leaning back on your support system and asking for help when needed.

You can also learn how to identify any anxiety triggers and avoid them when possible. You can use self-soothing techniques as a way to mitigate stress, such as creating art, journaling, taking long walks, celebrating achievements, and exercising. Ultimately, you can learn to take care of yourself physically and psychologically, and to focus on your strengths and attributes.

The exercises in this chapter will help clients reduce their anxiety through a variety of art therapy techniques that are intended to promote cognitive restructuring, stress reduction, self-soothing, and mindfulness.

Waves of Change

PROCEDURE: Draw a series of waves and use colors, images, and symbols to describe any changes that you have experienced, changes you are currently experiencing, and possible future changes.

BENEFITS: This exercise helps you become more self-aware of your attitude and behaviors, specifically in terms of how you react to difficulties and changes in your life. Engaging in this exercise helps you strategize and personalize healthy coping skills that you can use to surf the waves of change and keep afloat instead of falling victim to dread, stress, and avoidance.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Are the waves smooth, undulating, or erratic? Are they dark, bright, or multicolored?
2. Do you feel like diving in, swimming cautiously, or avoiding the waves? Is there any fear of falling into the waves?
3. Are the waves new, or have they been there a long time?
4. Are you able to surf the waves, or do you tend to struggle?
5. How do the waves relate to the way you handle change and challenges?
6. Are there any fish, mammals, or other creatures in the waves?

Radiating Peace Outwards

PROCEDURE: Draw a symbol representing anxiety in the center of the paper. Next, create long rays emanating from the anxiety as if they were similar to extended flower petals. The rays should be wide enough to be able to write or draw within them. Each ray should contain images, colors, or shapes that represent a feeling of peace and serenity.

BENEFITS: When you feel anxious, visualize calm, peaceful rays surrounding your anxiety. Try to imagine the calming feelings that each ray evokes with you. Take deep, cleansing breaths and allow yourself to feel the stillness in your body and your surrounding environment. This brief exercise can help lessen stress and discomfort.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How did you represent your anxiety and the rays emerging from it?
2. Is your anxiety manageable, somewhat difficult, or overwhelming?
3. How do the rays promote a feeling of peace and lessen tension?



CLIENT RESPONSE:

A 35-year-old woman named Emily symbolized her anxiety as a horrified figure, copying the style of the artist Edvard Munch. She shared that when she experiences anxiety, she feels like the world is caving in on her and she loses control; sometimes, she hallucinates (e.g., one day she thought she saw her friend walk in the air and stated, “She was well above the ground”).

In order to help control her stress, she reported trying to use many coping skills, some of which emanate from the core of her anxiety (as seen in the sketch). They include trying to take deep breaths to stay calm, focusing on herself and not on others, accepting what is happening in her life, and thinking about positive things, like going on vacation, swimming, and bicycle riding. One of the rays in the picture represents the love she has for her family and friends. Emily remarked that the “love ray” is the most significant one, and it is the one that keeps her from incapacitating depression.

Beauty of Butterflies

PROCEDURE: In a realistic or abstract manner, draw or paint a grouping of butterflies. Then, add additional sketches, photos, and images of beauty in the background. *The group leader may choose to distribute outlines of butterflies that can be cut out, filled in with color, and glued on the paper. These outlines may be copied from Google Images® or sketched by the group leader. The images may help certain clients feel more comfortable working on the exercise.*

BENEFITS: Observing butterflies, birds, flowers, flowing streams, green fields, and other serene images tend to help us feel brighter and calmer. A feeling of well-being often replaces negativity when we are viewing the splendor of nature.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. In which ways do you find nature soothing?
2. Share one or more beautiful sights you have observed in recent years. How did you feel at that moment in time?
3. What do you see on a daily basis that uplifts your spirit (e.g., colorful gardens, lush foliage, the sunrise, or the sunset)?
4. How can you use nature to become more mindful and peaceful?

Stress Relief Collage/Sketch Collage

PROCEDURE: Create a grouping of drawings and photos that symbolize ways in which you can decrease anxiety and stress. For example, you could include a photo or sketch of someone exercising, practicing yoga, sitting in a park, journaling, drawing, sewing, knitting, boating, listening to music, petting a dog or cat, etc.

BENEFITS: This exercise helps you develop a repertoire of leisure skills that aid in distraction and anxiety reduction, and that also enhance serenity, focus, and problem solving. You become stronger when you have a variety of relaxation techniques at your fingertips. Problem solving is enhanced as you make decisions regarding ways in which you may relieve stress, and by choosing specific photos to use in your collage.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which activities seem most doable?
2. Which ones do you currently engage in and which ones do you want to begin in the near future?
3. Which photos attract you the most and seem the most motivating?

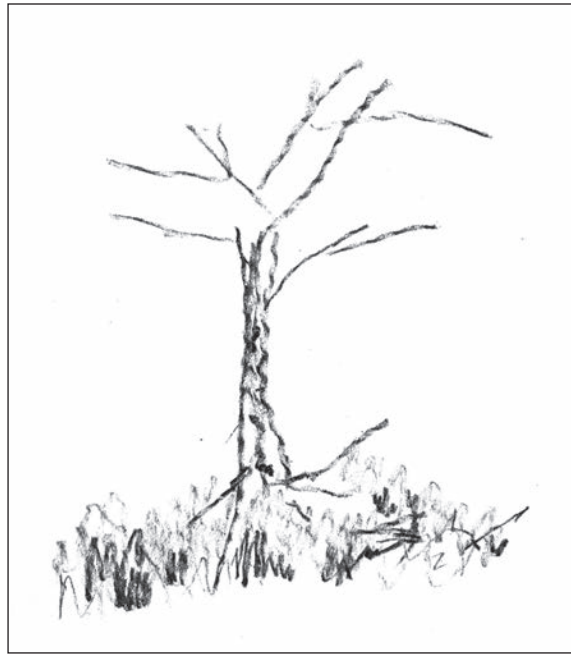
Anxiety Tree That Relates to Me

PROCEDURE: Draw an outline of a tree that fills most of the page. *Alternatively, the group leader may provide the outline to group members.* Then, fill in the tree with anything that causes you anxiety or dread, including your problems, worries, concerns, or fears.

BENEFITS: Increasing your awareness of the people, places, and things that create anxiety is the first step toward dealing with anxiety and eventually lessening and perhaps eliminating it. When you draw or write about your stress, you are better able to distance yourself from it and gain more control. It allows you the opportunity to analyze your worries and develop coping techniques to deal with them. You don't "own" your anxiety as intensely when you bring it out in the open for exploration.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of tree did you draw? Think about its size, shape, and color.
2. Is your tree full or sparse? Does it seem to be thriving or does it appear stagnant?
3. What have you placed on your tree? What is your reaction to the concerns included?
4. Are your fears or worries realistic?
5. Are your worries within your control?
6. Are the things you fear imminent?
7. How likely are the things you worry about going to happen?
8. Is there any other way of viewing your concerns?
9. How can you channel your worry so you can feel calmer and become more productive?
10. How does worrying help you? How does it harm you?
11. Will you allow yourself to "let go" of your worries for at least a little while? Perhaps you can give yourself a vacation from your worries.
12. Is there something you can do right now that is more productive than worrying and feeling stressed? What can serve as a distraction?



CLIENT RESPONSE:

Joe, a 41-year-old man who often worked as an extra in Hollywood movies, drew a fragile, “scrawny,” tree with a shaky base. He stated that the tree could fall down at any moment and that the ground it was planted upon was muddy, unstable, and cracked. He added a variety of holes in the tree to represent traumas in his life, such as his parents’ divorce at age 8 and a car accident at age 16 where he was thrown from the car and broke both arms, a leg, and a number of ribs, but miraculously survived. His best friend died in the accident.

Tongue in cheek, Joe remarked that his depression is strong, but his tree is “a weak mess.” He related his current depression to an impending divorce, financial problems, and severe migraines that seemed never-ending. He did say that he was trying to practice coping skills, such as deep breathing and meditation. He shared that he enjoyed art and stated it helped him express his feelings and feel more relaxed.

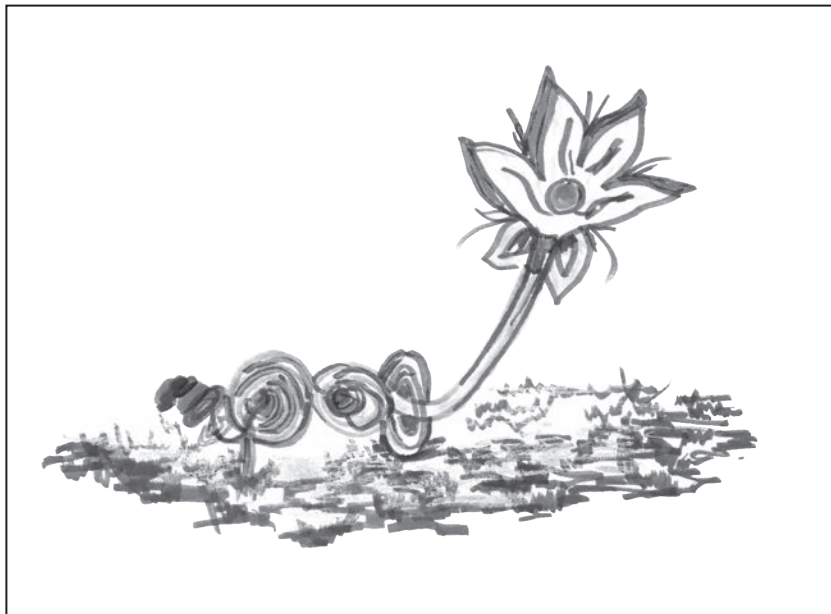
Uncoiling Anxiety I

PROCEDURE: Draw yourself unwinding. Envision yourself as a spiral or helix disentangling. Think of a coil, and imagine it knotted up at first and slowly untwisting in order to be less compressed. You may attempt to do this exercise in a realistic or abstract manner.

BENEFITS: Designing, observing, and examining your personal coil, and then creatively unwinding it, is a first step toward understanding your emotions, what creates stress in your life, and what tools you need to begin to reduce anxiety and stress. The exercise serves as a reminder to take mental health breaks and increase awareness of “who, what, and when” adds anxiety to your daily routine.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What did your coil look like at first, and how does it appear when less tightly knotted?
2. How can you relate to the coil?
3. What do you do to unwind? What would you like to do in the future to reduce stress?



CLIENT RESPONSE:

A 64-year-old woman named Marietta drew herself as a flower unwinding bit by bit. She shared that her stress starts as a seed (bottom left of the flower), which is very small, but tight and compressed. The seed starts to grow and becomes less compressed, but still remains knotted and uncomfortably tight. This is the point where Marietta feels confused and distraught, which is usually brought upon by work and relationship problems.

Marietta stated that her anxiety continues for some time but eventually begins to uncoil little by little until it stretches out and a flower blooms. This is when she feels calmer and more at peace. It is during those times that life is “good for her.” According to Marietta, the flower represents how something positive can come from negativity if you have patience. Marietta also added that her serenity is usually short-lived and that the ground, which she characterized as dark and dangerous like quicksand, could “swallow up the flower at any time.”

Uncoiling Anxiety II

PROCEDURE: Represent your anxiety as a coil. On the same page, or on another sheet of paper, begin to unwind the coil slowly by drawing it untwisting bit by bit. You may do this in any unique way you please, or by drawing a long wavy line that appears to have been disentangled. On each wave or part of the coil, write or draw a symbol of ways to reduce anxiety, including grounding techniques. Examples may include deep breathing, meditation, filling in adult coloring outlines, guided imagery, or focusing on your senses.

BENEFITS: By visualizing your anxiety physically uncoiling itself, you can stop or limit the spiraling of anxiety and hopefully avoid a full-blown anxiety attack. It allows you to gain control of your thoughts and feelings and focus on being in the moment instead, which can help lower blood pressure and slow heart rate.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How would you describe the appearance of your anxiety coil and the unraveling coil?
2. What techniques are represented on the unraveling coil?
3. How long is the unraveling coil, and how effective do you think the methods included will be for you in times of need?

Anxiety as an Appendage

PROCEDURE: Imagine your anxiety is like an appendage that is attached to your body with Velcro®. It can be a ball-like growth, an extra hand, a squiggle, or whatever shape you want to imagine. Now, draw a human figure with this appendage attached to it, or just draw the appendage itself. As you draw, think about its size, shape, form, and color. *The group leader can also provide an outline of the human form to those who desire more structure.*

BENEFITS: This visualization exercise allows you to explore what triggers your stress and helps you develop methods to diminish its impact on your life. Envisioning stress helps you distance yourself from it, understand it, and better control it. The stress loses some of its grip on your thinking, attitude, and functioning.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of appendage did you design?
2. How much of your body does it cover?
3. How strongly attached is it?
4. How long has it been there?
5. How does it affect your mood, motivation, relationships, and general behavior?
6. Are you ready to detach it?
7. Do you need assistance to detach it?
8. How would you feel if you did remove it?

Wandering of My Anxiety

PROCEDURE: Draw the way anxious thoughts wander through your mind. Think about how and where they begin, the way they travel, and where they end up. For example, do they meander gently through your mind? Do they increase and decrease sharply? Do they zigzag? Do they tend to spiral out of control? Do they erupt like a volcano? Do they form knots, or do they stay in one place, becoming increasingly tight and pressured? In addition, are there specific feelings and images associated with your anxious thoughts?

BENEFITS: Engaging in this exercise helps you acquire new perspectives regarding what elicits anxiety and how stress affects your disposition, emotions, and behavior. When you have an increased awareness of how anxiety evolves, you are better able to recognize and understand it.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What does your anxiety look like?
2. What feelings are elicited when you observe your anxiety art?
3. Are you able to relate your drawing to the way your anxiety generally moves throughout your body and mind?
4. Do you notice any points on the page where your anxiety slowed down or became more intense?
5. What would you like to say to your anxiety? For example, you might want to say, "Calm down," "Leave me alone," or "You don't control me."

Stretched and Drawn-Out

PROCEDURE: Create a sketch that answers the question, “How are you being stretched in your life?” Think about obligations, family, work, thoughts, worries, etc. You may draw what is stretching you specifically, or a figure symbolizing you actually being stretched.

BENEFITS: In today’s fast-paced society, we sometimes become entrenched in and numb to our routines, which can create stress and anxiety, and even lead to failing physical health. This exercise helps you take a step back and notice how you are living your life. It allows you to explore your daily patterns and ask yourself if you are allowing time to rest and heal. If your life is too frenzied, then you may benefit by changing parts of your routine and obligations so you can feel stronger, healthier, and more in control.

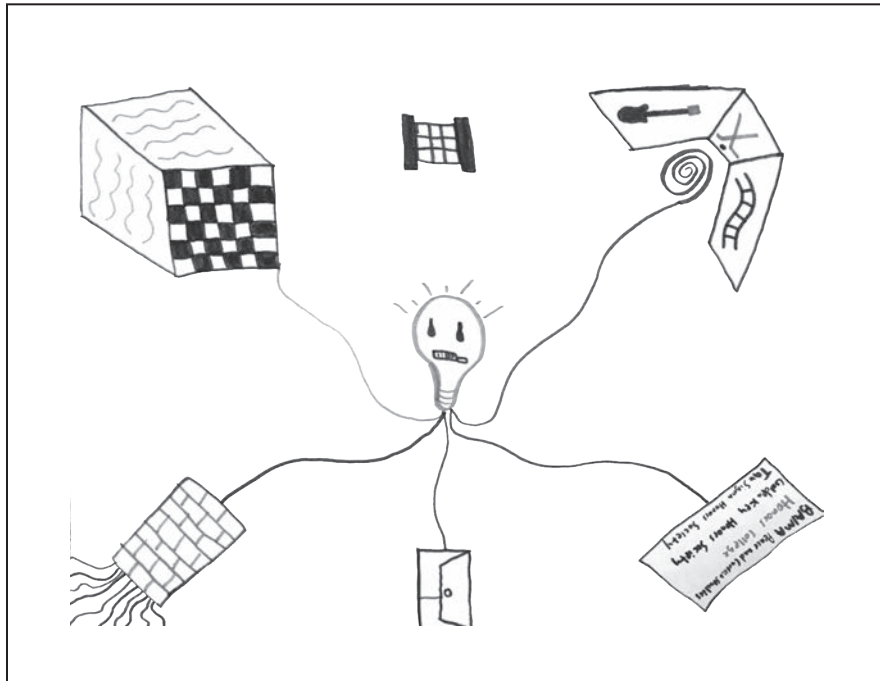
QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How stretched is your figure?
2. Are your limits stretched now?
3. If your figure is overly stretched, are there ways you can tweak some of your obligations and duties?
4. How do your responsibilities affect your mood, emotions, and motivation?
5. If your figure is too overstretched, would you like to change the way the figure is drawn? Would you like to create another figure that is less drawn-out? How might doing that symbolically be of help?

CLIENT RESPONSE:

Kevin, a 28-year-old man with a variety of problems, including addiction, drew his center as a distressed light bulb. Kevin mentioned that he feels like his head isn't screwed on right, noting that "sometimes it is too tight, and sometimes it is too loose." He shared that he is being stretched in ways that are distracting and stressful. Kevin remarked that he wants to go back to college to study music (guitar in the upper right) but feels too anxious; he said he can't concentrate for more than a few minutes. Kevin complained that he owes his parents and others too much money and felt weighed down by bricks (bottom left), bills, and obligations.

He stated that his only hope, represented by the small window above the bulb, is that there is some light at the end of the tunnel. He was hoping that his medication, which had recently been changed, would make him feel calmer and more focused so he would be able to better cope with all his responsibilities. He shared that if he had more energy and wasn't so nervous, then he could at least begin to explore ways to work on his issues and goals.



Worry Box to Store Troubles

PROCEDURE: Decorate a small white or light brown box with personal designs, small shapes, doodles, positive words, and affirmations. Next, write a few worries or concerns on small strips of paper and place the papers in the box. Then, store the box in a place that is out of sight. When you feel worried or stressed, write or sketch the worry on a small strip of paper and place it in the box. Once a week, or whenever you feel the need, review the contents of the box and decide if you want to keep certain worries or throw some of them out (e.g., let them go). You may then dispose of the strips of paper by throwing them in the garbage or ripping them up. Your mood and the intensity of the concern may dictate how you dispose of them.

BENEFITS: Designing this personal box, and keeping it hidden but handy for future exploration, will enable you to gain better control of your anxiety. Stress is lessened by separating yourself from your concerns and gaining control over them by deciding whether or not they are worth keeping.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Does the outside of the box reflect your mood, stress level, or personality?
2. Did you decorate the box with affirmations that you find particularly useful?
3. Is your box currently full, partially full, or empty?
4. Are there any concerns you are ready to let go of today?
5. How can a stress box help you reduce anxiety and separate yourself from worries for at least a while?

“Here to There” Design

PROCEDURE: Create a drawing that depicts where you are now and where you want to be. As you create your drawing, think about your environment, home, work situation, relationships, health, financial status, etc.

BENEFITS: Working on this exercise enhances self-awareness by allowing you to explore future goals and ways to achieve them. Possible frustrations about present circumstances may be identified, examined, and worked upon to increase motivation and improve life satisfaction.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How do you feel about your current situation?
2. How much of a discrepancy is there between where you are now and where you'd like to be?
3. Does this discrepancy affect your mood, thoughts, motivation, self-worth, or behavior?
4. How did you symbolize this discrepancy in your artwork?
5. Which part of your artwork did you spend the most time creating, or did you give equal attention to the “here” and “there”?
6. Are your goals (the “there”) attainable? Are they realistic?
7. Do you have a plan to reach your goals?

“Stress is caused by being ‘here’
but wanting to be ‘there.’”

– Eckhart Tolle

Pushing Away Anxiety

PROCEDURE: Draw yourself pushing away anxiety and unpleasant emotions. You may represent this theme realistically or abstractly, using line, shape and color. An example may include a figure with large hands pushing his anxious thoughts (e.g., red spirals) into a wall.

BENEFITS: You learn to deal with anxiety by exploring its origins, meaning, triggers, and intensity. Through this drawing, you are able to better analyze, understand, and control your anxiety as you symbolically push it away.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What is the size and strength of the figure in relation to the anxiety?
2. Does the figure or the anxiety seem to be in control, or is it about equal?
3. Is the figure actively or passively dealing with the anxiety?
4. In which ways do you relate to this depiction?
5. What would you like to say to the figure or the anxiety?

Fist Filled with Frustration

PROCEDURE: Draw a closed or clenched fist in a realistic or abstract manner, and decorate it with people, places, thoughts, and things you find frustrating.¹ Next, draw an open hand (you may do this by tracing the outline of your hand), and fill it in with ways to relieve the frustration you are experiencing. For example, you can focus on your strengths and abilities, practice acceptance, volunteer to help others, or distract yourself with hobbies and interests, such as listening to music, creating art, or playing with a pet.

BENEFITS: Your hands are amazing structures that allow you to do a huge amount of helpful and wonderful things every day. They are helping you engage in this art therapy exercise right now. Your hands can also inform you of your current emotional state. When you are relaxed, your hands are often opened in a stress-free position, but when you feel anxious, a fist often forms. A clenched fist can mean many things, such as anger, annoyance, fear, stress, or frustration. It can also mean that you are feeling short-tempered, have the urge to fight, or are hiding something. This fixed position can be harmful if it occurs too often. Self-awareness is the first step toward relaxing your fist, coping with your frustrations, and taking some of the burden off your body and soul. By developing this self-awareness, you can express your feelings and frustrations, actively explore ways to cope and work through them, and finally accept your current circumstances.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How did you feel while you designed the fist, and how did you feel while you designed the opened hand?
2. What did you include in the fist and in the opened hand?
3. Today are you more drawn to the fist or the opened hand?
4. In what ways does the “fist” help you and in what ways does it hurt you?
5. How does a focus on the opened hand aid in relaxation and motivation to move on?
6. Are you able to tolerate living, at least temporarily, with both the fist and the opened hand?

Toleration Pie

PROCEDURE: Create a pie by using a paper plate to form the outline of a circle, and then fill it in with ways to tolerate stressful situations. You may decorate the pie in a variety of ways, including dividing it into slices of coping skills, such as deep breathing, sketching, and meditation. Six to eight slices is optimal. You may also add toppings, such as chocolate chips and sprinkles, while thinking about the pie's benefits.

BENEFITS: Tolerating stress helps you function and cope with everyday life. It enables you to view situations from more than one angle, and it helps your body relax and work effectively. It keeps you from staying stuck in the mud. This exercise can remind you to ask yourself, "Is there any part of this situation I can possibly tolerate?" the next time you are in an anxiety-provoking situation. Even if you can accept some small part of the situation, healing begins.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of pie did you create, and how effective do you think it will be in reducing stress?
2. Which slice do you think will be most effective?
3. Is there anyone you would like to share a slice of the pie with in order to help them feel stronger?
4. How long do you think the pie will last? Will you remember what it tasted like (the coping skills listed) after it has been consumed?

Coping When Unfairly Treated

PROCEDURE: Draw a person, animal, or imaginary creature in the center of a 8.5 × 11 inch or larger sheet of paper. Next, create an environment around it that appears ominous, such as lightning strikes, clouds, a dark gray rainy sky, or fiery shapes. On another sheet of paper, draw a positive image or shape, such as a sunrise, or write a positive word or phrase, such as, "I am strong." You can also use magazine photos for this exercise. Then, cut out the positive shape, word, or phrase, and tape or glue it somewhere on the original drawing to provide symbolic relief to the person, animal, or creature situated in the middle of the page.

BENEFITS: Working on this exercise helps you develop coping skills to handle the occasional unfairness of life and bullying from others, such as a strict boss, unfair teacher, domineering partner, angry friend or neighbor, or critical family member. It also reminds you to practice self-soothing strategies when you feel wrongfully criticized or punished.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of figure and environment did you depict?
2. Is the environment frightening or menacing? If so, to what degree?
3. How does the figure appear in relation to the environment? For example, is the figure tiny or cowering, or does the figure seem to stand up to the hazards surrounding it?
4. Do you relate more to the figure or the environment?
5. How can you cope when you are in psychological pain or being treated unfairly?
6. In what ways can you self-soothe when you feel stressed and vulnerable?

Illogical Mode

PROCEDURE: Draw what your mind looks like when it is in illogical mode. Think about the organization, patterns, shapes, colors, connections, and disconnections that characterize your mind in this mode. Examples of illogical thinking include the fear that everyone dislikes you or that your family would be better off if you moved far away.

BENEFITS: When you become aware of illogical thinking, you are able to utilize coping skills, such as sensory awareness and deep breathing, in order to think more rationally. You become more reality-oriented, gain better self-control, and feel less disconnected and fearful.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What happens to your brain in illogical mode? What do you notice about the activity that takes place in your brain during this period of time as it relates to your artwork?
2. Are there specific triggers that may create irrational thinking or behavior?
3. Which coping skills do you think may help?
4. How would self-awareness of unhealthy thinking patterns help you make healthier choices when you feel very stressed and are beginning to spiral out of control?



CLIENT RESPONSE:

Adam, a 36-year-old man with addiction issues and PTSD, drew Fort Knox. He stated that when he is in illogical mode, his mind often tells him that people in his life think he is worthless. He stated that he believes they tease him about his low-paying job and his appearance. For example, he shared that he thinks his wife and parents make fun of his slightly crossed eyes and bright red hair. Adam remarked that on one level, he knows his family loves him, but when he is in “crazy mode,” he becomes very paranoid. Fort Knox, which he designed using bricks and a moat with alligators in front of it, is his defense. He stated that he attempts to keep himself safe from upsetting feelings by going to sleep so he doesn’t have to experience these uncomfortable feelings. He shared that sleep (his Fort Knox) keeps him from focusing on his stress and possibly becoming suicidal.

Filling My Worry Cloud

PROCEDURE: Draw a large cloud covering most of the paper, and fill it in with drawings, images, symbols, or magazine photos that symbolize your concerns, fears, and worries.²

BENEFITS: Engaging in this exercise allows you to externalize your worries and concerns. By distancing yourself from your anxiety, you can more effectively problem solve how to deal with it and facilitate positive change.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How full is your cloud? Is it being weighed down or is it light and airy?
2. Which worries fill up most of the cloud?
3. Have your concerns been in the cloud for a long time, or have they been recently added to the cloud?
4. Would you characterize your cloud as changeable or stagnant?
5. How has your cloud changed over the years?

Rooted to the Ground

PROCEDURE: Draw a realistic or abstract figure with roots attached that are spreading into the ground beneath it. These roots represent that which makes you feel grounded and secure.

BENEFITS: Grounding techniques reduce anxiety and may ward off an anxiety attack. One of many helpful grounding techniques includes imagining that you are rooted to the ground like a tree. Viewing yourself in this way may help you feel more stable, strong, and reality-oriented when you enter illogical or anxious mind. Other grounding techniques include placing ice cubes on your neck and wrists, focusing on your senses, and eating something very spicy, cold, or hot.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How is the figure drawn? Is it large or small, sturdy or fragile, colorful or dull?
2. Are the roots deep and complex, or weak and shallow?
3. How does the figure and its root system relate to your own stability and relationship to your environment?
4. Would you consider using this technique when you are feeling extremely anxious?

CLIENT RESPONSE:

A 28-year-old woman named Iris drew her ankles almost strangled with roots that led beneath the dark brown earth. She shared she felt trapped, not rooted. She remarked that, sometimes, she feels so anxious and apprehensive about almost all of the things she has to do on a daily basis, including grocery shopping, that she can hardly move. Iris remarked that she was working on self-compassion, not worrying what others thought of her, and trying to take baby steps to move forward.

Treasure Chest of Coping Thoughts

PROCEDURE: Draw an elaborate treasure chest and fill it with thoughts, phrases, and affirmations that are calming, introspective, and uplifting. You may design symbols to represent the thoughts and/or write them using markers or gel pens. You can also use magazine photos. Some examples of coping statements include:

- "This is temporary."
- "This too shall pass."
- "My feelings make me feel uncomfortable right now, but I can accept them."
- "I can ride this out and not let it get to me."
- "My anxiety won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now."
- "I will not allow my feelings to control me."
- "It's okay to make mistakes."
- "I've survived other situations like this before, and I'll survive this one too."
- "I am enough."
- "I'm strong and I can deal with this."
- "So what?"
- "I can't change others, but I can change my reaction to them."

BENEFITS: Creating a treasure chest of helpful thoughts and affirmations can motivate you and provide a sense of relief, acceptance, and self-worth in times of stress. They can inspire you to accept yourself as you are and allow yourself to experiment, make mistakes, and learn and grow at your own pace. You can realize that you are only human and are doing your best in what is sometimes a turbulent world.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How does your treasure chest symbolize the amount of positivity in your life now? Is it large enough to contain all of your encouraging thoughts and affirmations?
2. Which affirmations or uplifting thoughts are your favorites? In what ways do they inspire you?
3. Which affirmations have you been using to help you deal with problems and/or anxiety?
4. Are you deserving of this decorative chest?
5. How often will you utilize it? Will it be a useful addition to your repertoire of coping skills?

Body Exit for Anxiety

PROCEDURE: Draw the outline of a person that covers most of the page. *The group leader can also distribute an outline of the human form to those who desire more structure.* Fill in the areas that represent where you generally feel the most anxiety (e.g., a red circle in the chest or head area). Next, envision one or more routes that the anxiety might take to leave your body, and represent this exit route using lines, colors, and shape (e.g., a light blue wavy line leaving your stomach, moving past your chest, up through your shoulder, down your arm into your hand, and then finally moving out through your fingertips).³

BENEFITS: Participating in this exercise will help you better understand and control your anxiety. Greater awareness of anxiety symptoms within your body and the effect anxiety has on your physical and emotional state helps lessen it. Visually and creatively allowing anxiety to exit your body can be generalized toward practical use. This may entail practicing your own unique guided imagery that mimics your “Body Exit” artwork.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Where in your body do you usually feel most of your anxiety?
2. How did you portray the exit route(s) that anxiety takes to leave your body?
3. What colors, designs, and shapes did you use to symbolize this departure?
4. Are you also able to visualize this scenario when you relax and close your eyes?

Stress Reduction Mandala

PROCEDURE: Using a paper plate, make an outline of a circle to form a mandala, and fill it in with ways to reduce stress. You may use words and phrases, or you can use images, designs, and magazine photos.

BENEFITS: This mandala art technique enhances mindfulness and soothes the mind as you explore techniques to help you reduce anxiety and increase control of illogical and/or chaotic thinking.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which techniques seem most helpful?
2. Which ones will you begin to employ today or this week?
3. Which ideas are very new to you and which ones have you used in the past?
4. How does creatively placing the coping skills within the mandala assist you to examine and explore them?

Invaders Among Us

PROCEDURE: Invaders are those stressful, negative thoughts that adversely affect your self-esteem and motivation. Using a piece of paper, draw your invaders. What do they look like? Think about their size, shape, movement, impact, and intensity.

BENEFITS: In order to lessen or eliminate your invaders, you first need to be cognizant of their existence. By placing your invaders on paper and giving them a form or identity, you can gain some sense of control over them. It gives you an opportunity to distance yourself from them while better understanding the impact they have on your mood and behavior.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of invaders did you draw? Do they appear ominous, strong, weak, silly, or cartoon-like?
2. Are there many invaders or just a few? How often do they seem to pop up?
3. Are there personal or environmental triggers that help them multiply?
4. Where do you think the invaders came from? For example, did they arise from your parents, friends, school, work, or unfortunate experiences?
5. Are you in the process of developing plans to deal with them? Is there a coping skill you find effective now?



CLIENT RESPONSE:

Rita, a 56-year-old mother of three adult children, laughed aloud after she drew this picture. She remarked that she had fun drawing and just sketched whatever came to mind. She liked the little creatures she designed and thought they certainly captured some of her stressful feelings. When she further examined her work, she realized that there were three creatures and, ironically, that she had three children. Rita stated her children do cause her stress, each one for a different reason. She remarked that she might need a vacation from her children's issues, which could be overwhelming at times. One of her children was going through a divorce and another was experiencing addiction issues.

Observing My Anxiety

PROCEDURE: Draw your anxiety as if you were observing it from afar, much like being in the audience of a movie or play. Think about its size, shape, and appearance. Consider the way it affects your mood, as well as the way it interacts with the environment.

BENEFITS: Observing your anxiety from a distance allows you to detach yourself from it so you can better analyze it, view it from a different perspective, and get a better handle on it. In doing so, the anxiety no longer feels as consuming; you don't "own" it as much. Instead, you gain increased control over it, which makes you stronger and increases your motivation and self-worth.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What is your assessment of your anxiety?
2. How does it appear? For example, is it large or small? Sharp or soft? Threatening or inconsequential?
3. Is anxiety prevalent in your life? How long have you experienced it?
4. How can being mindful help you better deal with anxiety and stress?

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

PROCEDURE: Before beginning this activity, read the following quote:

“Yesterday is history,
Tomorrow is a mystery.
Today is a gift,
That’s why they call it the present.”

Then, take a piece of a paper and fold it into thirds. In the first section, draw something that is representative of yesterday (e.g., your past). In the second section, draw something that reflects where you are today (e.g., the present – your gift). Finally, in the third section, draw something that signifies tomorrow (e.g., your future – a mystery).

BENEFITS: Reviewing your history can be a useful reminder of past achievements and obstacles that you have overcome. Similarly, glancing at the future may be helpful for planning potential goals and seeking opportunities. The idea is not to dwell on the past or future, as you can’t change the past and the future is not guaranteed. Dwelling on the remnants of yesterday or the uncertainty of tomorrow will only cause anxiety. Rather, reviewing the gifts that you bring today can help you stay in the here-and-now and feel calmer and in more control.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What did you draw to represent the present, and what is the significance of the drawing?
2. Which section did you fill in first, and which section was easiest versus most difficult to fill in?
3. What techniques do you employ to stay in the here-and-now?
4. What are the benefits of mindfulness?

Talking Back to Anxiety

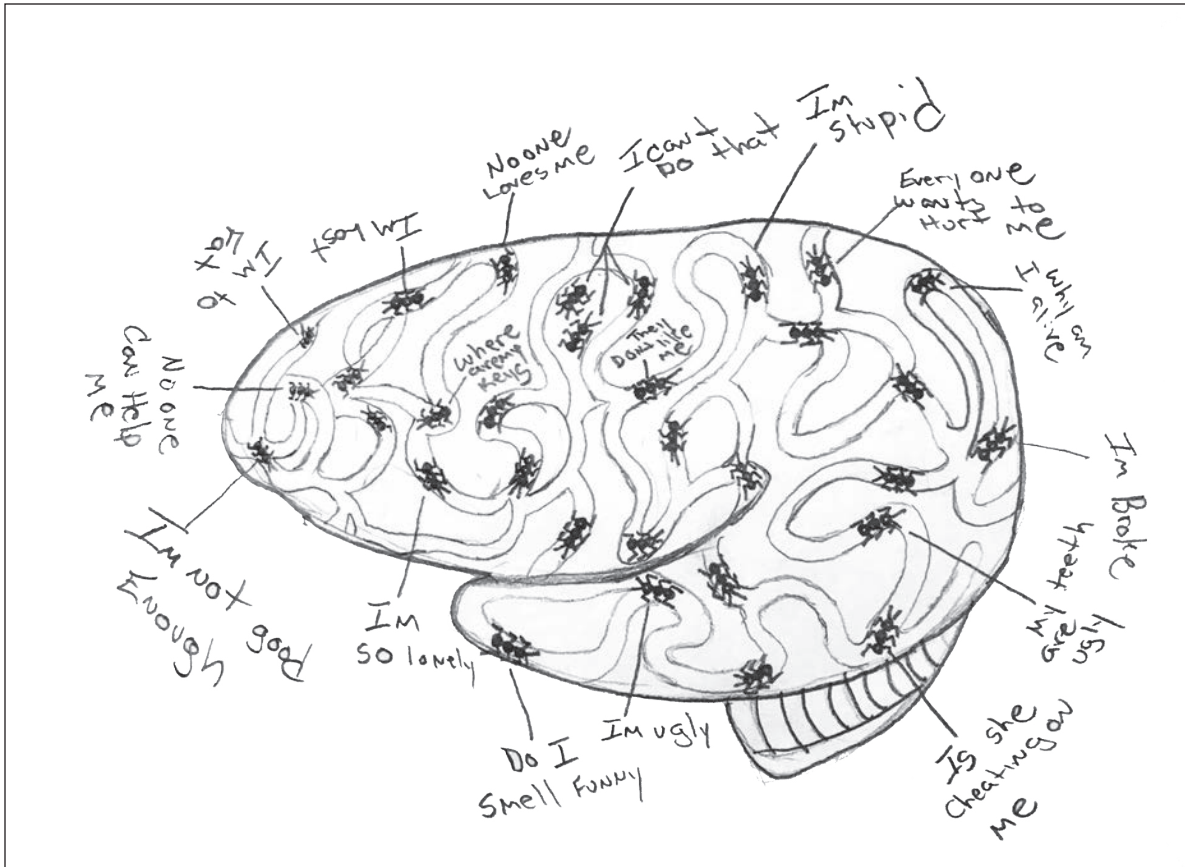
PROCEDURE: Draw yourself talking back to your anxiety. You may represent yourself and your anxiety in any creative manner you please. For example, your anxiety may be portrayed as a monster, animal, person, insect, amorphous shape, or creature. You can refute your anxiety by saying:

- "I don't have to think this way."
- "I am stronger than you."
- "I will not be a victim."
- "I am safe."
- "I will focus on my breath."
- "This too shall pass."
- "I can distract myself to feel better."
- "I can ride this out."
- "I will not allow you to control me."
- "I will focus on my senses and send you away."
- "Today I will call someone for support to help stop you."

BENEFITS: By talking back to your anxiety, you begin to gain control over it and the anxiety starts to become less overwhelming. When you don't remain in the victim role, your anxiety no longer seems as scary.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How did you portray yourself and your anxiety?
2. Which figure appears dominant?
3. What are you saying to your anxiety?
4. What techniques do you use to deal with stress?
5. What techniques would you like to implement now or in the future?



CLIENT RESPONSE:

Derek, a 39-year-old man with bipolar disorder and addiction issues, drew a brain filled with an abundance of ants, which represent negative thinking. He stated, "The ants are all over my brain, in every nook and crevice." The following are some of the cognitive distortions that the ants represented: "I'm so lonely," "No one will ever date me," "I'm not good enough," and "Do I smell funny?" Derek shared that this was the first time he realized how his negative thinking patterns impacted his relationships. He remarked that he understood that his negativity was probably a major reason for his lack of friends and low-level job. His goal was to fight the ants using his brain; he characterized himself as smart academically, and he did see that as a valuable asset.

Stress Stone

PROCEDURE: Draw a large stone on a piece of paper and fill it in with symbols and words that represent your current stressors. While you are drawing, try to place the stone near a body of water like a lake, river, or stream.⁴ After the drawing is complete, think about the stone and decide if you want to rid yourself of your stress. If so, imagine throwing the stone in the water. Think about the way it falls into the water, try to hear the splash, and through your mind's eye watch it sink slowly downward toward the bottom of the lake, river, or stream.

BENEFITS: This exercise allows you to take control of stress as you visualize all your worries, concerns, and fears sinking to the bottom of a body of water. Using visual imagery and distraction techniques such as this allows you to free yourself from stress, even if just for a little while.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What size is your stone? What did you draw or write on it?
2. How does it look? Is it full of stress or nearly stress-free? Is it dark or bright? Dull or shiny? Full of color? Black, gray, brown?
3. How long have you had your stone? Has it grown in size recently?
4. What do you want to do with the stone today? Would throwing it away right now help you?
5. Do you ever take a break from stress?

Anxiety Break

PROCEDURE: Draw what an anxiety break would look like for you. For example, it could involve taking a walk in the park, engaging in a brief meditation, doing a few minutes of yoga, sipping a cup of tea, petting your dog, focusing on your breathing, eating frozen yogurt while enjoying the sun, or turning off all technology.

BENEFITS: Taking a break from anxiety and engaging in self-care is important in reducing stress and promoting self-compassion. Sometimes, you have to practice being kind to yourself and give yourself permission to take mental health breaks throughout the day. These brief pauses help you relax, reboot, and energize.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How does your artwork reflect your current needs and goals relating to self-care?
2. What do the images in your art convey to you about time management?
3. Is someone or something blocking you from taking anxiety breaks during the day, or do you have a period where you can relax and unwind?
4. Do you allow yourself to take “time outs” during the day?
5. How would taking anxiety breaks help you function more effectively?