

# 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?

# Mind Over Matter

**PROCEDURE:** Take a piece of 8½ × 11 inch paper and fold it into thirds vertically, and then in half horizontally, so that there are six total boxes on the page. Next, draw an outline of a brain in each of the three **bottom** rectangles. *Alternatively, the group leader can distribute templates of a brain for participants to outline.* Inside each of the three brain outlines, draw or write one problem or concern.

Next, within each rectangle on the **top** row, draw at least one way to work through the issue that is represented in the brain directly underneath it. For example, if one of the brains in the bottom row contains an anxiety symbol, then the picture drawn above it may represent someone practicing yoga or meditating.

**BENEFITS:** This exercise helps you problem solve and learn to connect specific coping skills with specific issues and stressors. It helps you put mind over matter as you focus on what you can do to overcome what's in your way instead of allowing negative self-talk to influence you. As you add new insights and techniques to your coping skills toolbox, you become stronger and better able to deal with adverse situations. You become enlightened and empowered as you continue to understand the tremendous impact that your thinking plays in your attitude, mood, choices, and behavior.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. In which ways does your artwork represent your most pertinent concerns?
2. Do you see how balancing worries with a positive mindset can increase emotional and physical health?
3. What are your typical thinking patterns?
4. Of the three concerns depicted in your artwork, which one are you ready to start working through with your identified plan?

"Where there's a will there's a way."

## Blowing Away Stress

**PROCEDURE:** Draw a large face or profile of a person blowing feathers out of their mouth. The feathers symbolize all of your stress, worry, and intrusive thoughts. You might choose to write your worries on the feathers themselves, or use other images, shapes, and colors to represent your stressors.<sup>5</sup>

**BENEFITS:** This creative, mindful technique allows you to lessen your worries as you visualize yourself blowing away intrusive thoughts like feathers.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How many feathers are being blown away?
2. Are any of the feathers more difficult to eliminate than others?
3. What type of feathers did you draw? Are they large or small? Colorful or dull? Oddly shaped or more traditional in nature?
4. How does it feel to blow away anxiety? Is this visualization something you might use in the future to help calm your mind?

# Chains of Anxiety

**PROCEDURE:** Draw a grouping of chains varying in size and shape while thinking about things in your life that are holding you back from peace and serenity. *The group leader may distribute copies or outlines of chains for reference.*

**BENEFITS:** The first step toward loosening or breaking the chains of anxiety is to become aware that they exist, including how and when they developed. By completing this exercise, you can explore the strength of your chains, their importance, and your role if the chains appear indestructible. For example, are you keeping the chains in place because you are fearful or uncomfortable with change? Sometimes, we are afraid of breaking the chains even though the freedom would be healthy for us emotionally and physically.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How would you describe the drawing? Is it full of chains or are they scattered? Are the chains ominous looking or do they appear frail?
2. How are you chained in life? Are you chained to a person, idea, job, or relationship?
3. Which chains keep you chained to stress and negativity?
4. Are you able to function with the chains or do they immobilize you?
5. Do the chains interfere with your functioning? Do they affect your mood?
6. How long have the chains been connected to you? How did they become attached to you?
7. What would life be like with fewer chains or without chains?
8. Do the chains help you in any way?
9. Do you have a plan of action to weaken the chains?

# Mapping Out Change

**PROCEDURE:** The following directive is adapted from Deah Schwartz:<sup>6</sup>

Write a list or think about changes that will be occurring in the near or distant future. Color-code these changes in terms of difficulty, with red being those that are most challenging or stressful, and blue being those that are a little easier to manage or less worrisome. With this color code system in mind, draw a road map similar to a “road itinerary,” with each life change representing a stopping point along the way. Using images or symbols, draw what roadside assistance services can help you manage these changes. For example, on a road trip it is important to know where you can get gas or meals along the way, or where to find a rest stop or a place for scenic viewing. On your personal map, a healthful stop may include a park to practice deep breathing or meditation, or a restaurant to self-soothe with hot chocolate or a cup of your favorite coffee or tea.

**BENEFITS:** This exercise helps you view the changes that lie ahead and instills a sense of control over your future circumstances. Although change is sometimes exciting and long-awaited, the prospect of change can be difficult and anxiety-provoking when too many changes occur at once. By creating a map of the changes that lie ahead in your life, you can reduce stress and find effective ways to manage the anxiety associated with these changes.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which changes are outlined on your map?
2. How would you describe the road ahead?
3. Are there safety measures and comfort stops included? How might the comfort stops help?
4. Is your map detailed and controlled, or is it disorganized?
5. How can you make future changes less stressful?
6. In general, how do you react to life’s changes?

## Problem/Solution

**PROCEDURE:** Draw an outline of a head on a sheet of paper and divide it in half. On one half of the head, symbolize a problem you are having using lines, shapes, images, and color. On the other side of the head, symbolize a solution to this problem. For example, on one side of a woman's face, there might be tears and small sketches of children to represent being an empty nester (e.g., her problem). On the other side, there might be the hint of a smile and a woman in a yoga pose to symbolize acceptance and finding new activities to keep her busy and satisfied (e.g., her solution).

**BENEFITS:** Engaging in this exercise allows you to problem solve and examine "what works." By exploring possible solutions to something that is causing you stress or anxiety, you gain back control and enhance your ability to think abstractly.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which side of the head was your main focus?
2. Did you arrive at a solution for your problem, or are you still in process?
3. How intense would you rate the problem on a ten-point scale, where one is the least extreme and ten is the most extreme?
4. Were you able to put your issue into perspective? Were you able to brainstorm possible solutions that would be beneficial?

# Evil Doppelgänger

**PROCEDURE:** Divide your page in half, and draw a picture of your evil doppelgänger (e.g., evil twin) on one side of the page. Your evil doppelgänger is the part of you that may appear when you are in emotional mind (e.g., when you are having a panic attack, thinking illogically, acting impulsively, or lashing out in anger). On the other side of the page, draw another sketch to challenge the doppelgänger, such as a peaceful scene or calming thoughts.<sup>7</sup>

**BENEFITS:** This exercise gives you an opportunity to confront the part of you that is sometimes disorganized, confused, and engages in destructive ways of thinking and behaving. Focusing on the doppelgänger helps you become increasingly aware of the part of your personality that may need more loving care, structure, and a watchful eye. It allows you to examine which coping techniques you can use to tame this evil twin.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How would you describe your doppelgänger? Is it large or small? Frightening or benign?
2. Which are the most effective ways you have to challenge it? Are there other techniques you are contemplating?
3. When did your doppelgänger emerge? What were the precipitating factors?
4. When is it likely to appear? For example, when you are very stressed or when you visit a particular person?
5. When was the last time you had to deal with your doppelgänger? Was your defense effective?



#### **CLIENT RESPONSE:**

Artie, a 59-year-old biologist, drew the “Good One,” as a professional person who takes his work seriously, and his evil twin “as a lazy, drug addict bum who doesn’t care about anything. He is smoking and drinking, throwing garbage on the floor and is overweight.” Artie’s doppelgänger is sloppy, has long, unwashed hair, and is selfish and uncaring toward others. He still has the brain of a teenager. Artie shared that he struggles between the two personalities, and, unfortunately, the evil twin often takes over his body and mind. Artie has been struggling for years with alcohol addiction and bipolar disorder. He has managed to keep his job, and his family still adores him, even though he has been a problem much of the time. He shared that he is very lucky that his family deals with his quirks and his weaknesses, and they accept him unconditionally.



# Lifelines for Coping with Stress

**PROCEDURE:** Draw your main stressors in the center of the page and then design lifelines emanating from the stressors that you can use to help mitigate a panic attack. These lifelines can represent coping skills you can use (e.g., deep breathing, mindfulness, guided imagery) to get you through a difficult situation, or people or places you can turn to for support. The stressors can be drawn in a realistic or abstract manner.

**BENEFITS:** Engaging in this exercise helps you identify and solidify at least a few strategies you can use to cope with stress and anxiety. Increasing awareness of lifelines and calling upon them in times of stress is an important tool for tolerating difficult situations, especially when you are very anxious or depressed.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which stressors were depicted?
2. How were the lifelines drawn and how are they useful?
3. How many lifelines did you include?
4. Do you think you have enough lifelines?
5. Which lifeline(s) do you tend to utilize the most?

# Vacation Spot in a Box

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:** Small, shallow gifts boxes (about the size of a department store jewelry box).

**PROCEDURE:** Draw a vacation spot you can visit in order to distance yourself from stress. The spot may be realistic, such as a country cabin or your backyard, or an imaginary place, such as a floating cloud or a magical island. It can be a place you have visited before or a place that you would like to visit in the future.

Create your drawing within the box as a way to contain it. Keep your drawing simple.

**BENEFITS:** Drawing within the box supports structure and security. In addition, the box may be thought of as a personal gift that you can view whenever you need a break from stress. You can use it as a stress reduction tool when you are away from home and need a reminder of comfort, hope, and stability.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What type of place did you draw? Have you visited this place before? Was your visit effective in terms of stress reduction?
2. How can a break from stress be beneficial to your body and mind?
3. When was the last time you chose to release your stress for a while?
4. Do you deserve a retreat from your anxiety?

## Extinguishing Negativity

**PROCEDURE:** Draw your own unique fire extinguisher to symbolize ways you can target and extinguish the negativity and other things you'd like removed from your life. You may choose to add strong streams of water, foam, powder, compressed nitrogen, or some other material being released from the extinguisher.

**BENEFITS:** Creating your own extinguisher allows you to release anger, stress, and anxiety by reminding you that you can let go of (and "extinguish") negative thoughts and feelings. It helps you consider what techniques you can use to cope with negativity, such as allowing yourself to say "no," reframing distorted thinking patterns, ridding yourself of toxic relationships, and/or changing your lifestyle.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How would you describe the extinguisher? Does it seem effective?
2. Does the extinguisher need to be upgraded in any way?
3. What types of things in your life need extinguishing?
4. What will you do once you feel freer and your environment is less toxic?

## Worry Stones

**PROCEDURE:** Using any type of soft, non-toxic clay, form a small ball, about half the size of a golf ball. Once it is smooth, press your thumb in it until the bottom of the ball becomes flattened. It should look like a mini trinket tray (just large enough to place a ring in) with the edges rising up just a little bit. Let it dry for a day and then paint it if desired.

**BENEFITS:** When the item is dry, you can rub your thumb on it as needed whenever you feel anxious. It will help soothe you and serve as a distraction.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How can symbolic items, rituals, or certain patterns of thinking help decrease stress?
2. Do you currently have a special friend, partner, style of thinking, mindfulness technique, or object that helps you reduce anxiety?
3. Which techniques – such as deep breathing, yoga, and meditation – are you presently practicing in order to reduce stress?

## A Calm, Peaceful Place

**PROCEDURE:** Create a relaxing, attractive environment, such as a tropical oasis, that you can escape to when you are stressed. Examples may include your backyard, a lovely park, or the beach. This place may be real or imaginary. You may draw, paint, and/or use collage materials such as cut paper, magazine photos, sequins and stones.

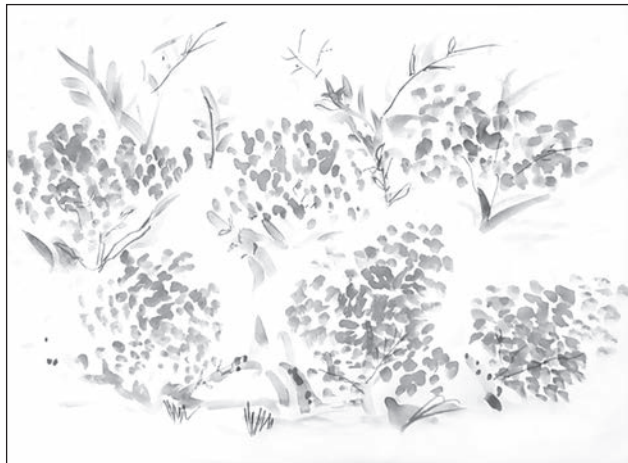
**BENEFITS:** This is a creative and effective way to reduce stress and focus on positive imagery. It is helpful to be able to visualize a serene scene in order to help you reduce anxiety. Visualizing tranquil imagery may also help you fall asleep quicker.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How can this type of environment be helpful?
2. Do you ever allow yourself to retreat from your work and stress?
3. When was the last time you gave yourself a vacation from your worries?

### CLIENT RESPONSE:

A 51-year-old woman named Jane painted an imaginary garden that looked like her actual garden at home. She stated that working on the painting gave her a reprieve from a very stressful day, helped her focus, and made her feel tranquil. Jane shared that her home garden was her refuge from anxiety, chaos, and a pending divorce. She stated that she felt “an amazing transformation” when she spent time there.



## Surfing the Wave

**PROCEDURE:** Draw yourself riding a wave. In dialectical behavioral therapy, “riding the wave” is a technique that allows individuals to deal with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.<sup>8</sup> The wave begins slowly, peaks, and then dissipates. The idea is to surf the wave (e.g., your discomfort) until it slowly disappears, you feel calm once again, and the anxiety fades away – like the ebb and flow of the ocean.

**BENEFITS:** By imagining yourself riding your discomfort like you would a wave, this exercise helps you tolerate stress and anxiety, and it increases emotional strength and acceptance. It serves as a reminder not to fight difficult emotions but, rather, to ride them until they fade back into the ocean.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How are you riding the wave (e.g., surfboard, small boat, body surfing, etc.)?
2. How does it feel to surf the wave?
3. What are the advantages to riding it?
4. How can you relate riding the wave to controlling anxiety and stress?

## Ship in the Storm

**PROCEDURE:** Fold a piece of paper into three parts. In the first part, draw a ship entering a storm. In the second part, draw the ship in the storm, and in the third part, draw the ship after the storm. Think of the ship as representing you in some way.

**BENEFITS:** Engaging in this exercise affords you the opportunity to explore how you act in times of stress, and if your actions help or hurt you. It reminds you that when you feel like you are drowning, you can “surf the waves” and use your coping tools to stay afloat. Remembering the affirmation “This too shall pass” can help you manage adversity.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. In which ways does the ship represent aspects of your personality, mood, and determination or lack thereof?
2. How would you describe the way the ship handled the storm?
3. Which part of the picture was the easiest to draw? Most difficult?
4. How did you depict the storm? Was it ferocious or mild? Was there much damage?
5. What was the ocean like? Were there large waves or great gusts of wind?

# chapter **four**

## **happiness**

Happiness is a sense of well-being, joy, or contentment. When people are successful, safe, or lucky, they feel happiness.<sup>1</sup> Research in the field of positive psychology has long since demonstrated that engaging in activities that give us a sense of purpose and meaning, and that reflect our values in life, are associated with the greatest levels of life satisfaction, as they give us a sense of living in accordance with our best self. When we engage in meaningful and value-laden activities, we feel like we are making a difference and that we count.

When I ask clients in therapy groups the question, “What is happiness?” I usually receive many different answers. For some people, the answer is related to mental or physical health, and for others, it involves maintaining financial security, interacting with their family, finding a partner, feeling like their “old self,” being independent, spending time with their pet, or going on vacation. The older individuals with whom I work will often joke that happiness is “waking up in the morning.”

However you define happiness, there are some certainties. First, you can’t solely depend on others for your happiness. Rather, happiness is a disposition that comes from within. Second, there is no magic wand for happiness; it won’t become part of your lifestyle unless you nourish and cultivate it. Third, money alone won’t produce happiness, and neither will a fancy car or large home.

In addition, happiness appears to be a trait that is at least, in part, influenced by genetics. For example, in her book, *The How of Happiness*, psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky describes that we all have a “happiness set point,” or a baseline level from which our happiness oscillates and then returns to its preset equilibrium. She suggests that 50% of happiness is genetically predetermined, while 10% is due to life circumstances, and 40% is the result of our own personal outlook.<sup>2</sup>

However, this happiness set point is not necessarily fixed in nature, as there are choices that you can make in order to improve your overall feelings of well-being. For example, engaging in gratitude practices, choosing to look at the bright side of life, practicing self-compassion, and learning to “go with the flow” can all increase happiness. In addition, engaging in creative activities, like drawing, painting, journaling, and writing poetry, can help promote a more positive mindset. In fact, research suggests that journaling for 15 minutes a day can increase happiness because it provides an outlet from which you can express yourself and resolve any conflicts or problems.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, people who think creatively tend to be more content. This does not mean that you have to paint like Picasso; it merely involves having a broad

perspective on life, empathizing with others, appreciating the beauty in art and nature, and reinventing yourself as needed. It may mean thinking outside the box and taking healthy risks.

When you are able to make choices that increase your happiness, you are more likely to pursue your goals, stop comparing yourself to others, and allow yourself to be “good enough.” In turn, you can stop becoming a victim of your circumstances. You can experience loss, illness, or financial problems and still be an overall happy person. You can learn that problems and obstacles do not have to rule out happiness, and that you can keep experimenting with ways to cope and feel better. You can take healthy risks, tame negative thoughts, and treat yourself with love and respect.

The following exercises are intended to help individuals cultivate a more positive mindset and find the joy in life. Engaging in these practices is associated with a variety of benefits, as happiness is associated with increased longevity, better immune system functioning, improved self-esteem, and enhanced motivation. In addition, people who are brighter and optimistic tend to be better parents, neighbors, and workers.

# Gratitude Totem Pole

**PROCEDURE:** Create a gratitude totem pole of people who have affected you positively in the past, and who currently support you and lift your spirits. You may use photos, sketches, paint, or pieces of paper to create your totem pole. It may be abstract or realistic, or a combination of the two art styles.

**BENEFITS:** Engaging in gratitude practices can help you create a positive mindset that counteracts stress and depression. It helps you appreciate what you have in life as opposed to focusing on what is missing. Gratitude makes you realize what is truly important and reminds you to appreciate your treasures and count your blessings.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. To whom or for what do you feel most grateful?
2. Is your totem pole rich and full, moderate, or leaning toward sparse and empty?
3. Does your structure reflect important people in your life?
4. Is your totem pole a work in progress, or do you believe it is complete?
5. Would it be helpful to view this structure on occasion?
6. Is there anything in your artwork that surprised you? Did you leave anything or anyone out of it?

“Wear gratitude like a cloak and it  
will feed every corner of your life.”

– Rumi



## Affirmation Tree to Grow Self-Worth

**PROCEDURE:** Draw the outline of a tree, including a number of large leaves.<sup>4</sup> Place some of your favorite affirmations on the leaves and fill the tree in with color. Colored pencils work well for this project. Spend time observing your artwork and explore the positive feelings derived from examining and reciting the affirmations. The following are some examples of affirmations:

- "I am enough."
- "I will do my best and then leave myself alone."
- "I will accomplish my goals."
- "I am abundantly joyful and happy."
- "I am so grateful for my life."
- "I am fine just as I am."

**BENEFITS:** Repeating affirmations reminds you to look at the positive side of life and focus on your strengths. Focusing on the positive enhances feelings of happiness, gratitude, and self-worth. With practice, the regular use of positive affirmations may eventually become second nature to you, and can lead to healthier thinking, improved mood, and more productive behavior.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Does your tree represent your current mood, feelings, or self-worth?
2. Are there many leaves on your tree, a moderate amount, or just a few?
3. Which leaves were emphasized artistically, and which leaves are most motivating?
4. How can affirmations help you feel happier about yourself and your life now?

## A Little Bit of Joy

**PROCEDURE:** Create a sketch or collage of the “little things” in life that presently give you joy or have given you joy in the past. Examples may include: your morning cup of coffee or tea, coffee breaks during the work day, brief naps, your favorite foods, petting your dog or cat, a sunrise or sunset, babies, a vacation, relaxation, the beach, watching sports, listening to music, a hug from a friend, a smile from someone you love, art, or a special family gathering.

**BENEFITS:** Life satisfaction, happiness, and self-worth are increased when you remind yourself of the pleasures that life has to offer. By recalling fond memories of the small things that give you joy, you can enhance gratitude, self-acceptance, and emotional resilience.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What is your reaction upon viewing your artwork?
2. Which “little things” are most significant?
3. Are there any items symbolized in your artwork that you take for granted or have forgotten about?
4. Is there anything depicted that you can resume doing or appreciating?
5. Are there any images or symbols in your artwork that represent people, places, or things that have played a role in who you are today?

# Popsicle Stick Affirmations

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:** Large popsicle sticks or tongue depressors.

**PROCEDURE:** Write an affirmation on a popsicle stick and decorate it if desired. Once you are finished, place your stick in a container in the middle of the table, after which each group member will select one stick and read it aloud. When everyone has shared, you may keep the affirmation stick you chose.

**BENEFITS:** Reciting and exploring the meaning of positive affirmations serves to increase self-worth and enhance motivation, and it helps you develop a more positive outlook on life.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What is your reaction to the affirmation you chose? Are you able to incorporate its message into your everyday life?
2. How does the affirmation relate to your thought processes, behavior, lifestyle, and/or attitudes?
3. Do you have your own favorite affirmation? Which affirmation did you write on your original popsicle stick?
4. How can positive thoughts and statements improve your mood, self-esteem, and quality of life?

# Controlling Negative Thoughts

**PROCEDURE:** *Provide group members with the outline of a person's profile, or ask them to design their own profile that takes up much of a 8½ × 11 inch page. Within the profile, draw or list any worries and negative thoughts that you focus on frequently. Next, on a separate piece of paper, sketch a variety of small, positive symbols, such as suns, rainbows, flowers, hearts, and smiling faces. Then, cut out the positive sketches and use them to cover up the negative symbols and words that compose the profile (glue or tape may be used).*

**BENEFITS:** Engaging in this exercise allows you to take symbolic control over your negative thoughts and worries. It also helps you become aware of your thinking patterns and gives you the power to control negativity by consciously transforming it into positive thinking. Happiness begins when you overcome worry and conquer your "doom and gloom" attitude.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How many negative thoughts were covered? Which negative thoughts did you cover?
2. How did the "cover up" make you feel?
3. What message does your profile convey to you?
4. Share one or more ways you can brighten unpleasant thoughts you are having today.
5. When was the last time you attempted to change unhealthy thinking styles?

## Filling a Mug with Happiness

**PROCEDURE:** Design a painting or drawing of a large mug, and fill it with images, colors, and shapes that give you a sense of joy. Examples may include an image of a sun, moon, flower, heart, fireworks, beach, cake, or party.

**BENEFITS:** Engaging in this exercise reminds you to focus on the positive. When you are mindful of everyday pleasures and concentrate as much as possible on joyful thoughts and experiences, you can lift your mood and increase your sense of well-being and motivation.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How full is your mug?
2. Is there anything missing from the mug?
3. Was there anything that filled your mug *in the past* that is missing now?
4. Are you satisfied with the contents?
5. Is there anything you would like to add now or in the future?

## Experiencing a Burst of Joy

**PROCEDURE:** Depict the feeling you experience (or may possibly experience in the future) when you have a burst of joy following a splendid event, such as the birth of a baby, being the guest of honor at a surprise party, watching an amazing sunrise or sunset, winning the lottery, falling in love, being given a substantial raise, or being unexpectedly invited on a special vacation.

**BENEFITS:** Sometimes, we become so used to sadness, worry, and gloom that we forget what it may feel like to enjoy life. Getting in touch with happiness and the feelings, colors, movements, and shapes associated with it can be very healing and insightful.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What does your burst look like? Is it colorful? Does it fill the page? Is it full of movement?
2. When was the last time you felt true bliss?
3. How can you tailor your environment so you can experience pleasure more often?

# Happy Words for Living

**PROCEDURE:** Write at least five happy words on a piece of paper and illustrate them in any way you desire to create an integrated design consisting of symbols, images, words, and shapes. Some examples of happy words include: peace, love, caring, mindfulness, gratitude, family, hope, smile, laughter, closeness, beauty, babies, believe, serenity, and inspiration.

**BENEFITS:** When you list and then symbolize uplifting words, positive feelings are often elicited. Reciting and living in accordance with positivity lifts the spirit and soul. It decreases sadness as it increases motivation and self-worth.

## **QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:**

1. Which words and designs represent joy? What are your associations to the images in the artwork?
2. How can you start to focus on positivity?
3. When was the last time you began or ended the day with positive statements, such as, "I am at peace," "I am grateful for..." or "I am proud of myself"?

# Building Blocks of Happiness

**PROCEDURE:** Draw at least four or more squares, one placed on top of the other, and fill them in with things you need to achieve happiness in your life. For example, one block may contain a heart to represent love and another may contain children to symbolize the need for a close family.

**BENEFITS:** Identification of wants and needs, and exploration of ways to achieve them, is the first step toward fulfilling lifelong and/or more recent goals, hopes and dreams.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which blocks are most significant?
2. Do you already have something in your life that is represented in one of the blocks? For example, are you already enjoying love in your life now?
3. What steps can you take to get your needs met?
4. Are there any blocks that are unrealistic? If so, are you able to tolerate that these wishes will not happen? Are you able to make substitutions that are more credible?
5. What role does hope play in building or re-building your blocks of happiness?
6. How high would you like the blocks to reach? Would you like to achieve a tower or skyscraper, or is a small structure satisfactory?



# You Choose Your Happiness

**PROCEDURE:** Draw a figure throwing a lasso around a symbol of happiness. A lasso is typically drawn as a rope with a circular ring at the end of it, which is meant to catch something (typically cattle or horses). Examples of things you might lasso to find happiness include a heart to represent love, children to symbolize family, a smiling face to represent a sense of humor, or dollar bills to represent financial freedom.

**BENEFITS:** Similar to throwing a lasso, this exercise reminds you to keep your eyes open wide, look around, and throw your energy toward that which brings you happiness. It reminds you that you need to take charge of your life if you want to feel satisfied. In most cases, people can choose to pursue happiness, or at least accept their lot in life, but attitude is key. Happiness usually involves making the conscious decision to engage in daily practices that bring you peace and joy and that contribute toward a life worth living.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What are you lassoing and in what manner are you trying to catch your object?
2. In your artwork, have you caught what you were pursuing?
3. What type of lasso did you draw? Is it sturdy, weak, long, or short?
4. Are you skilled in using it?
5. What happens when you catch your desired person, place, or thing?

## CLIENT RESPONSE:

A 91-year-old woman named Lilly, shared that she was trying to lasso acceptance of her life situation. She remarked that she felt sad for losses in her life and for her inability to do the things she was able to do when she was younger. She said she still tries to be thankful and feels grateful that she is alive and not in pain. She stated that she likes to eat all her meals and she sleeps well. Lilly shared that she enjoys being in her little home and appreciates her helpers who keep her house tidy and assist her in dressing and cooking. Lilly's motto was, "What is, is, and what was, was." She relayed this saying in Yiddish to group members who tried to repeat it, albeit unsuccessfully. They smiled, though, getting the gist of what Lilly was conveying to them.

# Happiness Map

**PROCEDURE:** In the center of the page, draw something in your life that elicits happiness. This center will be your starting point. From there, use lines, shapes, and branch-like structures to connect the people, places, animals, positive thoughts, or memories that bring you happiness. Create as many connections to the original symbol as possible.

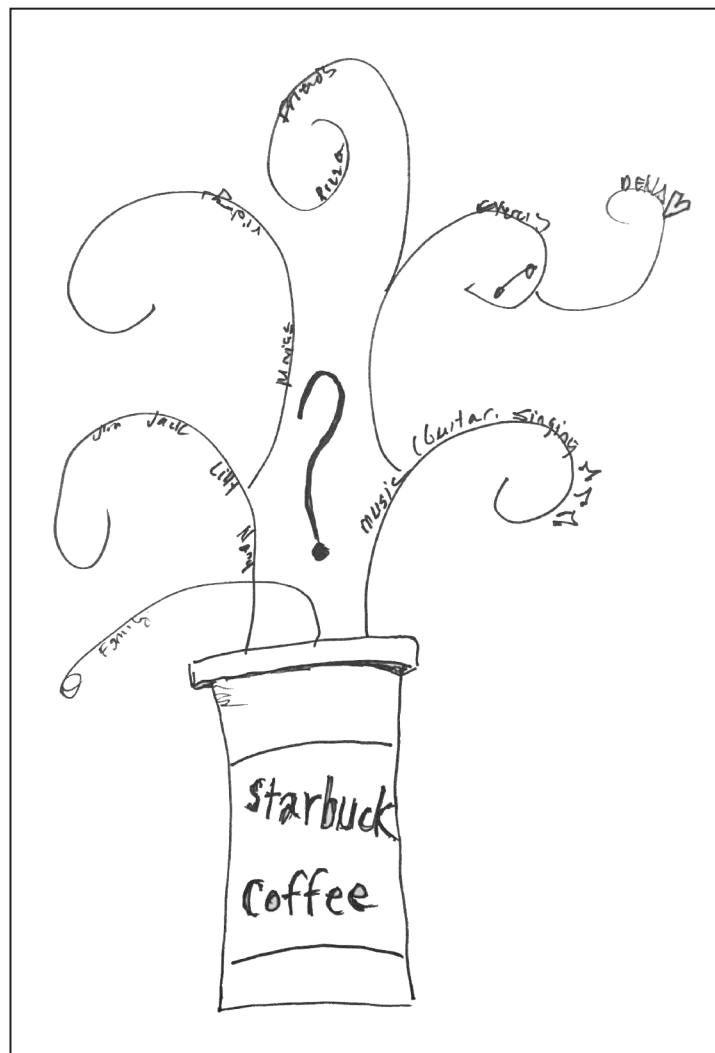
**BENEFITS:** Getting in touch with that which gives you pleasure enhances feelings of happiness, promotes a positive attitude, and increases motivation. By creating a map of the things in your life that bring you happiness, you can decrease stress and anxiety, and strengthen physical and emotional health.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What does your map represent about your life and yourself?
2. Are there any changes you would like to make regarding what is placed on your map?
3. Was your map different in the past, and do you think it will change in the future?
4. How simple or complicated is your map?

**CLIENT RESPONSE:**

A 25-year-old man named Justin, healing from a deep depression and trying to overcome an addiction to marijuana, drew the base of his happiness as a Starbucks cup of coffee. He stated that he begins every day with a large macchiato and shared that his coffee is usually the highlight of his day. He remarked the rest of his day usually "sucks." He did add positive words to his map, some of which included "family," "music," "singing," "exercise," "my girlfriend," "friends," and "pizza." Justin also added a dark black question mark to the center of the map, which he shared represented the unknown, as he did not know what would keep him from feeling depressed and hopeless again in the future.



# Patterns of Joy

**PROCEDURE:** Create a pattern design that instills brightness and cheer. Think about repetitive shapes, images, and figures in movement as you create your design. For example, you may create a repeating pattern involving an arrangement of flowers, hearts, sunrises and sunsets, smiling faces, or figures dancing. You can also include words and magazine photos in your creation.

**BENEFITS:** Drawing happiness distracts you from dwelling on sad or negative thoughts. It reminds you to choose positive thinking when you have enough strength to make that choice. The act of drawing cheerful art increases your focus, purpose, mindset, and self-awareness.

## **QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:**

1. Which patterns represent your current thinking? How do the patterns represent the way you would like to see yourself, life, and the world?
2. Do your thinking patterns tend to remain about the same, or do they change frequently or periodically?
3. How does the way you think affect your mood, motivation, and behavior?
4. Have your thinking patterns changed over the years?

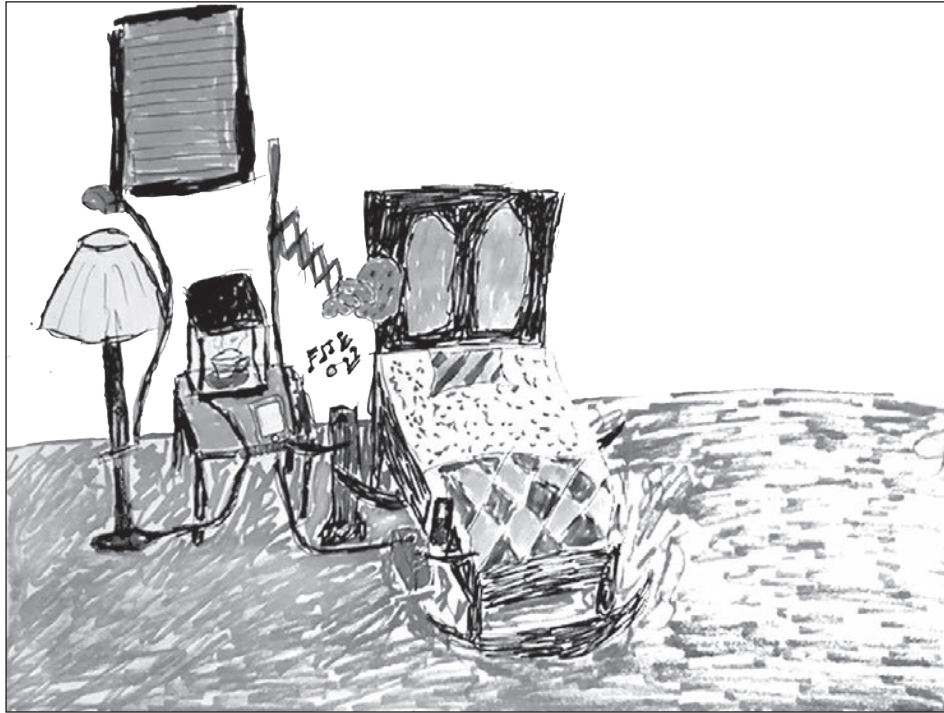
# Happiness Machine

**PROCEDURE:** Draw a machine, with a variety of parts, that will help increase joy in your life. As you create your machine, think of designing it like a Rube Goldberg machine, which is a device that uses a complex chain reaction to complete a simple task in an overly complicated manner. Each step in the machine triggers the next step, like a domino effect, until the task is complete.<sup>5</sup>

**BENEFITS:** This creative exercise facilitates problem solving and promotes feelings of lightheartedness as you examine different methods you can use to increase pleasure and decrease sadness and stress. In addition, this artistic technique helps you understand that, sometimes, you have to take many small steps in order to achieve your goals. There is no specific formula or method; we each have to find our own specific path to happiness.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How does your machine work? What steps are involved in pursuing the goal of happiness?
2. Which steps seem to be the easiest? Which ones seem to be the most difficult?
3. Do you think happiness can be achieved? How long do you think it will take to achieve at least part of your goal?
4. How does taking small steps toward your objective help?
5. Which part of your machine is most unique? Which part will be most advantageous to your current needs?



#### **CLIENT RESPONSE:**

A 29-year-old man named Sal drew a machine that would “soothe you before bed.” He stated that it consisted of many parts, including his iPhone®, which would play soothing music for about an hour. A switch from the phone would connect to a light switch in his bedroom, which would dim the lights and close the blinds. A battery under his bed would create a gentle swaying movement. A long metal arm with a life-like hand would provide a glass of milk or a mug of hot chocolate and cookies or crackers. Finally, a soft blanket placed on the bed would heat up a little bit “to make you feel warm and comfortable.” Sal shared that the most important part of this machine was that it would be distributed to everyone for free, so that most people could benefit from a good night’s sleep. Sal remarked that if he could get a good night’s sleep, he would feel less angry and irritable all the time.

# Mandala Full of Hope

**PROCEDURE:** Using a paper plate, make an outline of a circle to form a mandala. Then, fill it in with sketches that represent what hope means to you and what you are hopeful for in the future. Create images that reflect your expectations, wishes, goals, and desires (e.g., to be in a relationship, own a home, graduate from college, etc.).

**BENEFITS:** Focusing on hope enhances motivation and creates a positive attitude. When you have faith in yourself and in your future, you are better able to concentrate and problem solve. It allows you to identify and pursue realistic, purposeful, and constructive goals. It gives you something to look forward to and strive for daily.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What did you symbolize within your mandala?
2. How is hope represented?
3. How does having faith motivate you? Do you feel driven now?
4. Are your wishes feasible?
5. Do you have a plan as to how you can achieve these objectives?



#### **CLIENT RESPONSE:**

Tom, a 46-year-old podiatrist recovering from depression and addiction issues, designed this peaceful looking “Mandala of Hope.” Tom remarked, “Hope is all I have right now.” He shared that he was recently divorced after 16 years of marriage and lost his job and driver’s license because of his drinking problem; he had very little money left in his bank account. He was forced to move out of his comfortable home and was renting a room in a small run-down townhouse.

He stated his wish was to get his job back, which he knew could take as long as two years, and to feel a sense of belonging again. Tom remarked he wanted to have a family, and he wanted to have a child before “He was too old to procreate.” Tom sighed while reviewing his art work, sharing that he needed to find his purpose again and would try to “hang on.”

Currently, he viewed his lack of finances as his greatest problem because he didn’t have enough money to eat in a nutritious manner (he was overweight and diabetic) and he didn’t have a way to get to his AA meetings because he couldn’t afford an Uber or taxi. Tom did say that drawing and designing this mandala helped him relax, even just for a short while. He viewed art therapy as “a safe place where he could be himself.”



# Humor Collagette

**PROCEDURE:** Design a collagette of people, places, thoughts, memories, and experiences that put a smile on your face. Some examples of humorous designs that you might incorporate in your collagette include: a photo of someone making silly faces, a picture of a baby playing with her food while it's splattered all over her face, symbols and images representing humorous experiences or memories, or your own drawings of unusual looking people, animals, or creatures.

**BENEFITS:** We sometimes get angry over things that are silly or unimportant in the long run. This humorous exercise helps put things into perspective by reminding you not to always take yourself so seriously. In addition, laughter can be considered a workout for your body, as it has been shown to decrease stress and blood pressure, boost your immune system, relieve pain, increase energy, and, in some studies, it has even been shown to increase cognitive abilities.

## QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Which part of your artwork attracts your attention the most?
2. Which is the funniest part of your work?
3. How does humor seem to help you?
4. What types of movies, videos, people, thoughts, etc., do you find comical?
5. When was the last time you had a good belly laugh?

## Strips of Gratitude

**PROCEDURE:** Cut a variety of paper into strips of varying sizes and write or symbolize what you are grateful for on each strip. Place the strips on a white or colored sheet of paper in any way you like to create a personal design.

**BENEFITS:** Gratitude allows you to take stock of the positive aspects of your life and to acknowledge what is special about your relationships, work, and everyday existence. It lowers anxiety and depression and increases satisfaction and motivation.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What are you most grateful for in your life?
2. How does gratitude provide relief from stress?
3. Which strips attract your attention the most?
4. Are there any gratitude strips you hope to include in the future? Are there any strips you may have left out unintentionally or intentionally?
5. Are you able to relate the design you created to the way gratitude currently colors your life?

## Beauty and the Beads

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:** Thin, stretchy beading material (that can be easily knotted) and inexpensive, colorful beads with wider holes for easy threading.

**PROCEDURE:** Examine the beads and choose ones that attract you or make you feel cheerful. Then, make a bracelet, necklace, or other item (e.g., a simple knotted chain of beads). When your beaded creation is complete, share your work with the group and give it a special, positive meaning. For example, a bracelet may be considered a “bracelet of hope,” or it may be thought of as an “I love myself bracelet” or an “I am fine as I am bracelet.” Similarly, a chain of beads may be considered a “mindfulness chain” to help you remember to take deep breaths and use coping skills. This way, whenever you wear the item, you will be reminded of its significance.

**BENEFITS:** This exercise helps to reduce stress, and also brings self-awareness and increased self-esteem. The process of choosing and then creating your personal trinket or piece of jewelry inspires positivity and strength. Designing this type of art is soothing and therapeutic because it promotes mindfulness and enhances one’s focus. Creating something special for yourself or others is empowering and provides you with a sense of purpose.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. What is the significance of the item you designed?
2. How can it help when you feel stressed or unworthy?
3. How did it feel to design the item, and what is the significance of the beads you chose?
4. Did you tend to choose brighter or darker beads? Larger or smaller beads? Does your completed work relate to your mood, feeling, or personality characteristics?

## Draw Your “Bounce”

**PROCEDURE:** Create a drawing, painting, or collage of your “bounce.” Your bounce can be considered your level of energy, motivation, and happiness. Think about its size, movement, and shape. When considering what your bounce looks like, you may even think of Tigger in the *Winnie the Pooh*® series.

**BENEFITS:** This creative exercise increases self-awareness with regard to your energy levels, behavior patterns, and enthusiasm.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. How did you draw your “bounce”? Do you have one right now?
2. Was it easy, moderate, or difficult to portray your bounce?
3. How high is it?
4. What types of colors, images, and shapes are included in your design?
5. Do you notice movement, flow, or patterns?
6. What is most distinctive about it?

## Attributes within a Figure

**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.* Imagine that this figure represents yourself, and fill it in with upbeat, constructive words, attributes, strengths, and achievements. You may use artistic symbols, magazine photos, images, sketches, and phrases to fill your figure.

**BENEFITS:** Sometimes we forget or ignore how strong and capable we are, and how important we are to people in our environment, such as family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. When we explore and acknowledge our positive attributes and achievements, it is therapeutic and enlightening. This project allows us to do that in a peaceful, non-threatening manner.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. In which ways is the figure self-representative?
2. How do you feel about the figure's appearance and its "filling"?
3. Is the figure complete?
4. Is there more that needs to be added?
5. How would you characterize the figure?
6. How does viewing it make you feel?
7. If it could speak, what do you think it may say to you?

## Re-Defining Happiness

**PROCEDURE:** *Before beginning this activity, the group leader will discuss how our definition of happiness may need to be transformed during different periods of our life, depending on our age, situation, and experiences. For example, the loss of a loved one or a long-time job may push us to create another way of finding joy and fulfillment.*

Draw ways in which you can redefine happiness for yourself. For example, someone who used to love being a professional dancer and now is retired may draw a sketch of herself dancing with tots to represent that she has found a new type of joy teaching children to dance.

**BENEFITS:** This exercise helps you explore the process of change and the way that people adjust to life's circumstances. It helps you explore new ways to find pleasure and consider innovative methods to reinvent yourself. It highlights the importance of making the most of what you have and are capable of doing.

### QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION:

1. Have you needed to redefine your definition of happiness recently or in the past? How challenging was this to do and how long did it take?
2. How does using our physical and emotional strength help us to make transformations and changes as needed?
3. How does your sketch represent a redefining of happiness for you?