

Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Balancing Stones/Creating Rock Towers

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Clients will make connections between gravity & recovery by exploring how to balance stones.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Follow instructions; strengthen communication skills

Physical: Manipulate small items; strengthen balance & bending down

Psychological/Emotional: Use Imagination, working through frustrations; encourage awe & surprise

Sensory: Expand sensory engagement of touch, sight, smell, & sound

Social: Strengthen team work, communication, support for others; practice persistence

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather all materials. Determine if groups will work indoors, outdoors or in both places.
2. Facilitator begins session by inviting participants to try balancing a hardback book on their heads & share the memories that might bring up.
3. Ask “what are you balancing in your life (or recovery) right now?”
4. Observe the fulcrum point & how you might tilt your head to hold the balance. Observe the delicateness of the contact.
5. Place rocks in shallow dish of water. Observe the rocks in the water & share observations & memories enlivened by the wet stones.
6. Choose 5 rocks of various sizes & shapes – 3 rough, one flat, one small, smooth stone.
7. Begin balancing by continually working with 2 stones (holding both) & their relationship to one another while balancing.
8. When adding another stone, hold the one(s) below.
9. Allow time for “awe” moments within the group.
10. Balance stones in the dish of sand, or in a sandy outdoor area. Begin with smallest point of rough stone, broad side of rough stone, flat stone, & smooth stone.
11. Choose or pick a flower to add to the top of the rock tower.
12. Ask participants for a word that describes what they have learned from this experience.

Materials

Assortment of hardback books

Shallow bowls of water

Small plates or trays, tape, markers

Sand

Rough stones, 2-3” width and depth

Flat or “skipping” stones

Small smooth stones the size of a dime

Flowers (optional)

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Certain populations may benefit from creating balance rock towers in the shape of a person – legs (medium rock) – torso (large rock) – head (small stone). Reviewing the term, “fulcrum point” – an example of a seesaw balancing at its fulcrum may provide a helpful visual. Highlight the surprises that occur during the activity – of “making it happen,” and the beauty of the balanced stones. Relate to the

beauty of dance and to the human form – an inverted pyramid. Take an inventory of what one is balancing and note that the key is in HOW heavy objects can be balanced with grace. Depending on the makeup of the group ask “What can disrupt or throw you off when trying to balance?” Some populations may benefit from participating in this activity in pairs or small groups.

Additional or alternative activity - Clients can be asked to think of 5 responsibilities they are learning to balance in their life and write them on pieces of tape. They can apply the tape to their balancing stones, then the group can move to an outdoor area to practice. This can take on significance for youth, corrections, mental health-populations who are working towards balancing life’s challenges and adversity. For populations who are managing physical disabilities or physical rehabilitation, medical conditions like diabetes or chronic pain, or who are navigating trauma recovery, using the balancing rock metaphor TH activity can heighten awareness of balance, strength, need for support and teamwork.

Skyland Trail, a residential mental health facility working with adolescents and adults uses this TH activity. The following are additional discussion points used at Skyland. Clients should step back and admire their accomplishment of balancing the rock tower. What have they worked hard to accomplish, persevere through, or overcome in life or on their recovery journey? Did they take the time to celebrate their accomplishment? It is a physical representation of balancing responsibilities, goals, relationships, etc., and how focus and perseverance must be practiced to balance it all. Clients can reflect on how they took advantage of the grooves/dips to find balance and what that looks like in their own lives or recovery journey.

For some populations, it may be appropriate for facilitators to simulate a disruption in their life (sickness, relapse, poor relationships, etc.) and knock towers over. Clients will have to build their towers in a new way. Sensitivity to triggers, resilience and emotional maturity of participants will dictate if this is integrated into session.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Review safety “ground rules” at the start of group as needed – example, “do not throw rocks, watch your fingers when picking up rocks, etc. Facilitators are responsible for conducting groups in safe places.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Consider the metaphor of the difference between balancing and stacking stones. The goal with balancing stones is to have as little contact as possible, whereas with stacking stones, the goal is the opposite.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

American Psychological Association. (2016). [Research-based strategies for better balance.](#)
The Grove Estate Addiction Treatment. (2024). [Therapeutic interventions for addiction: Definition, types, and recovery.](#) [Grovetreatment.com.](#)

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.