

Activity: Creative Expression/Art Goal: Cognitive/Intellectual Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – Felting Soap

Text by Mikkele Lawless

Photo by M. Lawless



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make felted soap, soap wrapped in layers of felt.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice following directions & sequential steps

**Physical:** Strengthen motor skills; lengthen time & attention to task

**Psychological/Emotional:** Practice strategies & activities as distraction from pain; learn to be present in the moment

**Sensory:** Use sensory stimulation as mechanism for exploring joy, new experiences & creative expression; address tactile defensiveness

**Social:** Work cooperatively in a group sharing materials; practice communication skills during creative process; gift finished product to others

### Materials

Needle felting wool/wool roving (1oz per 8oz bar of soap)

Soap: 1 bar per person

Nylon stockings

Large towels

Water (hot & cold)

2 large bowls per person

Wipes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Set up work area by laying a towel on the table in front of each participant's space.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing example of felted soap and having participants wash their hands with the sample.
3. Pour hot water & cold water into bowls, with the temperatures as hot or cold as tolerable.
4. Participants pull apart wool roving into pieces long enough to wrap soap, mixing a couple of colors together if desired.
5. Stack layers of felt on top of each other, laying soap on the pile. Wrap the felt tightly around the soap until its evenly covered. The goal is to cover the soap, but if parts are exposed at the end, that's ok!
6. Place the wool covered soap into the stocking to keep the wool on the soap until it starts to adhere to the soap.
7. Place the stocking in hot water for about 1 minute until fully wet.  
Gently start packing & squeezing it together like making a snowball. Continue for 1 minute moving it from hand to hand.
8. Start rubbing the soap evenly, noticing that the wool is shrinking & sticking to the soap. Continue rolling it with your hands. Dip back & forth between bowls of hot & cold water to help shrink wool.
9. After 5-10 minutes of rubbing & dipping the wool will become tight. Take soap out of stocking before it adheres completely & continue felting on its own. Rinse felted soap in the sink with very cold water & let dry. Decorate with twine, rosemary sprigs or natural items.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This TH activity like many others, can address a variety of health challenges across health domains. Facilitators will select one or two to focus on depending on clients or group. The tasks, physical requirements, and materials are tolerable for most individuals with the exception of people with

allergies to wool or soap. The physical manipulation of soap and wool felt can support goals related to hand-eye coordination, strengthening motor skills and can focus on lengthening time and attention to the task at hand.

For populations who can benefit from distraction from pain, this activity can provide this while creating a useful product with a dash of creative expression. Gifting the completed felted soap can offer opportunities for role reversal where the participant thanks and takes a lead in offering something (a product instead of service to care partner for example). This can complement psychological/emotional goals learning and practicing to be present in the moment while attending to the steps as directed by the facilitator. Sensory goals may also relate to these, with participants using felting and its sensory elements for exploring joy and new experiences.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Allergies to wool, soap or other materials need to be identified prior to session.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** It is recommended that plant-based soaps be used for this activity. The use of plant-based soaps ties this TH activity more directly to plants. “Many native plants, especially those with waxy cuticles, contain saponins which are steroids that dissolve in water and create a stable froth. Saponins are named from the soapwort plant (*Saponaria*) whose roots were used historically as soap” (US Forest Service, n.d.). Soaps can also be made from plant-based oils from almonds, canola, avocado, coconut, evening primrose, sunflower and walnut among others. Plant items like Douglas fir needles, rose petals, chamomile, poppy seeds, oatmeal, dried herbs, and lavender flowers can be added as exfoliant textures, with these and essential oils providing fragrance (Garms, 2016). To add coloring to soap using plants, consider carrots, goldenrod and calendula flowers. Consider creating your own soap and then felting it.

Wool roving not synthetic craft felt needs to be used for this activity (Walker, 2019). Wool felt is more expensive than craft felt. Large pieces can be made into smaller pieces as noted above. Once felted soap is completed, excess felt can be trimmed off. Cutting soap into the desired size can best be done by using a knife warmed in hot water to slice slowly through soap avoiding crumbling.

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

- Birnie, KA., Chambers, C. (2017). Mechanisms of distraction in acute pain perception and modulation. *Pain* 158(6), 1012-1013.
- Garms, G. (2016). [How to make your own plant based soaps](#). *Raven’s Roots Naturalist School*.
- Pain Management Network. (2024). [Segment 4 – How can distraction be used to manage pain?](#)
- U.S. Forest Service. (n.d.). [Soaps](#)
- Walker, A. (2019). [The difference between craft felt & wool felt](#). *Stab Things into Existence*.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2024.

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