

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Psychological Populations: Specialized Populations

TH Activity Plan – I’m Tired: Plants & People

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Photo by L. Fleming, Walmart, House Digest & Canberra Times



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will learn about plant care & use plant metaphors addressing their feelings of fatigue.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Explore personal fatigue relating it to plants & plant care; identify strategies for coping with their fatigue

Physical: Take care of plants as a strategy to distract & cope with their fatigue

Psychological/Emotional: Discuss mental & physical fatigue; relate plant wilting to human fatigue

Sensory: Observe, touch & smell plants that are drooping, tired & not thriving

Social: Use humor in the session; share coping strategies with group

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Locate and have several live plants that are wilting, tired or drooping. Purchase or provide live cut flowers & some greenery for use in session.
2. Facilitator begins session by stating “I’m tired”. Then asks group “who else is tired?”. Present the plants that are drooping or wilted. Begin discussion of mental & physical fatigue, reasons for feeling like this (asking participants to shout out reasons as a mechanism for active engagement). Using the *shout out method*, participants are asked to label how they and/or how the plant examples feel (droopy, withered, drooping stuff).
3. Relating plants to humans, and moving the discussion to a more positive focus, facilitator presents techniques for plant care – how to revive plants, reduce wilting and feel better. These include: use of preservatives (good metaphor for humans?), removing spent blossoms, using fresh water in vase, sanitizing pruners & making clean cuts (human metaphor of removing toxic or bad influences like alcohol, drugs, chocolate). Have several techniques in mind, stopping at each, asking participants for human examples to match the plant metaphors.
4. Distribute one flower stem & plastic cup or small vase to each

participant to practice plant care. Share pruners, water jug, floral preservative, passing these around the group. Do a second round of plant care using greenery as the example, expanding on metaphors, life conditions & relating these to woody stemmed greenery which can be more challenging to revive/improve water intake.

5. Have participants identify 3 strategies for coping with or improving their feelings of fatigue. Encourage humor along with serious strategies, with a fun “reward” of wearing a goofy flower hat or holding a brightly colored gardening claw when a strategy is shared that will claw back fatigue.

Materials

One flower stem & some greenery per person

Potted plants: cyclamen, fittonia, birds nest ferns (wilted &/or thriving)

Plastic cups or small vases, water jug w water, floral preservative

Pruners (preferred to scissors depending on population), gardening claw, disinfectant wipes

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Many people experience mental and physical fatigue for a wide variety of reasons including surgery, chronic fatigue syndrome, recent medical diagnoses, chronic health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and lupus, as well as stress, bereavement, poor sleep, prescribed medicine, depression, anemia, and COVID-19. Fatigue is a health condition that can have serious short and long-term impacts. Using therapeutic plant activities and plant metaphors, with an intervention of humor, can distract, even for a short interlude, while addressing and discussing coping strategies. Shifting the perspective on fatigue, realizing and acknowledging the wide-spread prevalence of it due to many reasons, and experienced by many types of people, can be an important therapeutic focus during a TH session. Identifying coping strategies, using humor to discuss fatigue can help uplift and normalize each person's situation.

Fatigue can be a very serious health issue. Assessing fatigue by medical practitioners has advanced in recent years using fatigue questionnaires, fatigue severity scales and multidimensional fatigue inventories. The latter evaluates five dimensions: physical fatigue, reduced activity, reduced motivation, mental fatigue and general fatigue (Esch & Newman, 2023). Where a participant's fatigue or mental state is concerning, referral to medical professionals may be warranted.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Populations or individuals with self-harm tendencies should not use pruners, floral preservatives or glass containers.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Plant care for droopy flowers includes understanding why they are losing their vigor. Reasons for plant droopiness and decline: aging, too much heat or sun, bacteria, barriers to water uptake, and proximity to ethylene gas (ripening fruit for example). Many flowers will droop. Recommended flowers (that do droop or wilt and can be revived) include mums, tulips, cosmos, hydrangea, dahlias, roses and daisies.

Caring for and revitalizing houseplants can be included in the session: cyclamen, peace lily, fittonia or birds nest ferns.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Esch, A.E. & Newman, S. (2023). [How to identify and treat fatigue in patients with serious illness](#). Center to Advance Palliative Care.

Latterner, T. & Copeland, B. (2023). How to bring wilting floral arrangements back to life. Martha Stewart.com. <https://www.marthastewart.com/7987290/revive-dying-flower-bouquet-tips>

Mount Sinai. (2024). Fatigue. <https://www.mountsinai.org/health-library/symptoms/fatigue>



Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.