

Activity: Herbs Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: Mental Health

TH Activity Plan – Lavender Soap Balls

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will prepare lavender scented soaps.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Participate in creative expression; practice executive functioning skills

Psychological/Emotional: Learn relaxation and self care techniques; practice self regulation strategies; improve mood/outlook

Sensory: Engage olfactory and tactile senses with lavender materials

Social: Practice social skills; work collaboratively towards a common goal in a group setting

Materials

8 bars mild, unscented, Castile or vegetable-based soap (2 bars per group)

2 cups dried lavender flowers (1/2 cup per group)

20 drops lavender essential oil (5 drops per group)

1 cup lukewarm water (1/4 cup per group)

Mixing bowls, 8-10" diameter (1 per group)

Large spoons (1 per group)
Cheese graters (1 per group)
Cookie sheets (1 per group)
Tablespoons

Fabric or decorative netting and decorative ribbon for wrapping up the soaps

Disposable gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Prep:** Gather dried lavender flowers - must be harvested and dried days earlier and ready to use. For a group activity, prepare four sets of materials and organize at four stations around the room.
2. Facilitator begins by placing participants in groups of 3 at each of the four stations. Assist participants with putting on gloves as needed.
3. Grate the soap bars into a large bowl. If it is safe, allow each participant to take a turn. Depending on the type of grater you have, the facilitator may need to do this step for participants, but explore all viable options first.
4. Add the dried lavender to the grated soap in the bowl. Encourage participants to measure out the correct amount.
5. Add the essential oil to the flower/soap mixture. Use spoons to stir thoroughly, encouraging each participant to stir the mixture.
6. Add the warm water and stir again. The consistency will be similar to cookie dough.
7. Roll balls of the mixture from heaping tablespoons.
8. Place the balls on a cookie sheet and allow to air-dry for about 2 days.
9. Wrap soaps up with decorative tulle and ribbons for gifts. Allow participants to use their own creativity in the packaging of products.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This activity offers opportunities for creative expression and exploration of personal self care and relaxation. This mental health/well-being focus is appropriate for most populations, however the activity may not be appropriate for some people with certain mental illness diagnoses where self-harm or erratic behavior exists.

Allow participants to shape the soap as they please; most shapes and sizes will work. Roll out the mixture on the cookie sheet and use cookie cutters to trim out desired shapes, instead of rolling into balls. Participants may

want to decorate their soaps with pressed flowers. This works best if warm water is added to the participants' hands and used as a paste over the pressed flowers like decoupage or a sealer coat of paint. The water makes the soap a bit stickier again so the flowers will adhere best to the surface. Throughout the soapmaking process, invite conversation about the uses of lavender as a relaxing herb (e.g. sleep aid, calming scent for stress reduction, etc.) and identify other ways to reduce stress and anxiety.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Be aware that some essential oils may cause skin irritation or other issues for some people. There are some oils that are only for aromatherapy use. Make sure the oil is safe to use on skin; consult medical staff as necessary. Because essential oils can be quite potent, use disposable gloves to protect hands and reduce lingering scents on hands following activity. Keep in mind that some participants may have strong olfactory sensitivities (due to medical conditions or medications they are taking) – alert these participants to the possibility of the strong fragrances during the session and give them the choice of attending the session or avoid using the essential oils altogether, only using the dried lavender flowers or other colorful dried flower petals. Supervise safe handling of materials and equipment during the blending process. Monitor individuals with tendencies to place non-food items in the mouth. Warm water should be tested like a baby's bottle on the wrist for temperature regulation. Consider all different grater options to ensure maximum safety of participants and utilize different muscle groups. Moulin graters and meat grinders are good examples. Grate the soap prior to the activity, if necessary. Take special care when using grater so knuckles do not get scraped.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Substitute dried leaves and essential oils of other fragrant herbs, such as rosemary or lemon verbena. The mixing bowls should be fairly heavy or perhaps be used with a suction cup on the bottom to keep it from sliding around while mixing the soap, which may become dough-like in texture and difficult to stir. If the soap begins to dry out and get crumbly, moisten hands with warm water (or add a splash of water to the mixture) and continue mixing.

Refer to THAD *Harvesting and Drying Flowers* activity plan.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

McQueen, J. (2022). Surprising uses for lavender. WebMD.

<https://www.webmd.com/vitamins-and-supplements/ss/slideshow-vitamins-lavender-uses>

Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. (accessed 2023). Lavender.

<https://www.mountsinai.org/health-library/herb/lavender>

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.