

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Psychological Populations: Specialized Populations

TH Activity Plan – Making a Walking Stick

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make their own walking stick to represent the help needed on their life journey.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Recognize & recollect the support needed when journeying through difficult times in their lives

Physical: Use physical activity making a walking stick; develop self confidence in physical abilities

Psychological/Emotional: Express emotions acknowledging difficult times and the help required during these time

Sensory: Use tactile and olfactory senses for a positive experience; self-select times for breaks as needed

Social: Support peers; interact cooperatively & positively with group members

Materials

Hardwood sticks about 4' long & 1-2" diameter

Heavy duty scouring pads

Sandpaper, 60 & 150 grits

Polyurethane or acrylic (spray on or brush on), brushes

Handsaw

Drill with 1/4" bit

Parachute cord or leather strips

Scissors

Beads (optional)

Face masks, gloves

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Cut sticks to length and drill a hole through each about 1" from the top (or if appropriate, have participants drill holes). Gather all other materials and place outside, perhaps around a picnic table. Have one finished walking stick for demonstration.
2. Facilitator begins session by asking participants to think about times in their life's journey that were particularly difficult and recall who or what helped them through it. Tell them they will be making walking sticks to help them on their future life journey.
3. Participants select a stick and rub it down as best they can with a scouring pad removing dirt and loose bark. The sticks are then sanded by hand to reveal as much of the wood as they want with 60 grit sandpaper, followed by 150 grit. Drill the hole (if not done previously). Then apply polyurethane. Having a saw on hand to cut sticks to preferred length is helpful.
4. When sticks are dry, parachute cord is cut to preference and threaded through the hole in the stick. Beads can be added before tying off.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This activity is appropriate and enjoyed by diverse populations, however it is a fairly physical activity and requires significant strength and stamina to complete. Some participants may not realize the physical effort required until they are part way through the activity and may need assistance to complete. Physical goals can include expanding stamina for physical exertion (standing, sanding, walking), strengthening pincer grip and hand strength (holding sandpaper and other

tools for a specific period of time or task), and expanding functional physical fitness with the above during the TH session, and then walking with stick post session, increasing distance and time spent exercising this way. Balance and gait can be integrated into physical goals related to this session.

A number of psychological goals are applicable to the walking stick activity and appropriate for adult populations who, for example, have experienced some trauma or recovering from addiction. Therapeutic goals in this domain can include: expressing emotions acknowledging difficult times and the help they required at the time, (the walking stick representing support); recognizing and acknowledging the need for help; practice accepting help and support; and practicing coping mechanisms like walking (with or without walking stick) where physical and emotional exertion contributes to release of stress and endorphins, the latter a positive physiological outcome. If the sticks are completed in enough time, a walk in the gardens or woods using the sticks is a good follow-up activity that can reinforce the goals identified here, and as discussed with participants.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

This activity is best done outdoors due to the dust produced from sanding. The application of polyurethane or acrylic must be done outdoors. Mask are recommended for sanding and applying polyurethane. Eye protection is also recommended for sanding step. Prior determination of how safe it is for participants to use a saw and drill must be made so that these steps can be done beforehand if necessary.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Any hardwood stick will work with this activity; however, they should be dry (not green) and be free of decay. Sticks that are dead but still standing or attached to the tree can be easily found and excellent for this TH activity. If green sticks are the only option, they should be left to cure for a period of time. Oak, cherry, maple and ash are all excellent. Sassafras results in especially attractive walking sticks and make for a very gratifying experience for participants.



REFERENCES/ RESOURCES

Bob, D. (2017). The right wood for walking sticks. Woodcarving Illustrated.com.

<https://woodcarvingillustrated.com/blog/2017/07/27/wood-chart-for-walking-sticks/>

Cleveland Clinic. (2024). Endorphins. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/23040-endorphins>

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.