

Activity: Planting **Goal: Psychological** **Populations: Veterans/Active Military**

TH Activity Plan –Multiple Relocations’ Sense of Place - Military

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Photo by Everyday Gardener



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participant(s) explore sense of place where they are presently stationed, re-potting a plant that represents this location.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Recall station locations; practice self-identity awareness related to plants/stations

Physical: Use mind-brain integration & concentration for activity

Psychological/Emotional: Investigate sense of place as part of personal identity; practice shifting mental state from negative to positive using sense of place/plant strategy

Sensory: Concentrate on sensory plant inputs; consider sensory joy or dislike of plant's sensory elements

Social: Work together with family or friends; consider pros & cons of lifestyle/career requiring multiple moves – discuss with others

Materials

Plants that represent location,
growing medium, containers,
watering can

Labels, markers, care
instructions, world map

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Have plant samples available. Session may be informal drop-in or scheduled workshop.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the concept of sense of place where plants contribute to human connections to places. Using a brief description to convey several key points, the facilitator asks participant(s) what plants or natural areas in current location are indicative of this place/station.
3. Facilitator can have several plants that thrive in local area at session, including some that will be used for potting in containers. Some horticultural information on local plants is shared, asking participants if these examples are familiar, have been seen in other locations they have lived, or have any special meaning (lavender-calmness, agave-tequila, Texas wildflowers-meadows of color).
4. The hands-on portion of the session involves repotting plants found in the local area, to be taken home & nurtured. Meant to convey this particular sense of place, small potted plants can be taken with the participants in their next move. This could become a positive leisure activity - gardening or collecting plants where they are/have been stationed.
5. Posing the question – can something like this provide a sense of place? Thinking about relocations in these terms – plants of a given location rooting them in a positive manner, marking a place in time, & as part of their career path – can this be a coping mechanism where each move has its distinct aspect with plant-rich details? Can participants share examples? A map of the world can enhance & share familiarity.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: How can a TH session support military personnel and families in shifting perspectives from negative to positive in relation to constant relocations? Research indicates psychological and even physical health impacts result from this type of lifestyle (Briggs et al., 2019; Neyland et al., 2021). Using sense

of place exploration and hands-on plant activity for active military personnel and their families can address health challenges related to a sense of impermanence and transiency. Studies have proven that individuals need to feel stability in their lives as part of positive health (Bodryzlova & Moullec, 2023; Danna & Griffin, 1999). This can be achieved or defeated by many situations and factors, including workplace disruptions or contributions, emotional stability or upheavals, family circumstances, and stress. Military members are subject to many of these, particularly given their mobile career requirements. Veterans can benefit from this TH session as well.

Using self-exploration individuals can reflect on their career path and/or multiple locations they have lived in to expand personal awareness, what gives them joy, impact on family members, and strategies for processing job situations related to multiple moves. By connecting with plants in the different locations, interpreting them in a positive manner, and making efforts in the future to see plants and natural areas as an opportunity in each relocation can provide a stabilizing aspect to the military lifestyle can be impactful. Making a point to make a connection using plants as a common low-cost activity, and involving family, can support children and spousal attitudes and their wellbeing who also participate in multiple moves. This session can be delivered as a family-friendly session at the military setting or other. Some posts have gardens where this type of plant-focused activity may be appropriate and welcomed.

HT practitioner Donna Hunt, [Hope Garden](#) project leader at [Robins Air Force Base](#), GA suggests such a TH session can be effective when children are included in the session along with the military member, and that the session not be presented as therapy but rather an opportunity to explore plants and themselves. Offering a hands-on activity at a base's [Military & Family Readiness Center](#), possibly using a drop-in format and not a regularly scheduled "course" will have greater appeal to the population.

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

Consideration for mental distress, agitation, PTSD, or trauma triggers should be noted prior to and during session. If children are participating in session, session should begin with request to avoid inappropriate or war violence comments or locations; these can be discussed with facilitator after session one on one.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Sense of place involves place identity, place attachment, sense of community and rootedness (Domingues, 2021). Place attachment is generally a positive emotional experience so expanding this as part of a TH session can foster positive attitudes (Brown et al., 2003). Place identity is considered an opportunity for individuals to develop and translate self-meaning for a given place. "This place is a reflection of me" (Okoli, 2013). Making emotional connections using plants, including distinctive or unique aspects of particular environments or locations contributes to wellbeing (Brown et al., 2003).

North Carolina has several large military bases (Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Fort Liberty, formerly Fort Bragg, and Marine Corps Camp Lejeune). [Plants that are characteristic of North Carolina](#) include: Carolina lily (*Lilium michauxii*), purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*) and [Dogwood tree](#) (*Cornus*). Plants that are characteristic of Fort Campbell on the Kentucky-Tennessee border: [Rough Blazing Star](#) (*Liatris aspera*), [mustard plant](#) in Tennessee (*Paysonia lescurii*), and Kentucky's state wildflower [Turk's Cap Lily](#) (*Lilium superbum*), and Slender Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*) native mint.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Brown, B., Perkins, DD., & Brown, G. (2003). Place attachment in a revitalizing neighborhood: Individual and block levels of analysis. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23(3).
- Bruzzichessi, A., Graber, D., Crowder, C., & Murphy, J. (2025). [HT activity plan – A sense of place: The Carolinas](#). University of Florida Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database.
- Domingues, RB., Goncalves, G., & De Jesus, SN. (2021). Measuring sense of place: A new place-people-time-self model. *Journal of Spatial and Organizational Dynamics*, 9(3).
- Fleming, L., Stark, B., & Brown, J. (2025). Plants and sense of place: Applications for horticultural therapy. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 35.
- 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.