

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Seed Self Portraits

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will sketch a self-portrait and decorate with seeds that represent qualities within themselves they would like to see grow.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn how seeds produce big things from small beginnings; consider human development where small beginnings can grow into significant, important work & contributions

Physical: Use fine motor skills to apply glue, put seeds on a drawing and press them into place

Psychological/Emotional: Identify and consider personal qualities that the participant would like to develop; explore personal growth

Sensory: Touch seeds & sticky glue exploring different textures; expand ability, tolerance & willingness to engage in sensory stimulation

Social: Share reflections & artwork with others in the group

Materials

Art or construction paper

Bag of mixed bird seed

Pencils & markers

Clear glue or glue sticks

Examples of plants grown from seed and the seed that produced it

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** If time is short, paper, seeds, markers & glue can be assembled on the table in advance.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing some sample plants and the relatively small seed that they grow from. Touching, smelling & looking closely at plant samples can expand sensory & plant experiences.
3. Facilitator asks these questions: What did the seed need to get to this point? (sunlight, water, appropriate soil, space).
4. Facilitator proposes that participants consider “seeds” to plant within themselves. Asks questions: Is there something about you that you’d like to see more of? Is there a personal quality you don’t have that you’d like to have?
5. Facilitator passes out materials and explains that each participant will draw a self-portrait and decorate it with seeds.
6. Participants are invited to share about one of the qualities their seeds represent and describe ways they could help it grow.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Personal growth—improving actions, behavior and emotional state—can help increase a sense of well-being at any age. Recognizing strong qualities in themselves and identifying ones to celebrate and expand on is a first step toward personal growth. Combining creative expression, intellectual stimulation (expanding knowledge about plant growth) and therapeutic goals can be an effective multi-modal process. Psychological therapeutic goals of relating human traits to plant characteristics and their growth makes

abstract ideas more concrete, and more likely to be remembered as both an intellectual experience and a fun hands-on plant activity.

Personal growth is an important human skill throughout the lifespan. The process of being self-aware and making changes to behavior, attitudes, perceptions and values can address areas where problems exist (self-regulation, addiction, interpersonal relationships) as well as working towards identifying and expanding potential, setting and achieving goals in multiple areas. Health professionals identify five areas of personal growth: mental growth, social growth, spiritual growth, emotional growth and physical growth. Any of these can be incorporated into the TH session, either by facilitator prompts asking questions relating to physical or social traits for example, or using activity tasks like sharing materials or being patient as art dries (emotional growth). Engaging in artistic activities can support self-discovery, self-reflection and emotional intelligence while strengthening personal identity. Art is a medium for introspection, for exploring ideas, feelings, offering visual and tactile sensory elements (Marimon, 2023) as evidenced by the field of [art therapy](#) which utilizes various techniques, mediums and activities. This TH activity uses seeds, artwork and hands-on experiences in a therapeutic forum akin to formalized art therapy.

Sensory stimulation can be one therapeutic focus during this activity. Differentiating between textures with or without using visual inputs can stimulate cognitive-physical integration, address sensory defensiveness and tolerance, while encouraging a greater willingness to touch items, and engage with nature and nature's items.

This TH activity is not recommended for children who may be tempted to explore with their mouths and who may try to eat the seeds, particularly children under the age of 4. For individuals living with dementia who may be tempted to eat non-food substances, substituting seeds intended for human consumption (pumpkin seeds, shelled sunflower seeds, flax seed) is an option. Be mindful of people who have swallowing issues if there is a possibility of seeds being consumed.

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

Packaged bird seed is not intended for human consumption – it may contain peanuts or tree nuts. Choking hazards from seeds is a possibility as is swallowing issues if seeds are consumed. Allergies need to be identified prior to session.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Extensions of this TH seed activity can include other seed activities, such as choosing a seed from a selection of packets and planting it in a small pot, making [eco seed orbs](#), growing and nurturing [grass seed heads](#), or adding water to seeds and touching the [mucilage](#) (gelatinous) substance that envelopes it.

Plants that make good samples for this TH activity include sunflowers with large seeds, [chestnut seedlings with its seed pod](#), [nigella](#), pumpkin seeds, and sesame seeds. [Watermelons](#), with more than 1,00 varieties grown in 96 countries worldwide have big black and some white seeds. Consider having several varieties of uncut watermelons on hand to share plant knowledge that plants come in different shapes, colors and sizes.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Ajmera, R. (2023). [9 impressive health benefits of kalonji \(nigella seeds\)](#). Healthline.

Ashbrook, P. (2017). [Seeing the real me: Using loose parts from nature to create self portraits](#). National Science Teaching Association.

Marimon, A. (2023). [How art shapes personal development: A journey of growth and fulfillment](#). Vancouver Visual Art Foundation.

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.