

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

TH Activity Plan – Sowing Seeds in Winter

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Sowing seeds in winter months for growth & emergence in upcoming season, reflecting nature's cycle of renewal.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn about vegetables; discuss life's unpredictability, adversity, resiliency & unexpected outcomes

Physical: Expand understanding of self-regulation, physiological responses

Psychological/Emotional: Explore sense of renewal & growth; focus on self-care, well-being, life skills and personal needs

Sensory: Use sensory experiences as mechanism for exploring joy, distraction from pain, unpleasant thoughts/experiences

Social: Expand skills working cooperatively in a group; practice teamwork & collaboration

Materials

recycled milk containers
soil or potting mix
seeds
marker, nail, knife



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

- 1. Pre-Session Prep:** Pre-wash & dry all recycled milk containers before session begins. Create a suitable growing medium for planting or have potting mix ready for session.
- Participants, where appropriate, prepare the milk container by cutting it almost in half, opening it so that the two parts (top & bottom) are not completely detached.
- Fill containers with soil halfway up the bottom part of container & gently press the soil.
- Leader gives directions re planting the seeds, referring to planting depth on seed packet. Seed types – rye grass, radish, cabbage, kale, onion, leek, broccoli, beetroot, kohlrabi. Cover with a thin layer of soil, gently compacting it.
- Gently water the containers so as not to disturb seeds. Use masking or duct tape to seal the two parts together at the cut line.
- Pierce 5 holes in the top half of container to create airflow and provide optimal moisture (pierce with nail, awl, or scissors).
- Label containers with participant's name, planting date & plant name. Read seed packet to determine days to germination.
- Place container outside including winter season, and plan schedule for observing plant germination, growth, with possible activity extension of transplanting seeds when mature.
- Discuss elements required for seed survival (winter temperatures, sun,

water), care of seeds, passage of time & patience during germination stage, expectations for plant emergence, seasons - life cycles of planting, germination, renewal, growth & harvest. Relate these to human growth.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This activity was developed and delivered for programs with survivors of trauma, including female survivors of human trafficking. It has been delivered as clinical horticultural therapy (HT) and as therapeutic horticulture (TH), the latter with therapeutic goals that were not clinically charted as they were in HT (Poláčková et al., 2023). The activity is appropriate across populations and can be adapted to focus on specific therapeutic goals of renewal, personal growth, passage of time, practicing patience, coping with life's unpredictability and unexpected outcomes. Its versatility as a winter-time plant activity for all types of climates including those with snow, underscores the theme of renewal, with the passage of plant dormancy being transformed and regenerated as a new season emerges.

This activity lends itself to therapeutic goals in all health domains. In particular, themes & metaphors related to plants & seasons including renewal, transformation, hope, growth, care & self-care. These can be both abstract & literal, understandable by all ages and cognitive/intellectual abilities.

This activity can be delivered as a one-time or multi-session activity, the latter including observations of plant cycles, perhaps most effective when seed growth is apparent as mature, viable plants. Using different types of seeds, identifying their specific needs, and recognizing the powerlessness of seeds relative to weather conditions & other inputs can lead to discussions/metaphors for human growth, overcoming adversity & trauma, cycles of darkness followed by blossoms/growth (plant & human), sense of self & coping strategies for dealing with situations and emotions participants may have experienced. Self-regulation is often intertwined with experiences & behaviors relating to these issues. Discussing self-regulation & physiological responses may further participants' understanding of their life, adversities they have faced & how to work towards a balanced healthy life. Knowledge of trauma & trauma-informed care is helpful, or sessions delivered in conjunction with "expert" in these fields (social worker, mental health professional) where participants have experienced trauma. Specialized training & experience with survivors of human trafficking when delivering horticultural therapy/therapeutic horticulture has proven to be effective (Poláčková et al., 2023).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Essential to check with staff and individuals before the activity to identify allergies, physical abilities, or emotional (in)stability. The use of sharp knives may not be appropriate for some populations. The option of leader doing this step during or prior to session will minimize safety challenges or having sharp objects within reach of participants.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Other containers may be used where recycled plastic milk containers are not available. Creating the sealed "greenhouse" effect for condensation/watering of seeds is essential. This activity provides for the integration of garden elements which are often missing during long winter months, with opportunities for participants to plan gardens, think about dreams, experience hope & joy at plant growth as a path to healing & recovery. Activity can integrate elements of food production, ethnobotany, and connections to reality through natural cycles (seasons, growth, rest).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Center for Health Care Strategies. (2021). What is trauma-informed care?
<https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma-informed-care/>
- Poláčková, Z. (2023). Horticultural therapy with female survivors of human trafficking. *Cultivate* 3(4), 1-5. <https://www.flhhn.com/cultivate-epub.html#/>
- Poláčková, Z., Fleming, L., Brown, J. & Kelejian, H. (2023). Horticultural therapy health interventions with female survivors of human trafficking: Program models. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 33(1) (pending publication).

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.