

Creativity at the Core

CREATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE ARTS
IN CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

We are co-creators with the Divine. Creativity is at the core of our spiritual essence. Creative and expressive arts help us access our most authentic self; as such, they are central to spirituality-focused clinical social work practice. Clinicians can use creative modalities to help clients expand and integrate self-learning and to assess what clients have learned. Clients can use creative and expressive arts to express themselves, experiment with new ideas, develop new understandings, and practice new behaviors.

Examples from the author's clinical practice suggest how to use modalities such as drawing, collage, journaling and creative writing to help clients strengthen relationships with themselves and others, discover and explore their soul purpose, and express their inner lives. These examples demonstrate:

- how creative and expressive arts can be vital tools in helping clients achieve important insights, develop enduring understandings, and create new, healthier behaviors;
- how to incorporate creative and expressive arts as a central aspect of clinical practice;
- how to use creative and expressive arts as client assessment tools; and
- how to use creative and expressive arts in different contexts.

Giving expression to feelings in words or some other physical form strengthens our connection with and appreciation for the awesome beauty of the mystical, magical masterpiece of Divine Creation and returns with ever-greater force, frequency, and vibration.

Empowerment is the primary goal.

- Avoid diagnosing, interpreting, or analyzing with the client
- Allow the client his or her own responsibility
- Honor each individual soul as an unlimited being
- Help only if the client asks; don't do the work for the client
- Help the client let go of his or her fears
- Hold sacred space
- Be nonattached to the outcome

Therapists can use a variety of techniques with clients of any age or gender who are working on a multitude of issues. The particular modality used will depend on the specific circumstances at hand.

The techniques shown here include the mandala process, creative journaling, humor, drawing, feeling wheels, soul maps, poetry, prayer flags, and collage. Clients included children and teens, adults, and families. Issues included serious illness and impending death, sibling issues, divorce, and gratitude.

Clients were able to gain insights into their issues and begin to deal with them in healthy, effective ways. Doing the creative process from a place of conscious intention helped create the healing.

The Mandala Process

As Jung stated, “The mandala represents the psychological expression of the totality of the self.” The mandala acts as both a mirror and a container. Mandalas—circular images—are powerful universal icons that portray a deep sense of oneness and reflect our soul’s essence. They reflect and focus spiritual energies of healing and transformation. When we work within the circle with conscious intention, we are better able to manifest our transformation.

The process emphasizes intention and how focused attention can shape our reality. Using a simple art-as-meditation approach in which each line created on the page is a prayer offered to the Divine, the client creates their own personal healing symbol. The client is encouraged to remain open, nonjudgmental, and accepting of their work.

Once the mandala is complete, the client is invited to share insights gained from both the symbol and the process.



What new insights about yourself did you gain from this process?

“How full living from my inner joy is still constrained by areas of darkness.”

Case Study: Andrew

- White Jewish male, 40 years old
- **Issue:** Going through separation and divorce, learning to be a single parent

The 1-2-3 Mandala Process

Client brings a question or issue.

Five minutes to do three mandalas.

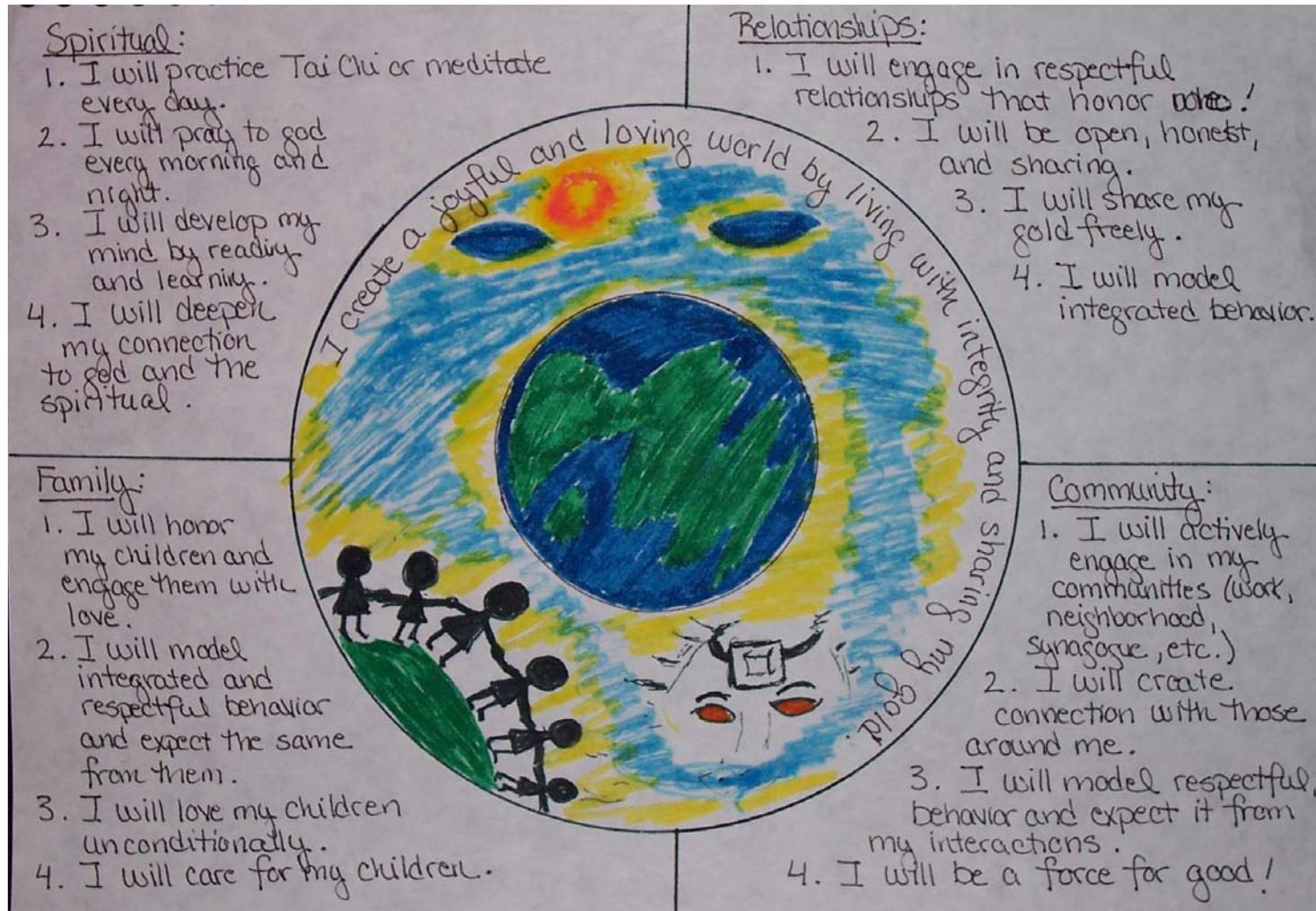
Once client finishes one, can't go back.

Finish in order, start to completion.

Client gets answers or information about the issue.



Mission and Intentions: Living the Mandala Process



A roadmap for integration:

Moving the inner into the outer and the outer into the inner

“All for the glory of God”



- The spiritual level is the highest form of healing
- Expanding Consciousness:
To shift one's identity and self-image, perceive oneself as essence.
- The mandala process is an art of self-realization

Case Study: Charlie

- White male, Jewish
- 55 years old, married, with grown children
- Scientist, highly rational
- Leukemia patient
- **Issue:** Coming out of remission, Charlie learns there will be no transplant. He explores his anger over the fact that he is dying.



Let Go and Let God: The Power of a Joke

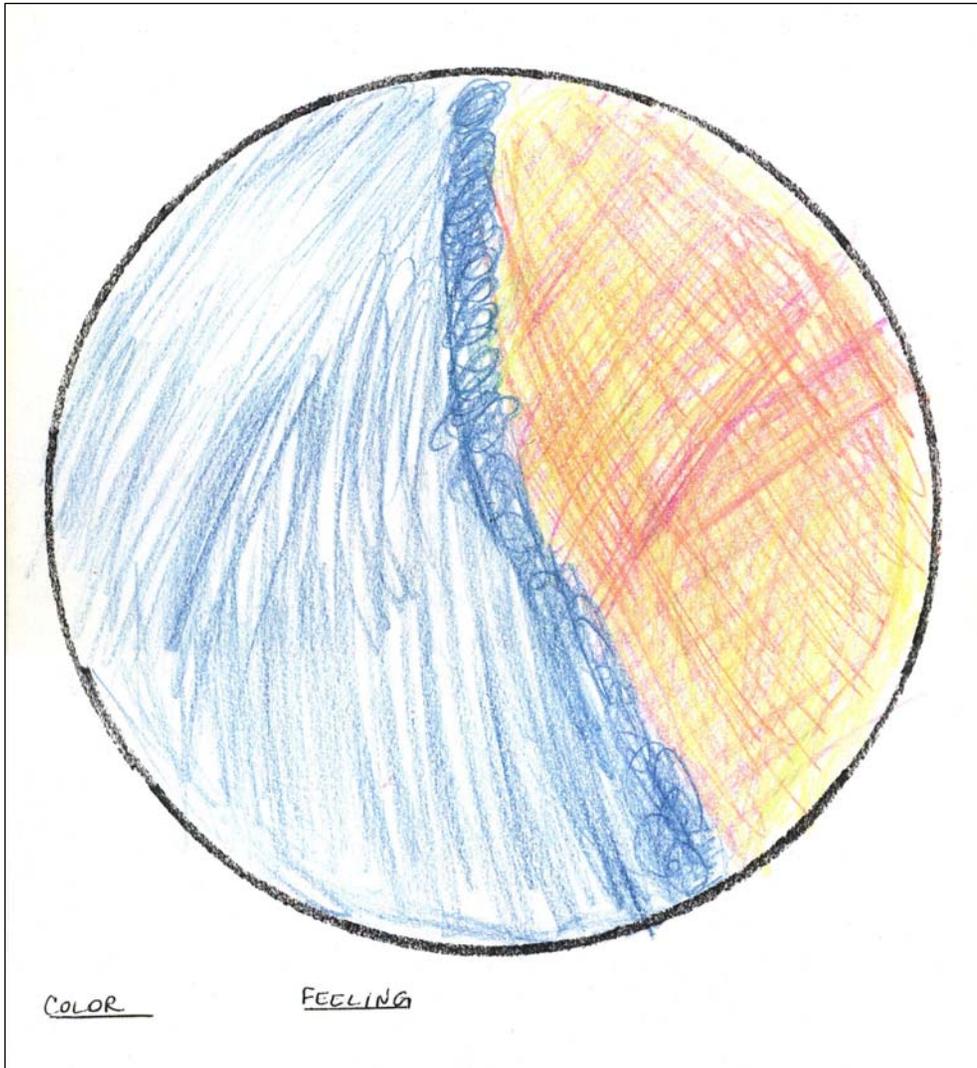
Q: What do you get when you cross an insomniac with an agnostic with a dyslexic?

A: Someone who stays up all night wondering if there is a DOG.

Charlie: "How do you get a miracle?"

Jennifer: "Well, Charlie, I think you have to believe in the Dog."

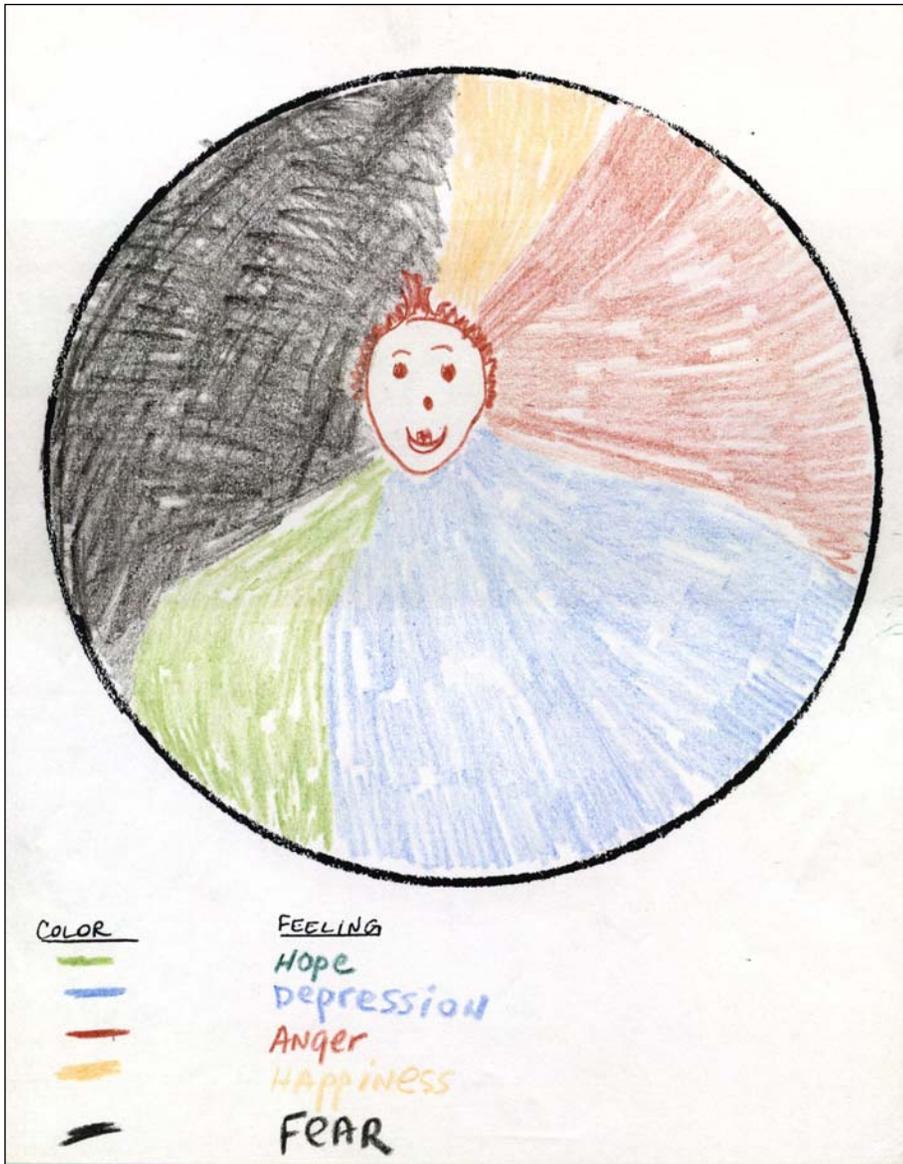
Feeling Wheel: “Five O’Clock”



The feeling wheel process can be used to expose a buried issue or emotion and provide information.

Through the feeling wheel drawing, the client, a cancer patient in a hospital, realizes he has anxiety and sadness about 5:00, when his wife comes to visit, because she may be drunk. Prior to doing this drawing, he was unaware of this connection.

Feeling Wheel: “Reason for Living”

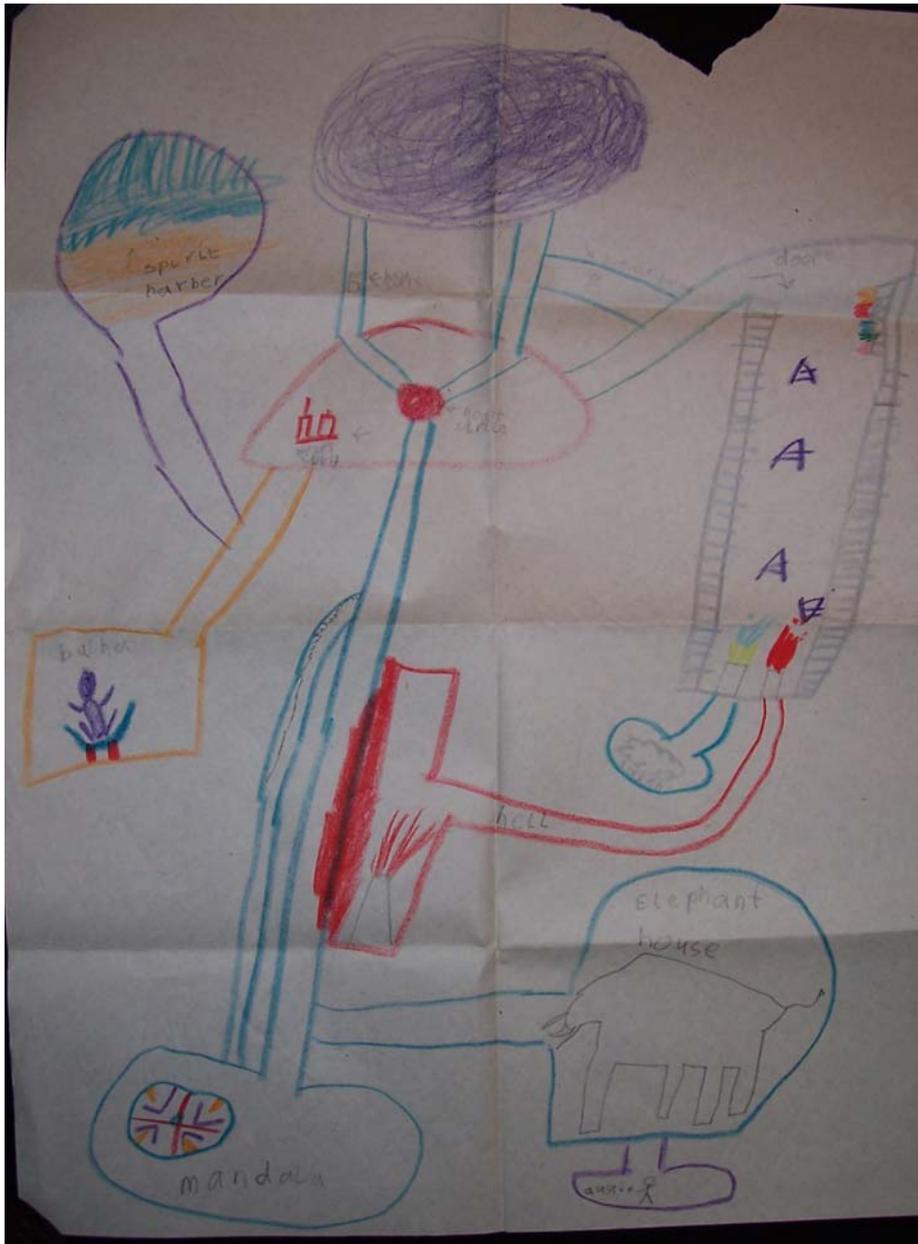


- White female, mid-thirties
- Single mother of a one-year-old daughter
- Diagnosed with a very aggressive form of breast cancer right after giving birth

“My daughter is the center of my world.”

Case Study: Jonathan

- White, Jewish boy, 8 years old
- **Issue:** Parents going through acrimonious separation and divorce



A Map of Myself

“The door to Hell opened and blocked my energy field, and turned one of my doors upside down.”

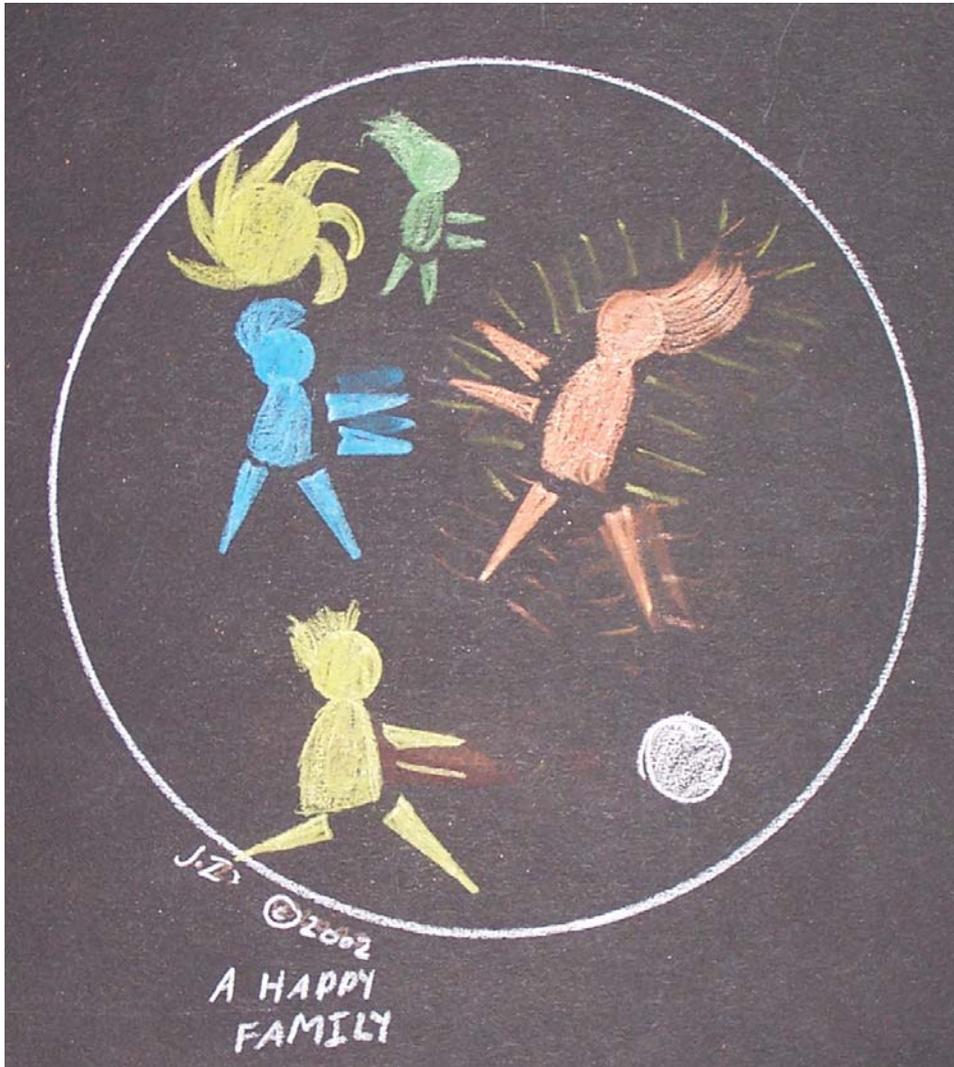
- Pain in liver and stomach
- Emotions: anger, fear, anxiety

Tarot Deck



- Getting used to going back-and-forth between parents' homes
- Doesn't like the changes
- Feeling angry, frustrated, out of control

“A Happy Family”



“A mother running toward the children; the children running toward the mother. The son is waving his arms. The dad is running toward the mother. The mother has prickly, porcupine energy; she’s a whirlwind and fiery.”

Feelings: nervous, anxious; didn’t want to talk about it.

Case Study: Timothy

- White, Quaker male, ages 11 to 13
- **Issue:** Learning to manage anger and develop other emotions and coping strategies

Development and Integration of More Emotions

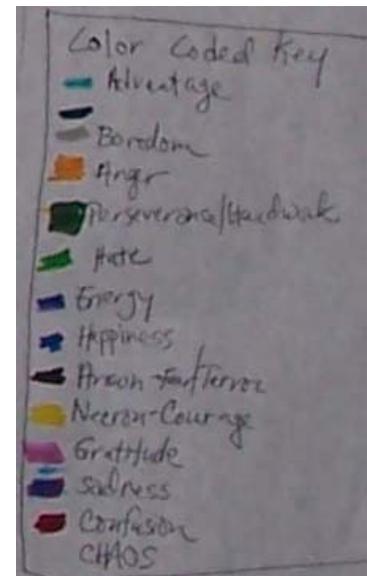


Two years later, the client's drawings demonstrate a significant increase in emotional development and improvement in coping strategies.



This process of creating another universe gave the client a chance to both work through his issues and practice responses that he then used in his daily life.

Two months later, the client shows a quantum leap in the range of effective emotions developed to cope with life challenges.



Creative Journaling

In this process, the client draws on a real experience and creates a journal entry that incorporates words and pictures. Journaling can be a way to evaluate what one notices and what meaning one gives to what one notices. What we focus on in our lives is what we create. Thus, this kind of creative journaling can be not only a way to record one's thoughts but also a way to train one's mind.

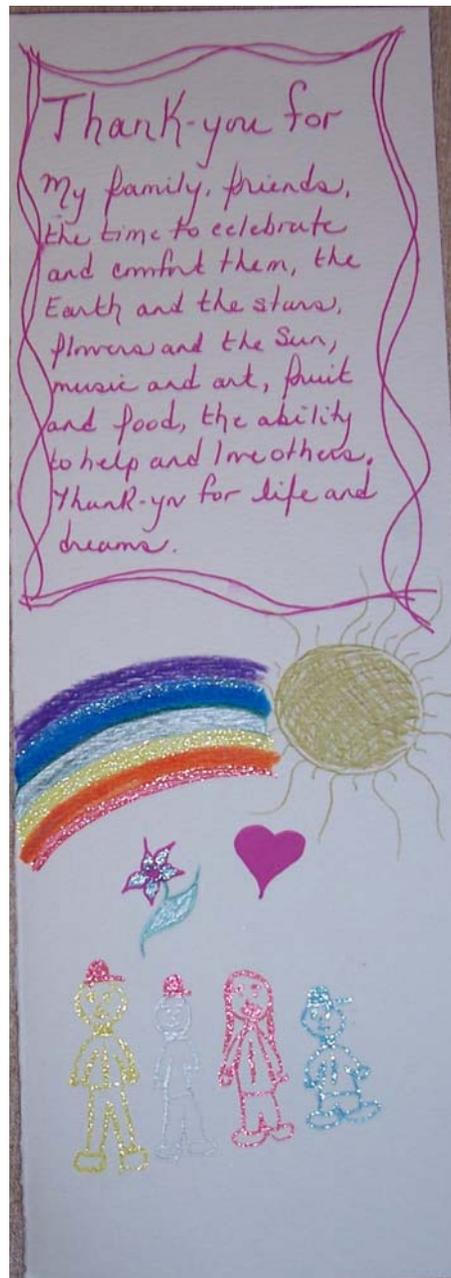


Case Study: Elizabeth

- 31-year-old white female
- Going through divorce
- Issue:** Feelings of isolation, loneliness

As I walked
through the woods
yesterday morning
I was struck
by the number of
spider webs
Visible in the sunrise Light.

These webs of life, glistening with
drops of dew,
patterns of universal information,
looked like diamond pearl necklaces
Waiting,
draping the flowers and trees,
For the goddess to pick them up
And adorn herself.

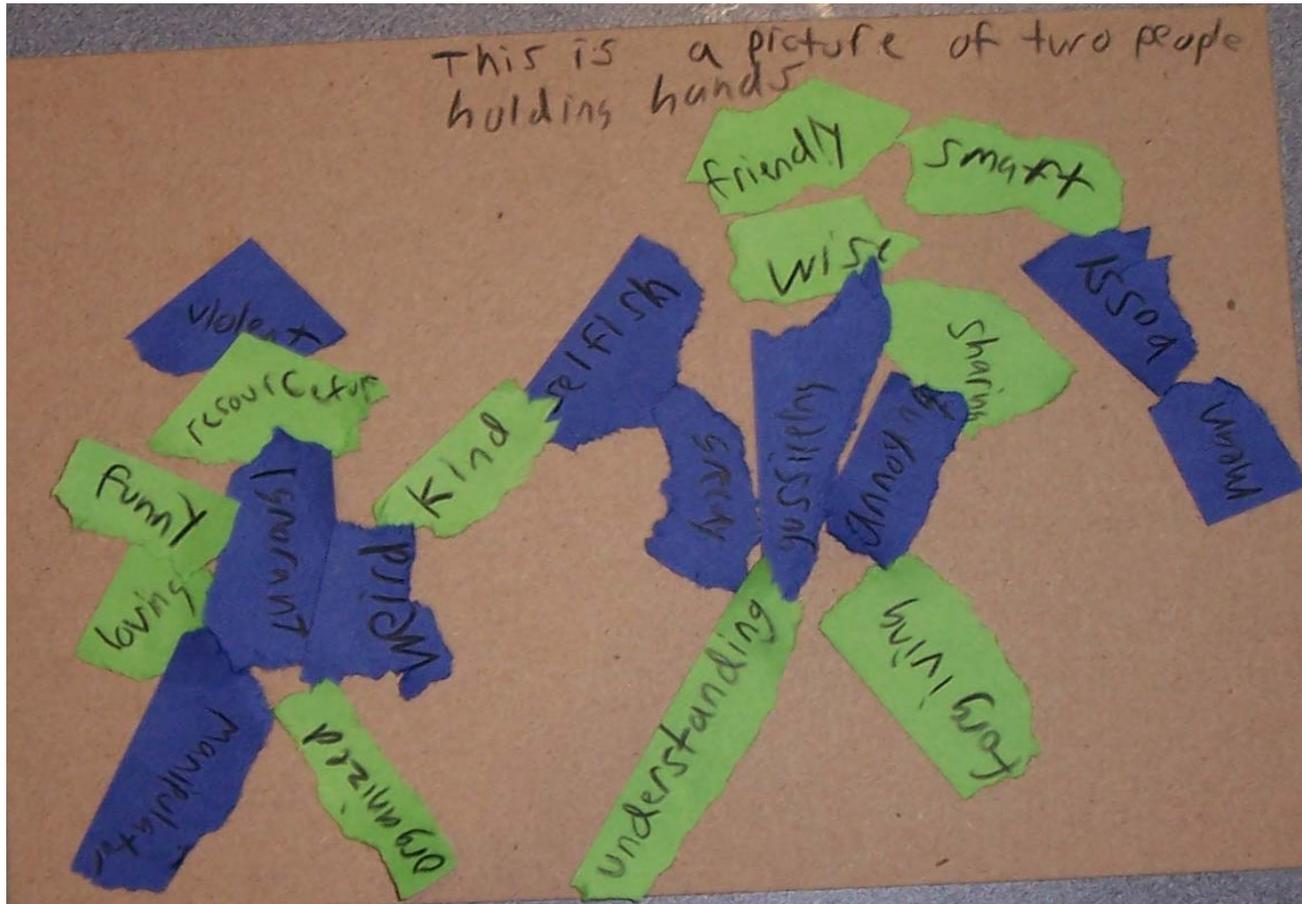


Gratitude Prayer Flags

Parents and children working together created “prayer flags” (adapted from a Buddhist concept) to express their gratitude for the blessings in their lives. The completed flags are hung in the home.

Having families create art projects together helps them with communication and negotiation, learning to work together as a team, and having fun.

Sibling Relationships: A 10-Year-Old's Perspective



After writing positive and negative characteristics of herself and her siblings on different-colored paper, the client was asked to create a picture about sibling relationships. The result shows that she understands that all people have both positive and negative characteristics and that siblings can have healthy relationships despite their differences .

About the Author

Jennifer Judelsohn, MSW, JD, is an artist, psychotherapist, and soulworker and author/illustrator of *Songs of Creation: Meditations on the Sacred Hebrew Alphabet*. She often uses art and other expressive therapies as well as spiritual practices in her work with clients. She presents workshops nationally and internationally on the mandala process, creative and expressive arts, and meditation and spiritual practices.

Visit www.soulworksstudio.com for more information about Jennifer and her work, including upcoming workshops and classes.