Benefits of the Expressive Arts
REACE - International Expressive Arts Therapy Association

Creative Practices to Heal Emotional Pain

I feel blessed to receive letters from people all over the world who share that they have been inspired by my website to start and maintain a regular creative practice. Below are some of the expressive arts modalities that I have explored, written courses about, and personally practiced.

Invitations to Express Yourself:

1. **Spontaneous Collage** is an easy way to begin expressing yourself with no need for drawing or painting skills. Choosing images that emotionally "call to you" (you do not need to know why) and placing them together in a spontaneous way can yield profound insights from your subconscious/unconscious mind.

Spontaneous collage can be taken to a high level of art or it can simply be a few images put together in a random fashion. The simplicity of collage offers a great way to self-express because it is so easy to do.

The mind sometimes cannot get out of its daily loop enough to be able to see the hidden parts of self that are longing to express and integrate into our conscious

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awareness. Spontaneous collage can bypass our censoring mind to reveal deeper thoughts and emotions.

**Benefits of Spontaneous Collage:**
1. Minimal art materials needed with intuitive collage - just a stack of magazines, cardstock for backing, scissors (or your hands for tearing) and a glue stick.

2. No art or drawing skills are necessary with intuitive collage.

3. Spontaneous collage refines intuitive choice-making.

4. Spontaneous collage expresses and reveals subconscious and unconscious emotional and thinking patterns.

**Spontaneous Collage Coursework:**

2. **Intuitive Painting**: Painting for process - without pre-planning - delves below your social presentation to help you discover what you authentically need to express.

When you paint for an end product, it reflects how you want to be seen by others, and it often requires practicing an art technique.

Intuitive painting does not require years of training in art techniques. Your authentic self-expression will evolve as you practice. Quiet your rational mind as you paint. See what wants to be expressed.

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In spontaneous painting do not aim for a pretty end product. Invite a truthful process. Dare to allow something new and unknown emerge.

A simple way to begin the intuitive painting process is to buy yourself some watercolor paints and a watercolor pad and begin splashing around. Commit to one intuitive watercolor painting per day for 30 days to get your intuitive self-expression moving.

**Benefits of Intuitive Painting:**

1. As you cultivate your authentic creative flow it becomes easier to let go of perfectionism and the inner critic.

2. When you exercise your spontaneous right brain you invite insight and discover wisdom.

3. When you let your brush move spontaneously, you discover an authentic painting "style" that is beyond a learned technique.

4. When you paint authentically, you generate self-compassion.

**Intuitive Painting Coursework:**

[https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/intuitive-painting/](https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/intuitive-painting/)

3. **Expressive Journal Writing.** Starting a daily journal writing practice not only invites fluidity into your written expression, you may also find yourself speaking more honestly as well. Writing everyday can help you express yourself in a freer, more authentic way.
"Write hard and clear about what hurts."
- Earnest Hemmingway

Regular writing practice is a way to explore your thoughts and feelings through words. Expressive journal writing can elucidate problematic thinking patterns and illuminate the deeper beliefs that are not serving you.

To begin, relax your body and close your eyes. Empty your mind and place your attention within. Simply wait. As your thoughts arise, write them down spontaneously without worrying about whether they make sense.

Do not censor your written self-expression. No thought is irrelevant. You can choose to write fast, so as to not overthink. Or, you can choose to write very slowly, allowing each thought to arrive up from your depths.

**Benefits of Expressive Journal Writing:**

1. Having a safe place (your private journal) to express your authentic voice allows you to practice honest self-expression.

2. Clarifying thoughts and feelings deepens your connection to your deeper preferences, needs and goals.

3. Knowing yourself better through daily writing will help you to better discern what situations and people feel healthy and toxic to you.

4. Writing about intensely charged thoughts helps to release stress and painful emotions.

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Expressive Journaling Tips:
Writer Natalie Goldberg shares how a daily intuitive writing practice can inspire the growth of your authentic voice:

1.) Lose Control. Say what you want to say. Do not worry if it is polite, correct or appropriate. Just let it rip.

2.) Be specific. Don't muddy your language with generalities.

3.) Don't think. Write down your first thoughts. Go with what first flashes into your mind.

4.) Forget the rules. Don't worry about punctuation, spelling and grammar.

5.) Impress no one. Be free to write the worst junk.

6.) Go for the jugular. Write about what is scary. That is where the energy is. Otherwise, you spend all of your time writing around what makes you nervous.

Writing Coursework:
https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/expressive-journal-writing/

4. Spontaneous Drawing can invite up information from your unconscious mind that needs to be loved and integrated. It can also provide a cathartic release of emotions (though scribbling, mark-making etc.)

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Drawing Every Day

"Jung made a practice of drawing spontaneous images in a journal everyday. He believed these images arose from his inner world and that they were sacred symbols of his higher self. You can engage in the same transformational practice and record spontaneous imagery, develop intuitive knowing, and explore synchronicity."

~ Cathy Malchiodi

To develop your unique voice with drawing, find your own way to express with markers, pencil crayons, pastels or even a ballpoint pen. If words arise as you draw, write them down even if they do not make sense in the immediate moment. Give your hand permission to play in its own way.

Benefits of Spontaneous Drawing
1. Spontaneous drawing bridges the gap between the conscious and unconscious mind and can illuminate areas in your being that are blocked, inhibited and stuck.

2. Spontaneous drawing provides a way to nonverbally express and release negative emotions.

3. Spontaneous drawing develops intuitive knowing.

4. Intuitive drawing provides an opportunity to find your authentic self-expression.

Spontaneous Drawing Coursework:
https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/spontaneous-drawing/

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5. **Meditative Creativity**. A creative practice can become a treasured time for daily meditation. Every time you sit down to create, you can consecrate your efforts to deepening your spiritual connection. All of the expressive arts can involve moving into a deeper spiritual place inside.

Healing spiritual messages in the form of symbols, metaphors and poetry often arrive when we are open, silent, honest and authentic in our expression. Our imagery and words can move us closer to an inner sense of inspiration.

**Meditating on Your Imagery**
1. Find a comfortable place to view your expressive collage, drawing or painting.

2. Sit up straight and breathe deeply, centering within your body as you would in a formal meditation.

3. Gaze softly at your artwork. Listen within to the feelings that arise as you look at your art.

4. Meditate upon your artwork for 5-15 minutes at a time.

5. Write down any deep insights that arise during your meditation.

6. If no insights come, enjoy being silent and centered. When meditating upon spontaneous art, spiritual insights sometimes come much later.

**Benefits of Meditative Creativity**
1. Meditative creativity deepens insight into what you have expressed and helps you to access a deeper understanding of your art.

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2. Meditative creativity improves concentration and deepens your emotional experience of your intuitive art.

3. Meditative creativity increases self-acceptance of what you have created.

4. Meditative creativity expands consciousness beyond everyday levels of thinking.

**Meditational Coursework:**

6. **Poetry Therapy** offers a way to give emotional voice to what would otherwise feel difficult to express in rational sentences.

   The aim of expressive poetry writing is to roam freely with word. Express anything that comes to your mind. Poetry is like a form of mental dancing. Your mental "mind-moves" do not need to make rational sense.

   We all have a free voice that is uncensored, not carefully planning what to say next. Finding mental fluidity of takes practice. Spontaneous poetry invites new insights to arise.

**Expressive Poetry**
1. Reach into the edges of your mind and express what is unique, free, honest and uniquely you.

2. Explore the line between what you think your should say, and what you need to say.

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3. Express what feels forbidden for you to say. Create poetry that expresses what you honestly feel.

4. Be creative with your poem's structure. Try writing very short poems that take a few minutes and long poems that take days to write.

Writing expressive poetry is a way to listen to your original voice. Writer Henry Miller found his original voice by allowing himself to write from the edges of his mind, "Immediately I heard my own voice, I was enchanted: the fact that it was a separate, unique voice sustained me. It didn't matter to me if what I wrote should be considered bad. Good and bad dropped out of my vocabulary....My life became a work of art. I had found my voice. I was whole again."

**Benefits of Poetry Therapy**
1. The use of rhythm in poetry can tap into the verbal music of your original voice.

2. The abstract nature of poetry can better support the expression of painful emotions that might feel too threatening to express directly.

3. Expressive poetry can gradually release the imprints of challenging experiences in a gentle and inspired ways.

4. Poetry can reframe difficult emotions through free-form verbal expression.

**Poetry Coursework:**
[https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/poetry-therapy/](https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/poetry-therapy/)

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7. **Storytelling** out loud or in written form - can provide an emotional connection to your life. Stories provide a chance to express, explore and change your narrative through spoken or written expression.

**Benefits of Storytelling**
1. Storytelling can help you to develop self-compassion for your life.

2. Storytelling increases the possibility of rewriting your narrative in increasingly positive ways.

3. Telling your story about an old problem can inspire a new ideas for change.

4. Storytelling can weave the themes of your life together.

**Storytelling Coursework:**
https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/storytelling/

7. **Depth Journaling** is the practice of listening deeply to the unfolding of your day and keeping a track of the emotional themes of your life.

**Seeing the Deeper Nuances of Your Day**
Keeping a daily log of your inner life can be a deepening experience. As you start to take note of what feels meaningful to you each day, you bring the edges of your unconscious mind into sharp detail.

Detailed in the classic book, *At A Journal Workshop* by Ira Progroff, I offer you a few suggestions for keeping a daily log of the meaningful inner and outer movements of your life.

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Depth Journaling Process

1. At the end of your day, sit in stillness. Contemplate the inner movements of your day. With your eyes closed, also revisit the outer events of your day. What details stand out in your memory?

2. Start by remembering the beginning of your day. How did you feel upon awakening? Recording the earliest fragments of your dreams will help you to see how themes of your night moved into your day-time themes.

3. As you began your day, what emotions, desires, anxieties, hopes and plans coloured your morning? As you began the tasks of the day, what thoughts came to your mind? What feelings, memories and fantasies moved through you?

4. What kinds of relationships did you encounter in the course of your day? Were they loving or frustrating? What emotions did you feel as you encountered the people in your day?

"To follow the movement of our emotions allows us to retrace the formation of our lives from the inside. Thus you will begin to recognize how your day unfolded from within yourself."

~ Ira Progoff

5. Do not censor or edit the content of your day. Do not exclude the things that you feel ashamed of, or emphasize the things you feel proud of. It is important to stay neutrally curious as you record your day.
5. Let your words flow with no editing or censorship. As you record each 24 hour block of your life experience, you will start to sense into how the movement of each day forms the larger themes of your life.

6. Once you have finished writing, close your eyes, breathe deeply and let your whole being absorb your day. Write any additional thoughts that come to you. Let yourself integrate the movement of your day as an integral piece of the larger theme of your life.

**Benefits of Depth Journaling**

1. Depth journaling can show you how your nighttime dreams relate to the unfolding of your day.

2. Depth journaling can help you to recognize the main themes of your life.

3. Depth journaling can supports you to become more aware of your emotions.

4. Depth journaling can help you to describe subtle thoughts and feelings that you might normally miss.

**Journaling Coursework:**

[https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/depth-journaling/](https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/depth-journaling/)

8. **Authentic Movement** involves dancing your body from your intuitive knowing.

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Your Body as an Art Form

We travel through life holding our emotions in. We repress many things - our sexuality and our passion, our grief, our anger and our hurt. We put barriers in front of our heart, and hold our repressed feelings in our muscles. Over time, we become stiff, contracted and tense.

To use your body as your art form, play a piece of music and move spontaneously to your own truth. Dancing to one song a day can free up your body's innate expression.

Our bodies can forget how to move authentically. You may feel self-conscious when you first start dancing. Go to where your body feels the most stiff and move that body part into fluidity.

Move through all of your body parts from head to toe. Allow each body part to express something honest about itself.

Dancing spontaneously opens us to more emotional fluidity. If you maintain a daily expressive art practice, it is helpful to release your body tensions through spontaneous movement first.

Benefits of Authentic Movement

1. Spontaneous dancing softens the body's defensive armoring so that emotions can come forward for release and healing.

2. Authentic movement expresses emotions nonverbally. We do not always have to find words to express how we feel.

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3. Authentic movement can be emotionally cathartic and provide a way to release difficult emotions.

4. Dancing breaks up the stagnation of stored emotional patterning, and opens up fresh ways of thinking.


9. **Photo Therapy** combines photography with an inner self-reflection process.

**The Photo Therapy Process**

1. Go for a walk outside, taking time to find something in your visual world that feels emotionally charged for you.

2. Take a photograph and contemplate how your photograph reflects how you currently feel.

**Benefits of Photo Therapy**

1. Photo therapy can deepen insight into what you love about your daily life.

2. Photo therapy encourages an emotional connection to your surroundings.

3. Photo therapy increases self-awareness of how your outside world symbolically reflects your inner life.

4. Photo therapy intensifies appreciation for your surroundings.

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Photo Therapy Coursework:
https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-arts-modalities/photo-therapy/

Bio:
I am a Registered Expressive Arts Educator/Consultant with the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. I am also a Registered Counsellor and a Registered Counselling Supervisor with the Association of Cooperative Counsellors of Canada.

I offer free and fee-based online coursework that provide experiential “doors into” expressive/spontaneous/intuitive art and writing practices. I warmly invite you to visit my website www.expressiveartworkshops.com and my online classroom https://coursecraft.net/u/shelleyklammer