

ART THERAPY RESOURCES



ART THERAPY CASE STUDY BACKGROUND: FIBROMYALGIA

Sarah is currently dealing with repeated sleep disruption. Sarah mentions she often wakes in the middle of the night and can't fall asleep. She then becomes anxious and irritated at not being able to fall asleep. She begins speculating on how the lack of sleep will impact her the next day. Her anxiety and worry about lack of sleep then affects her ability to attempt sleep again that night.

This exercise is designed to help your client deal with anxious and pervasive thoughts that can sabotage efforts to engage in activities of physical well-being including sleep and rest. This exercise can help disrupt negative thinking patterns and encourage your client to engage in relaxation techniques.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Explain to your client that this exercise is to help introduce an art exercise focused on relaxation as well as develop a ritual of techniques that can help trigger your client's cognitive process to work towards relaxation and rest.
- Ask your client to create a space that reflects relaxation and calmness. Remove or reduce any sounds, smells, sights that may be disruptive to the process of relaxing and maintaining focus. Additionally, introduce any calming elements such as soft music, burning essential oils, or a soothing drink that may encourage calm and relaxation.
- Take a series of deep breaths before beginning the art exercise. Let any thoughts that come to mind flow by. Do not focus on any specific thought that enters your mind and do not attempt to resolve any real or perceived problems. Let all thoughts flow through while maintaining a process of deep breathing.
- Ask your client to create a smaller inner circle and use this circle to express the feelings of tension and frustration that may come from not being able to sleep. Include as little or as much detail that expresses this feeling. Use colours and shapes that also reflect this tension.
- After your client has created this circle of pattern, ask them to again engage in deep breathing and the concept of releasing any thoughts as passing through. Do not hold on to any specific thought or attempting to problem solve.
- Ask your client to create a second circle that surrounds the first circle. In this circle, ask the client to introduce patterns, colours, and shapes that reflect the release of the first circle of tension. This circle can contain a looser point of view. Maybe some areas are still tense and restricted. If these patterns appear, ask your client to transform them into looser patterns.
- After your client has created this circle of pattern, ask them to again engage in deep breathing and the concept of releasing any thoughts as passing through. Do not hold on to any specific thought or attempting to problem solve.

NOTE: more details can be found at www.arttherapyresources.com.au/case-study-fibromyalgia

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- Ask your client to create a final circle that is drawn around the outside of the two previous circles. Use this space in the last circle to create patterns, colours, and shapes that reflect the release of the previous circle of tension and the transition to becoming even looser and more relaxed. The client may want to extend their creation outside of the circle to reflect a complete release from restrictions and limitations and relax into the entire space before them.
- After the final circle area is completed, the mandala is finished. Ask your client to notice the transition from the first inner circle to the outer circle. Did they notice a similar transition in their feelings? Did they notice any tension being released?
- Your client may want to create multiple mandalas to keep exploring this release. They may also want to make additional circles to continue the process. The mandala instructions should not be prescriptive but instead provide a springboard for your client to explore this art making process.

EXAMPLE EXERCISE:

Sarah noticed that the mandala exercise gave her an opportunity to distract herself from her feelings of tension and instead focus her attention to the ideas of release and relaxation.

Sarah felt a significant change in her physical state and felt she had gained some control over her ability to do something constructive and beneficial to her relaxation process other than trying to think herself out of a tense state into a more relaxed state.

Sarah also felt the exercise required little physical and mental effort from her which allowed her to focus more on the process of creating art instead of worrying about her ability to undertake the task.



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