



COLLABORATIVE MANDALA

ART THERAPY EXERCISE

The following exercise is designed to build rapport and enhance engagement between therapist and client through the creation of a collaborative mandala. Mandalas, circular designs that symbolize wholeness and balance, are often used in art therapy to facilitate self-expression and mindfulness. In this exercise, the therapist and client work together to create a mandala, fostering a sense of partnership and mutual exploration. The collaborative nature of this exercise not only strengthens the therapeutic alliance but also encourages the client to engage fully in the creative process.

INSTRUCTIONS

To begin, the therapist and client should gather materials for the mandala creation, including a large sheet of paper or canvas, drawing tools (such as markers, colored pencils, or crayons), and any additional materials the client might want to incorporate (such as magazine cutouts, natural elements, or fabric scraps).

The therapist should introduce the concept of the mandala, explaining that it is a symbol of unity and balance, and that creating a mandala together can be a way to explore their therapeutic relationship. The therapist might also share that mandalas can serve as a visual representation of the shared therapeutic space, where both the therapist and client contribute to the process.

Next, the therapist and client decide on a central theme or intention for the mandala. This theme might relate to a specific therapeutic goal, such as exploring emotions, fostering mindfulness, or addressing a particular life challenge. Once the theme is established, the therapist and client take turns adding elements to the mandala, working from the center outward. Each person can contribute shapes, colors, symbols, or other elements that resonate with the chosen theme.

Throughout the creation process, the therapist should remain attuned to the client's responses and emotional states, offering gentle guidance and encouragement as needed. The therapist might also engage in reflective dialogue with the client during the creation process, asking questions like, "What does this color or shape represent for you?" or "How do you feel about the way the mandala is developing?"

Once the mandala is complete, the therapist and client take time to reflect on the finished piece together. This reflection might involve discussing the creative process, exploring the meanings behind the different elements, and considering how the mandala relates to the client's therapeutic goals. The therapist might also invite the client to consider how the collaborative nature of the exercise impacted their experience and how it might reflect the dynamics of their therapeutic relationship.

Finally, the therapist and client can decide how to preserve or display the mandala, whether by taking a photograph, framing it, or incorporating it into the client's art therapy journal. This final step reinforces the value of the collaborative process and provides a tangible reminder of the shared therapeutic work.