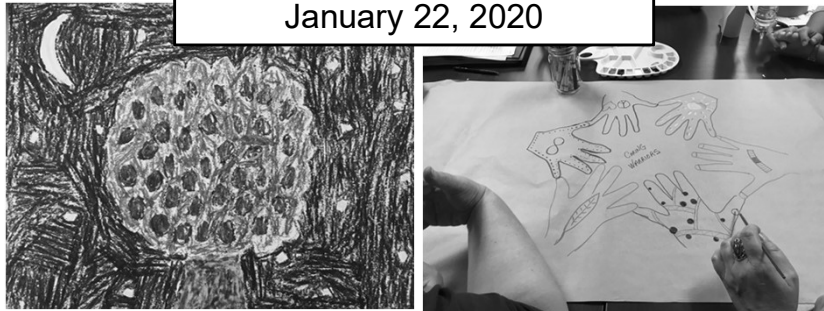


Diana Coholic, Ph.D., RSW  
School of Social Work



*Arts-Based Mindfulness  
Methods for Personal &  
Professional Benefits*

CASW - Webinar  
January 22, 2020



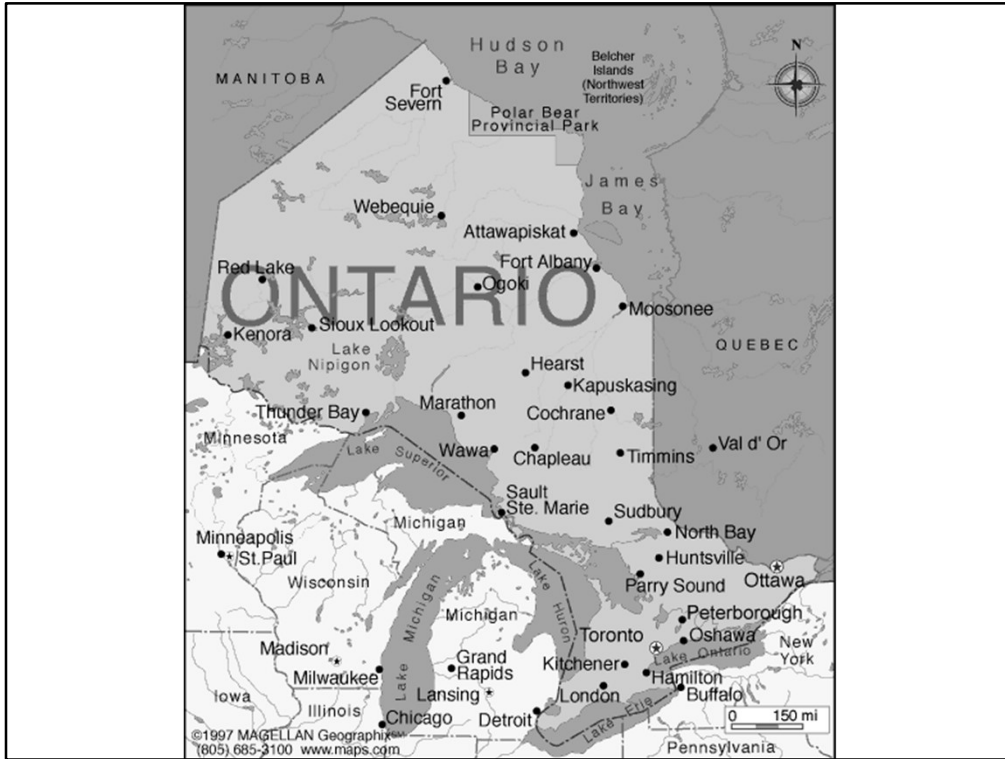
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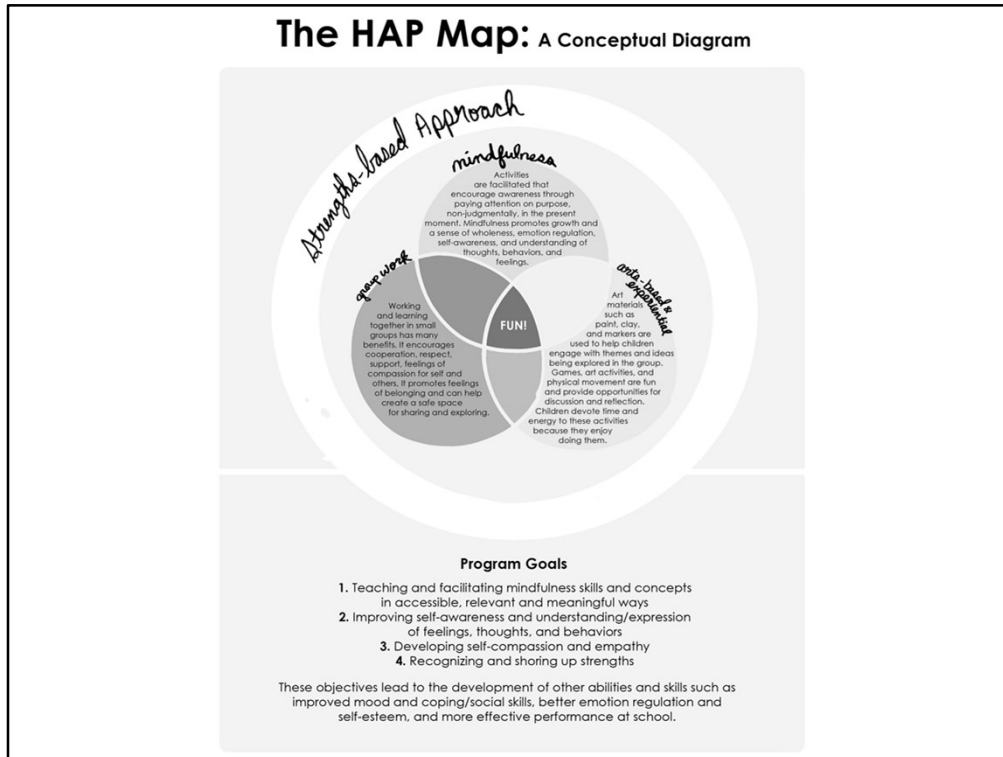


Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada








- Since 2005 I've been studying the benefits of arts-based mindfulness group work
  - HAP was developed & refined in our research with children involved with child welfare and mental health systems
- learning mindfulness
  - improving self-awareness
  - developing self-compassion and empathy
  - shoring up strengths.


We have unique contribution to make as social workers as we bring a creative, holistic approach to mindfulness, and we have skills in the purposiveful use of group work. We're concerned about social justice issues, and work from anti-oppressive approaches. Mindfulness is sometimes criticized as being focused on changing the individual or helping them adapt to oppressive systems, and we certainly don't agree with this. Mindfulness is about recognizing all of our connections and working towards larger changes.

# THOUGHTS JAR




**PURPOSE**

Thoughts Jar teaches the concept of mindfulness. It symbolizes how we feel when we have many thoughts and feelings all swirling around in our minds versus how we feel when our minds are calmer and more focused (when the objects have settled to the bottom of the jar).




**HOW TO**

1. Use a clear glass jar half-filled with water.
2. Take various shaped and coloured beads, which represent thoughts and feelings, and drop them into the jar one by one saying out loud what each bead represents.
3. Everyone can take a turn shaking the jar.



**LEARNING**

With a calm mind and self-awareness, we can make better choices and decisions rather than reacting because of a feeling.



**THE EXPERIENCE**

"Thoughts Jar lets me show my feelings to my friends and family"

"Thoughts Jar teaches me to wait for my mind to settle before I react"

"Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)" [www.dianacoholic.com](http://www.dianacoholic.com)

I would encourage you to use this in your practices – I use it 1:1 to begin sessions



Power of being mindful is this ability to make choices rather than reacting & acting out.

# Mindfulness

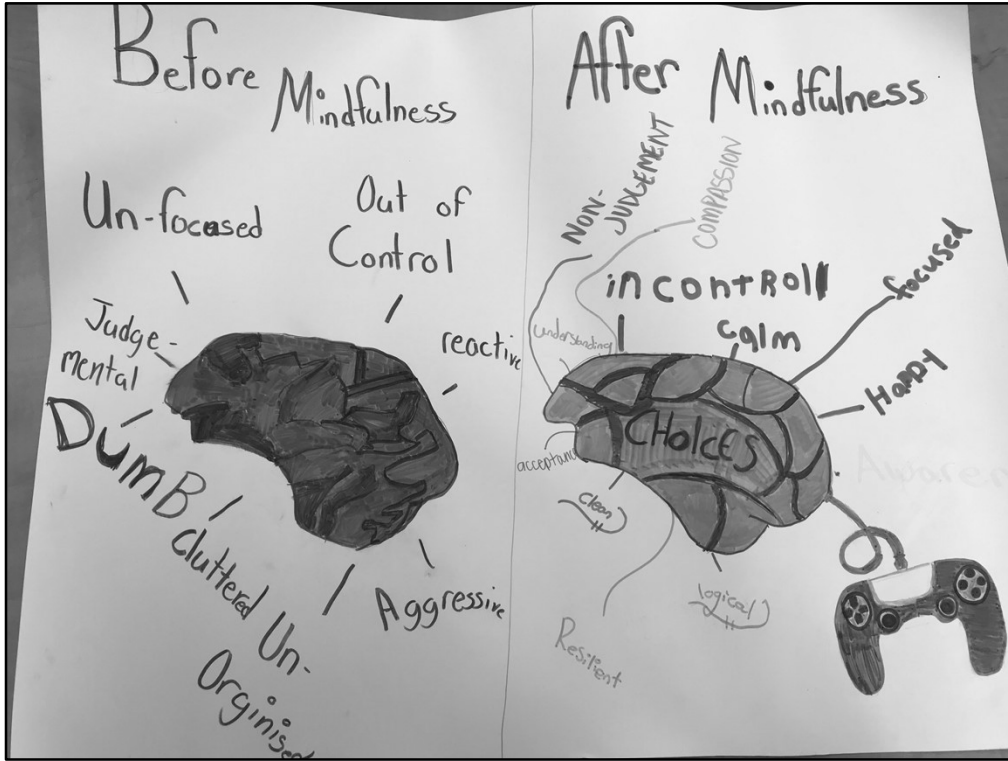
- Accessing the present moment
- Cultivating attention to attend to what is happening right now
- Seeing things without a distortive lens of judgment
- “activity that encourages awareness to emerge through paying attention on purpose, non-judgmentally in the present moment”  
(Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn)

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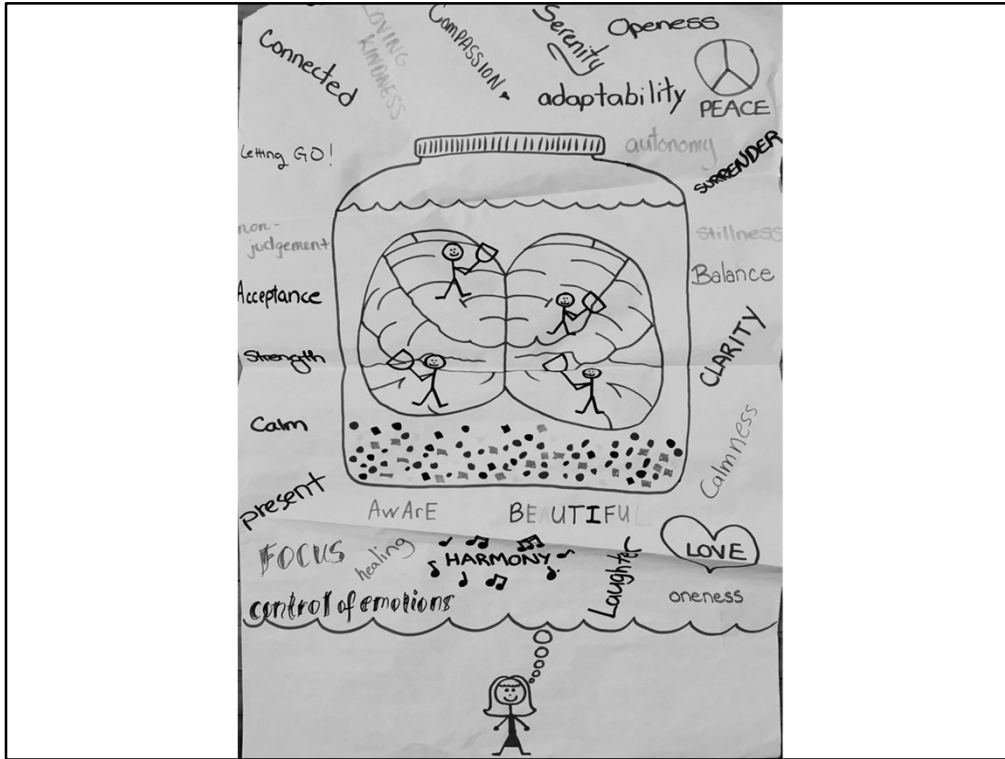
# Mindfulness

- Is both a state & a trait (dispositional)
  - Secularized in the West
    - Self-awareness
  - Daily life mindfulness
    - Formal practice

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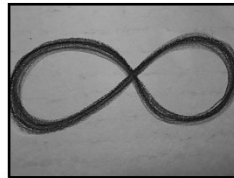
The women drew stickmen shoveling beads off their brain, so that thoughts & feelings won't cloud the mind, keeping it stuck in a reactive cycle. The liquid preserving the brain is calm representing how practicing mindfulness helps their minds feel calmer and more clear. Finally, each woman wrote what mindfulness means to them around the *Thought Jar*.

# Mindful Breathing

- Take 5



- Figure 8 / infinity symbol



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Also use clay.

**Tai Chi:  
"Little Grass"**

- (a) Visualize yourself as a little blade of grass blowing in the wind. Your whole body is soft. (Inhale)
  - (b) Bow down from your waist. (Exhale)
  - (c) Dangle your arms down towards the floor and move your arms/hands from side to side. Breathe in and out slowly to match the movement.
- Focus on how soft you can be. You can stand up against any big storm when you are flexible.



Some need more physical ways to learn to focus on their breathing.

Yoga too.

## Attitudinal Foundation of Mindfulness

- Non-judging
- Patience
- Beginner's mind
- Trust
- Non-striving
- Acceptance
- Letting go



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Mindfulness is a holistic Philosophy – important to teach concepts that go with a mindful approach.

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Description</b>
Acceptance	Seeing and acknowledging things as they are in the present moment.
Curiosity	A spirit of interest, investigation and exploration.
Empathy and compassion	A respectful consideration of one's own experience and of another person's experience – including compassionate listening and communication of feelings, needs and desires. This consideration will naturally extend to include the environment, with an aim of reducing oppression, injustice and suffering.
Loving kindness	A quality where you truly wish another well – to be healthy safe, free from harm and free from fear. A quality embodying friendliness, benevolence and love. Loving-kindness extends to all that surrounds a person – including the self.
Non-attachment	Letting go, not grasping and clinging to outcomes. Allowing events to simply unfold.
Non-judging	Impartial witnessing, observing the present moment without evaluation or categorisation.
Non-reactivity	Ability to respond with consciousness and clarity, instead of automatically reacting in a habitual or conditioned way.
Openness (Beginner's mind)	Seeing things newly, as if for the first time.
Patience	Allowing things to unfold in their own time.
Trust	Developing a basic trust in your experience and your own inner wisdom.

Source: Albrecht, N. J. (2016). *Teachers teaching mindfulness with children: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Doctoral dissertation, Flinders University).

## Non-Judgment, Self-Compassion, Loving Kindness

- Adopt a wondering, curious attitude towards feelings
- Self-compassion = tolerate & understand our challenging characteristics, mistakes are part of being human, & don't judge your pain & suffering
- Meditation – caring feelings towards yourself, to loved ones, acquaintances, strangers, someone challenging, all beings.

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Many people judge their feelings and thoughts – worse thing you can do.

When we do self-compassion meditation, often begin with universe or all beings and move down.

## Painting on a Line (control, letting go, non-striving...)



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Promotes discussion about control, perfectionism, going with the flow, non-striving...

Sometimes group members feel frustrated by painting with only one hand because they cannot accomplish what they have in their imagination.

Connections can be made about adapting your expectations in a challenging situation.

In one girls group, one participant shared that this activity shows how you need to keep trying your best when there are challenging situations because something good can come out of it in the end.

## Bad Day Better (acceptance, self-compassion, trust...)



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After the bad day has been made better, each group member discusses and explains their painting to the group.

This activity allows for a discussion about how we have the ability to make our bad days better depending on what we focus on, how grateful we are, and so on. Some group members have shared the ways that they make themselves feel better: “You can do something you find relaxing,” “You can talk to a friend,” and “You can think about a happy time.”

It is important to discuss with the children that having a bad day is a normal part of life and that the point of becoming a mindful person is not to avoid difficult feelings but to learn how to feel and express these in healthy and helpful ways.



## Benefits of Mindfulness

- More self-acceptance /  
Less negative self-judgment
- Interrupt cycles of rumination
- Help reduce cravings
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety, depression, stress
- Emotion regulation
- Improved optimism
- Improved social skills
- Better self-concept
- Improved mood

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From research...

## Self-Awareness: Coping with & expressing feelings better

*“I learned a lot about myself. And I learned about how I perceive things...I found other strategies to change those thoughts or alter them to be in a more helpful thought. Instead of something that is so negative...It gave me a chance to understand what is going on in my head. And being able to stop and say, okay, I am going down this path and I need to back up and find another route“.*

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21 youth with pre and post interviews

(another 20 pre interviews were done)

Making choices about what they are focusing their thinking on.

## Outcomes - Benefits

- If a young person learns to pay attention enough to develop some self-awareness of their feelings and learns to express these in healthy ways, it makes sense that they will have better regulation of their emotions.
- In turn, improved responses to emotional events will build social and coping skills. Making friends and gaining support of others can then lead to improvements in self-esteem and confidence that then improves overall mood.

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Benefits are connected and build on each other.

## Mechanisms of Change

- Mindfulness training in the conscious control of attentional resources is likely to benefit learning & problem solving because an ability to regulate attention is a building block for all types of learning.
- Learning mindfulness can help to view negative thoughts as passing events rather than valid reflections of reality, and it may promote flexible responses as opposed to ruminating.

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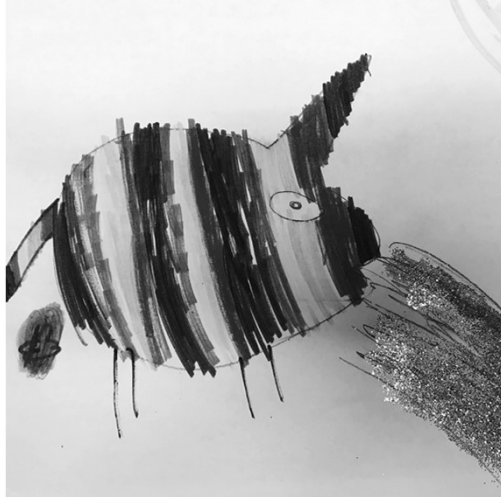
Interesting as we try and understand how practicing mindfulness leads to changes.

## Therapeutic Presence

- Reflexivity (awareness) and reflective practice (reflect while doing)
  - Common Factors Research
- From research = less distracted, greater ability to tolerate emotion & be more empathic / compassionate
  - Leads to effective ability to deal with transferences.

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## Why an Arts-Based Approach?



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Why do we teach mindfulness using arts-based activities?

- Some children can become easily frustrated and disengaged, have poor listening skills, and trouble remaining physically still.
- Engage children in the process. We've had no problem keeping children in the group once they agree to come.
- Power is flattened – more collaborative process.

Arts-based activities can:

- teach concepts,
- help develop skills,
- encourage non-verbal expression,
- foster enjoyment and mutual aid where group members help each other.



The use of arts enables understanding and learning about feelings, and expression of these feelings.

Makes sense that engaging youth in something they enjoy is going to help them practice these skills. Most do not want to go to counselling.

I have learned that change and learning new skills doesn't have to be painful – it can happen through the process of fun and creativity.

It also brings enjoyment to our work that is often difficult and challenging.

## Relevance of Art-Making Process

***“It’s really difficult for me to communicate as it is. And to be able to either write something down or communicate through poetry or through my drawings...really, it definitely helps out”.***

***“It has built my self-esteem...when I expressed my art on the paper, I just expressed who I am...I just learned more of how I’m feeling and what kind of person I am”.***

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## Examples of Activities

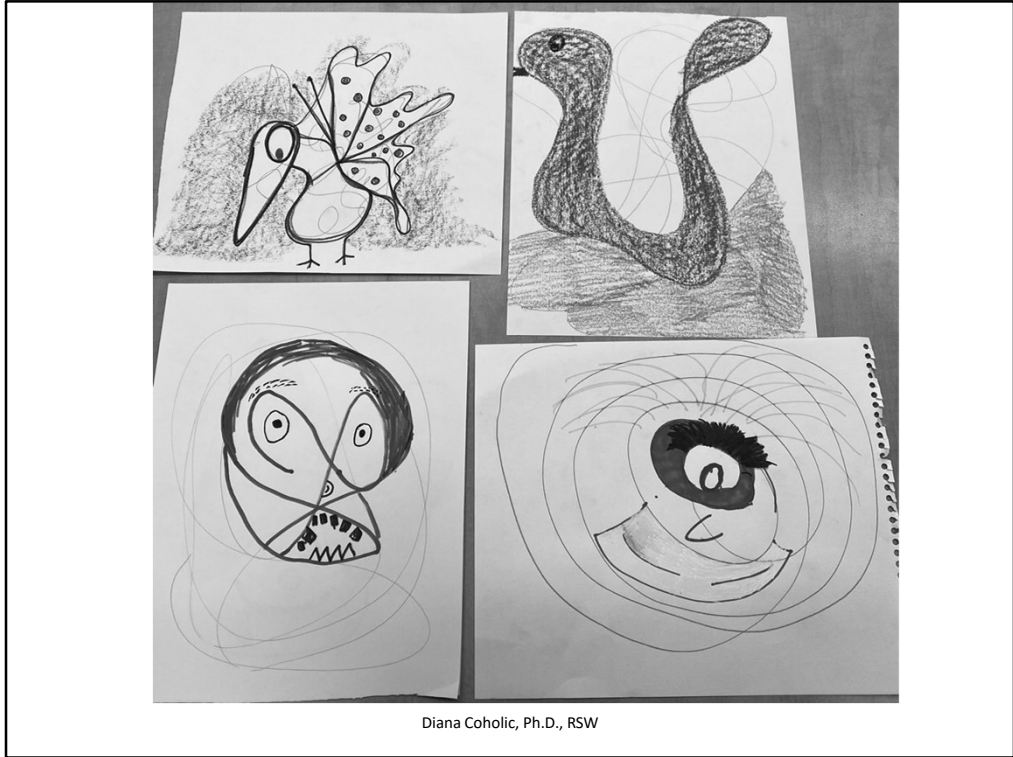


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**Doodle  
Draw**



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# ME AS A TREE



## PURPOSE

Me as a tree helps people symbolize themselves as a tree. This is a good "get to know you" activity.



## HOW TO

1. Participants are asked to draw themselves as a tree.
2. Participants are encouraged to share their tree and how it represents who they are.



## LEARNING

Everyone can draw a tree, but everyone's trees will always be different and unique. This helps to understand how diversity is important.

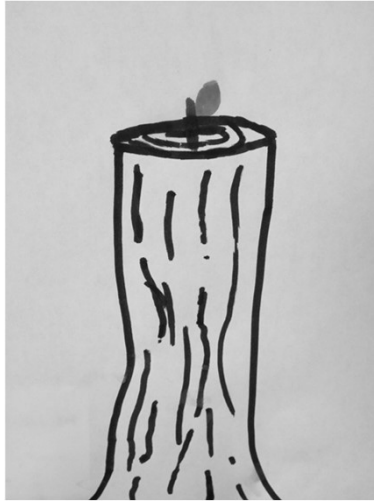


## THE EXPERIENCE

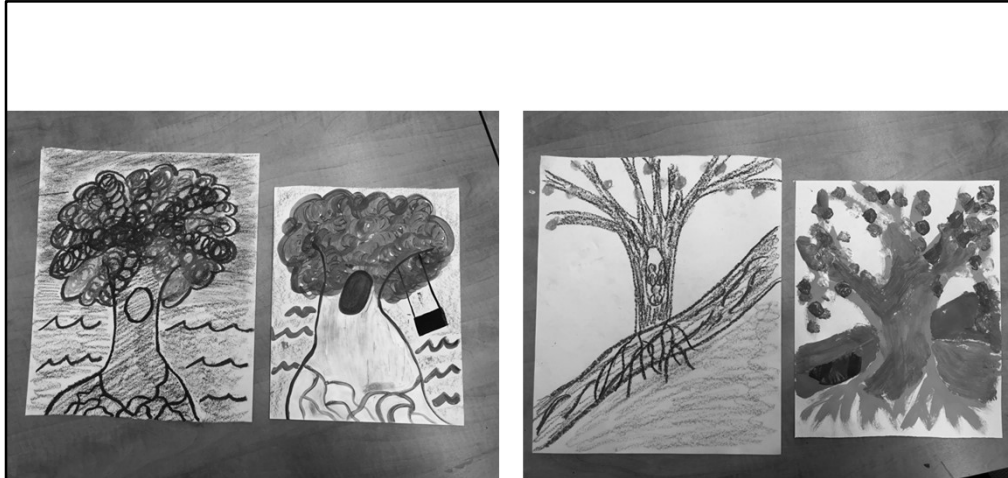


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# Me as a Tree



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## Beginning and Ending Trees

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## *How to Effectively Use Arts-Based Activities in Youth Work*

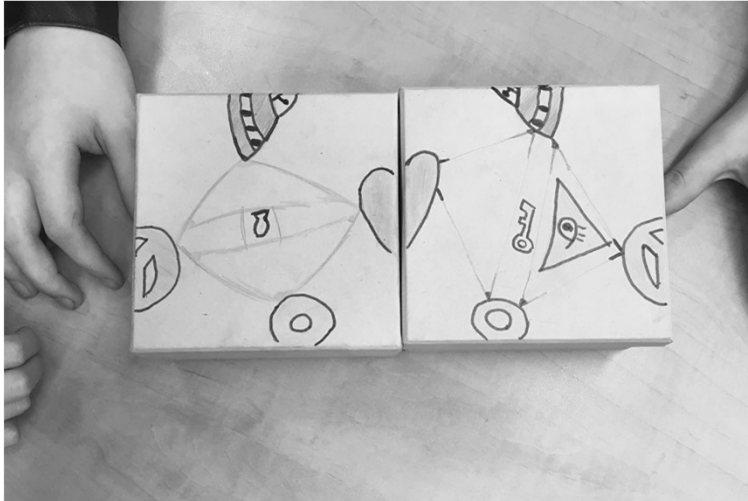
- 1. Please tell us about your tree.
- 2. What kind of tree is it?
- 3. Your trunk appears... (adjective – solid, strong, small, colorful)
- 4. Your tree has lots of... (objects - roots, branches, leaves, animals, fruit). Can you tell us about that?
- 5. If you gave a title to this drawing, what would you call it?
- 6. It looks like your tree is in a (season – winter, spring, fall, summer) scene.
- 7. Does your tree make a sound? What does it say?
- 8. It looks like your tree is... (verb – growing, reaching for the clouds, swaying, losing all it's leaves).
- 9. You used a lot of colors to draw your tree.
- 10. I'm wondering how you feel about your tree.

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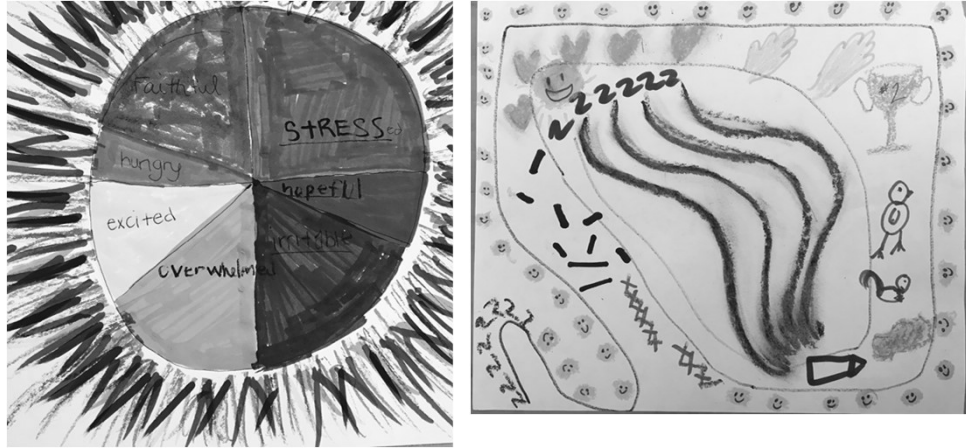


# Power Box



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# Feelings Inventories



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# Feelings Inventories



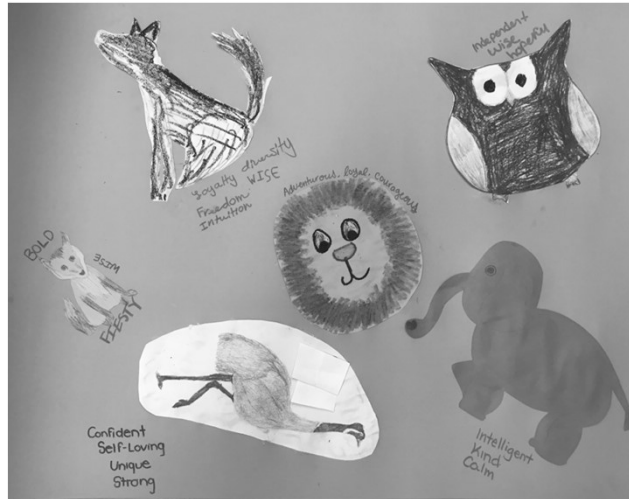
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# Paint to Music



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# Group Animals



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## Group Symbol



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Self-destruction  
Self judgement  
Distracted thinking  
Negative thinking  
No control  
Putting others first

## Group Symbol



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## Resources

*Facilitating Mindfulness* (2018): In this 12-minute video, the concept of mindfulness is discussed and HAP team members describe their experiences learning and practicing mindfulness:

<https://www.dianacoholic.com/my-work/films/>

<https://youtu.be/pNPTyG20YT0>

Book - *Facilitating Mindfulness: A guide for human service professionals*:

<https://www.northrose.ca/northrose-titles.html>

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## Follow our Work

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Facebook: [@artsbasedmindfulness](https://www.facebook.com/artsbasedmindfulness)

Instagram: [hap\\_group](https://www.instagram.com/hap_group)

Twitter: [@DianaCoholic](https://twitter.com/DianaCoholic)

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