

Colouring In For Emotional Clarity

 Awareness of emotions in oneself

 Exercise

 30 min.

 Client

 No

Emotional clarity is the extent to which people identify, understand, and differentiate between their emotional states (Gohm and Clore 2002). According to Abeyta and colleagues (2015), emotional clarity improves our ability to detect and derive meaning from emotional information. For example, close relationships arouse feelings of love, belongingness, and acceptance; when such emotions are clearly reflected upon, one develops a sense of worthiness and of mattering to someone else. Without clarifying this emotional information, one would be unlikely to derive such meaning (Abeyta et al., 2015). Existing research suggests that individual differences in trait emotional clarity predict a number of psychological outcomes: high levels of emotional clarity have been linked to adaptive coping (Gohm and Clore 2002), life satisfaction (Palmer et al., 2002), greater meaning in life (Abeyta et al., 2015), and emotional intelligence (Mayer et al. 2004); and an absence of emotional clarity is associated with dysfunctional coping (Abeyta et al., 2015), depression (Salovey et al. 1995) and borderline personality disorder (Gratz and Roemer 2004).

This tool is designed to enhance emotional clarity, through mandala drawing. Mandala drawing is a form of colouring therapy, which combines elements of art therapy and meditation to engage individuals in colouring complex geometric forms, in order to direct attention away from the dominating flow of negative thoughts and emotions (Belchamber, 1997). Mandala designs use a circular boundary within which the drawing is done. Mandala drawing is an artistic task that lends itself particularly well to the disclosure and processing of traumatic events (Henderson, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2007). Mandalas function as symbolic representations of emotional information.

Mandala drawing is suggested to provide cognitive organisation to complex emotional experiences, which in turn gives rise to personal meaning (Henderson, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2007). Further, mandala drawing is proposed to serve as a mechanism of therapeutic exposure, as negative emotional associations become extinct as one repeatedly exposes him or herself to a particular emotional experience (Henderson, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2007)

This tool is the first of its kind to utilise mandala drawing as a means of increasing emotional clarity.

Author

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Goal

The goal of this tool is twofold: first, to allow clients to connect to their emotions; second, to gain clarity around the different emotional states experienced in a given situation.



Advice

- If clients are reluctant to engage in the exercise (perhaps because they associate colouring in with childhood behaviour), you can suggest that they adapt the exercise to an expressive writing task. Rather than using colours to represent different emotional states within a given situation, they can use words. Instruct the client to write about their emotional experience for approximately 20 minutes.
- This task can be done post hoc (i.e., after the given event has taken place) or in the moment (i.e., in the midst of an emotional experience). Adopting this non-cognitive way of approaching emotions may help your clients to better manage intense emotional experiences.
- If clients are not sure where to start, suggest that they begin at the centre of the mandala, with the strongest emotion that showed up at the time (this is likely the easiest emotion to identify). They could work their way out from there, tapping into the next most intense emotion and applying colour accordingly.



Suggested Readings

Abeyta, A. A., Routledge, C., Juhl, J., & Robinson, M. D. (2015). Finding meaning through emotional understanding: Emotional clarity predicts meaning in life and adjustment to existential threat. *Motivation and Emotion, 39*(6), 973-983.

Gohm, C. L., & Clore, G. L. (2000). Individual differences in emotional experience: Mapping available scales to processes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*, 679-697.

Henderson, P., Rosen, D., & Mascaró, N. (2007). Empirical study on the healing nature of mandalas. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 1*(3), 148.

Jung, C. G. (1973). *Mandala symbolism*. Bollingen Series. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Palmer, B., Donaldson, C., & Stough, C. (2002). Emotional intelligence and life satisfaction. *Personality and Individual Differences, 33*, 1091-1100.

Salovey, P., Stroud, L. R., Woolery, A., & Epel, E. S. (2002). Perceived emotional intelligence, stress reactivity, and symptom reports: Further explorations using the trait meta-mood scale. *Psychology and Health, 17*, 611-627.

Tool Description

Preparation

You will need: a set of colour pencils, oil pastels or paints, a print-out of Appendix #, and a quiet, well-lit room.

Instructions

1. Bring to mind a recent emotional experience. This might be something happy and pleasant, like visiting your newborn niece, or something difficult or challenging, like having an argument with a friend. Choose an experience that you feel like you can explore today. While either type of experience will help you build your capacity for emotional clarity (i.e., the capacity to identify and differentiate between different emotional states in a given situation), choosing something that is difficult or challenging may help you to process the experience. You might like to close your eyes for a moment and place yourself back into the emotional experience, to reconnect with the emotions that were present.
2. Once you have your emotional experience in mind, choose one of the blank mandalas displayed in Appendix 1, and begin to apply colour to represent the different emotions that are tied to your chosen experience. The idea with this exercise is to express your emotional experience in whatever way feels right to you.
3. Colour your mandala for as long as you would like. Allow yourself to immerse fully in the practice of associating colour with your emotional experience.
4. Once you have completed your drawing, take a moment to view your creation and reflect on the different emotional states that you identified.

Appendix 1: Blank Mandala Design





