

UNIT 4 | TOPIC 4

TAKE A BREATH: TECHNIQUES AND METHODS FOR STRESS RELIEF AND
RELAXATION

T O P I C

04

PRACTICAL ART FOR STRESS RELIEF

Art techniques are a powerful tool for dealing with stressful situations or persistent work-related stress. In this topic you will learn more about different art activities and how they can help you deal with stress..



The contents herein are for informational and educational purposes only and are not intended as medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a qualified healthcare professional for any medical concerns or decisions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

THIS TOPIC IS DESIGNED AROUND THE FOLLOWING MAIN LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

01

Art for Stress Relief

Understand how practicing different artistic activities leads to reducing the levels of work-related stress.

02

Holistic Art Benefits

Learn the holistic health benefits of incorporating art activities into one's routine.

03

Practical Art Defined

Understand what is meant by practical art.

04

Art Activities for Well-Being

Get familiar with different practical art activities for stress relief.

05

Art Mediums & Techniques

Gain proficiency in selecting appropriate art mediums and techniques tailored to individual preferences and stress management goals.

06

Challenging Art Stereotypes

Fight stereotypes related to beliefs that only talented individuals at younger age shall engage in artistic activities.

COMPETENCES

THIS TRAINING CONTENT IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU ACQUIRE THE FOLLOWING COMPETENCES:

- 01 **Self-perception:** Observe and interpret one's own behaviours, thoughts, and feelings, and using those observations and interpretations to define oneself.
- 02 **Self-regulation:** Ability to understand and manage your behaviour and your reactions to feelings and things happening around you.
- 03 **Building Positive Working Relationships:** Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.
- 04 **Sociability:** Interact and relate effortlessly with other people. Being able to make contacts with others and develop social activities.
- 05 **Energy Management:** Ability to approach your working day with the mindset that you are managing your energy, not only your time.
- 06 **Self-organization:** Effectively organize one's schedule of activities, establishing the necessary priorities and organizing your daily routine in the most efficient way possible.
- 07 **Initiative:** Taking prompt action to accomplish objectives; taking action to achieve goals beyond what is required; being proactive.
- 08 **Time Management:** The ability to use one's time effectively or productively, especially at work.

HOW CAN ENGAGING IN ART ACTIVITIES CAN REDUCE THE LEVELS OF WORK-RELATED STRESS?

In recent years increasing number of people in the western world are rediscovering various artistic practices and hobbies, such as sketching and painting, pottery and sculpturing, photography, Do It Yourself (DIY) crafts, and even gardening. The market is being flooded with workshops on these and many other artistic activities addressed at the general public, while literally every bookstore has included a number of colouring books, diamond painting, sewing and tapestry kits in their assortment. And all of this makes perfect sense as such art activities are alternative and pleasant ways that can help you relieve the accumulated working stress in an ever busier and more competitive environment we live in.

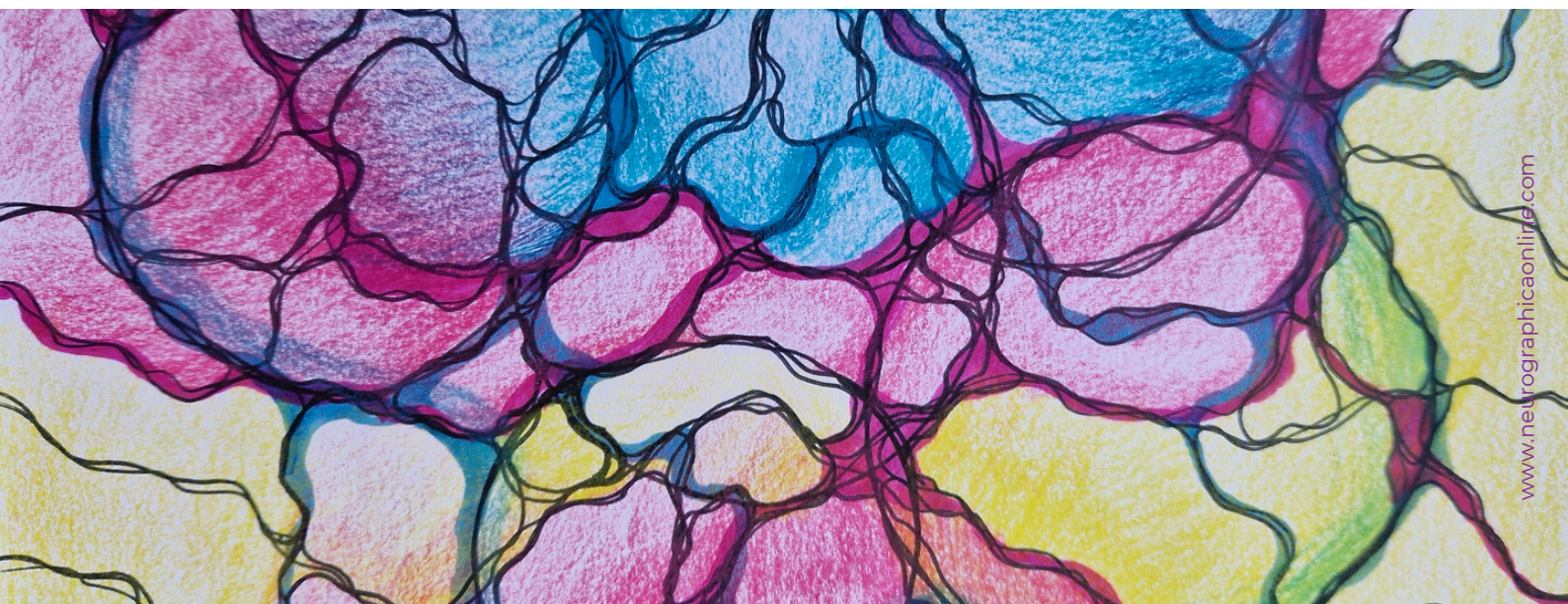


www.neurographicaonline.com

“THIS ISN'T JUST A FLEETING FEELING OF RELAXATION BUT A MEASURABLE **REDUCTION IN CORTISOL LEVELS**, EMPHASIZING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ART THERAPY IN STRESS MANAGEMENT.”

Art practices have been used as a positive stress reliever for years. Nowadays, its benefits are becoming more and more well known, making art a common choice as an alternative way to help deal with stress and other mental health conditions. Art plays a different role in every person's life in an intricate way, allowing many people to process emotions and reduce stress as they are creating art. Therefore, art activities are one of the best natural ways to help combat stress in your everyday life. And most importantly – it is fun!

Art therapy can be used to help deal with many issues, from rehabilitation to processing past trauma, in which cases it requires practicing with a licensed therapist. Yet, there are many art activities, which we review in this material, that you can do on your own or share with friends or colleagues.



“UTILIZING ART TO RELIEVE
STRESS ISN'T JUST A
CONTEMPORARY TREND;
IT'S **A TIME-TESTED TECHNIQUE**
THAT INTERTWINES CREATIVITY,
EXPRESSION, AND HEALING.”

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's hands painting a portrait on a canvas. The person is using a paintbrush to apply blue and white paint to the face of the subject. A palette with various colors of paint is visible in the foreground. The background is out of focus, showing a wooden easel and some studio equipment.

QUOTE

“

Art enables us to find
ourselves and lose
ourselves at the same
time.

Thomas Merton

PRACTICING YOUR PREFERRED FORM OF ART COMES WITH AMULTITUDE OF BENEFITS

Stress relief

Engaging in creative activities such as drawing, painting, or crafting can serve as a form of stress relief. The act of creating can be soothing and cathartic, helping to alleviate tension and promote relaxation.

Fosters self-awareness

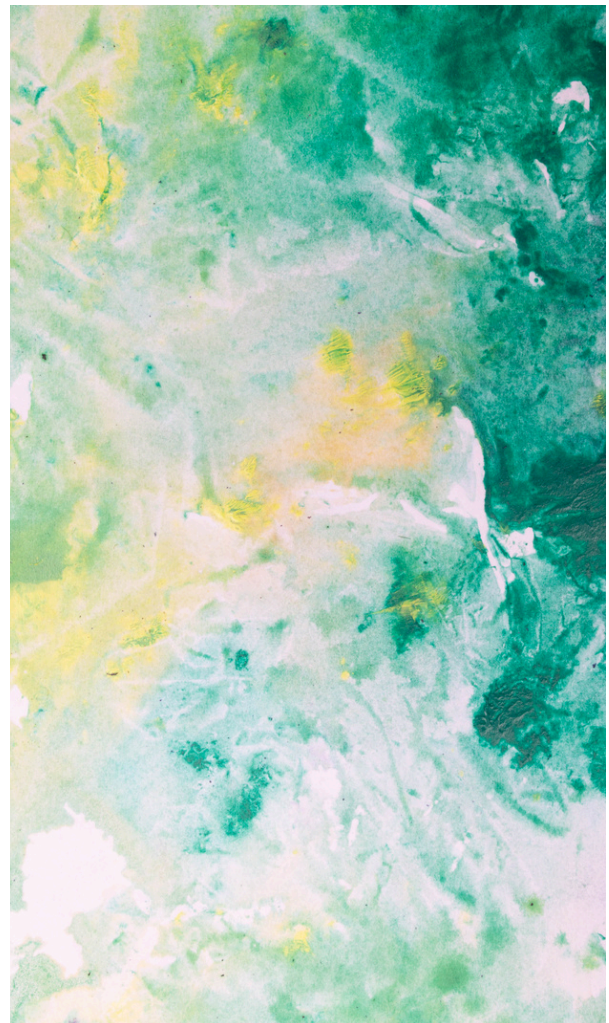
Art activities often require individuals to focus on the present moment, which can promote mindfulness. As they immerse themselves in the creative process, individuals can temporarily let go of worries about the past or future, leading to reduced stress levels.

Relaxation response

Participating in art activities stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, and thus trigger the body's relaxation response, leading to reduced heart rate, lower blood pressure, and decreased muscle tension. This physiological response promotes a state of calmness and tranquility, counteracting the effects of stress on the body.

Emotional Expression

Art provides a means for individuals to express their emotions in a nonverbal way. Through colors, shapes, and textures, people can communicate their feelings and experiences, which can be particularly beneficial for those who find it challenging to express themselves verbally.





ART THERAPY USHERS YOU INTO
A WORLD FREE OF THIS
WORLD'S CARES INTO A REALM
WHERE YOU ARE ONE WITH ART.

IT STIMULATES YOUR STATE OF
MIND BY OPENING AVENUES
AND ENCOURAGING
INDIVIDUALS
TO CREATE ART.



www.neurographicaonline.com

Art can provide a secure outlet for your feelings:

These feelings **include** rage, fear, anger, guilt, and shame. Many people struggle to find adequate words to express what they are feeling.

Art therapy, therefore, provides an excellent avenue for you to express yourself without using words.”

www.whitecraneclinic.com

Creativity and self-expression

Artistic activities help individuals connect with their creativity by allowing them to express their unique personalities and perspectives. The latter can foster a sense of authenticity and empowerment, helping individuals to feel more in tune with themselves and less stressed by external pressures.

Sense of accomplishment

Completing a creative project, whether it's a painting, sculpture, or piece of jewelry, can instill a sense of achievement and pride. This feeling of accomplishment can boost self-esteem and confidence, counteracting feelings of stress and inadequacy.

Distraction from Stressors

Engaging in practical art techniques provides a healthy distraction from stressors and worries. As you are focusing on the creative process, you can temporarily shift your attention away from sources of stress, allowing you to recharge and regain perspective.





WHEN PAINTING, DRAWING,
CLAY MODELING, SCULPTING,
YOUR MIND FOR A PERIOD IS
TAKEN OFF FROM THE STRESSES
THAT HAD BEEN WEIGHING IT
DOWN.

AS A RESULT, YOU EMERGE DE-
STRESSED AND WITH CLEARER,
MORE FOCUSED THOUGHTS
THAT MAY HELP YOU TACKLE THE
CHALLENGES AHEAD BETTER.

Social connection

Art can be a social activity, whether it involves attending a painting class with friends or sharing creative projects online. Social interaction and support can buffer against the negative effects of stress and foster a sense of belonging and connection.

Cognitive benefits

Engaging in creative pursuits can stimulate cognitive processes such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and imagination. These cognitive benefits can contribute to a sense of mental stimulation and fulfillment, reducing stress associated with boredom or monotony.

Overall, the practice of practical art techniques offers a holistic approach to stress reduction, addressing physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects of well-being. Indeed, it is by integrating creativity into our lives, that we can cultivate resilience and develop coping strategies for managing stress more effectively.

In the next section of this topic, we would like you to explore some practical art activities which can help you get started.





CREATING ANYTHING — WHETHER
A PAINTING, A SKETCH, OR A
SCULPTURE — IT FOSTERS A
FEELING OF SELF-LOVE.

www.carylfineart.com



Art Activities Promote Creativity

Many adults are obligated to follow a strict policy of dos and don'ts, especially at the workplace.

These regulations tend to undermine creativity, and the pressures of work can get to you at times.

With art, do away with the rules and allow yourself to imagine. Art enables you to re-experience the child within you while providing an avenue for you to rediscover new things about you or aspects about you that were long forgotten.



LET GO OF PERFECTIONISM.

**CREATE SOMETHING
THAT'S JUST FOR YOU
IN A DRAWING JOURNAL,
A CANVAS, OR WHATEVER YOU
HAVE HANDY.**

www.verywellmind.com

DID YOU KNOW

ART ACTIVITIES CAN **REDUCE** **CORTISOL** LEVELS

Cortisol, commonly referred to as the “stress hormone,” is a reliable indicator of an individual’s stress and anxiety levels. [A recent study found that] engaging in art-making sessions, even for **just 45 minutes**, led to a significant reduction in cortisol levels among participants.

www.scholistico.com

PRACTICAL ART ACTIVITIES

Painting

Painting is a great way to relax and let go of any stress you might be feeling. Depending on the technique, you can use different materials. You can choose between acrylic, water or oil paints, coloured pencils or even experiment with fingerpainting!

Remember that you don't need to stay closed at home – if you feel excited about going into nature, just take your painting supplies and explore landscapes, flowers, animals. Alternatively, you can paint static objects from the comfort of your home. Arrange a collection of interesting objects, such as fruits, flowers, or everyday items, and draw what you see.

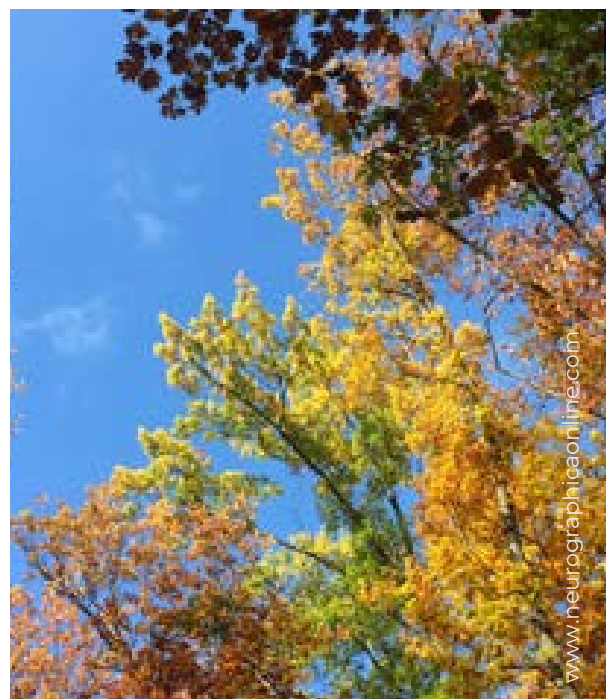
Sketching (Drawing)

Drawing is similar to keeping a visual diary. You can draw whatever you are feeling. Some people enjoy drawing shapes and objects, and other people might draw animals or other scenes. No matter what your skill level is, you can just draw or even sketch what you are feeling in a sketchbook. It is therapeutic, and it will help you relieve stress.

Doodling and Scribbling

If you don't have time for art classes, and a 20-minute drawing session sounds like more than you have time for, you can always embrace your inner doodler!

You can have a journal just for 5-minute doodles, and keep it somewhere handy. At night, you can draw quick pictures of hearts, flowers, or smiling faces for a minute or two instead of maintaining a journaling practice, or in addition to a gratitude journaling practice – just beautify the margins! The trick is to let your inner artist come out whenever you have time and to enjoy.



Scribbling is another technique that some people find appealing and holds similar therapeutic benefits. Both doodling and scribbling are also considered good methods of exercising emotions or anxiety in a situation. Many people who struggle with nervousness may find themselves doing one or the other already in other public settings.

Coloring books

If colors capture you, but painting sounds like a lot of work, there is an easier way! You have probably already noticed the variety of coloring books on the market. You can find them in almost every bookstore and they take the necessity to draw out of the equation – be it mandalas, flowers or human faces, you simply choose your colors and create something beautiful the way you did with coloring books when you were a kid! They are easy to carry around and you don't feel the anxiety of not knowing how to draw. Yet, there is some creativity involved and a beautiful finished product. And if you are uncomfortable with your artistic abilities, this couldn't be easier!



Mandala and Zentangle patterns

Creating mandalas or zentangle patterns are other art techniques to immerse you into a meditative state. Mandalas are circular designs, while in zentangle you can use combinations of dots, lines, simple curves, S-curves and orbs to create your preferred patterns. Yet, both can include intricate patterns and symbols within them.

The practice also allows you to root yourself in the moment as you create a piece of art, and can free you from concerns about whether the pictures look “good” or even realistic. Your mandala or zentangle pattern can look however you want it to look, and it can be rich with meaning or just a bunch of shapes and squiggles that look good to you. Alternatively, you can find various free models on the internet. All you need to do is have fun!

IF YOU OBSERVE CHILDREN
CREATING DRAWINGS, PAINTINGS,
AND DOING OTHER CRAFTS,
YOU CAN SEE HOW IT RELAXES THEM
AND GIVES THEM GREAT JOY.



<https://blog.sandiego.org/2014/09/arts-kids-san-dieg>

ADULTS DON'T OFTEN THINK
TO PRACTICE ART OR
DRAWING
TO RELIEVE STRESS...

BUT IT CAN DO WONDERS FOR
MOST PEOPLE.

Collage making

Some people find it difficult or don't enjoy the practice of drawing, painting, or writing but there are endless ways to practice art. You can create a collage that expresses what you're feeling about a specific situation to process your emotions and thoughts. You may also collage a vision board to focus on the future and use photos that excite you. All you need are some magazines, newspapers, or old images around your house.



Pottery or Clay sculpting

Working with clay can be therapeutic and engaging. And the best is that nowadays many galleries organize regular workshops so you don't have to think about supplying materials and equipment. Ceramics and clay work are intimate forms of art that help people practice mindfulness and delicate design while allowing their minds to focus on something other than stressors.

Nature art

To immerse yourself in nature art you need to collect any materials found in nature. The very elements that compose our natural surroundings are the foundation of environmental art: leaves, flowers, branches, seeds, bark, pigment, minerals, stones, boulders, sand, dirt, moss, water, ice, wind and even sunlight, become the paint, charcoal, glue, and canvas. Your only restriction is your imagination!



Gardening

While not traditionally considered art, gardening and flower arranging can be very creative activities. And you don't need to own an estate with a garden to engage in gardening activities – you can always contribute to a better-looking green areas in your neighborhood or plant a flower in a nearby park.

Photography

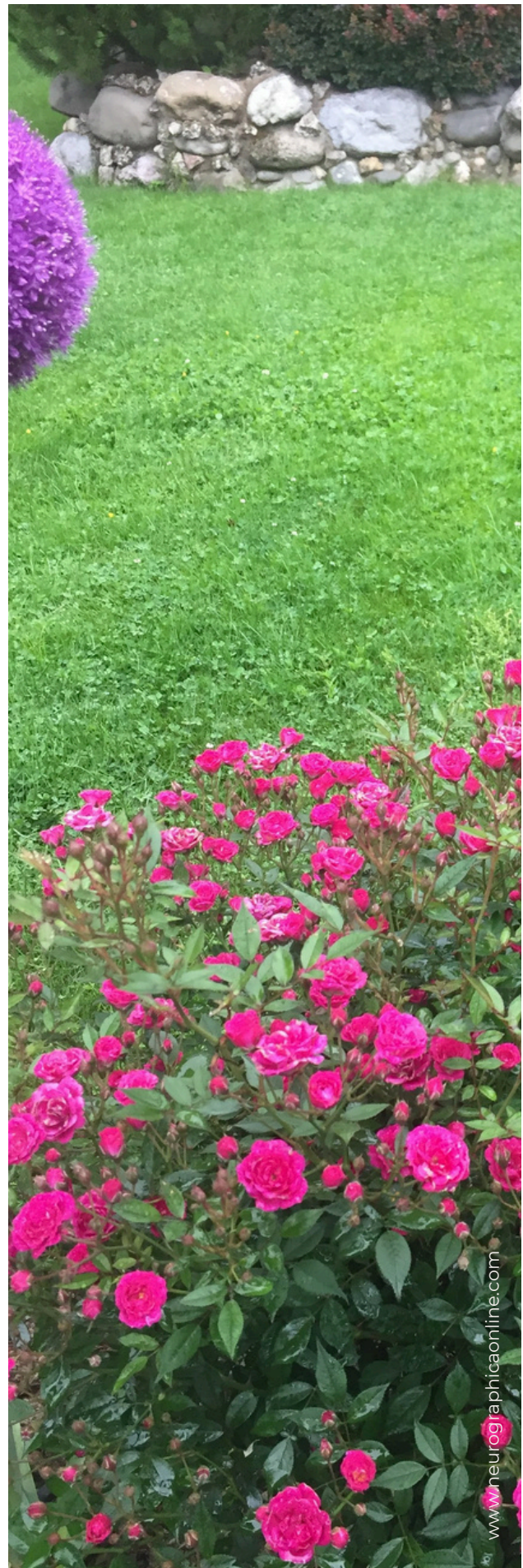
Photography is another enjoyable method of art therapy. Photography enables the artist to take pictures of anything, whether they love or hate them. This activity can enable you to explore the world around you from another angle and through new filters. You can even introduce yourself to a habit of drawing yourself in photo walks say every morning or every weekend afternoon to capture scenes of nature or interesting objects!

Digital art

Digital art is any kind of art that uses digital technology as a key part of making it. This includes things like digital drawings, paintings, photos, videos, and even sculptures. As long as it's made, improved, or shown digitally, it counts as digital art. In today's world, where digital devices have become tremendously intertwined with our lives, digital art is a big opportunity for people who want to create. Since you're not limited by physical materials or tools, there's almost no end to what you can make!

Journaling with art

Art journals are great ways to practice art therapy both in and out of sessions. Keeping sketchbooks with certain themes or specific notebooks for certain aspects of life might help you stay organized and inspired.





Sculpture with Found objects

Found object sculpture is all about using stuff you find lying around to make fascinating art. It's like recycling, but with creativity – you take things others might throw away and turn them into something awesome. You can express yourself by picking out stuff you like and arranging it in a way that tells a meaningful story for you.

Do it Yourself (DIY) crafts

DIY crafts are a great way to connect with your creativity and develop an interesting hobby. Exploring various craft projects, such as making greeting cards, creating decorative items (candles, boxes, sweets), or crafting simple jewelry can not only de-stress you but also bring about a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

Collaborative art

Many of the artistic activities listed above can be practiced individually or collaboratively. Collaborative art involves multiple people working together to create a single piece of artwork, whether it's a painting, sculpture, or performance. This approach fosters teamwork, communication, and a sense of community, as individuals contribute their unique perspectives and skills to the project.

Engaging in collaborative art has been shown to reduce stress by promoting social connection, as well as creativity, and a shared sense of accomplishment, as participants support each other and work towards a common goal.

Remember, the goal of these art activities is not to produce professional-level art but to provide opportunities for self-expression, creativity, and enjoyment.



“

**When it comes to
stress
management,
the end product
doesn't really
matter;
it's the process of
creating a piece of
art that counts.**

www.verywellmind.com

“

PAINTING PROVIDES A DISTRACTION THAT GIVES YOUR BRAIN A MUCH-NEEDED BREAK FROM ITS TYPICAL THOUGHT PATTERNS.

INSTEAD OF LOOPING ANXIOUS OR STRESSFUL THOUGHTS, YOU'RE FOCUSING ON SOMETHING ELSE.

THIS GIVES YOUR MIND THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESET—A BRAIN RINSE, IF YOU WILL.”

www.carylfineart.com



Engaging in any of the listed artistic activities and many more can be a fruitful process. Not only can it directly decrease your stress levels but it can also indirectly contribute to your overall well-being by providing you with tools and space for creative self-expression and emotion regulation. It can help you nourish a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

And the best part – recent scientific studies suggest that participants' mastery level does not play a role in regards to the beneficial effects art activities have on the brain.

Let yourself relax and enjoy the process!

GOOD VS. BAD PRACTICES

Here you can find the Good Case Practices and Bad Case Practices about art activities when it comes to work-related stress and burnout prevention.



GOOD PRACTICE:

- Practicing art every week.
- Experimenting with different art activities and including more than one in your routine.
- Practicing at a quiet and comfortable place.
- Focusing on the process, instead on the result.



BAD PRACTICE:

- Trying too hard to practice the chosen technique.
- Continuing even when it induces you anxiety and stress.
- Practicing only when stressed or anxious.
- Leaving your art practice as a last priority for the week.

BEST PRACTICES

Getting started with art activities

Here we have listed the best tips to help you get started with the art activities of your choice and easily make it a part of your routine:

- Choose a subject that you find calming or relaxing. This could be a scene from nature, a portrait of a loved one, or even an abstract design.
- Use colours that you find soothing. Avoid using bright, jarring colors that can be stimulating.
- Focus on the process of creating art rather than the end result. The goal is to relax and de-stress, not to create a masterpiece.
- Listen to calming music or nature sounds while you create. This can help to further relax your mind and body.
- Take deep breaths and focus on your breath as you draw or paint. This can help to reduce stress and anxiety.
- If you find yourself getting frustrated, take a break and come back to it later. There's no need to rush.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- TIP 1 — **Find a comfortable space**
Find a quiet place where you can relax and focus on your art. This could be a corner of your bedroom, a spare room, or even the kitchen table. Make sure the space is free from distractions, such as your phone or laptop.
- TIP 2 — **Choose suitable materials**
Choose materials that you enjoy working with. If you're not sure what to use, start with basic supplies like pencils, pens, paper, and paint. You can always experiment with different materials later.
- TIP 3 — **Let go perfectionism**
Don't worry about making your art look perfect. The most important thing is to express yourself. So relax, let your imagination flow, and have fun!
- TIP 4 — **Take breaks**
Take breaks as needed. Art therapy should be a fun and relaxing experience. If you start to feel overwhelmed, take a break and come back to it later.
- TIP 5 — **Search for a professional if needed**
If you find that the chosen art activity is not helping you to manage your anxiety and stress, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. Art techniques are not a replacement for professional help, but can be a helpful tool in addition to other treatment options.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITY



Color a Feeling wheel

Leah Guzman is an art therapist who wrote a book on further practices in essential art therapy, and an exercise she champions is to develop a color feeling wheel to deal with emotions. It starts by drawing a circle then dividing it into eighths and writing one emotion in each section, then pick a color that represents that feeling and color the section in. Afterwards, pay attention to which emotions were associated with which colors, the feelings you wrote first, and how this is applicable to your everyday life.



PRACTICAL ACTIVITY



Paint with your non-dominant hand

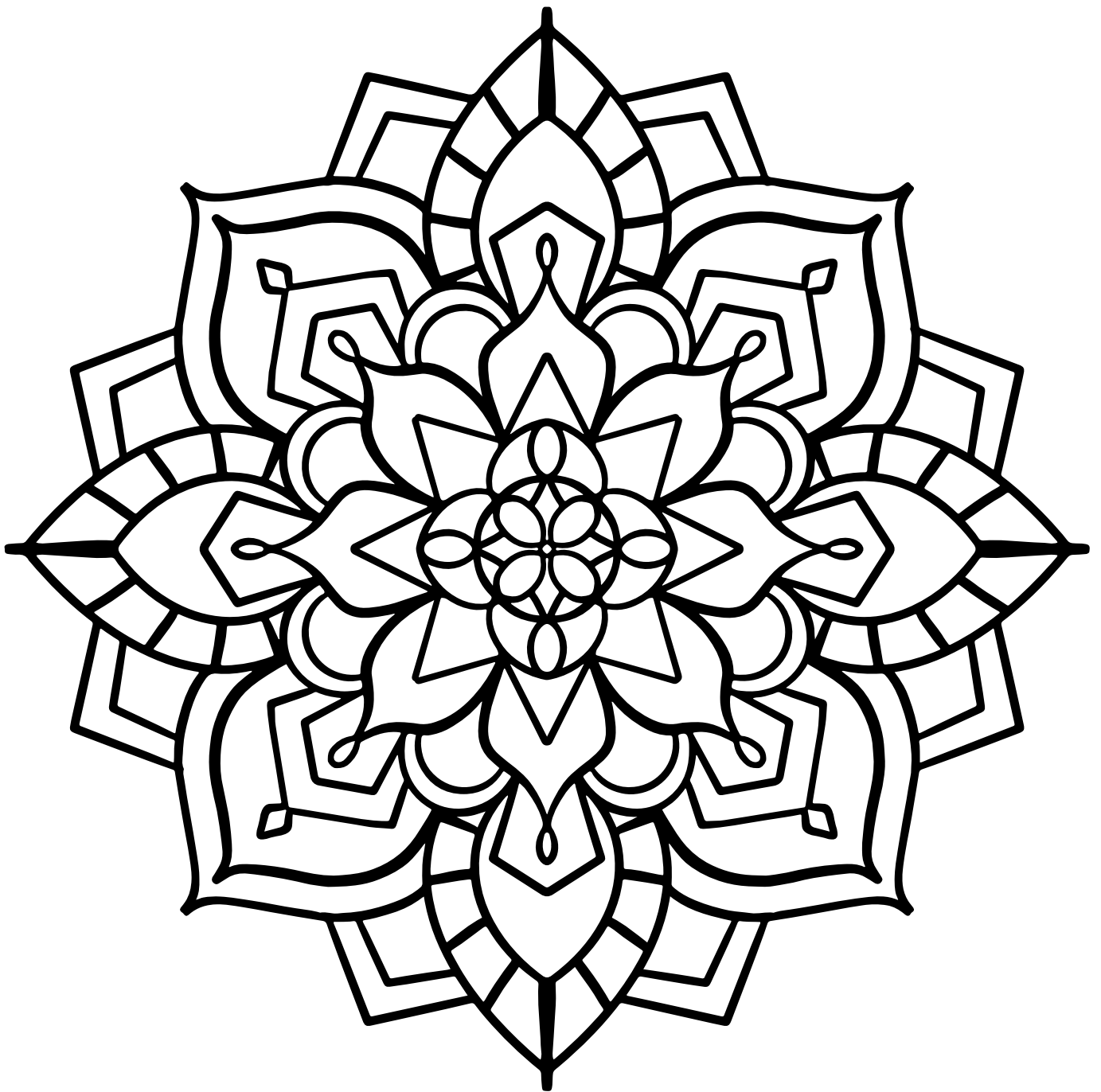
Painting with both hands at once isn't as difficult as it sounds — just pick up two brushes with different colors and start painting! The act itself is meditative, but it will also help you feel accomplished when you're done. In fact, the more you do it, the better you'll get at it. You can even try painting with your eyes closed or blindfolded to make things even more challenging.

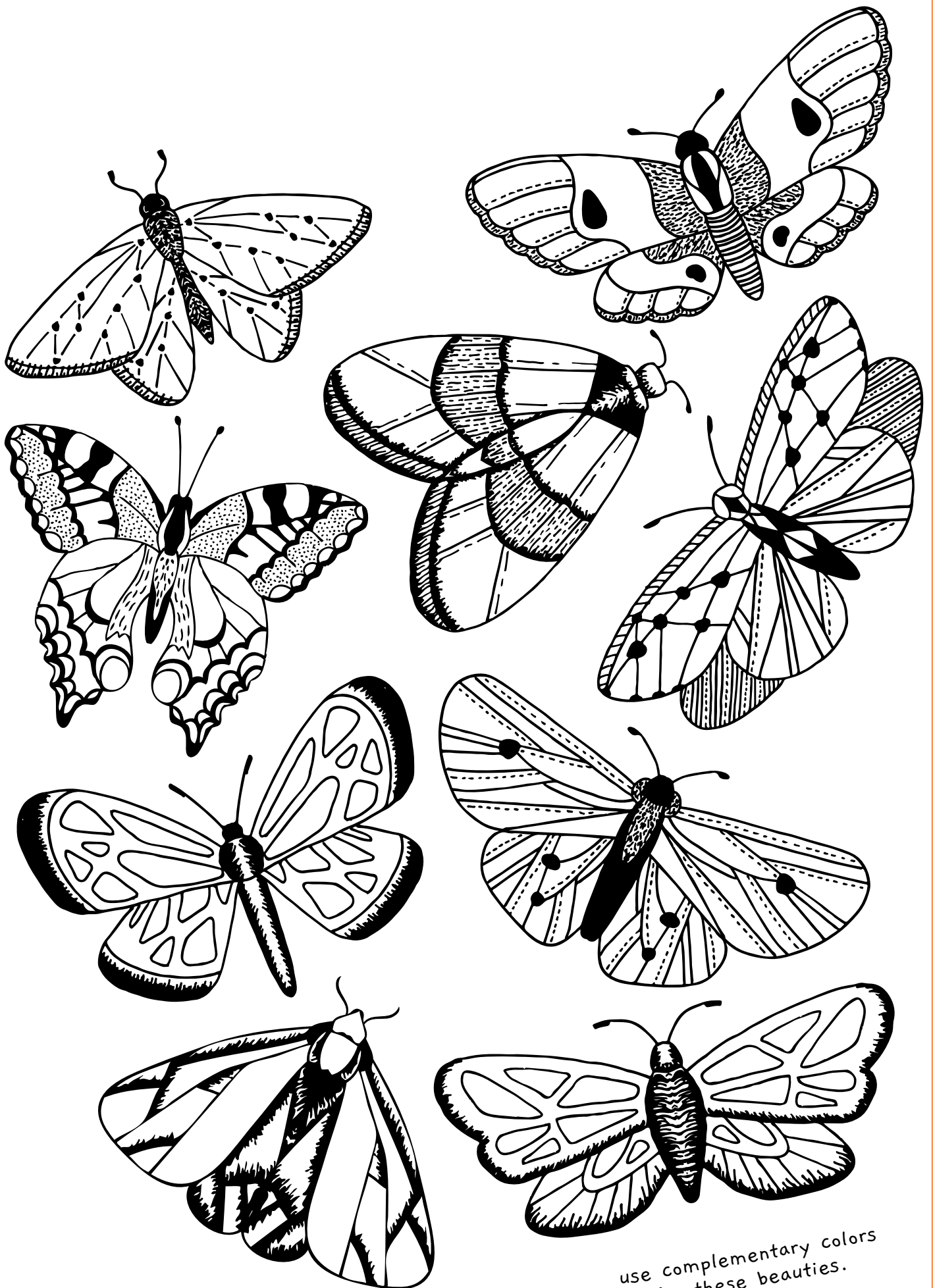
You can also try coloring the mandala in the next pages.

MINDFUL MANDALA

The word 'mandala' means circle in the Sanskrit language. It represents the universe in Hinduism and Buddhism. It can be used to help people meditate.

Have a go at colouring in your mandala!





use complementary colors
for these beauties.



EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY

Join an Art class

If you have the time for a regular art class, this can be a wonderful option. The social support of a group class can be a stress reliever in itself, and a supportive, non-competitive class can be very nurturing.

Another benefit of a class is that it cements the activity into your schedule; you don't have to work as hard to find time for drawing because you already have time for it planned into your schedule.

Also, if you are someone who worries about your artistic skill, this can help you to improve your abilities and make that less of a distraction.

However, if an ongoing class is more of a commitment than you have time for, many communities have one-time workshops or evenings where participants enjoy a glass of wine with a standalone art class. Look into your options, and see what might work best for you.



GET STARTED BY:

1. Check social media for workshops or art classes in your area.
2. Don't forget to invite a friend or a colleague so that the activity gets even more pleasant and fun. You might also feel more accountable if you have an arrangement to attend!

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

Engaging in art activities is not merely about the end product or the beautiful piece of art created; it's about the process, the mindfulness, and the moments of genuine presence it instills.

02

Remind yourself that you don't need any formal training or elaborate materials to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of art.

03

You don't have to draw anything meaningful or important, a beach scene or drawing a tree can be therapeutic.

04

The freedom to keep your artwork private is essential in art therapy. It creates a safe space for personal expression without the fear of judgment or criticism. In this private and non-judgmental environment, you are free to explore your inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences through various artistic mediums.

05

Art therapy encourages experimentation, allowing you to try different techniques, materials, and styles. There are no rules or expectations to follow. You can use vibrant colors, abstract forms, or any other creative approach that resonates with you. The process of experimentation can be liberating, enabling you to discover new ways of expressing yourself.

ASSESSMENT

01.

How can engaging in artistic activities reduce the levels of work-related stress?

- ☐ A- by providing a healthy distraction
- ☐ B- by changing the cognitive patterns
- ☐ C- by improving your communication level skills

03.

Which of the following is NOT a benefit of engaging in art activities?

- ☐ A- improving body posture
- ☐ B- decreasing cortisol levels
- ☐ C- improving dexterity and fine hand movements

02.

Which of the following is NOT considered a form of practical art?

- ☐ A- photography
- ☐ B- ballet
- ☐ C- gardening

04.

When can an art technique be somewhat dangerous?

- ☐ A- When practiced in solitude and without professional supervision.
- ☐ B- When used as a complementary approach to manage stress
- ☐ C- When overused or misused, and especially when anxiety and stress occur.

ASSESSMENT

05.

What is one of the primary benefits of engaging in artistic activities?

- ☐ A- Improving leadership skills
- ☐ B- Reducing work-related stress
- ☐ C- Increasing physical strength

06.

What is the physiological benefit of art activities in stress management?

- ☐ A- Lowering heart rate and blood pressure
- ☐ B- Increasing muscle tension
- ☐ C- Enhancing athletic performance

ASSESSMENT ANSWERS

1 - A

2 - B

3 - A

4 - C

5 - B

6 - A

RESOURCE LIBRARY

Explore the resources below to discover the powerful stress-relieving benefits of practical art and its positive impact on overall well-being, along with beginner-friendly activities and inspiring talks on art therapy.



ARTICLES COLLECTION

We've compiled a list of articles exploring further why practical art is such a powerful stress-reliever (and not only), while also providing more insights on the various other health benefits they bring. Check them out below.

[SAGE NEUROSCIENCE CENTER](#)[CARYL POMALES FINE ART](#)[MEDIUM](#)[VERY WELL MIND](#)[ADOBE](#)[WE TEACH ME](#)[SMITHSONIAN](#)[PSYCH CENTRAL](#)[BEACH HOUSE ART](#)

ART THERAPY ACTIVITY FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

If you are looking for a beginner friendly art therapy activity for stress management, this is an easy art project to help you use imagery and intuition to tap into the peace and calmness within yourself.

[WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)

THE POWER OF ARTS THERAPY

In this wonderful TEDx talk, Laurence Vandenberg - a certified and registered arts therapist, will reassure you that there is no dead end in life and, one drawing at a time, everyone can be the hero of one's life.

[WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)

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