

A Wildflower Path: Healing in Hard Times

Mind-Body-Spirit Practices for Reclaiming
Wholeness Beyond Trauma



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The authors bring experience weaving mind-body-spirit (MBS) practices into self- and community care. Our work is rooted in personal and ancestral experiences with healing trauma, informed by our diverse backgrounds as survivors, advocates, clinicians, educators, and healers. We approach our work with curiosity, creating spaces where individuals and organizations can explore their paths to healing while moving forward together.

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Victoria was first introduced to mind-body-spirit practices when she started counseling for the first time in her life. It was through these sessions that she recognized how MBS practices can complement the traditional practices and knowledge she grew up with in her tribal community. Today, Victoria approaches advocacy and support for survivors with an embodiment of cultural humility and community care.

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- [Giada Matteini, Founder and Artistic Director, Wandering Avian Dance Experience](#)
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- [Adrienne Gantz, Co-Executive Director, New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence](#)

Dedication

This toolkit is dedicated to:

All those experiencing harm and trauma, those who have lived through it, and those who may face it in the future.

We acknowledge your power and perseverance. Even when it feels impossible, healing is always within reach.

May this work support you on your path.

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Introduction to the Toolkit: A Seed Holds Potential for All of Life to Unfold

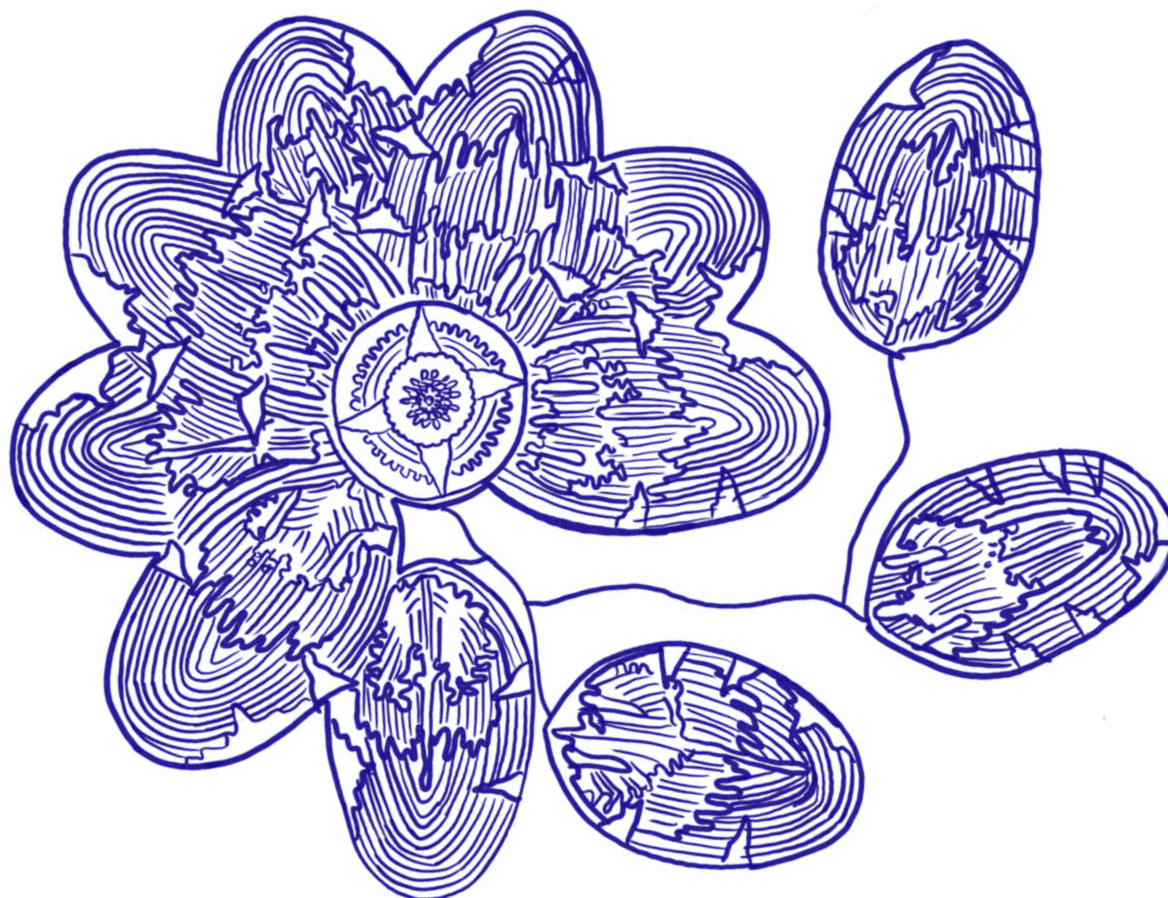


A tiny seed holds the potential to grow into a beautiful flower. Our mind, body, and spirit possess an innate capacity for healing and transformation.

In this section:

- [Purpose of this Toolkit](#)
- [Intentions of the Toolkit](#)
- [Teachings of the Flower](#)
- [How to use this Toolkit](#)
- [Sharing with Others](#)
- [Stories from the Field: From Human Doing to Human Being](#)

Color Me!
↓



Purpose of this Toolkit

This guide is a humble offering of mind-body-spirit (MBS) practices, sometimes also known as grounding, mindfulness, or wellness practices. These practices can also be known as strategies to take care, feel good, unwind, make time to be oneself, or have fun. Some people don't use specific words or phrases to describe these practices at all. And, all of that is right.

This toolkit shares many ways we can care for ourselves and our communities by reducing stress and promoting healing. Many practices can be used and shared freely in ways that are accessible and adaptable, making them valuable in everyday life. Different practices resonate with different people at different times, so having options is essential (C. Cave, personal communication, 2017).

This collection provides a sampling of helpful practices rather than a complete reference. It's an invitation to try new approaches, revisit what has worked in the past, and share practices with others.

This toolkit is for:

- People and their families who have experienced trauma, as well as
- Programs, advocates, and other helping professionals supporting those affected by trauma.

With this toolkit, the authors hope to:

- Empower people and their families with direct access to trauma healing and recovery.
- Support advocates and other helping professionals in using these practices for their own well-being, as well as to support community members' well-being.
- Inspire programs to integrate these practices into their services and organizational culture.
- Broaden perspectives on healing, wellness, and well-being.

Intentions of the Toolkit

The toolkit intentionally incorporates multicultural perspectives on well-being while actively resisting cultural appropriation. It offers practices that are freely usable, require minimal or no materials, and can be adapted to various ages, needs, and cultural contexts.

Highlighting the centrality of culture in healing, this guide features a variety of advocates, programs, coalitions, and other helping professionals who share their own experiences using MBS practices as part of nurturing wellness within themselves and their communities.

Teachings of the Flower



At the heart of this guide's cover is a flower symbolizing the healing journey. Each petal represents a different MBS practice, while the center anchors us in our personal values and inner strength.

Key lessons from the flower beadwork:

Imperfections Reflect Uniqueness

Mistakes in beadwork symbolize individuality and personal touch.

Growth Starts from the Center

Healing begins at the core and unfolds outward, revealing new tools and experiences.

Life Follows a Circular Path

Life's journey involves emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental well-being, with evolving needs, preferences, and perspectives.

The arrangement of the flower petals mimics the way we move through life, each petal representing a different mind-body-spirit practice calling us back to ourselves. The flower's center represents our foundation as human beings, anchoring us in our personal values that guide how we want to show up with ourselves and others. Not every petal, or in this case practice, needs to be used to guide us through our healing journey. It is through trusting ourselves that we identify and know which practices feel good and allow us to bloom in ways that work best for us. There is no right or wrong way to engage with the practices.

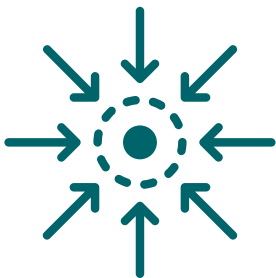
In many Indigenous cultures, beadwork has always been used as a form of art to convey creative expression, storytelling, and cultural values. For the cover art, Tori was inspired by the beauty and elegance of traditional Ojibwe floral designs and chose this style in recognition of the land that she and the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health reside on, which are the traditional homelands of the Council of Three Fires: The Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations, among many others.

Designing this flower was a journey in itself reminding Tori of the teachings she received from her community as she was being prepared to cross the threshold into womanhood throughout her life. There are many lessons that beadwork can give us. Of those lessons, there are three that most notably influenced the creation of this flower:



Imperfections Reflect Uniqueness

It is through imperfections that we identify our unique selves. Making a “mistake” in beadwork means to leave a part of oneself in that work as a reminder that it was one’s own hands that crafted these beautiful works of art.



Growth Starts From the Center

At the center, we start as infants - moving along our path and encountering new challenges that help us unfold experiences, one petal at a time. As we get older, we determine if the practices we used then need to be adapted or find new ones to navigate these more complex challenges. This is how we move through life.

Regardless of the number of challenges or where we are in life, we all have one thing in common - we all have a center. Our centers will not all look the same because they represent our needs, wants, and how we nurture ourselves. We continuously adapt and build, with each new experience and challenge guiding us back to our centers as individuals, families, communities, and land.



Life Follows A Circular Path

Everything in nature exists within an interdependent circle. Similar to a flower, we follow a circular path in life. In many Indigenous cultures, a circular path is often referred to as a medicine wheel, divided into four quadrants representing emotional, social, physical, and spiritual well-being. Having a circular path doesn’t mean that we begin and end in the same place. For example, the way we care for our emotional well-being as a child will look different from how we care for ourselves as adults. It is the four quadrants that connect us to our centers and have us reflect on what we need for healing and renewal. Like everything under the sun, we each go through seasons. There are times when we will feel closer to our path and times when we will feel like we’ve strayed and need to find our way back. While these moments can be difficult, they can also help us build a deeper understanding of ourselves as we continue growing through life’s seasons.



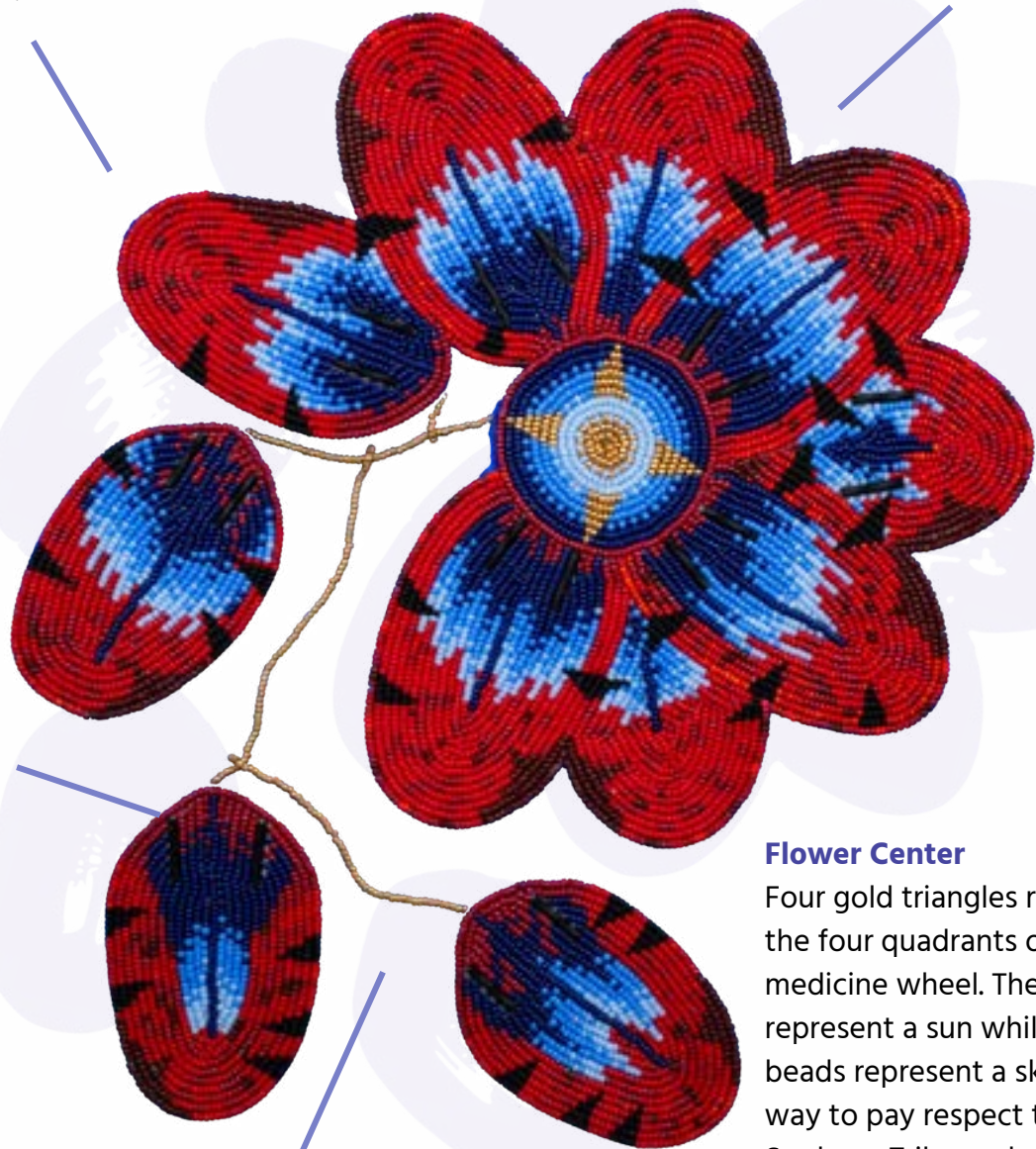
With these three lessons, we now apply them to the flower. Here are important pieces to know when reviewing it:

11 Petals Total

The eleven petals represent the practice areas shared in this toolkit. The red and blue in these petals were chosen to evoke emotions of empowerment, strength, peace, and connection.

7 Interconnected Petals

There are black arrows moving up and down between each interconnected petal, representing the ebb and flow of practice and how we connect with ourselves and others.



4 Orbiting Petals

Not directly touching the center but still hovering around it, the orbiting petals show us that even when we feel lost in our journey, our centers will always be our guiding points to regroup and balance ourselves, families, and communities.

Flower Center

Four gold triangles represent the four quadrants of the medicine wheel. They also represent a sun while the blue beads represent a sky as a way to pay respect to Tori's Spokane Tribe and community knowledge, who in Salish are known as the "Children of the Sun."

Gold Lines

The gold lines (re)connect the orbiting petals back to our center and represent how we come back to our circular path in our healing journey.

How to Use This Toolkit



This guide can be explored in any order, like petals circling a flower. Each practice was selected with a focus on accessibility (requiring little or no materials) and adaptability, including ideas for adapting practices across a variety of ages, abilities, preferences, and spaces.

Sometimes people think that they have to feel centered before beginning a practice. In this toolkit, you can come as you are and start however you want to start. All feelings are welcome here.

Each practice starts with a short legend that provides some basic information. This is included to help the reader have a better sense of what may be involved if they decide to try the practice.

Legend Example

Time:



Mental Energy:



Physical Energy:




Materials: Writing materials


Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for writing

Legend Descriptions


Time

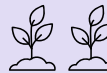
 = 5 to 10 minutes

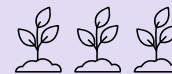
 = 10 to 15 minutes

 = 15+ minutes


Mental Energy


 = Low mental effort

 = Medium mental effort

 = High mental effort

Physical Energy

 = Low physical effort

 = Medium physical effort

 = High physical effort

Materials

List of items that may be needed for the practice

Physical Positions

What kinds of physical positions may be involved in the practice



Additional Suggestions on Using this Toolkit:



Some Ideas for Getting Started

- Start anywhere and explore what feels helpful.
- Ask yourself, “What do I need right now?” while checking out the [Table of Contents](#). Be open to where that question takes you.
- Choose a practice based on your current needs and feelings (for example - “I’m feeling tense so something relaxing might be helpful”).
- Try practices for a few minutes or combine multiple practices, as desired.
- If all else fails, just flip to a random page and try it.

Noticing How You Feel

- It can be helpful to notice how you feel before and after a practice to know whether it’s a practice you’d like to try again in the future. Each practice has built-in reflection questions to support checking-in with yourself.
- If you don’t want to, it’s okay to skip that part and just try out the practice. There’s no wrong way to do this.
- For those who want to spend more time noticing how you feel, check out [Appendix F: Practice Reflection Journal](#) for deeper insights.

Every practice is adaptable, so engage at your own comfort level and revisit as needed. This guide aims to deepen well-being through flexible, supportive options - how and when you practice is up to you.

Sharing with Others

MBS practices can be taught, learned, and shared to support both individual and community care. Practicing individually fosters a sense of connection and belonging within ourselves. Sharing these practices strengthens the community by building connections with others.

Before Sharing this Toolkit (or a practice from it), Consider Asking

“What helps you to feel relaxed and peaceful?”

“What helps when you’re feeling stressed or overwhelmed?”

Many people already engage in these kinds of practices, even if they don’t call them MBS practices. Learn what is helpful and build on it. With their permission, offer a little about what you find helpful and why. Create opportunities to explore practices together, learning from one another.

Stories from the Field


“From Human Doing to Human Being”

By Janette Garcia, Survivor, Advocate, Educator

The trauma that I experienced led to many years of numbing myself with substances, abusive relationships, and running myself ragged trying to be “enough.” I pushed myself hard and worked faster than the speed of feelings. I became a human doing instead of a human being.

Two years into my recovery, I was standing at a mirror doing my hair and happened to glance over to see my four-year-old daughter staring at me with a strange look on her face. I asked, “What?” She replied, “You’re pretty.” I teased, “You just now noticed that?” She said, “I’ve never seen you hold still.”

Wow! Her observation was profound. The best word to describe my life up to that point was FRANTIC.



Today, I can be present, identify and express my feelings, and recognize when I need rest. I recognize when I am physically tired, when I need emotional or mental support, or when I am spiritually weary. I make myself a priority and take care of myself! I know I’m valuable, loveable, and worthy of care. I’ve learned to be gentle with myself, rest when needed, and I can simply be!



Building Safety in the Body



Building Safety in the Body



Roots anchor plants, providing nourishment and stability. Similarly, building a sense of safety in our bodies helps us feel rooted, secure, and able to access resources for growth and healing:

In this section:




- [Butterfly Hug](#)
- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Drawing a Safe Space](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Wandering Avian Dance Experience](#)

Color Me!



Butterfly Hug



Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 	Materials: None
Physical Position(s): Arms across chest			

What is It?

The Butterfly Hug involves gently tapping on your chest while noticing thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It's been shown to soothe stress, anxiety, worry, and other trauma-related distress (Karadag et al., 2021). Developed by Lucina Artigas to support survivors of Hurricane Pauline in Mexico (Artigas & Jarero, 2014), it has since been used by people of all ages recovering from traumatic events across many different countries, languages, and cultures. It is a tool often used in trauma therapy, including [EMDR](#) (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing).

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

1

Get Comfortable

Choose a position that feels good (sitting, standing, etc.)

2

Cross your Hands

Bring your hands together in front of your chest, crossing them at the wrists. Hook your thumbs together to form a butterfly shape (thumbs as the body, fingers as the wings).

3

Position your Hands

Place your crossed hands on your chest, fingers pointing upwards below your collarbones.

4

Tap Gently

Alternately tap each side of your chest with your fingers, mimicking the flutter of a butterfly's wings.

5

Notice Without Judgement

Observe your thoughts, emotions, and body sensations as if watching clouds drift by. You can pair this with practices like belly breathing or affirmations, or pause to draw a safe space.

6

Finish

Lower your hands gently when you feel ready.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Infants and Toddlers

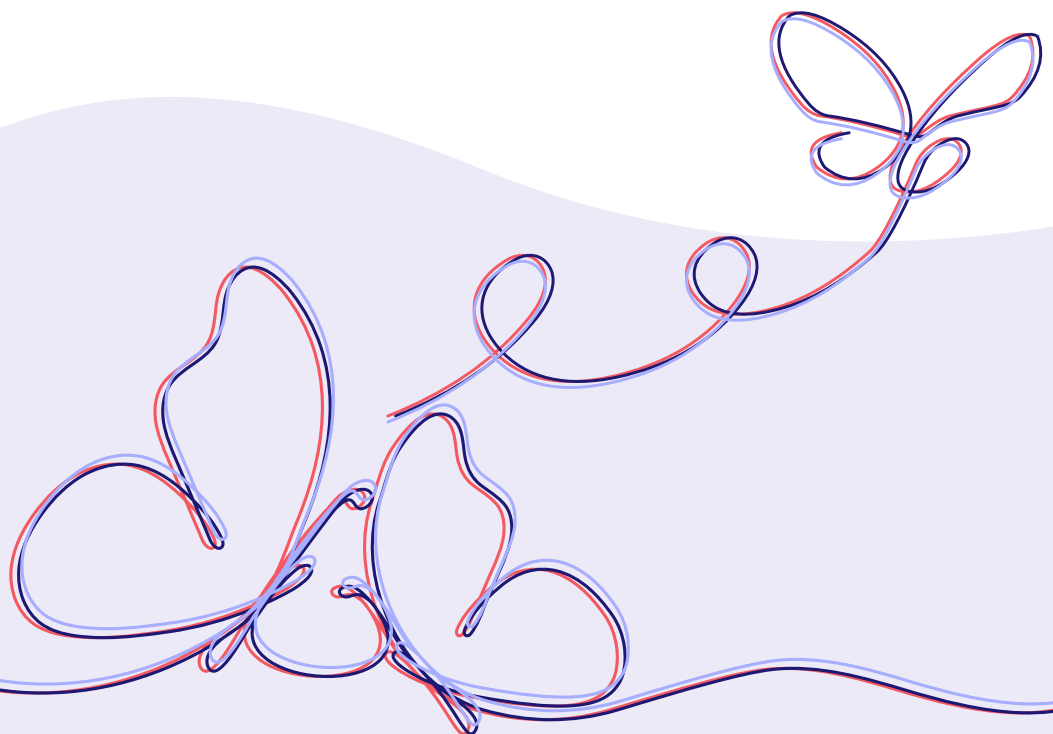
Caregivers can hold the baby against their chest or shoulder. Using the hand supporting the baby's back, gently tap on the baby's shoulders with your thumb and pinky (Kiesling as cited by Artigas & Jarero, 2014).

For Children

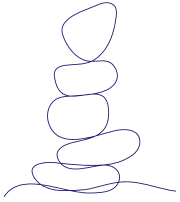
Try doing it together while watching a children's video, such as this [Butterfly Hug video](#) by EMDR for Kids.

Alternative Approaches

If tapping on your chest is inaccessible or uncomfortable, you can tap the tops of your knees or shoulders, or have a trusted person tap on two sides of your body where you feel comfortable being tapped.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan



Time:   Mental Energy:  Physical Energy:  Materials: None

Physical Position(s): Sitting, lying down, any comfortable position

What is It?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) involves tensing and releasing muscles to promote deep relaxation, reduce stress, manage pain, aid sleep, and interrupt the survival responses (fight, flight, freeze) (Mackereth & Tomlinson, 2010).

Body Scan uses focused, gentle attention on the body to lower anxiety and pain, improve sleep, self-compassion, and trauma recovery (Ussher et al., 2014). It's central to [Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction](#) with origins in U Ba Khin's "sweeping practice" and Hatha Yoga meditation (Drummond, 2006; as cited by Dreeben et al., 2013).

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tense and relax each area of the body for 5-10 seconds, resting 10-20 seconds between. Breathe throughout, using only 20-50% strength. Skip any injured areas.

1

Feet

Curl toes, arch feet... release.

2

Lower Legs

Point feet downwards or flex upwards, tighten calves... release.

3

Upper Legs

Lift legs or press knees down, tighten thighs... release.

4

Hips and Seat

Squeeze glutes... release

5

Belly

Tighten abs inward or outward... release.

6

Hands

Make fists or stretch fingers wide... release.

7

Arms

Bend elbows, make fists, or stretch arms long... release.

8

Chest

Press palms together, squeeze chest... release.

9

Back

Pull shoulders back, arch slightly... release.

10

Shoulders

Lift shoulders toward ears... release

11

Neck

Gently pull chin backwards... release

12

Face

Scrunch face, press tongue to the roof of the mouth... release.



How to Do It: Body Scan

With kindness and gentle appreciation, notice each part of your body, moving gradually across your body until you've noticed every part.

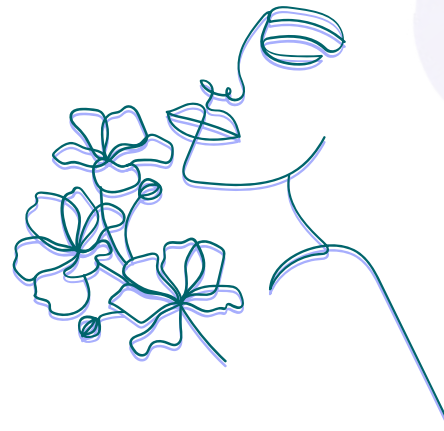
- 1** Start at your toes (or another area) and just notice how they feel. For example, are they warm or cold? Are they loose and relaxed or tense and tight? Approach yourself with openness and appreciation as you notice how they feel.
- 2** Breathe into the area, directing attention deeper as you exhale.
- 3** When you're ready, let your attention and breath move to the next part of your body. **Repeat steps 1-3** as you continue to move through each part of the body from toes to head (or head to toes).
- 4** Complete the body scan by noticing your whole body as breath flows in, out, and through your whole being.
- 5** If you notice any tension, focus your breath wherever you feel it and just notice it with kindness. When ready, return your attention to your whole body again.

Optional:

Visualize light flowing through your body

Use affirmations:

- "My whole body is safe."
- "My whole body is peaceful."
- "My whole body is blessed."
- "My whole body is my own."



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation: You can introduce PMR to children as a game or song, similar to the “[Hokey-Pokey](#)” by Kiddie Nation, “[Simon Says](#)” by the Kiboomers, or another song or game that involves different parts of the body.
- Body Scan: You can introduce a body scan as a way of “saying hello” to our bodies, following the steps in this [audio recording that features Sesame Street’s Big Bird](#), by Sesame Street Workshop.

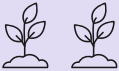


Alternative Approaches

Both of these practices can be modified to fit your specific needs and comfort. Here are some potential ways to adapt one or both of these practices.

- Perform exercises on one side of your body at a time.
- Start at your head and move down your body (vs. starting at toes and moving upwards).
- Add [Belly Breathing](#) or [Affirmation Breathing](#) to either practice



Drawing a Safe Place

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing or drawing materials (optional)	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Drawing a safe place involves imagining and drawing a space that represents a real or imaginary space where you feel safe. This can be done through drawing, writing, or visualization, making it accessible to various preferences. Once visualized, the safe place becomes a mental refuge to revisit for comfort, peace, or grounding. This practice is widely used in advocacy, art therapy, trauma recovery, and social-emotional learning programs.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

1 Imagine Your Safe Place

- Engage all your senses as you imagine your safe place: What does it look, sound, smell, taste, or feel like?
- Explore your safe space: What trusted people, animals, or objects would you like to add to your safe space to make it even more peaceful and comforting?

2 Draw Your Safe Place

Draw a physical representation of your safe place, taking breaks from drawing to re-imagine it. It's fine to skip this step if it's inaccessible or you don't want to do it.

3 Notice How You Feel

Notice any emotions, physical sensations, or thoughts that come up for you as you imagine or draw your safe space.

4 Revisit Your Safe Place

Now that you have imagined (and potentially drawn) your safe place, you can visit this place inside of yourself whenever it would be helpful to tap back into those peaceful feelings. You can visit this place as often as you'd like. You can even imagine this safe place as a bubble of peace around you as you move through stressful situations.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Families

- This activity can be done with family members of almost any age, from toddlers to elders. Something to consider is what kinds of writing or drawing materials would be most comfortable for each family member. For example, some of the younger or older family members might prefer thicker materials that are easier to grasp, like crayons or markers.
- For toddlers, consider adapting the exercise into a game or simple guided drawing activity. Check out [this handout](#) from NCDVTMH's Core Curriculum on Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations (NCDVTMH, 2021) for more information on using this activity with children and youth.

For Groups and Communities

This activity can be used to foster connection. Participants can create individual safe places or co-design shared visions of safety or peace. When done in groups, transparency about how information will be used is essential. Community members can share their creations or collaboratively visualize a collective safe place.

Alternative Approaches

- If drawing is not accessible, the activity can be done entirely through imagination or by discussing the safe place with a trusted individual.
- The term "safe place" can also be changed to something more personally meaningful, such as a "peaceful place" or "comfort zone."



Stories from the Field

Wandering Avian Dance Experience

By Giada Matteini, Founder and Artistic Director, wadedance.org



“I started thinking about my own road to freedom through movement and dance and decided to dedicate this next chapter of my life to help others with some of the tools available to me.” - Giada Matteini

Wandering Avian Dance Experience (WADE) is a women-led multifaceted performing arts company working at the intersection of art and social justice. Giada began this work during the COVID-19 pandemic due to her own experiences of survival, freedom, and healing. She recognized how building safety in her body through dance was an essential part of her survival and was inspired to affect change in a landscape of global normalization of violence against women, children, and non-binary folx. Through writings, ballet pedagogy, movement practices for survivors, rehabilitation efforts for people who have caused harm, educational programs, and curated festivals, she explores the many ways in which our moving body responds to and heals from trauma. Through the creative arts, WADE advocates for cultural shifts in our families and communities to create safer and healthier environments for women and their children. At the core of their research is the notion that movement is a strong tool for healing that allows us to reclaim our dignity and agency.

Upcoming Projects

Movement Practice for Domestic Violence Survivors - Rimini, Italy

Movement Practice for DV Survivors is a community-based educational program developed in collaboration with the anti-violence Center Rompi il Silenzio in Rimini (Italy), supported by NCDVTMH's guidance. Joy and compassion are at the center of the work.

Somatic based rehabilitation program for people with violent convictions - New York, NY

This project explores a somatic movement rehabilitation model with people imprisoned for causing harm. The research started over 30 years ago observing the often violent approaches to the body in the dance spaces, evolved through Giada's own somatic healing from domestic abuse and rests on the work of countless others, including non-violent and transformative justice practices.



Cultivating Hope and Joy



Cultivating Hope and Joy

The warmth and light of the sun nurture a flower bud, guiding it to bloom. Cultivating hope and joy provides a nurturing environment where our beauty and resilience flourish.

In this section:





- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Noticing Joy](#)
- [Affirmation Breathing](#)
- [Gratitude Journaling](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Sista Afya Community Care](#)

Color Me!



Setting Intentions



Time: 	Mental Energy:  	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing or drawing materials (optional)	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Setting intentions focuses attention on a hopeful future, bridging the gap between the present (“here”) and a desired future (“there”). This practice engages curiosity, creativity, and clear strength-based language to clarify goals, helping refine what you want more - or less - of in life. Intentions can be thought, spoken, or written, and serve as a guide for personal growth. Intention setting can also be aligned with significant times like birthdays, anniversaries, new years, seasonal changes, or moon cycles.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Prepare Your Space

1

- Choose a safe, comfortable place where you can be still for at least five minutes.
- Take a few deep breaths and settle in.

2

Identify a Goal or Vision.

Reflect on the future:

- Do you already have a goal? Write it down.
- If not, ask yourself what could create a more joyful or fulfilling future.

Goal or Vision Notes:

Explore Your Intention. Ask:

3

- Why does this goal matter to me?
- How does it make me feel?
- What might help me get from “here” to “there”?

Exploring Your Intention Notes:

4

Craft Your Intention. Use one or both prompts to name your intention:

- “I Intend to ...”
- “(Today,) I will ...”

Crafting Your Intention Notes:

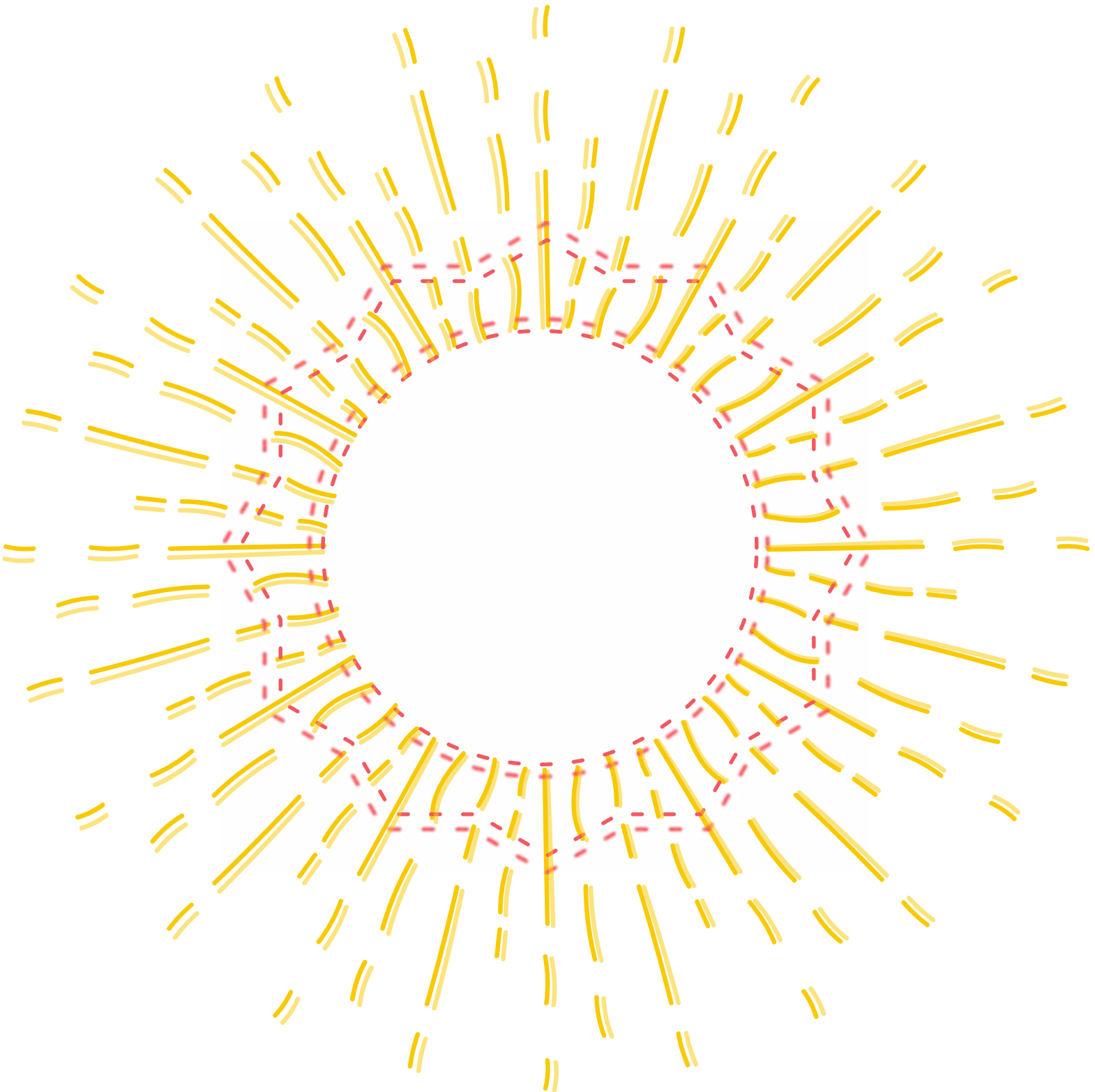
5

Optional:

Create a visual representation of your goal or intention, or use the next page.

My Intentions

Write down your intentions in the center of the sun and color.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

If you enjoyed this practice, you might also like to try [Affirmation Breathing](#) or [Noticing Joy](#).

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children and/or Families

Practice this with children or family members by drawing, imagining, or acting out intentions. Ask questions to deepen understanding, such as:

- Why is this important to you?
- How would it make you feel?
- What does it mean to you?






Alternative Approaches

If writing is not accessible, speak or think through your intentions. Alternatively, use art forms like drawing, collages, or vision boards to express your goals.



Noticing Joy



Time:  to  	Mental Energy:  (may include excitement)	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing or drawing materials	Physical Position(s): Any position used for writing	

What is It?

Laughter and experiencing joy can be soothing and healing. Whenever possible, actively include moments of pleasure, enjoyment, and laughter in your day. Spend time with joyful people (or pets), and engage with books, shows, or music that uplift you. Even revisiting familiar favorites can bring comfort and inspiration.

When direct joy isn't accessible, reflecting on it can be powerful. This drawing practice offers a creative break, boosting energy and creativity.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

- 1 Gather drawing materials (paper, crayons, markers, pencils).
- 2 Find a comfortable place and take a few breaths.
- 3 Think about what brings you joy - people, places, experiences.
- 4 Draw what comes to mind: an object, a scene, or even abstract representations of joy. If you're unsure where to start, consider:
 - *Your favorite song, movie, or food*
 - *A joke that makes you laugh*
 - *A memory or place that makes you smile*
 - *Sounds, smells, colors, or textures that delight you*
 - *The best part of your day so far*



Example of a "Noticing Joy" drawing

My Joy

Write or draw about things that bring joy or laughter in the spaces below. Think about: people, places, experiences, memories, favorite foods, songs, movies, jokes, the best part of my day or week. There are no right or wrong answers!



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

If you enjoyed this practice, you might also like to try [Mindfulness Drawing](#) and [Zentangle Method](#)

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

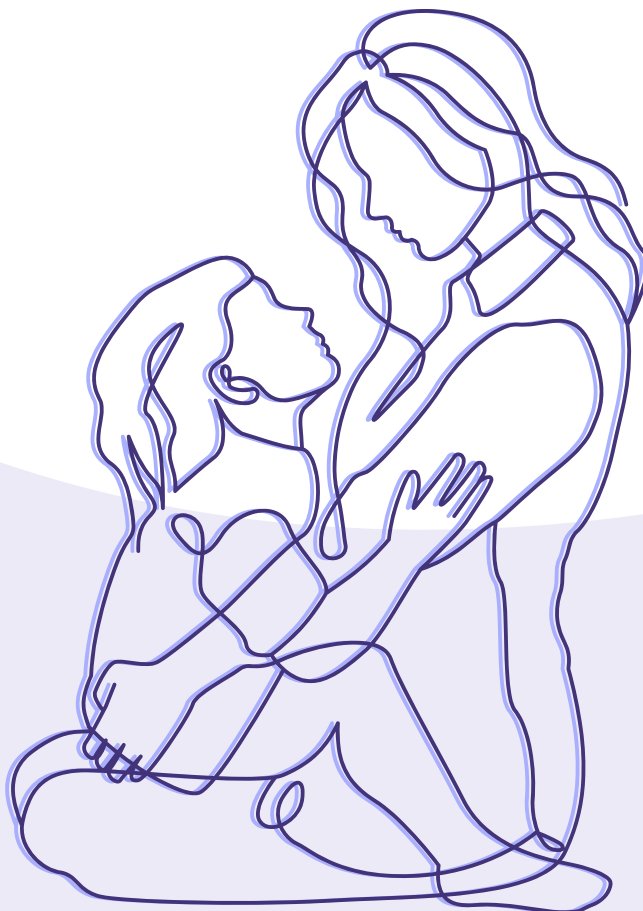
For Children

Ask questions and discuss joy before drawing together: (e.g., “What’s your favorite color? Why?”)

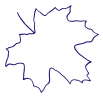
Alternative Approaches






If drawing isn’t preferred, try:

- Making a magazine collage
- Writing about what brings you joy
- Expressing joy through movement



Affirmation Breathing



Time:  to  	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

This practice is adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh's Moments of Mindfulness (2005), originating from Buddhism. This breathing practice can soothe anxiety and center the mind. Pairing breathing with affirmations can support our staying present and grounded within ourselves.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

In general, this practice should feel comfortable while you're doing it. If you feel any discomfort, pause and get comfortable again. When you first start this practice, begin with just 1-2 minutes of breathing and gradually increase the time you practice as you grow used to it.

Get in a comfortable position, usually sitting or laying down

Breathe naturally, repeating these phrases as you breathe:

- "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in...Breathing out, I know I am breathing out."
- "Breathing in, my breath grows deep... Breathing out, my breath goes slowly."
- "Breathing in, I feel calm... Breathing out, I feel ease."
- "Breathing in, I smile... Breathing out, I release."
- "Breathing in, I am in the present moment... Breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment."

As you become comfortable, shorten the phrases:

- "In, out"
- "Deep, slow"
- "Calm, ease"
- "Smile, release"
- "Present moment, wonderful moment"

My Breathing Affirmations

Use the affirmations below with the breath, or create your own at the bottom of the page



Breathing in, I know I am breathing in
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out

Breathing in, my breath grows deep
Breathing out, my breath goes slowly

Breathing in, my breath grows deep
Breathing out, my breath goes slowly

Breathing in, I feel calm
Breathing out, I feel ease

Breathing in, I smile
Breathing out, I release

Breathing in, I am in the present moment
Breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment



Breathing in,
Breathing out,

Breathing in,
Breathing out,

Breathing in,
Breathing out,

Breathing in,
Breathing out,



Breathing in,
Breathing out,

Breathing in,
Breathing out,



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Say the phrases for them until they feel comfortable saying it with you.

Alternative Approaches


- If speaking the phrases isn't accessible, they can be intentionally thought or visualized instead.
- Change or add phrases that feel positive or affirming. For example:
 - "Breathing in, I feel ____" and choose a word for something positive you want to bring in.
 - "Breathing out, I feel ____" and choose a word that signifies letting go or resting in a calm or peaceful place.
 - Have the affirmations you create written for easy reference during practice.


Practice Resources

Video: [Breathing in, I Know I'm Breathing in](#), Thich Nhat Hanh, Plum Village App

Gratitude Journaling

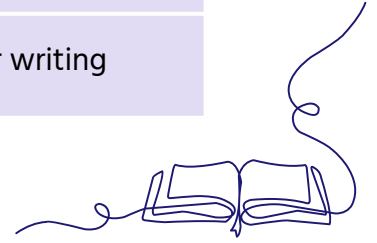
Time:  to  

Mental Energy: 

Physical Energy: 

Materials: Writing materials

Physical Position(s): Any position used for writing



What is It?

Gratitude journaling involves writing down three or more things you're grateful for each day. Practicing gratitude is linked to social, mental, and emotional well-being (Jans-Beken et al., 2020). This habit can help you recognize positive patterns in your life, what brings you joy, and what you want to focus on more.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

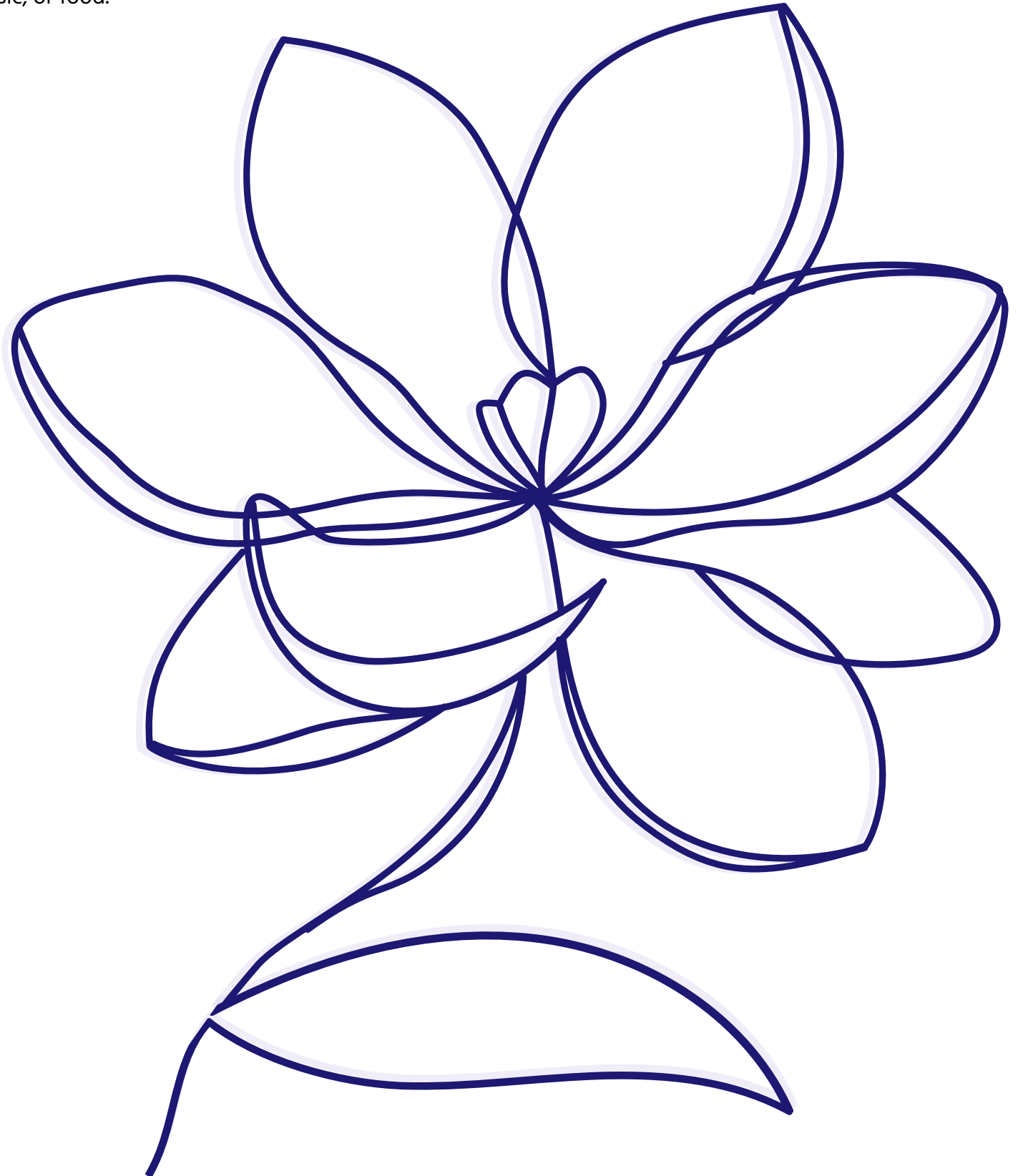
- **Gather something to write on and something to write with.**
- **(Optional)** Write today's date at the top of the page.
- **List three or more things you're grateful for.** You can write as much or as little as feels right.

Need inspiration? Consider:

- Something that made you laugh or smile today
- A part of your body you appreciate
- An item you own that's useful or comforting
- A personal skill or ability you value
- Something you like about yourself
- Someone who has helped you
- A beautiful aspect of nature or your surroundings
- An activity or hobby you enjoyed recently
- A favorite meal or food
- A positive life change
- Music that helps you feel good
- A cherished memory

I am Grateful

In each petal, write down three or more things you're grateful for each day, writing as much or as little as feels right. For inspiration, think about what made you smile today, something you appreciate about yourself or your body, someone who helped you, something beautiful around you, or a favorite memory, music, or food.



Additional Tips

- Set a goal to journal daily for a week, a month, or as long as you like. Some people prefer to write longer reflections once or twice a week - find what works best for you.
- Keeping a consistent routine may help, such as journaling in the morning, before a meal, or before bed.
- Consider writing a gratitude letter to someone who has positively impacted your life.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*



Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

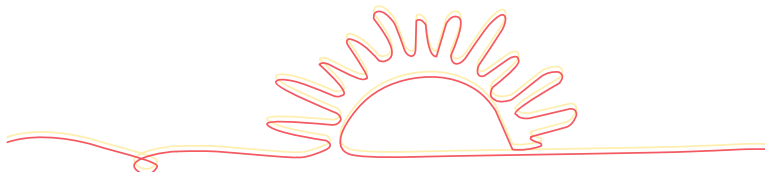
Practice gratitude as a family before bed or a meal. If children can't write yet, write for them. Express appreciation out loud, (e.g., "Thank you for listening earlier" or "I really like spending time with you").

For Community

- Make it a habit to express gratitude to at least one person each day.

Alternative Approaches

- If you don't like to journal, you can mentally list or visualize three things you are grateful for.
- On tough days, keep it simple - gratitude for drinking water, breathing, or simply being in this moment.
- Pay attention to how gratitude feels in your body and notice if that feeling gets stronger with practice.



Sista Afya Community Care

Black Women Cultivating Hope and Healing through Community

By Camesha L. Jones-Brandon, LCSW, Executive Director, communitycare.sistaafya.com

Sista Afya Community Care (SACC) engages Black women in Chicago through community mental health care designed to empower, uplift, and heal. Too often, systemic barriers exclude Black women from accessing the care they want and need. SACC affirms that all Black women deserve mental health services that are affordable, community-centered, and culturally and gender-responsive.

Through our Community Care program, we take a holistic approach to support the whole person while addressing the systemic issues impacting mental health care. Our free workshops, wellness classes, and peer support groups create a space where Black women connect and support each other's mental wellness in a community-centered space. By building on cultural wisdom and creating new pathways for healing, we help women reconnect with themselves through authentic liberating experiences.



Each month, we host events focused on mental wellness and community support. For example -

- A Gentle Ease into the New Year: Women collaborated with a life coach to create artistic visualizations of their intentions and goals for the year, focusing on approaching their aspirations with grace and ease.
- Fall Into Liberation Retreat: A free day-long retreat featuring yoga, journaling, meditation, and art-making focused on being their full, joyful, liberated selves.
- Heal TogetHER - Peer Support for Black Women: Research-backed peer support program where Black women feel seen and heard while building authentic connections. This program supports participants with building their skills around inner peace, problem-solving, and accessing essential services.

Creative Expression



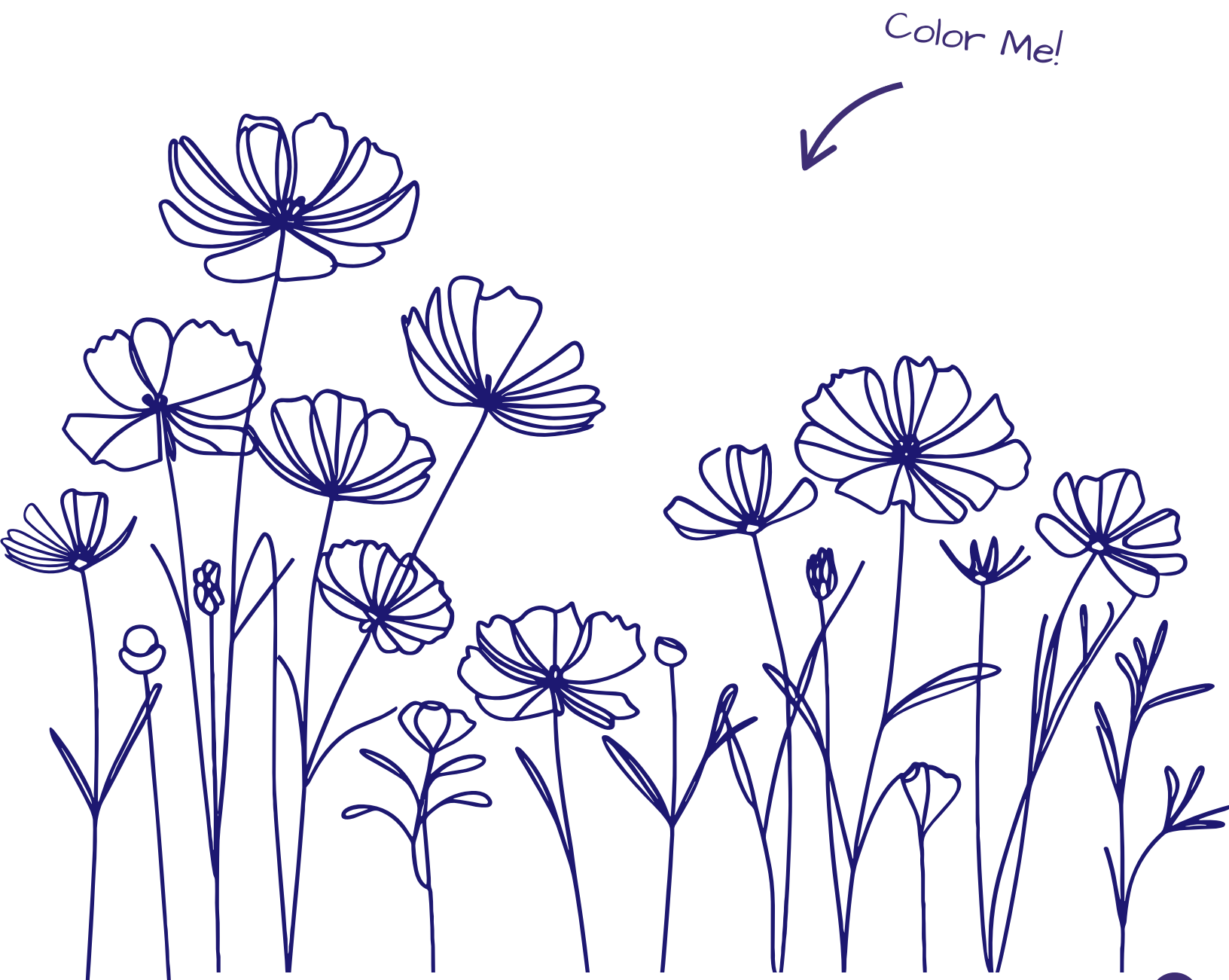
Creative Expression







Like a flower unfolding its petals, creative expression allows us to manifest our inner healing and transformation.

In this section:

- [Mindfulness Drawing](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [Zentangle Method](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)



Mindfulness Drawing

Time:  	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing or drawing materials	Physical Position(s): Any position used for drawing	

What is It?

Mindfulness drawing connects us to the present moment by inviting us to explore creativity through our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. This particular activity was adapted from Chris Rusinko (2023), Museum Educator and Program Coordinator at the National Gallery of Art. In addition to bringing us into the present moment, this activity can also be used to help us identify what we're feeling and experiencing in our bodies.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

1 Find a safe, comfortable space.

Get into a position that is comfortable for drawing.

2 Take a moment to notice your surroundings.

Consider asking yourself:

- How does the earth feel beneath me?
- How does this writing utensil feel in my hand?
- What kind of sensations do I feel in my body? In my mind?

3 Choose a drawing prompt to engage one of your senses.

- What can I see?
- What can I hear?
- What can I smell?
- What can I taste?
- What can I feel?

4 Begin to draw.

Remember to focus on the experience of drawing. Connect with yourself and your senses.

If you experience any type of interruption or distraction, you can step away for a moment and come back to the activity when you feel ready.



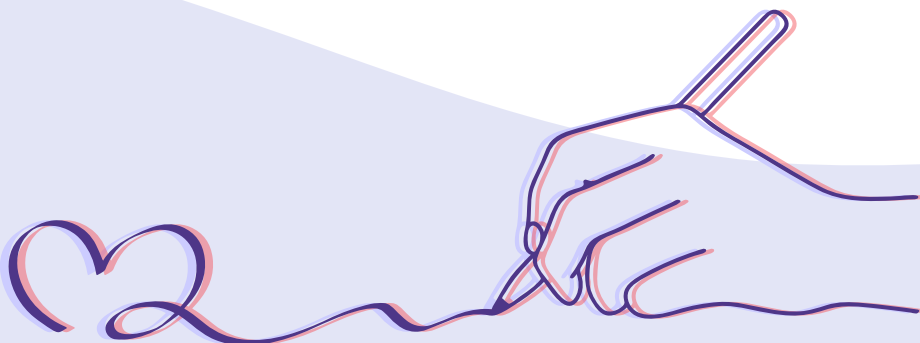
What am I feeling? A hot cup of coffee



What can I hear? Point of view of the direction of the birds



What can I see? My living room



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

If you are a parent or caregiver, you can use this activity to bond with children. Here are some ideas to consider when inviting them to draw:

- Use scented markers. This allows children to engage their smelling senses while drawing, coloring, tracing, or doodling. You can ask questions like “What does this marker smell like to you?”
- Identify what their favorite food is. You help them draw, color, or trace a picture of the food. You can also ask them to draw or color how they feel when they eat their favorite food.
- Grab their favorite toy. Let the child hold or sit with it while they draw, color, or doodle. You can also ask them to draw or color how they feel when they have their favorite toy with them.
- Draw, color, trace, or doodle while listening to a favorite song or show together.

For Groups or Communities

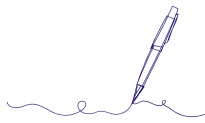
This activity can be done in a group setting by sharing prompts and drawing together.






Alternative Approaches


Adjust as needed for comfort while engaging with this activity. Here are a few examples to consider:


- If you begin to feel sore from sitting, consider adjusting yourself to standing or lying down.
- If there is distracting noise or the lack of background sound is bothering you, you can try moving to a different space or changing the sounds around you through ear plugs or playing background sound you enjoy.
- If drawing feels overwhelming or if you don't like drawing on a blank page, try using coloring pages or tracing instead.

Poetry



Time:   to   

Mental Energy: 

Physical Energy: 

Materials: Writing materials

Physical Position(s): Any position used for writing

What is It

Poetry is a written art form that conveys meaning, emotion, and imagery, offering a creative and therapeutic outlet for self-expression. With no right or wrong way to engage across the many forms of poetry, it can help individuals work through a range of emotions including more challenging ones such as sadness, frustration, or worry.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It: Individual Poetry

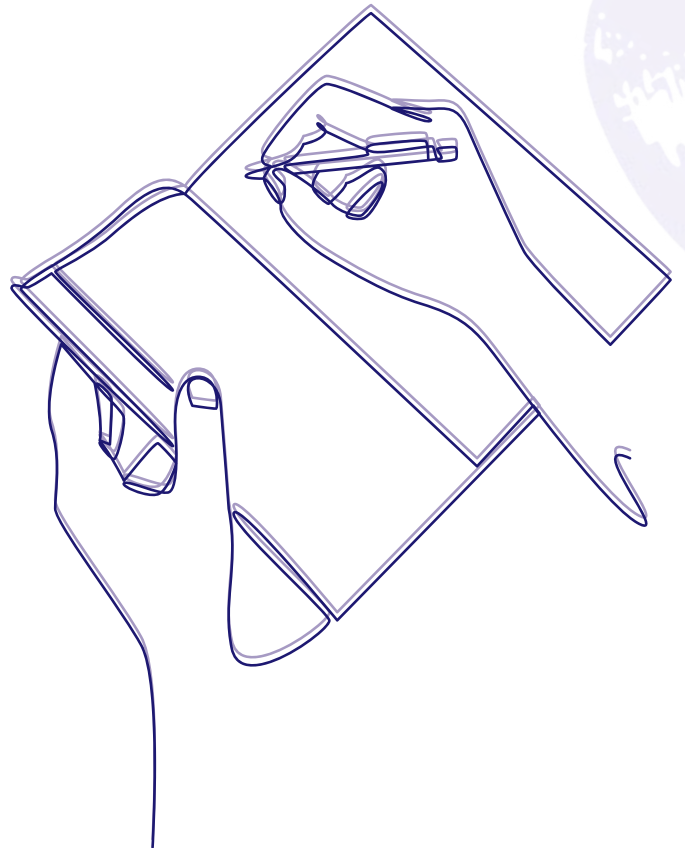
Get into a position that is comfortable for writing. Below are prompts for individual practice. Feel free to adapt them for your preferences and needs.

Tuning into our surroundings and senses

- Start by taking a couple of deep breaths.
- Focus on your surrounding environment.
- Start by mentally responding to the following questions below:
 - Engage your senses - What do you see, taste, touch, smell, or hear?
 - What emotions or memories arise for you?
- Begin to write freely.
- Once you feel done, review what you've written.
 - Is there anything you want to adjust (words, phrases, etc.)?

Peaceful Place

- Think of a real or imaginary place that feels safe and special to you.
- Describe it:
 - What does it look like?
 - Where is it located?
 - Why is it special to you?
 - How does it make you feel?
- Write freely about this place.
- For more details on imagining your peaceful place, see Building Safety in the Body: [Drawing A Safe Place](#).
- Once you feel done, review what you've written.



How to Do It: Group Poetry

Get into a position that is comfortable for writing. Below are prompts for group practice. Feel free to adapt them for your group's preferences and needs.

Collective Storytime

- Each person writes a sentence that they find interesting. This can be a quote from a book, social media post, or a conversation they've had.
- Collect each sentence that has been written down into a container.
- Each person will randomly draw a sentence out of a container. The first sentence drawn will be the start of the poem.
- Continue adding the sentences one-by-one until everyone has drawn one.
- Read the completed poem out loud, reflect together, and enjoy what you created together.

What's The Word?

- Begin by having each person in the group write down a word that is meaningful to them.
- Place the words into a container and have the facilitator draw one.
- Use the word that was chosen and turn it into an acronym.
 - For example, if the word chosen is "**COURAGE**", align the letters of the word in a vertical line. Refer to the example below.
- Ask the group to brainstorm together or in smaller groups to write a phrase or sentence that represents the meaning of the word or represents personal experiences

- C** Coming together as one.
- O** Opening our hearts to the possibilities.
- U** Unique perspectives.
- R** Raising each other up.
- A** Accomplishing our goals.
- G** Gratitude for each other's support.
- E** Expressing our emotions together.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*



Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Engaging children in poetry is a great option to not only bond with them but to also help strengthen language recognition by hearing new sounds and new words, and exploring their creativity. Here are some kid-friendly resources to help you get started:

- [Acrostic poems](#) from Poetry 4 Kids
- [Shape poems](#) from Equip The Little Ones
- [Color poems](#) from Poetry In Voice
- [I Am poem](#) by Mary Wilson

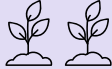




Alternative Approaches:

If writing is not a preferred or accessible option, here are additional ways you can engage with the poetry prompts:

- Instead of words, use images (through drawing, collage, etc.).
- Instead of writing, speak the poetry out loud (with or without a partner).
- If it's not safe to keep something you've written, consider safety planning around how to safely store or dispose of what you've written.

Zentangle Method

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing or drawing materials	Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for drawing	

What is It?

The Zentangle Method is a type of doodling practice that invites you to connect with the present moment by drawing structured, repetitive patterns of dots, lines, and curves. While it follows a somewhat structured approach, there are no strict rules, allowing for creativity and self-expression. In this activity, you can identify your own needs, and control your own design process. Research suggests Zentangle drawing can enhance emotional well-being, self-esteem, and self-regulation (Sit et al., 2022).

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

- 1 Find a comfortable environment that feels safe to you.** Get into a comfortable position and take a couple of deep breaths. Then, grab your writing materials.
- 2 Start by drawing a shape, dot, or line.**
- 3 Repeat the pattern across the page** in any direction, breathing deeply, slowly in and out, as you draw. Notice any tension in your body or wandering thoughts.
- 4 Fill in blank spaces,** darken lines, or shade areas as desired. Continue breathing and noticing sensations or thoughts.
- 5 Avoid erasing any part of your pattern.** It's not about making it perfect. If you feel like you've made a mistake, use it as an opportunity to begin a new pattern or work around the "mistake" (Zentangle, n.d.).

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

This resource provides some easier Zentangle patterns that can be more kid-friendly - [Easy Zentangle Patterns for Beginners and Kids](#) by Kitchen Counter Chronicle.

For Groups and Communities

This practice can be done with other individuals in a group setting. You can work together on the same patterns or work on your own patterns while sharing the same physical space.

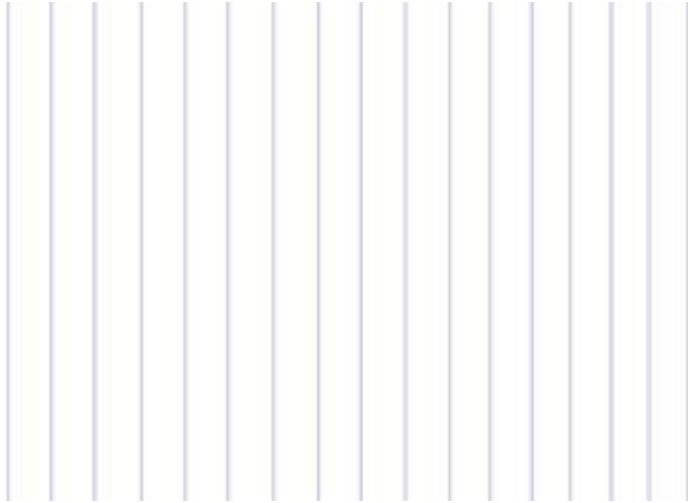
Alternative Approaches

Adjust as needed for comfort while engaging with this activity. Here are a few examples to consider:

- If you begin to feel sore from sitting, consider adjusting yourself to standing or lying down.
- If there is distracting noise or the lack of background sound is bothering you, you can try moving to a different space or changing the sounds around you through ear plugs or playing background sound you enjoy.
- If you don't enjoy starting with a blank page, there are patterns available online that you can color or trace instead. Check out the resource listed above for beginners and children as an example.

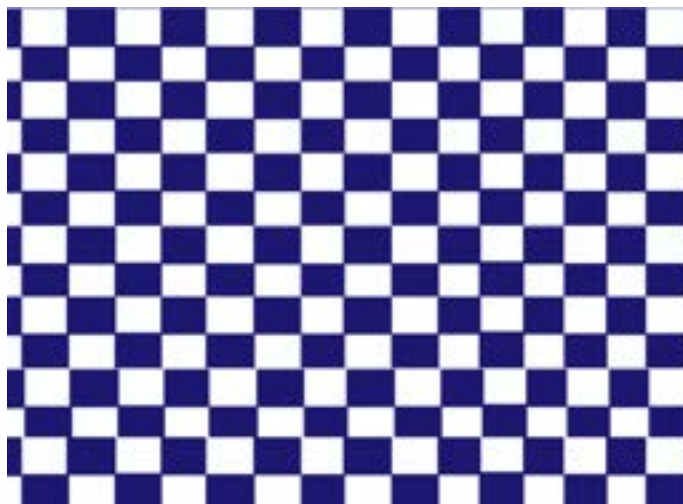
Visual Example of Zentangle

Here is a step-by-step visual example of a pattern made using the Zentangle Method that only focuses on the drawing aspect (see full steps for information about breathing and mindfulness).



Draw lines across the paper

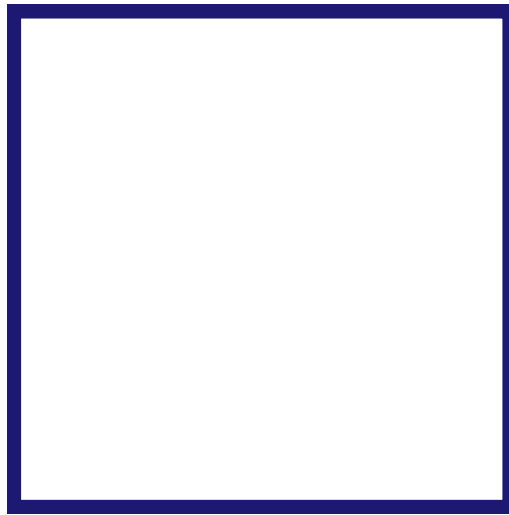
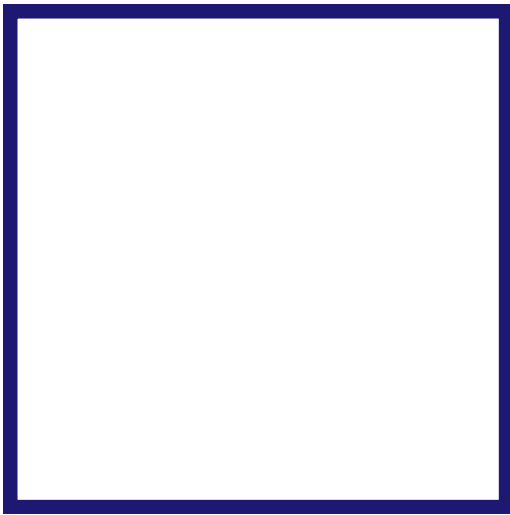
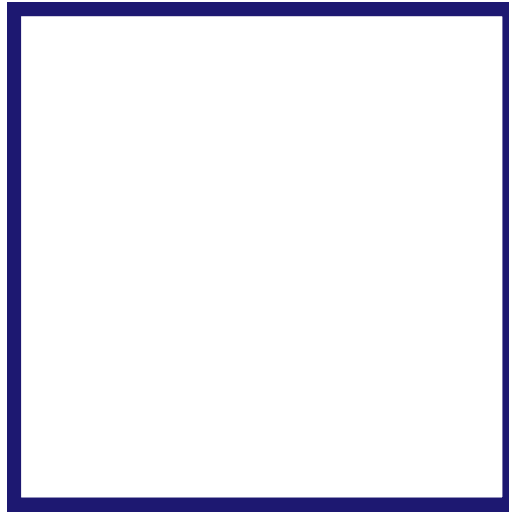
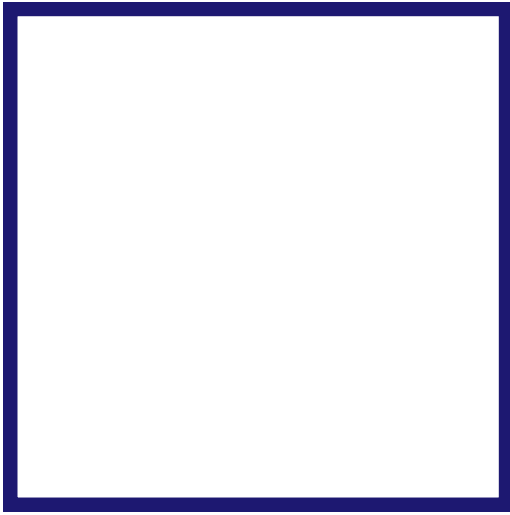
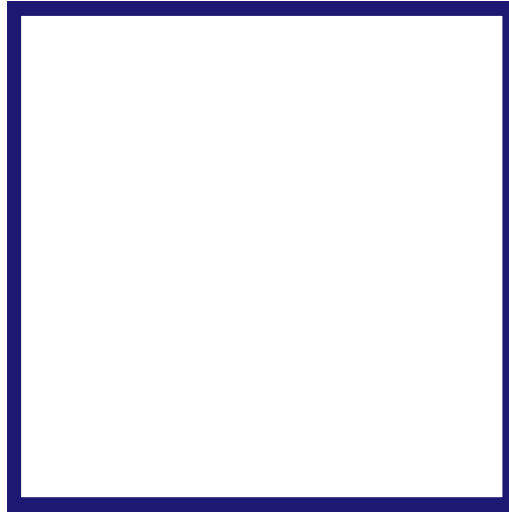
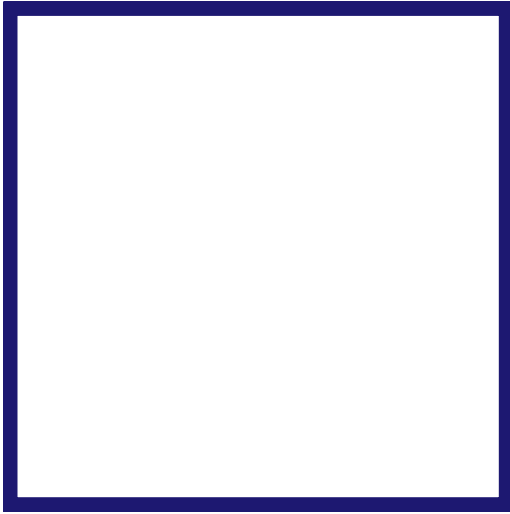
Draw lines across your original lines to make squares



Shade in every other square (at a pace that feels good to you)

My Zentangle

Use the outlined squares below to create Zentangle patterns. Fill in spaces as you like, and try to let mistakes become part of new patterns.



Stories from the Field

Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Lullaby Project

By Amy Torchia, Healing Together Project Director, vtnetwork.org

Since 2021, The Vermont Network's Lullaby Project has connected parents and caregivers with professional Vermont musicians and writers to create and sing lullabies for their children. Participants have included survivors of domestic and sexual violence, residents of Vermont's women's correctional facility, parents of gender creative kids, advocates, and coalition staff, and queer youth who write songs of self-affirmation and love.

During Lullaby Workshops, participants are guided through writing an original song for their child, their inner child, or another loved one. In the process, musicians and participants collaborate by taking turns, building on each other's contributions. Each workshop culminates in a song share, often with children present to hear a lullaby written just for them. Each participant receives their song recording and lyrics, and are invited to share their song at an annual public concert with musical accompaniment.



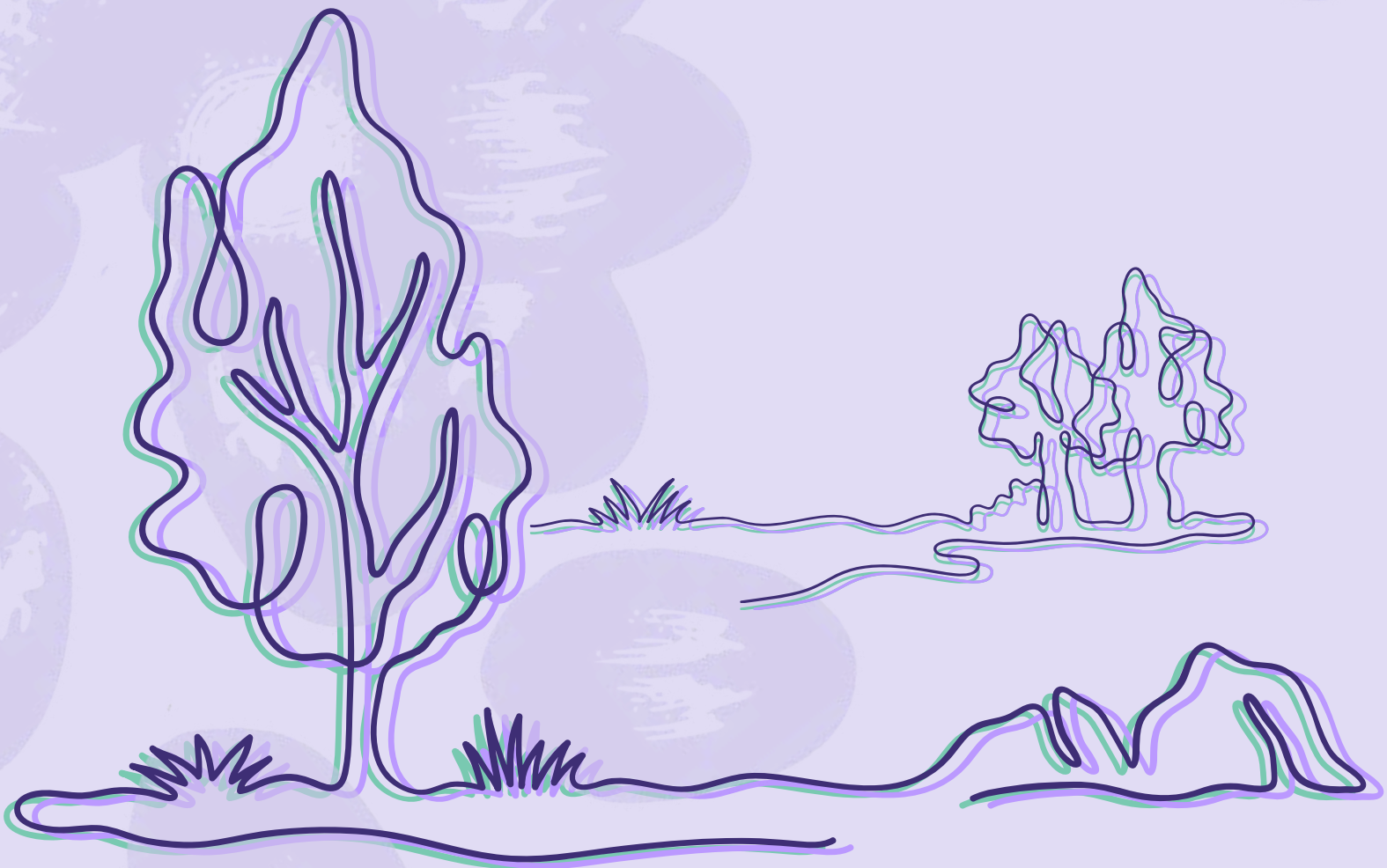
"This was the single **best experience** I've had in here. Made even better because I get to share something with my children that they will have forever and can be proud of their mom for." - Lullaby Workshop participant from the women's correctional facility

Participants' lullabies often express themes of unconditional love and joy, but can also reflect the separation and grief they've experienced. This creative process and expression fosters healing through the artform itself as well as through community-building. Lullabies can connect families through songs that can be sung for many years and across many generations – a precious family heirloom. Bonds between caregivers and children are strengthened through words of love, playfulness, and reverence. These multi-layered connections support the general wellbeing for everyone involved, including families, facilitating artists, and supporting staff.

The Lullaby Project is part of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, with trained musician partners worldwide.



Connecting to Nature



Connecting to Nature

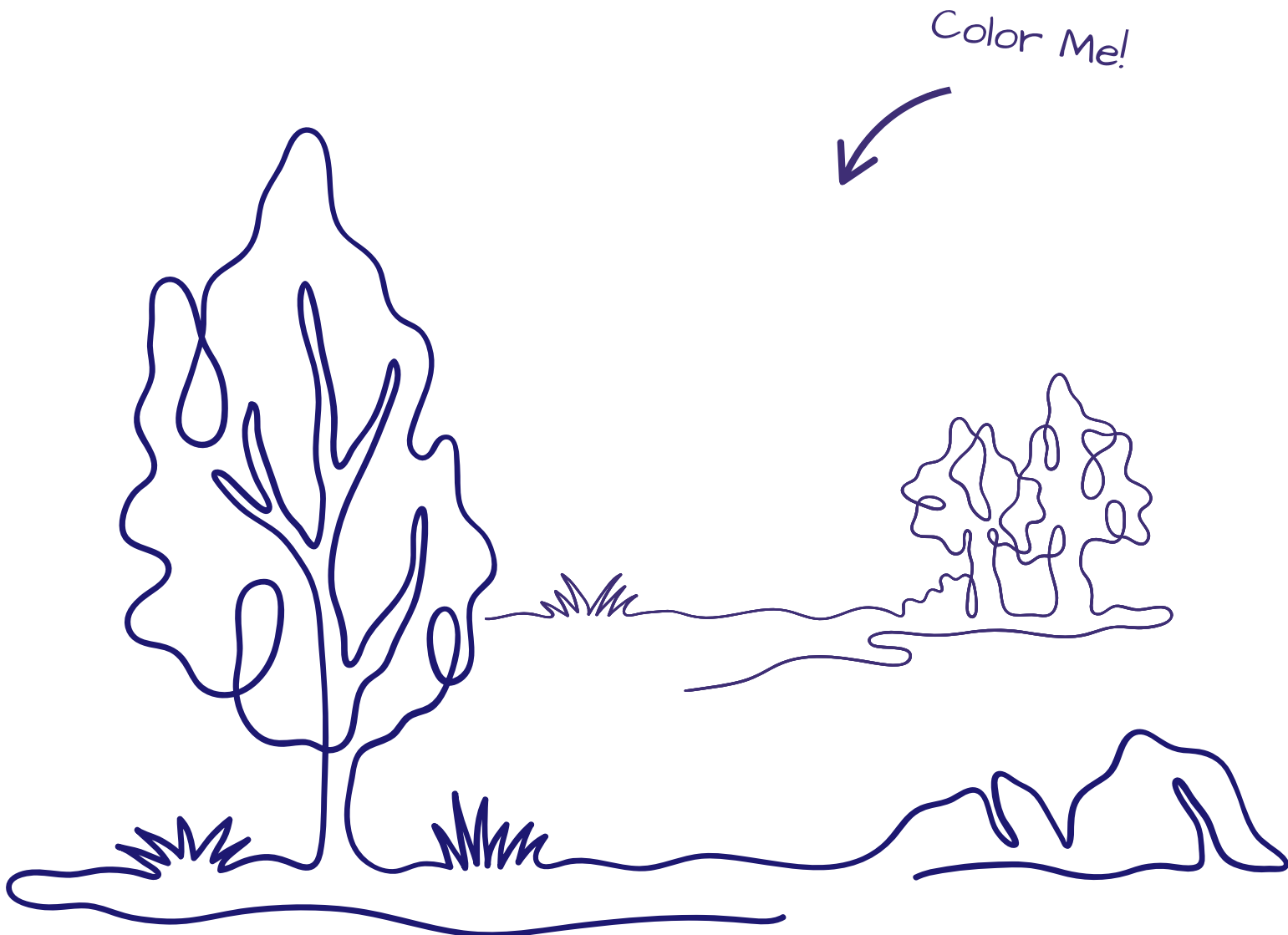


A flower's life cycle - growing from tiny seed to beautiful blossom to returning to the soil - reminds us of renewal and growth.

Observing and connecting with nature's rhythms offers hope, even in difficult times, reminding us that rebirth and new possibilities are always within reach.







In this section:

- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Spending Time with Natural Light](#)
- [Nature Journaling](#)
- [Stories from the Field - National Indigenous Women's Resource Center](#)



Grounding Tree Visualization



Time:  to   	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Sitting, standing, or any comfortable position	

What is It?

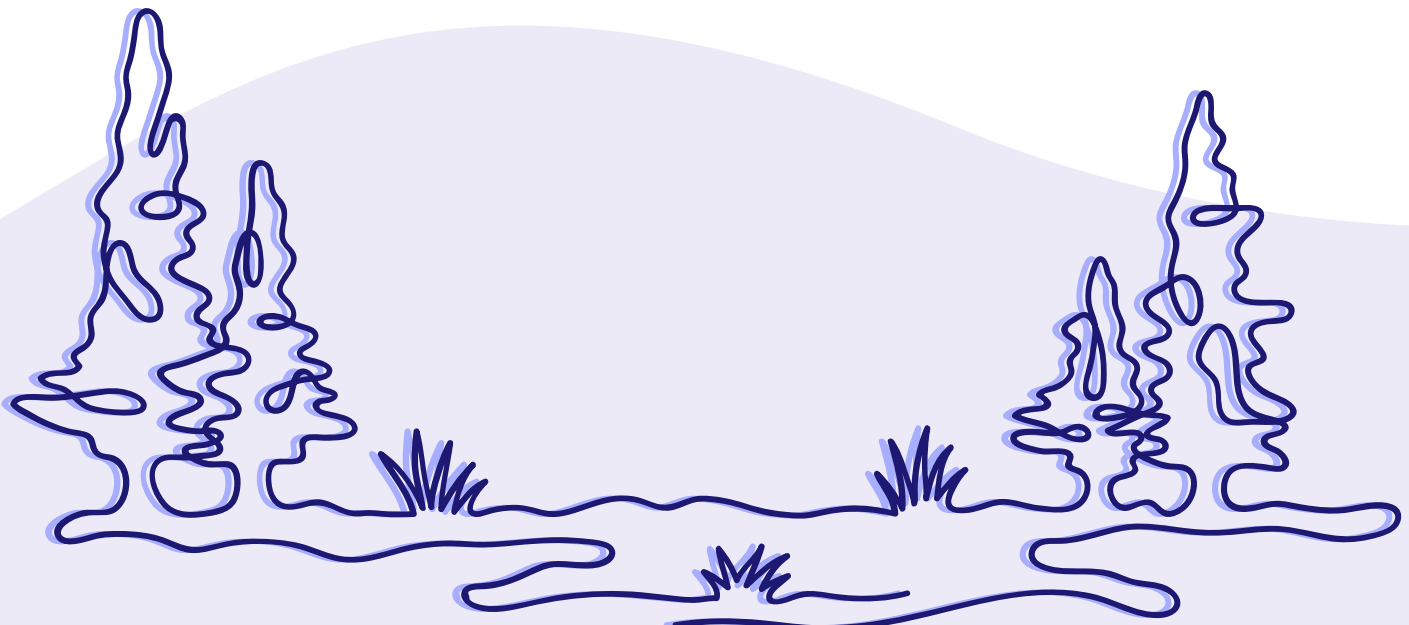
This visualization practice uses the images of a tree to promote grounding, safety, and connection to nature. It has two parts: growing roots for stability and branching upward for expansion and healing. You may find this practice helpful if you're feeling uncertain, overwhelmed, or disconnected.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:


- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.




How to Do It

Part 1: Roots

- 
- Find a comfortable position, ideally with your feet on the floor. Place your hands in a way that feels natural. You may want to focus on your breath, letting it slow and deepen.
 - Visualize a ball of light at your heart center in a color that feels healing or protective (e.g., gold, white, pink, or green).
 - Imagine a seed in your heart sprouting roots that extend through your torso, legs, feet, and deep into the earth. If standing, bend your knees slightly.
 - With each breath, let your roots grow stronger, deepening into the earth until they feel sturdy enough to support a mighty tree. Be gentle and patient with yourself, as growing strong roots may take time.
 - If you wish, release any tensions, emotions, or worries through your roots, allowing the earth to accept and transform them.
 - Draw energy from the earth through your roots, feeling grounded, nurtured, and protected. Stay here as long as needed.
 - Offer gratitude to the earth. You can end the practice here or continue to the next part.

Part 2: The Blossoming Tree (Optional)

- 
- Grounded in your strong roots, shift focus back to your heart center. Imagine your body as a tree trunk, growing branches from the top of your head toward the sky.
 - Imagine leaves and flowers emerging, nourished by the earth's energy. Let your branches grow at a balanced size - strong, but not overwhelming.
 - Imagine the sun's warmth energizing your leaves and flowers.
 - Picture a gentle rain falling, nourishing your tree.
 - Feel a soft breeze moving through your branches, flexible yet anchored. Try raising your arms and swaying gently as you imagine the light breeze.
 - Bring your attention back to your heart center, gathering the elements of nature: earth, sun, rain, wind - into yourself. Place your hands over your heart, feeling nurtured. Offer gratitude before moving on with your day.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*



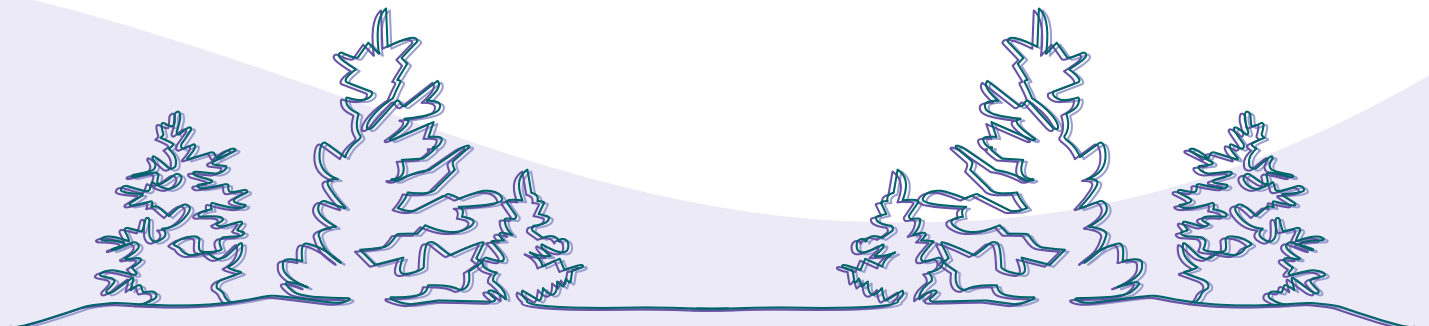
Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Keep the practice shorter for children. You can try drawing or coloring your trees together and talking about what your trees and colors look like.

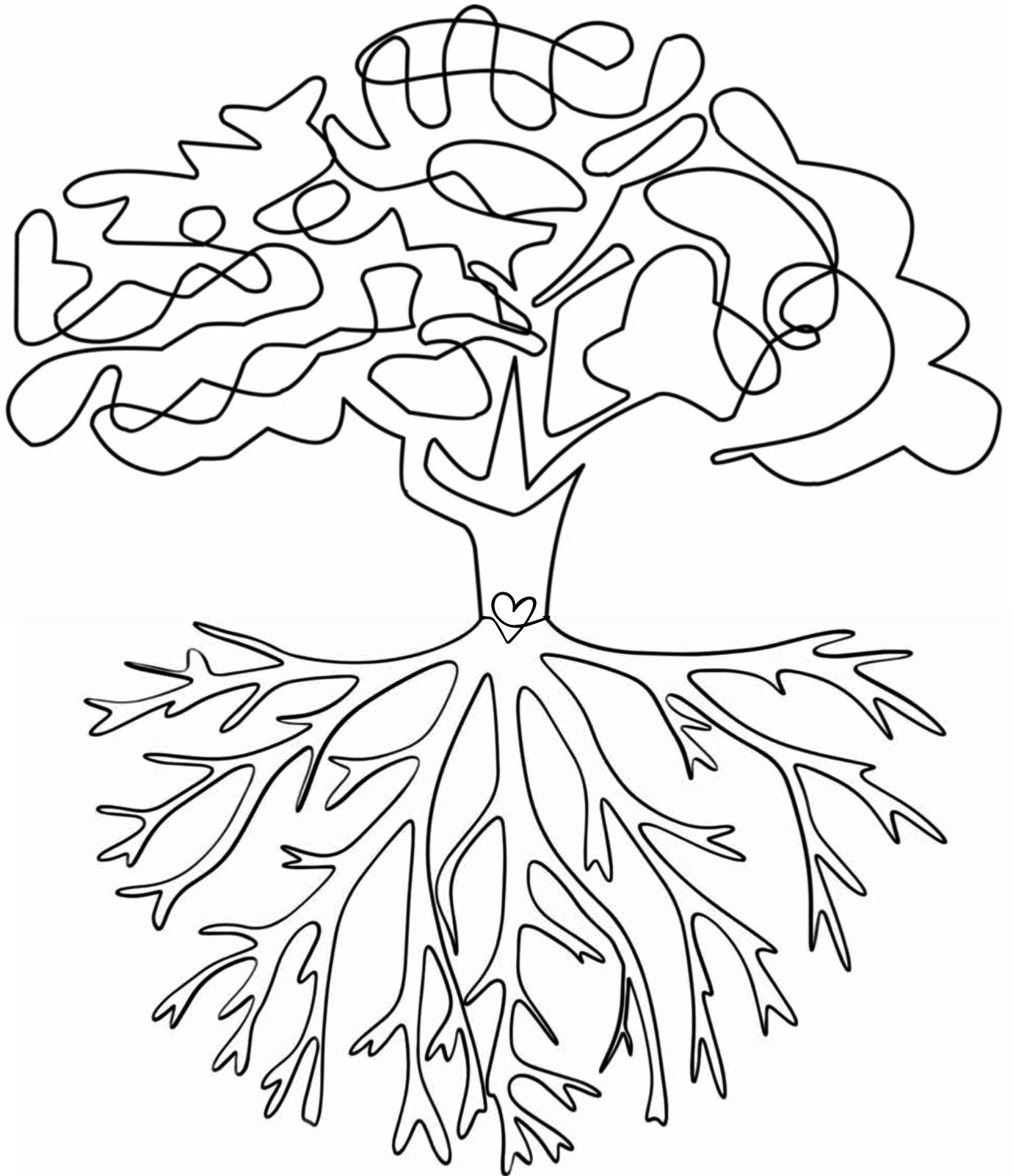
Alternative Approaches

- Try practicing near a tree or using a picture for inspiration.
- Think about how the biggest trees have the strongest roots so they can stand tall despite weather conditions.
- If your roots feel small or difficult to visualize, know that your roots will grow stronger with practice.
- Some may enjoy imagining a rainbow overhead, absorbing its colors into their tree.
- Record yourself or someone you trust reading the practice out loud to listen to later.
- Use this visualization before situations that can make you feel anxious or uncomfortable.




My Grounding Tree


Color the illustration below or use for inspiration during your visualization practice.



Spending Time with Natural Light

Time:   to   

Mental Energy: 

Physical Energy: 

Materials: Natural light

Physical Position(s): Sitting, standing, or any comfortable position

What is It?

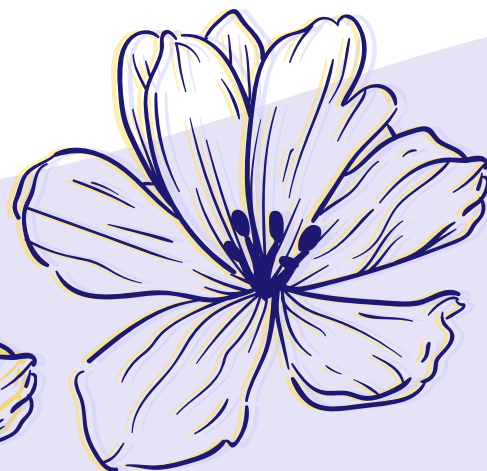
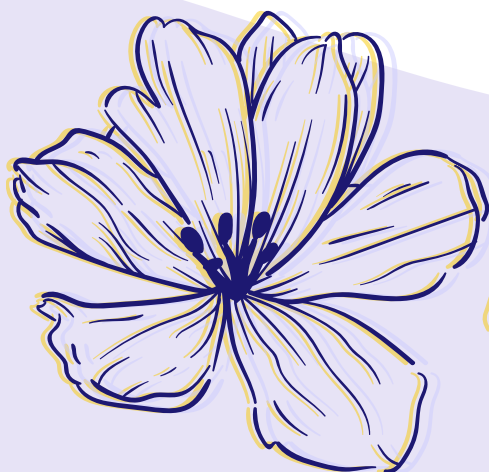
Natural light comes from the sun, moon, stars, sky, or even clouds. Exposing ourselves to natural light can boost energy, enhance mood, and promote relaxation, helping you feel more connected to yourself. This practice is very flexible - you can do it no matter how you're feeling (stressed, angry, happy, or sad), and you can do it actively or just let it happen in the background while you're resting or doing other things.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

1

Find a comfortable spot with natural light (indoors or outdoors).

Indoors:

- Choose a space where sunlight or moonlight can reach you. This can be near a window, a door, or anywhere that feels safe, comfortable, and accessible to you.

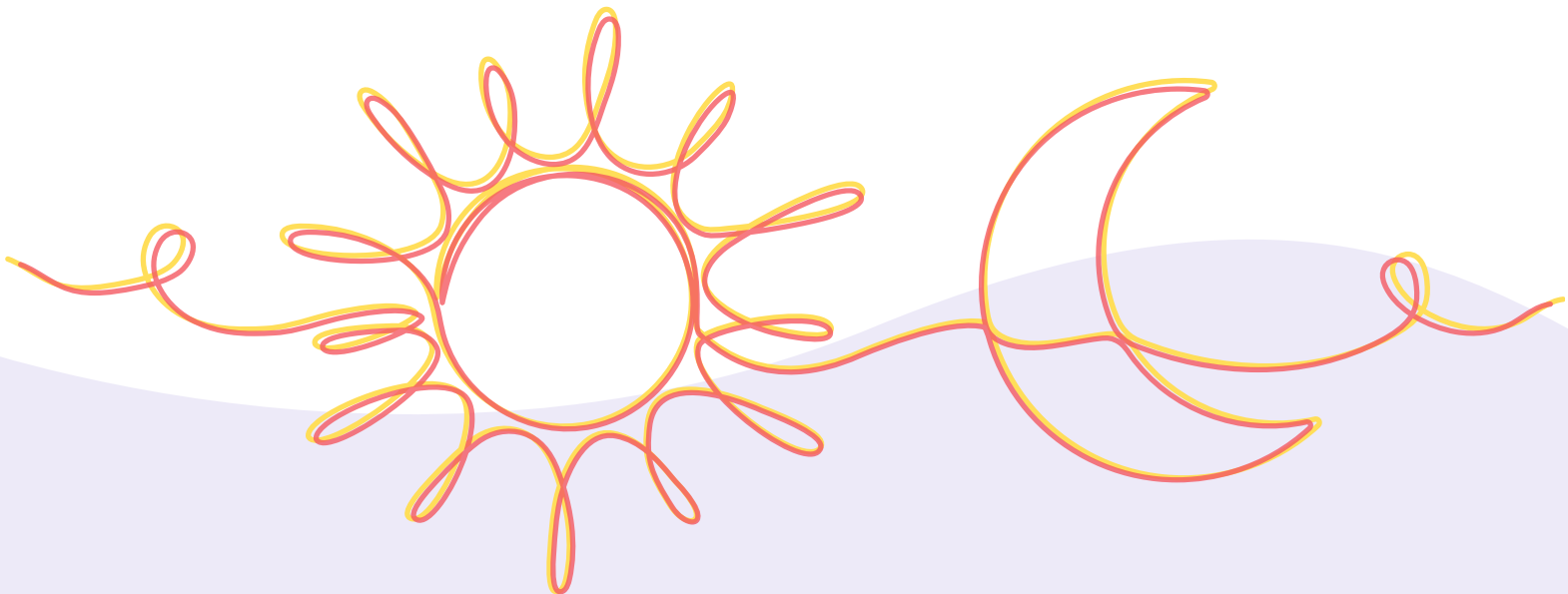
Outdoors:

- If you are in a city or suburb, consider using public parks, community gardens, or other spaces available to the public. If that doesn't feel safe, you can check to see if a local anti-violence advocacy program or other community-based program has an outdoor space that you can use.
- If you are in a rural area, consider community spaces, cultural or family gathering spots, or additional natural spaces that you know of.

2

Think about what you prefer and ask yourself:

- Do I want the light to be on me directly or indirectly?
- Do I seek energy, relaxation, or both?
- Will I use this time for reflection, [Daydreaming](#), rest, or to do something more active?
- Would I like to pair this with another practice (e.g., [5 Senses Grounding Practice](#), [Exploring Body Rhythms: Rock and Shake](#), [Butterfly Hug](#), or [Belly Breathing](#))?
- If I'm going to be outdoors in the sunlight, what kind of sun protection might I need?



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Children can be more engaged in this activity through playfulness, imagination, and creativity. For example, you might invite your child to imagine being lizards laying out on a sunny rock as you both sit by a window and take in some sunlight. Or you could invite your child to howl at the moon together as you take in some moonlight. You can also invite your child to draw together while spending time with natural light, here are some potential ideas for drawing together:





- Draw what the light looks like to different animals
- Draw how you feel while spending time with natural light
- Draw ourselves as natural light sources (the sun, moon, clouds, etc.)


Alternative Approaches


- If privacy or safety is a concern, adjust blinds or curtains to allow light in while maintaining privacy.
- If you have sensitivity to bright light, you can be near the light indirectly or use curtains or blinds to reduce the exposure.
- If a safe space is unavailable, speak with an advocate or someone you trust about alternative locations with natural light.



Nature Journaling

Time:  to   

Mental Energy: 

Physical Energy: 

Materials: Writing or drawing materials

Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position

What is it?

Nature journaling invites you to explore the world around you—whether through imagination or direct, physical interaction. You might write about nature, draw it, or connect physically by touching soil, grass, or even pavement. It's a simple way to feel more connected to yourself and to notice how you relate to nature in your everyday life.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.


How to Do It

There are many ways to approach nature journaling. Creating individual or group prompts can help you get started. Here are some ideas:

- Draw what you see (flowers, trees, clouds formations, etc.)
- Make a written or mental list of what you notice in your natural environment. For example, you might list the plants and birds you notice. What kinds of plants or birds do you notice? How many? What do they look, feel, sound like? Engage your senses as you list them.
- Write a description of your surroundings.
- Feel natural textures. This can be tree bark, leaves, or dirt. (Be careful to not remove anything so you don't disturb the ecosystem, be aware of potentially poisonous plants or mushrooms in your area, and don't touch wild animals).
- Notice different smells like wildflowers, grass, or nearby water.
- Take photos of nature around you.
- Reflect on past experiences in nature and share them with someone you trust and feel safe with.
- Find ways to engage with the outdoors, such as bird watching, visiting a river, or checking out a nature trail.


My Nature Journal

Use the prompts below for nature journaling, or write your own reflections. Be careful to not remove anything so you don't disturb the ecosystem, be aware of potentially poisonous plants or mushrooms in your area, and don't touch wild animals



Draw what I see:


Write a list of what I notice:



Describe where I am right now:

What can I touch?

What do I smell?



Other drawings or reflections. For example:

What do I like about being in nature? Or, write about a good memory in nature.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Engage children's natural curiosity and playfulness to connect with nature. Some ways to support children in nature journaling include:

- Visiting a playground or park
- Walking on a public trail
- Identifying plants and trees using free botanical apps
- Playing instructional games outside that include tag, hide-and-seek, or red-light green-light
- Spending time barefoot in grass, sand, or other natural spaces (where it's safe to be barefoot)
- Using nature-themed coloring pages
- Imagining talking to an animal - which one would you choose, and what would you say?
- Taking care of a potted plant together
- Collecting fallen leaves, potentially using them in art projects

Alternative Approaches

If the outdoors aren't accessible, here are some ideas for connecting with nature:

- Find ways to bring the outdoors inside through plants, sun catchers, rocks, and nature sounds.
- Find ways to spend time with these natural items. For example, gently cleaning plant leaves or running your fingers over a smooth rock.
- Natural items, including plants, can hold deep cultural significance and foster a sense of belonging and connection. See how it feels to choose plants and other natural items that reflect your cultural roots.

Stories from the Field

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

Cultivating Seeds of Healing

By Kim Zahne (Tewa|Hopi), Training and Technical Assistance Specialist, niwrc.org

The **Cultivating Seeds of Healing** activity was developed to strengthen our interconnections of community and land, and how it can support strategies for healing. It is based on Indigenous teachings that understand healing as a reciprocal process between these interconnections and that we do not heal or grow alone; all living things depend on each other and land.

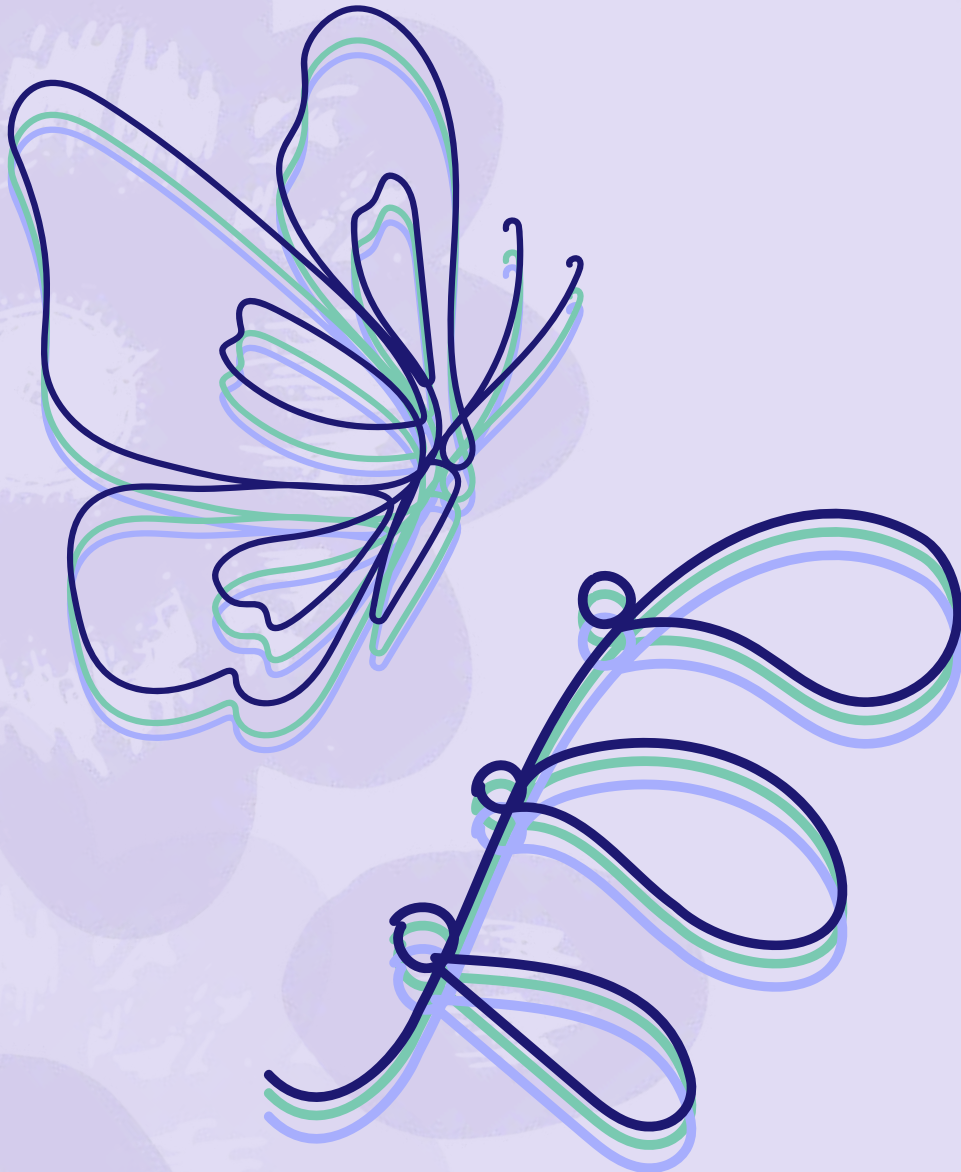
In this activity, participants will choose a seed to plant. The seed represents our connection to land because seeds are powerful teachers. They are family members who teach us lessons that are vital to reciprocal relationships, such as compassion and responsibility. The purpose is to think of the seed as a journey, a connection between ourselves and the land. As participants plant the seeds, they will be asked to think of a person in their life who needs healing. By planting the seeds, there will be a time of reflection to think about how the soil and the water support and protect the seed through its different phases of life. As the participants nourish the seed and its life, this will be an opportunity to think about all the good memories and associations they have with seeds, soil, and water - the earth.

At the end of the activity, participants are asked to show up for one another to continue the practice of community healing. As people and communities strive to strengthen their ties to one another, we look to our environment to teach us how connection fortifies. Reciprocity is not just a practice or statement but a demonstration of a way of life that roots our existence and relations to each other, land, and all life. As we nurture, protect, and nourish our plants, the seeds in turn teach us how to be present and encourage each other.

Kim and NIWRC have generously shared the full activity in **Appendix G**.



Movement



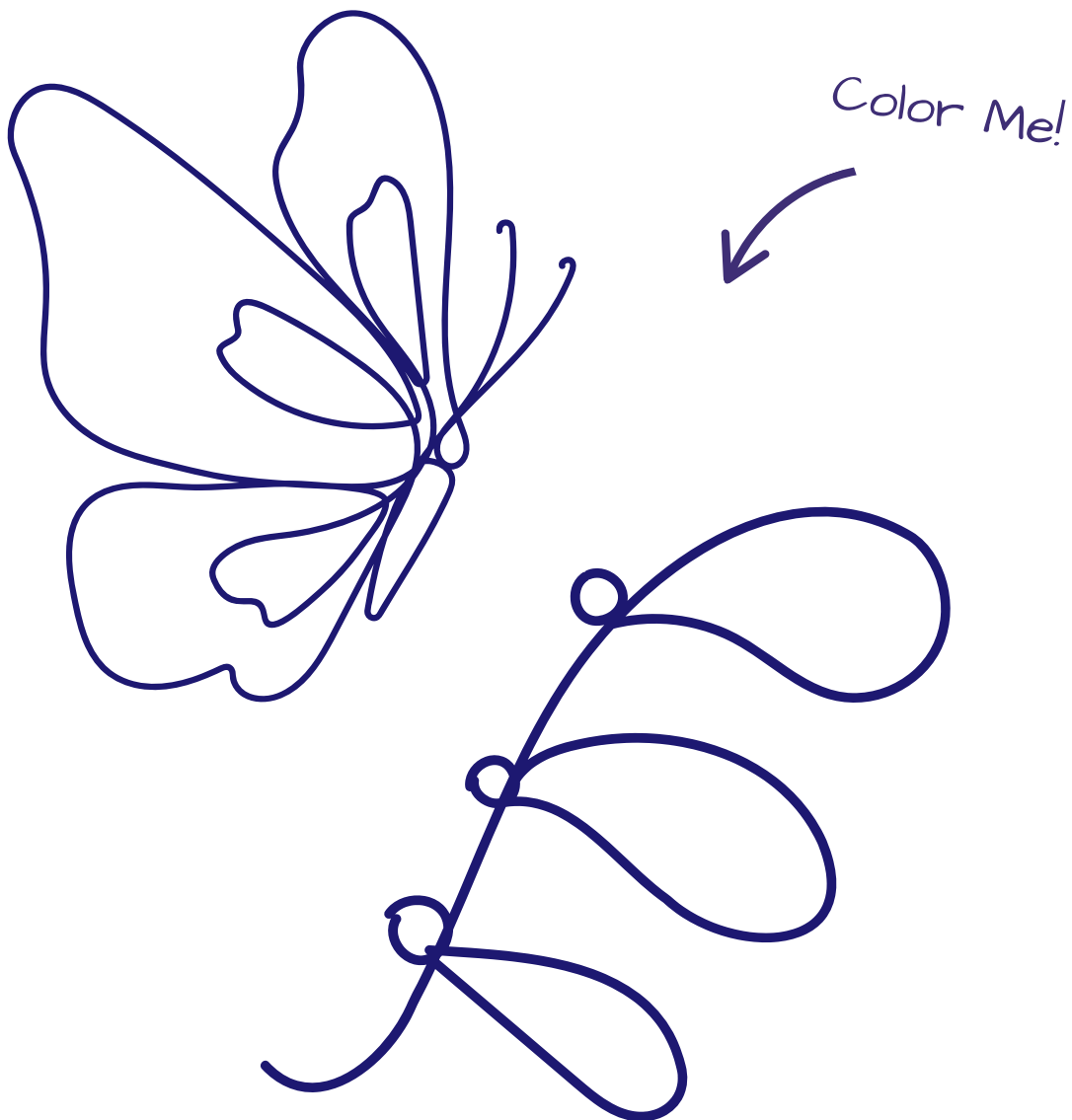
Movement









The wind carries a seed to new ground, where it grows and blossoms into new life. Movement practices can transport us to new places of growth, vitality, and well-being.

In this section:

- [Gentle Stretching](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Exploring Body Rhythms - Rock and Shake](#)
- [Stories from the Field: TaskForce Prevention & Community Services](#)



Gentle Stretching

Time:  to   	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position for stretching	

What is It?

Stretching is a low-impact practice of gently moving parts of your body to help your muscles feel softer, longer, and looser. This can make it easier to move and may reduce pain and stress. Stretching can help create a sense of physical and emotional safety, allowing you to tune into what your body needs. There are many different ways to stretch your body. Only stretch in ways that feel good and comfortable. Use stretching when you feel tension or need a quick way to relax.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

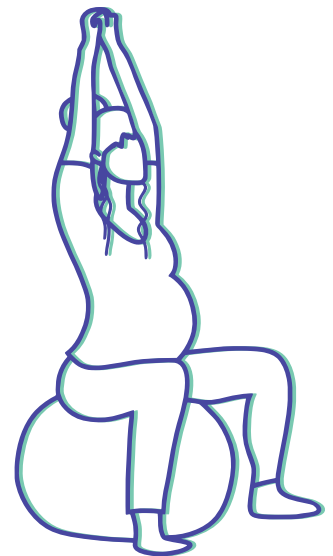
- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

- **Find a safe, comfortable place** where you have room to move.
- **Keep breathing normally** (don't hold your breath while stretching).
- **Try stretching** as you breathe out and relaxing as you breathe in.
- **Stop right away** if you feel sharp pain, burning, tingling, or numbness. Continuing can cause injury.
- **Some stretches feel better** when you hold them still, others feel better as gentle movements. Try both to see what works for your body.
- **Start** with the seated stretches on the next page or experiment with what feels good.



Stretching While Sitting in a Chair

Neck side stretch

- Gently tilt your head to one side, bringing your ear toward your shoulder.
- Hold, then switch sides.

Neck rolls

- Gently tuck your chin down. Keeping the chin tucked, slowly bring the right ear towards the right shoulder, then switch sides.

Shoulder rolls

- Roll your shoulders up, back, and down in slow circles.
- Switch direction, bringing your shoulders back, up, forward, and down in slow circles.

Shoulder shrugs

- Lift your shoulders up toward your ears, hold for a few seconds, then relax.

Wrist circles

- Make slow circles with your hands, then reverse direction.

Hands and fingers

- Extend your fingers out, clench your hands into fists, then relax the hands.

Arm circles

- Extend your arms out to the sides and make slow, small circles, then bigger ones.

Seated twist

- Turn your upper body to one side, using the chair seat or arm for support.

Side reach

- Reach one arm up and over your head, leaning to the opposite side.

Back arch

- Sit up tall and gently arch your back while squeezing your shoulder blades together.

Ankle rolls

- Lift one foot slightly and rotate your ankle in circles.

Calf raises

- Lift your heels off the ground, keeping your toes down.

Calf stretch

- Extend one leg, point and flex the foot a few times, then switch to the other side.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children and Youth

Involve children and youth in choosing what parts of the body to stretch to make it more fun and interactive. Here are some additional ways to make it more engaging for children and youth.




- **For Energy:** Try active stretching, such as flexing leg muscles while stretching. This helps increase flexibility and build muscle.
- **For Relaxation:** Hold the stretch together and take 2 to 3 deep breaths before releasing.
- **Games:** Play "copycat" where you take turns making up stretches for each other to copy. Do "statue" poses where you stretch into a shape and hold it. Try "opposite day" where if one person reaches high, the other reaches low. Play "Simon Says" with stretching movements (e.g., "Simon says touch your toes").
- **Animals:** Watch and move like the family pet, stretch out your arms and 'fly' like a bird, reach up tall like a giraffe, walk like a sleepy bear, or ask how their favorite animals move.
- **Stories:** Create stories while you stretch. Move like explorers through a forest, jungle, or mountains.
- **Nature:** Be a tall tree reaching for sunlight, sway like grass blowing in the wind, bloom like a flower, or try making the shape of things around you with your body.

Alternative Approaches

- Stretching can be done in small, gentle movements. You can also choose to be seated while stretching if that feels more comfortable or safer.
- Gentle stretching may feel easier while following a video or audio recording talking you through different steps, finding what works for you.
- If you feel like you don't have the time to stretch or it feels boring, try stretching while doing other things like watching TV, using your phone, listening to music, or waiting for something (like an appointment, a delivery, or in a line).



Dance

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Music optional	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position for dancing	

What is It?

Dance is a form of movement with your body creating a pattern of steps or motion that can be planned or made up as you go. Dance is an artistic expression that can also support physical activity and wellness. As an artistic expression, dance can incorporate cultural teachings and practices that may help us feel closer to our community and within ourselves. As a physical activity, dance can help relieve stress and enhance mental well-being.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Tip: Don't continue to dance if you feel sharp pain, burning, tingling, numbness, or other discomfort. This can cause injury.

Choose a safe, comfortable place where you have room to move around. This practice can be done with or without music.

With Music

Listen to music, sing a song, or imagine a tune and notice how your body wants to respond.

- Allow yourself to be moved by what you are hearing and feeling.
- Move to the rhythm of the music.
- If you're not sure where to start, you can:
 - Step from side to side
 - Shake your shoulders
 - Sway your hips
 - Combine the movements listed above



Without music

Imagine the way something in nature moves like tree tops swaying in the wind or water flowing through a stream.

- Begin to move your body in a way that resembles what you're imagining.
- Start with small movements, then make them bigger and more expressive as you feel comfortable.
- Move your body in any way that feels right to you.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Dance can be done spontaneously to help release energy. Parents and caregivers can also engage their children in dance through:

- Playing their favorite songs and dancing together
- Instructional games, like the “Hokey Pokey” (“put your right arm in, take your right arm out, put your right arm in and shake it all about...”)
- Dances that name different body parts, like “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”
- Freeze dancing: dance while the music plays or the song is sung – when the melody pauses, freeze and hold that position until the music starts up again
- Dances that tell stories – from nursery rhymes (“Itsy Bitsy Spider,” “Wheels on the Bus”) to interpretive dance, which can express more complex feelings or ideas
- Learning and trying a style of dance that is new to the whole family
- Groups, events, or online sessions – consider your child’s age and interest in different styles of music or dance when exploring in-person or online sessions

Here are some free online resources, including videos and classes:

- [GoNoodle](#) (ex. [the Nervous System Song](#))
- [Kidz Bop YouTube Channel](#)
- [Dance ‘N’ Culture YouTube Channel](#) (ex. [Virtual Dance Party](#))
- [¡Hey Amigos! YouTube Channel](#) (ex. [Spanish Freeze Dance, Para Baila: Bilingual Merengue Activity](#))
- [Battery Dance Kids Classes](#)
- [Stardust Dance Academy](#)



For Communities:

- Dancing can be an important way that community members come together. Below are a couple of considerations for making community dance spaces more accessible for people experiencing abuse or trauma.
- Community events that include dance can offer opportunities for cultural expression and sharing. Consider how dance can support cultural learning as well as a sense of belonging and connection in the larger community.
- Public dance spaces may not be safe for all individuals. Consider what safety planning needs may exist for someone to access the space more safely.
 - For example, people may decide to use a buddy system, have certain times set aside to check in with a trusted support, or have a code word they can use when they need to discreetly leave.
- Bystander intervention training can be helpful for community members to be able to recognize and respond if a safety need arises during a public dance. See NCDVTMH's [Expanding Bystander Intervention Training for more information](#).

Alternative Approaches

Dance doesn't require full-body movement to be enjoyable. If movement is undesired or not as accessible, consider some of these options:




- Imagine dancing. This can be done with or without music.
- Watch dance through videos, movies, or live performances.
- Move in small ways such as tapping your fingers, swaying, or isolating specific body parts to a rhythm.

If you're seeking dance opportunities that come with a financial cost but don't have the budget currently, here are some ideas to access dance in the meantime:

- Explore whether your local park district, city, or county offers any free, reduced, or scholarship-based dance opportunities.
- Explore whether local dance studios offer any free or sliding scale sessions.
- Search online platforms for recordings that you can follow along. This can be especially helpful when seeking out different kinds of traditional and cultural dances that may not be as available in your immediate area.
- Connect with others in your community who may be interested in dance or creative movement, and get together to share what you each know and try out different dances together.



Exploring Body Rhythms: Rock and Shake

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position for movement	

What is It?

Softly rocking and gently shaking are two low-impact movements with significant effects. Softly rocking our bodies from side to side (or forward and back) offers a soothing experience, while gently shaking parts of our (or our whole) body offers an energizing or releasing experience. Both practices release tension, reduce stress, and enhance mood. Try one practice at a time or both together to loosen up tight spots and promote relaxation in just a few minutes.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It: Softly Rocking

Tip: Don't continue to rock or shake if you feel sharp pain, burning, tingling, numbness, or other discomfort. This can cause injury.

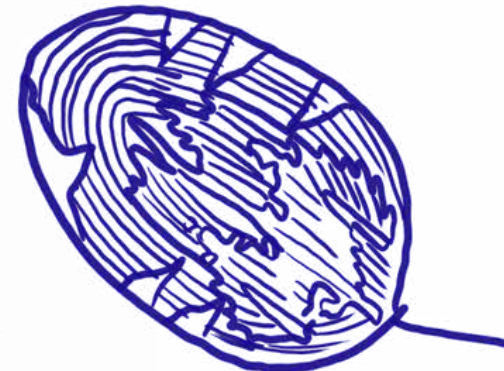
Choose a safe, comfortable place to be (indoors or outdoors) and take a few deep breaths to settle in. You can try this practice while sitting or standing:

Seated Rocking

- Sit in a chair with feet flat on the floor.
- Start swaying side to side or forward and back.
 - Start with small movements, go bigger if comfortable.
- Try different arm positions:
 - Rest hands on legs
 - Let arms hang and swing naturally
 - Float arms out like wings
 - Reach arms up like tree branches
 - Wrap arms around yourself
- Rock for 1-2 minutes.
- When you're ready, return to sitting still for a few breaths.

Standing Rocking

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart.
- Bend knees slightly.
- Sway side to side or forward and back.
- Start with small movements, increase if comfortable.
- Try different arm positions:
 - Let arms hang and swing naturally
 - Float arms out like wings
 - Reach arms up like tree branches
 - Wrap arms around yourself
- Rock for 1-2 minutes.
- When you're ready, return to standing still for a few breaths.



How to Do It: Gentle Shaking

Tip: Don't continue to rock or shake if you feel sharp pain, burning, tingling, numbness, or other discomfort. This can cause injury.

Choose a safe, comfortable place to be (indoors or outdoors) and take a few deep breaths to settle in. Start with small, slow movements and if it feels comfortable, work up to bigger, faster movements. You can try this practice while sitting or standing:

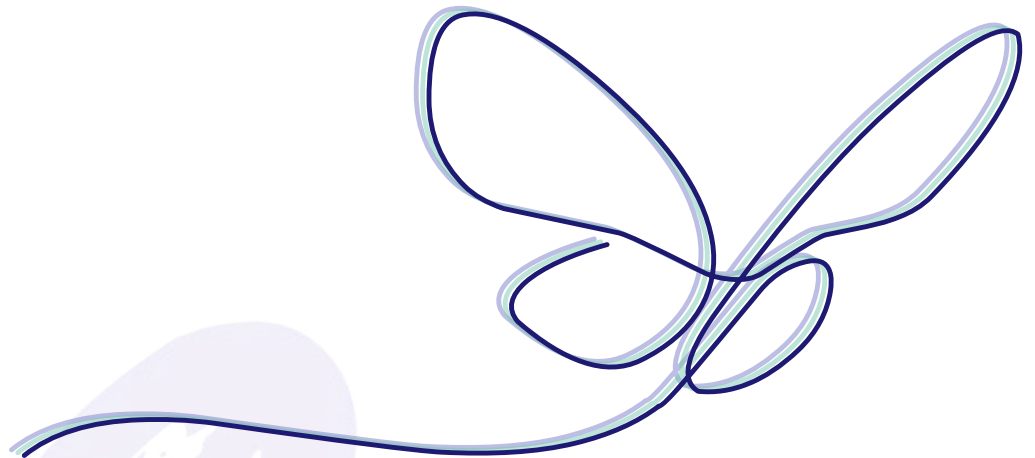
Seated Shaking

- Start by wiggling and stretching your fingers and toes.
- Lift one leg at a time and gently shake your leg and foot.
- Shake one arm and hand at a time, then both together.
- Shake half of your body with one arm and one leg, then the other side.
- Shake across your body with one leg and the opposite arm, then switch.
- When you're ready, return to sitting still for a few breaths.

Standing Shaking

Shake your entire body by gently bouncing your knees.

- Add your arms, hands, and fingers, imagining you can "shake off" or "flick away" stress through your fingertips.
- When you're ready, return to standing still for a few breaths.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

- **For Energy:** Practice gently shaking. Engage the children by asking what they want to shake. Tie the movement to a song or phrase (“It’s time to wake up!”) or name the body part(s) being shaken and wiggled.
- **For Relaxation:** Practice softly rocking. Engage the children by asking what they imagine themselves to be while rocking: a tree, a bunch of tall grasses, or a flower swaying in the wind. Ask questions to help them describe the tree, grass, or flower in as much detail as possible.

Alternative Approaches

- Rocking and shaking can be done with small, gentle, slow movements.
- Adjust your position as needed to what feels more comfortable.
- Consider adding sound to your shaking or rocking practice. Breathe in, and when you breathe out, add a sound like: shhhhhh, hmmm, bzzzzz, haaaah, or sigh.



Stories from the Field

TaskForce Prevention & Community Services

Community Safer Space and Violence Prevention Program Serving LGBTQ+ Youth

taskforcechicago.org

TaskForce Prevention & Community Services is a grassroots organization committed to improving the sexual health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth of color in Chicago by providing a safe space for fellowship, HIV/STI screening and education, and on-site referrals to medical, housing, and other social services. We are dedicated to making a difference by working towards solutions in partnership with our community in order to improve our overall quality of life.

At TaskForce, we believe in the power of movement as both a physical and spiritual practice, fostering healing, self-expression, and community. That's why we offer complimentary access to our Vogue School where community members can dance, learn to Vogue, and connect in a safe and welcoming space. Beyond Vogue, our free wellness and fitness classes throughout the week support holistic well-being—because movement should be accessible to all. Recognizing the importance of movement and cultural expression, we incorporate dance, yoga, and other kinds of movement into our community safer space and violence prevention program, as well as our mental health and wellness program.

Community Safer Space and Violence Prevention Program

Our community safer space operates on a drop-in basis on weeknights to provide safe harbor for neighborhood youth and young adults to freely express themselves via dance and bolster community connectedness. In addition to providing a safer space at our center, we also actively intervene in violence within the community via our peer-to-peer violence prevention intervention program

Mental Health and Wellness Program

Our mental health program includes traditional, alternative, and restorative approaches, including 1) provision of counseling services via our onsite mobile van, 2) our Healing Arts program which utilizes multiple arts for healing, including paint, dance and yoga, and 3) our mental health training for community members.



Compassion Practices



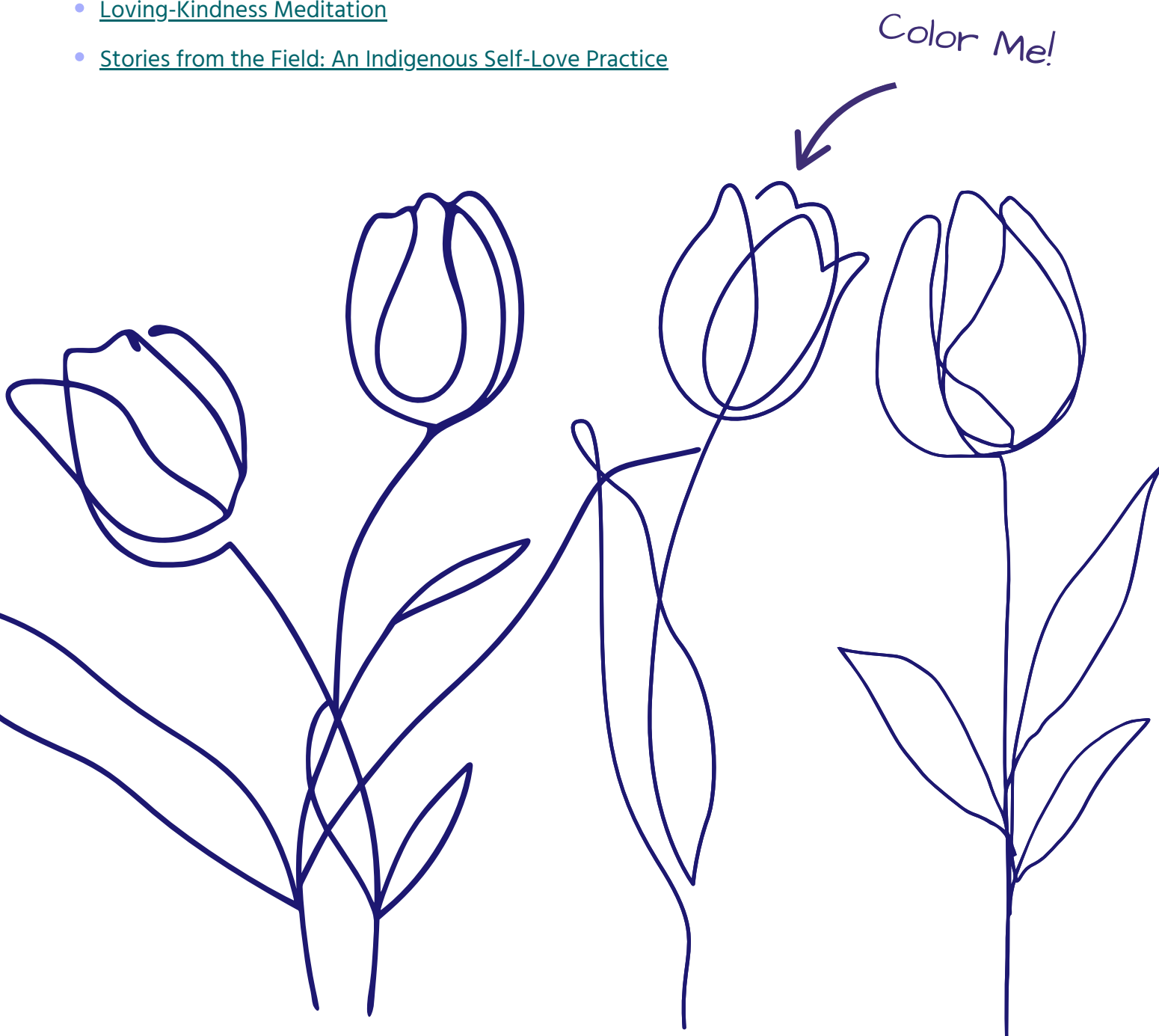
Compassion Practices








A flower gently blooms and expresses its beauty. Compassion practices teach us to approach ourselves and others with kindness, allowing our authenticity to blossom.

In this section:

- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [How Would You Treat a Friend?](#)
- [Loving-Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Stories from the Field: An Indigenous Self-Love Practice](#)



Self-Compassion Break

Time:  to  	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Self-compassion helps us develop kindness towards ourselves, making it easier to take caring actions. It is especially useful for managing stress, shame, guilt or secondary trauma. Some people have difficulty expressing self-compassion and may find this practice challenging at first. If it feels uncomfortable, try another practice, practice with a friend, or return to it later. This practice was adapted from the [Self-Compassion Break](#) developed by Dr. Kristin Neff (included with permission).

Self-compassion consists of three components (Neff, 2023):

- 1 Self-kindness**
is treating ourselves with care and understanding rather than judgment.
- 2 Common humanity**
is when we remember that all people have difficult times in their lives, and we don't need to feel alone when we are having a hard time.
- 3 Mindfulness**
is when we practice being aware of our thoughts and feelings without being hard on ourselves.



Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Choose a mildly stressful situation - not something overwhelming - and follow these steps:

1 Acknowledge the struggle (mindfulness)

Say: **“This is a moment of suffering (or pain)”**

Alternative phrases:

- This is stress.
- I feel (name the discomfort).
- I am having a hard time right now.
- This hurts.

2 Recognize common humanity

Say: **“We all struggle sometimes”**

Alternative phrases:

- I’m not alone.
- Into each life, some rain must fall.
- Everyone feels this way sometimes.
- This is part of being human

3 Offer yourself kindness

Place your hands over your heart, belly, or any comforting area.

Say: **“May I be kind to myself”**

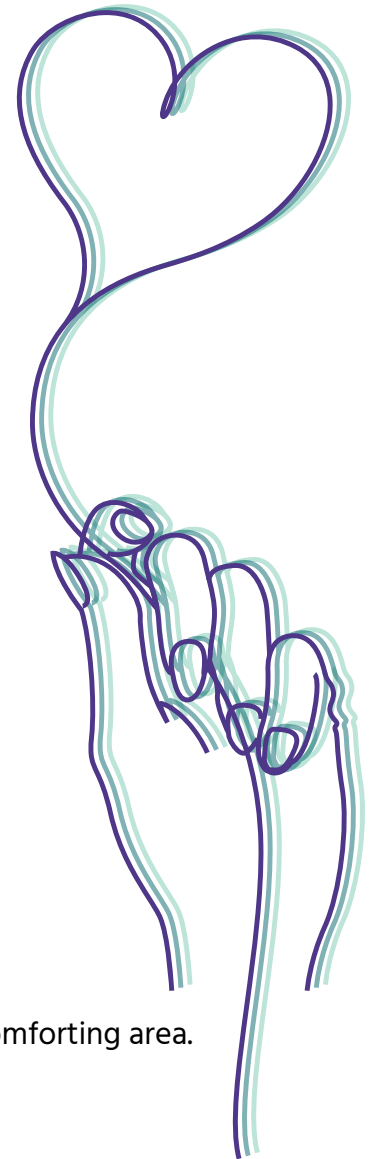
Alternative phrases

- May I give myself the compassion I need.
- May I learn to accept myself as I am.
- May I forgive myself.
- May I be strong.
- May I be gentle and understanding with myself.

4 Take a kind action

Ask: **“What can I do right now to care for myself?”**

(Neff, 2024a)



My Self Compassion Break

Cut out these prompts from the page. Keep them with you so you can practice whenever you want, or put them in the spot where you usually practice. Or, write your own phrases in the empty leaves.

Self Compassion Break

This is a moment of suffering

We all struggle sometimes

May I be kind to myself

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children






Introduce self-compassion to children during calm moments. Use simpler phrases, such as:

- Step 1: "I feel..." or "This hurts."
- Step 2: "Other people feel this way."
- Step 3: Use comforting words or engage in self-care together.

Alternative Approaches

- If this practice feels challenging or you'd like some additional guidance, try using the additional recordings and resources available on Dr. Neff's website: [Self-Compassion Guided Exercises and Practices](#).
- If this practice feels challenging, try writing down some ways you might like to practice self-kindness before you begin (e.g. eating, resting, movement, organizing, connecting with loved ones, spending time with pets, or listening to music).

How Would You Treat a Friend?

Time:  to 	Mental Energy:  to 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing materials	Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for writing	

What is It?



This exercise helps you cultivate self-compassion by exploring how you treat yourself compared to how you support a friend. By reflecting on your supportive actions during tough times, you can build a stronger foundation for self-compassion. This practice is particularly useful for managing feelings of shame, guilt, stress, or secondary trauma. While many find self-compassion beneficial, some may struggle to express it. If this exercise feels challenging, you may want to try a different practice or revisit it later (Neff, 2024b). This practice was adapted from the exercise, [How Would You Treat a Friend](#) developed by Dr. Kristin Neff (included with permission).

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.





How to Do It

Find some quiet time and write down or think about your responses to these questions:

1 **Think of a time** a close friend was struggling or feeling bad about themselves.

- How would you respond to your friend from a place of care?
- What would you say or do?
- How would your tone and body language show support?

2 **Reflect on times when you have struggled** or felt bad about yourself.

- What did you do or say?
- What words or phrases did you tell yourself?

3 **Compare your responses:**

- What are the differences between how you treat a friend and how you treat yourself during difficult times?
- Why might it be different?

4 **Imagine the impact of change.**

- How would it feel if you responded to yourself as kindly as you do a friend?
- What else could change?

5 **Plan for the future.**

- How can you support yourself the next time you struggle?
- Try treating yourself like a good friend and notice the difference.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Friends, Families, and Children

Work on this exercise with a trusted friend or family member. Discuss your responses together, and explore new supportive phrases. Use simpler phrases with children. For example:








- What would you say to a friend who is hurt or upset?
- What do you do when you feel upset?
- Let's try treating yourself like a friend, and practice.

Alternative Approaches

- If this practice feels challenging or you'd like some additional guidance, try using the additional recordings and resources available on Dr. Neff's website: [Self-Compassion Guided Exercises and Practices](#).



Loving Kindness Meditation

Time:  to  	Mental Energy:  to  	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Loving-kindness meditation, also known as Metta or Maitri, originates from Buddhism and fosters compassion for yourself and others through positive phrases. Many people find that loving-kindness increases positive emotions, reduces self-criticism, and strengthens a sense of connection, especially during times of stress or isolation (Hutcherson et al., 2008).

While this practice can help extend compassion toward challenging relationships, it is not recommended for individuals who may have caused you harm or trauma.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Start with just a minute or two, gradually increasing the length of time as you feel ready.

1

Find a comfortable position - usually sitting or lying down.

2

Repeat the following phrases to yourself, placing your hands over your heart or another part of the body that feels safe and supportive:

- *May I be well*
- *May I be happy or I am deserving of happiness*
- *May I be safe*
- *May I be peaceful and at ease*

3

If these phrases don't feel right, **choose affirmations that resonate with you.**

4

If self-compassion feels difficult, focus on a loved one - such as a person or pet - and direct the phrases toward them. Extending these wishes to others can also strengthen your sense of compassion and connection. You can imagine the person you care about or use a photo if that is helpful.

- *May you be well*
- *May you be happy or You are deserving of happiness*
- *May you be safe*
- *May you be peaceful and at ease*

5

Repeat these phrases as often as you like, either silently or aloud. This practice can be used for grounding throughout the day or as a longer meditation.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Families and Children

If practicing with a child or family member, try saying the phrases aloud to each other. For children, make it fun by turning the words into a song, clapping, or by adding movement (dance, hand gestures). You can also direct the phrases toward a pet, stuffed animal, or toy. [The Peace and Kindness Practice for Children](#) from The Center for Child and Family Well-Being can be a helpful resource for practicing with children.

With younger children, try using simpler phrases or encourage them to create their own:

- May you be happy
- May you be healthy and strong
- May your heart be filled with love
- May you feel safe and loved

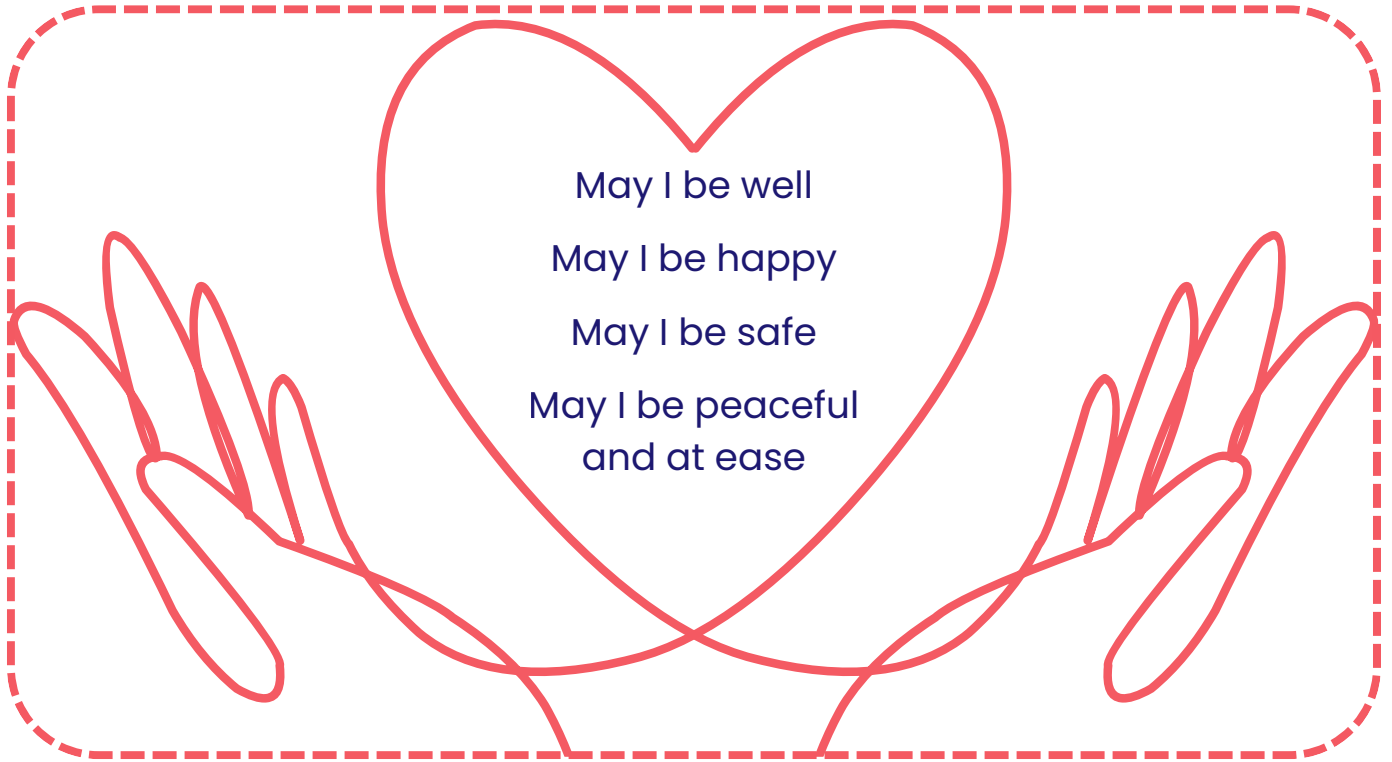
Alternative Approaches

For those who would prefer a more detailed description, an audio recording, or a video of the practice to follow along, visit [Metta Meditation: A Complete Guide to Loving-Kindness](#) from Lion's Roar.

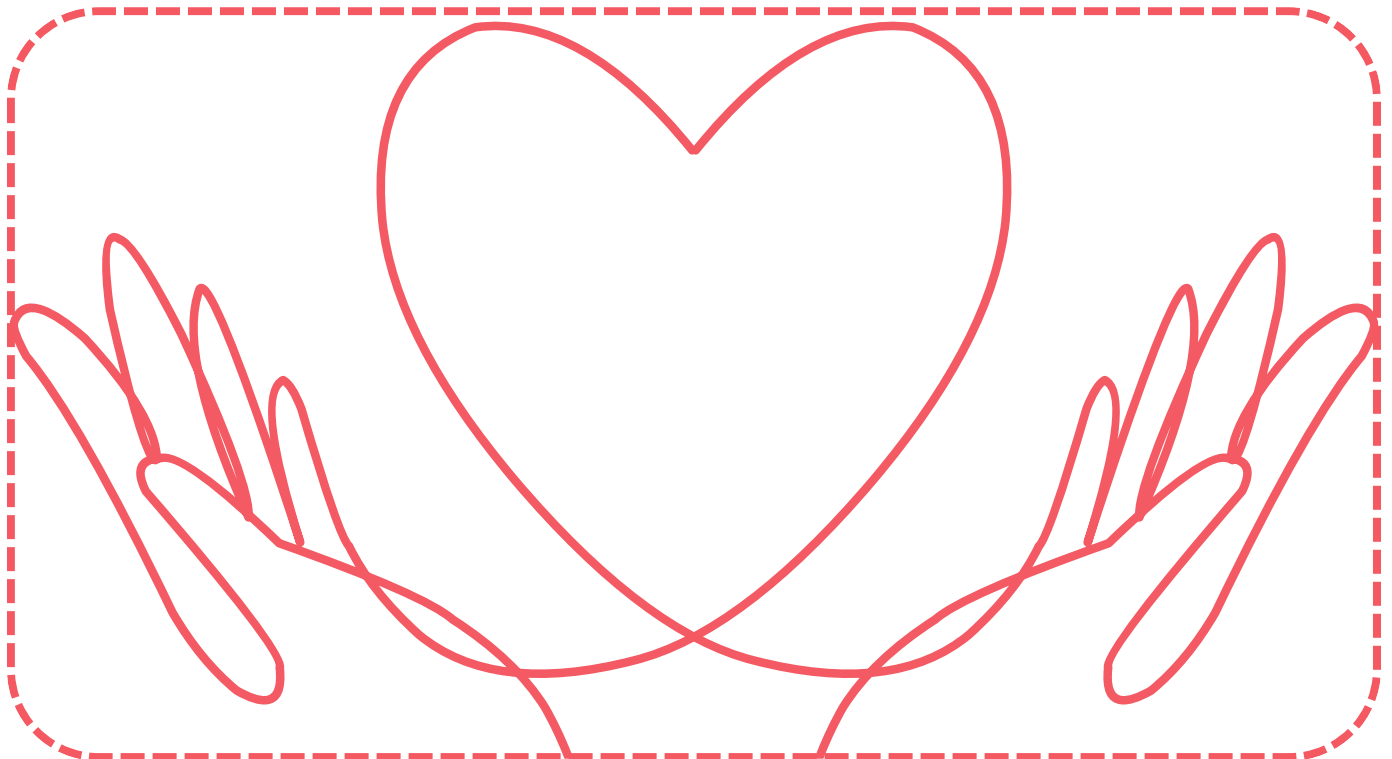


My Loving Kindness Practice

Cut out these prompts from the page. Keep them with you so you can practice whenever you want, or put them in the spot where you usually practice.



Or, write your own Loving Kindness phrases to cut out:



Stories from the Field

“An Indigenous Self-Love Practice”

By Christina Love (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, Egegik Tribal Member), Survivor, Advocate, and Educator, christinaloveconsulting.com

Self-compassion is the antidote to shame, but we don't often talk about what that actually looks like in real time. Here's my process: I acknowledge my thoughts, see them for what they are, understand where they come from, and thank my body and mind for trying to protect me. Then, I release them.

Physically, I use a ritual taught by the Elders in interior Alaska - I take my hands and wipe away the thoughts from my hair, mind, voice, eyes, and ears. I wipe it all off my body, all the way down to my feet, and stomp them out. Then I step into a new space with new thoughts.



I survived, and that's what's most important.

Now, I'm allowing myself to LIVE. If I get distracted, that's okay—I can always begin again.

This is my practice. I hope it helps you too.



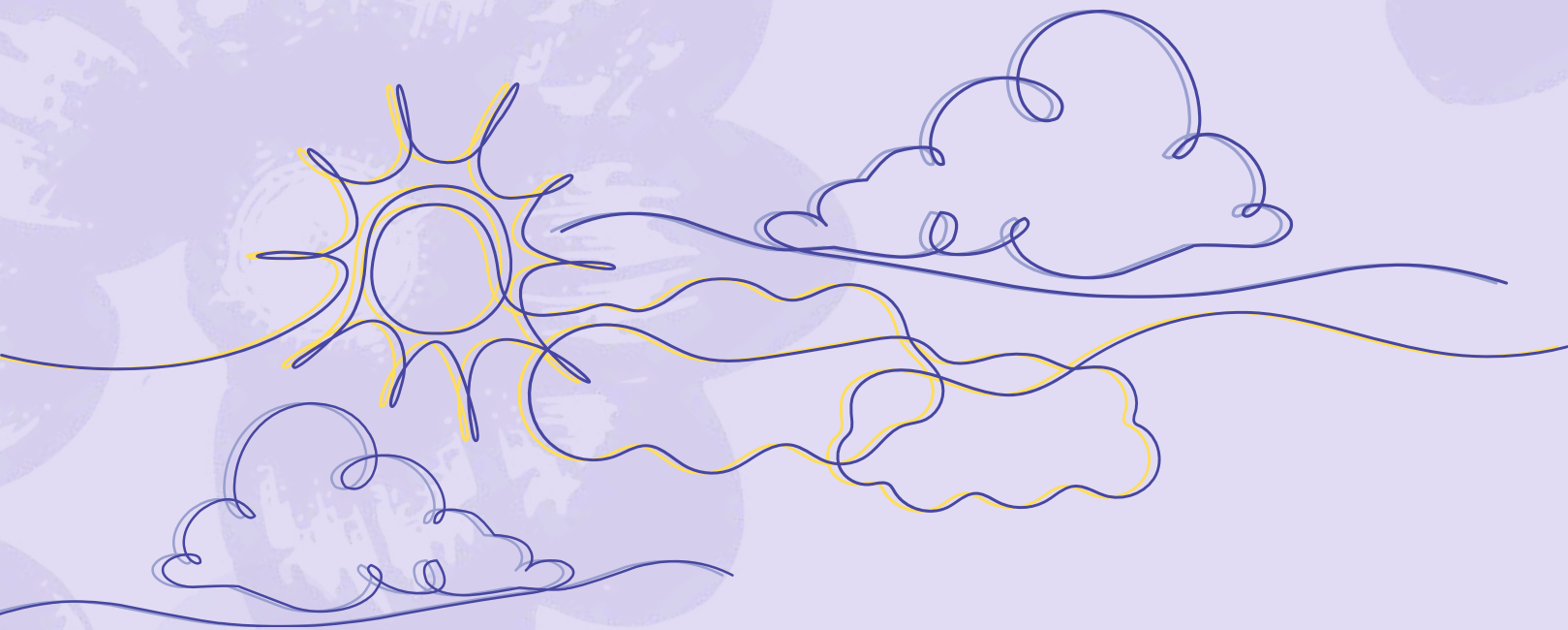
I remind myself:

- I am enough just as I am
- I am not broken
- It's ok to rest

I know I can't fully restore if I shame myself for not doing what I think I **should** be doing. It's okay to sit here, have my tea, read a book, take a walk. The emails will be sent, the invoices completed, the taxes prepped - when the time is right. What matters most is being present and practicing compassion.



Sensory Healing



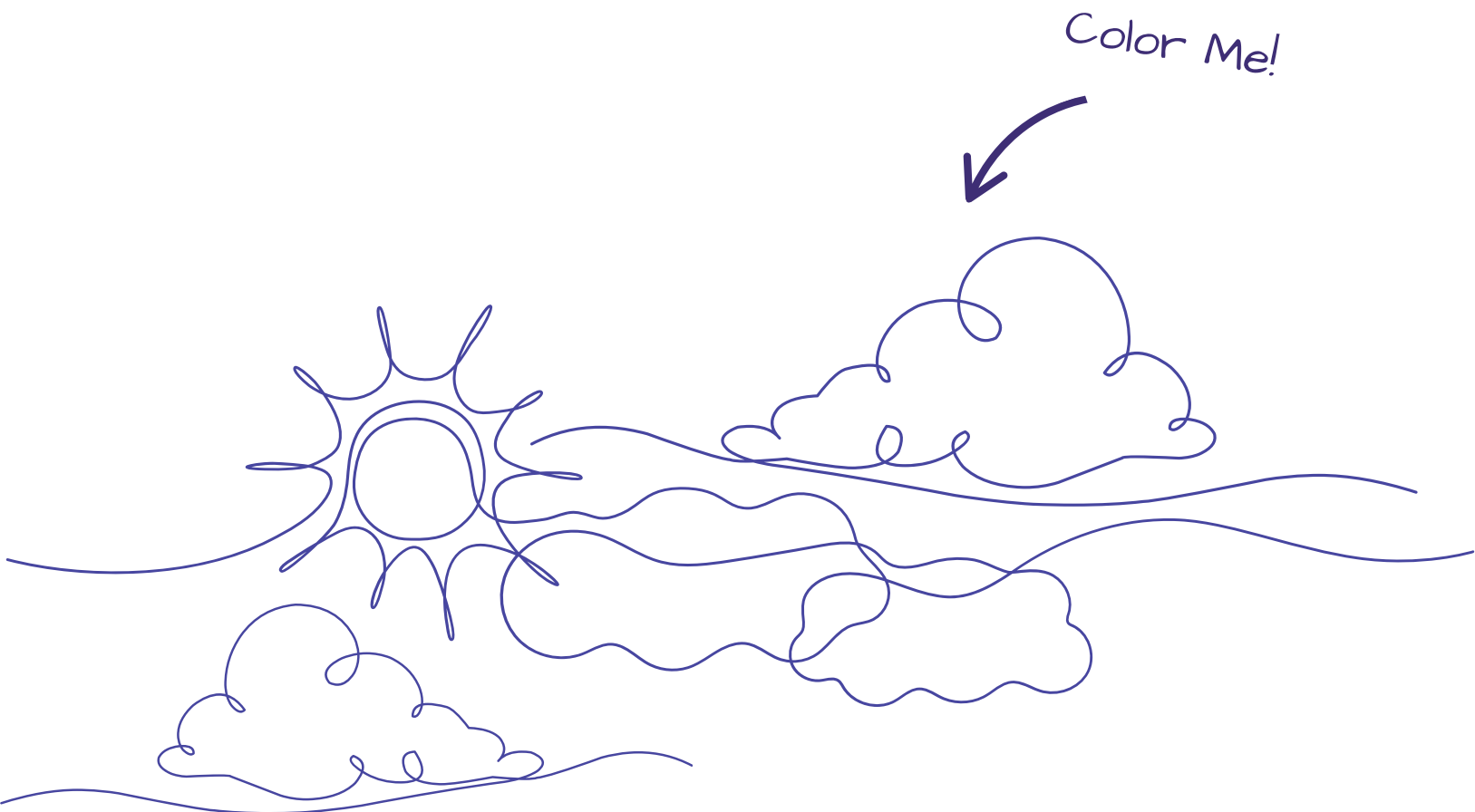
Sensory Healing






Gentle raindrops nourish all parts of a flower. Sensory practices help us to feel revitalized, soothed, and better equipped to navigate life's storms.

In this section:

- [Sound and Vibration](#)
- [Sense of Touch](#)
- [5 Senses Grounding](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Survivor-Led Peer Support Group](#)



Sound and Vibration

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Sensory practices help focus attention, encourage relaxation, and promote a sense of presence in the current moment. Sounds and vibrations in particular can be deeply soothing. For example, a daily humming practice has been found to help slow down the body's stress response and promote relaxation (Trivedi et al., 2023). Whether humming a tune, singing a song, or creating a melody, using your voice can be a soothing experience - for yourself and those around you, like when singing a lullaby. Everyone experiences sounds and vibrations differently, so explore what works best for you.

Examples of sound and vibration practices include:

- Humming
- Noticing the sound around you
- Experiencing the tones and vibrations of bells, singing bowls, windchimes, or instruments
- Listening to or creating music

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It: Humming

1

Get comfortable in a place where you can safely relax for a few minutes. You can keep your eyes open or closed. Take a few deep breaths to settle in.

2

Begin Humming. With your mouth closed, make a steady “mmm” sound that you can hear and/or feel. Play with volume, pitch, and/or vibration to explore different sensations.

3

Try Buzzing. Bring your teeth together, slightly open your mouth, and make a steady “zzz” sound - like a buzzing bee. Notice how different pitches and tones feel.

4

Experiment with a lip trill. Lightly close your lips and exhale to create a vibrating sound - like a horse.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children




This practice can help children slow down or relax. It can be helpful to turn it into a game to make it more interesting for children. For example:

- Hum (“mmm-moo”) like a cow or imagine tasting something delicious.
- Buzz (“bzzz”) like a bee.
- Lip trills (“brrr”), like a horse or someone shivering in the cold.

Alternative Approaches

If you'd like to focus more on the vibration, experiment with hand placement - place your hands on your chest, throat, or another area to feel the vibrations better.

Sense of Touch

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: (Optional) Something with an enjoyable texture	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Engaging with our sense of touch can be deeply soothing and supportive in moments of stress or overwhelm. Tactile sensory practices help us feel more focused and present. Additionally, experiencing textures can evoke emotions - just as the words we use to describe touch often relate to feelings.

“The things we feel with our hands can remind us of the things we feel in our hearts” (Kleck et al., n.d.). A soft, fuzzy object might bring happiness, reminding you of a beloved pet; or, a silky, smooth fabric might bring calmness, like the feeling of fresh sheets on a cozy bed.

If you’re seeking a way to slow down and feel more grounded, this practice may help. Since everyone experiences touch differently, it’s important to explore what feels best for you.

Examples of tactile sensory practices include:

- Touching smooth stones, textured fabrics, or objects nearby
- Practicing self-massage
- Cooking or preparing a meal
- Blowing bubbles
- Using spiritual or religious beads, such as rosaries, malas, and other beads used in meditation, prayer, or other forms of religious or spiritual practice
- Working with craft materials like putty, playdough, pipe cleaners, knitting, or weaving



This practice can be combined with many others. For example, try taking a nature walk and combining this practice with one of the ones found in the [Connecting to Nature](#) section.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

Get comfortable.

Find a safe and quiet place where you can focus for a few moments. Take a few deep breaths to settle in.

Choose two things to touch within your immediate surroundings.

If you're unsure where to start, try:

- The fabric of your shirt
- The skin on your hand

Explore the first texture: (e.g., the fabric of your shirt).

Ask yourself:

- How does it feel? Soft, rough, smooth, bumpy?
- Is it warm or cool?
- Is it firm or flexible?
- Does the texture remind you of anything?

Move to the second texture:(e.g., your hand).

Notice:

- The temperature - cool or warm?
- The softness or firmness of your skin
- Any unique textures - smooth, wrinkled, rough?
- How does this compare to the first texture?

Continue if you'd like:

Choose another object nearby and explore its texture with the same level of attention.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children




This activity can be made into a scavenger hunt, creating a game together of finding and exploring different textures together. The National Braille Press offers a kid-friendly texture scavenger hunt called [The Texture of Feelings](#).

Alternative Approaches

- If you're feeling frustrated, angry, or overloaded, try putting your hands against a wall and pushing as hard as you can.
- If you'd like to have more ready access to using this practice, gather objects with textures you enjoy (fabrics, stones, etc.) to create a readily available sensory collection.
- If it's harder to focus on a texture, gather two different textures (such as a smooth rock and a rough rock) and compare how they feel.



5 Senses Grounding

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

The 5 Senses Grounding technique helps bring awareness to the present moment by engaging your senses. It can be especially useful when you feel overwhelmed, anxious, stressed, or caught up in thoughts about the past or future. Use this practice whenever you need a reset to feel more grounded and connected to your surroundings.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

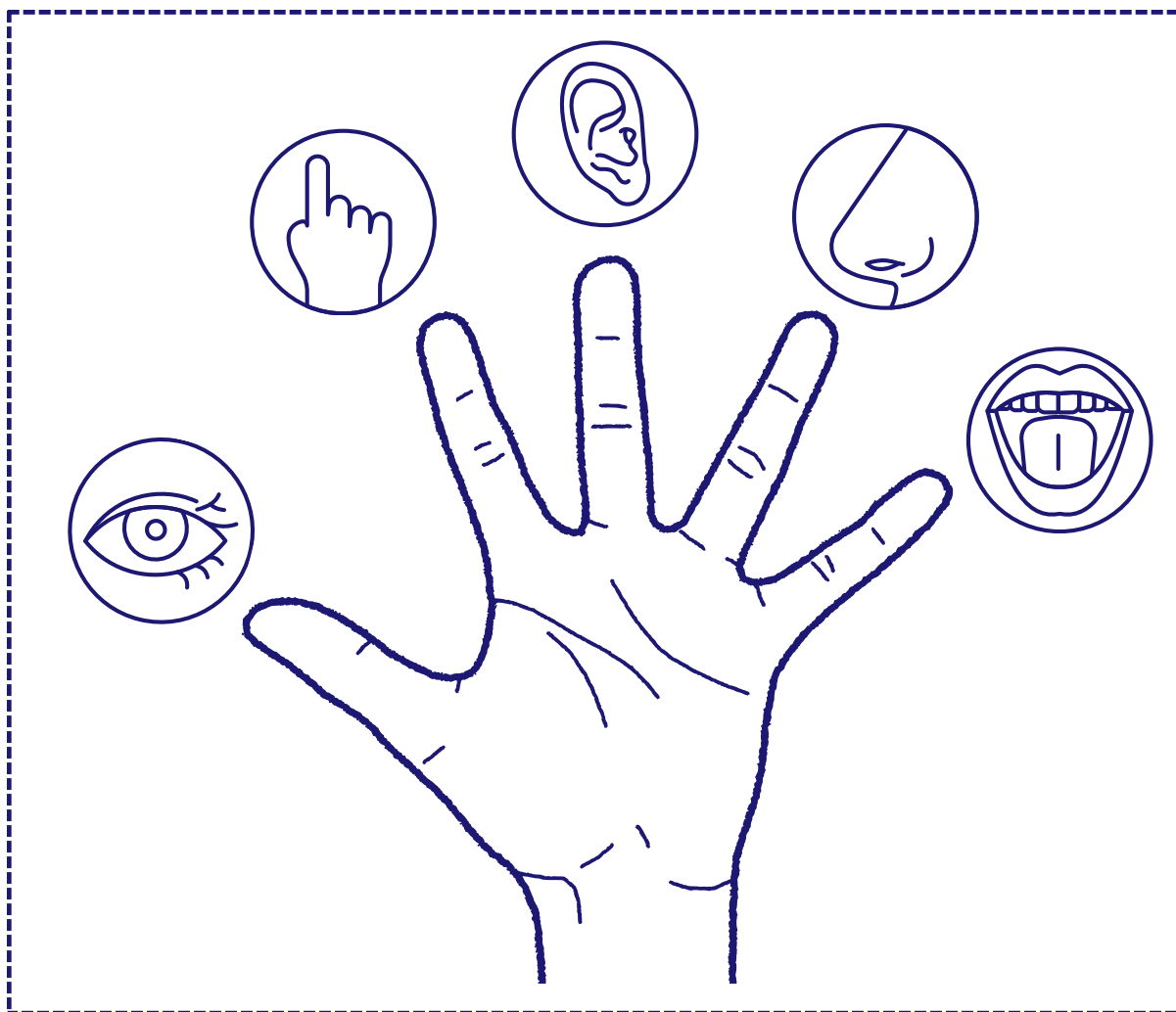


How to Do It

Use the countdown method to engage your senses

- 5 **Sight:** Notice five things you can see, taking in their colors and shapes.
- 4 **Touch:** Notice four things you can touch, taking in how they feel (e.g. rough, smooth, soft, firm?).
- 3 **Sound:** Notice three sounds you can hear, taking in their qualities (e.g. near or far, loud or soft, smooth or scratchy?)
- 2 **Smell:** Notice two things you can smell. You can move around to discover scents in your space or remain in one place to notice the subtle scents that surround us every day.
- 1 **Taste:** Notice one thing you can taste. This may be a sip of water, a piece of food, or simply the natural taste inside your mouth

You can practice this once or repeat it as needed for deeper grounding.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

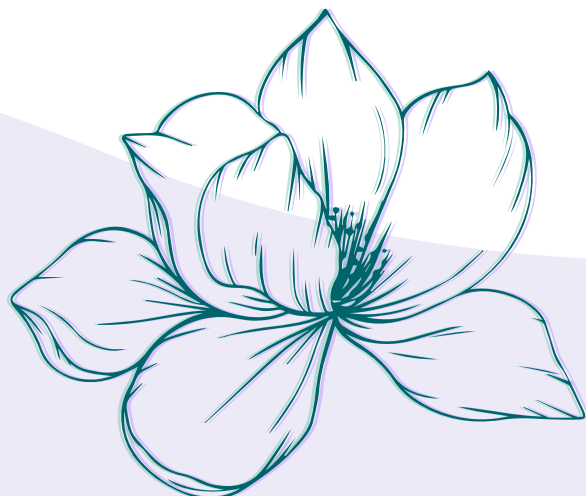
Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

With toddlers and preschool-aged children, try incorporating favorite objects for each sense - such as a soft stuffed animal to touch or a scented candle to smell. This Sesame Street video [Look and Notice with Cookie Monster](#) may be helpful. For elementary-aged children, this could be turned into a game such as "Eye Spy."

Alternative Approaches

- If a sense or senses are not available, adapt by focusing on the remaining senses, modifying the practice to skip the sense(s). For example, use a 4-3-2-1 method for someone who is blind or 5-4-2-1 for a Deaf person.
- For people who prefer to follow along with a recording, try the University of Rochester Medical Center Behavioral Health Partners' Blog video: [5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique for Anxiety](#).



Survivor-Led Peer Support Group

Personal Sensory Boxes

By Pat, Support Group Member

A DV program in Maryland has been a homebase for a survivor-led peer support group. About ten women participate in holding the space with and for each other, developing group agreements, and enjoying snacks when they meet in person. The group also has a text thread to connect and communicate, acknowledging that not everyone feels safe being outside.

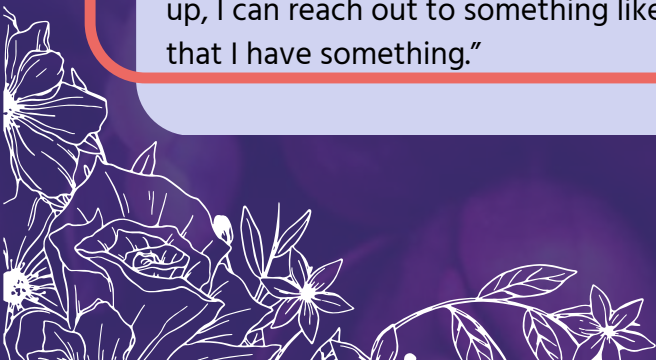
When the group accessed some technical assistance with Cathy Cave, Senior Training Consultant at NCDVTMH, Cathy suggested the idea of making sensory boxes together as a group. For the members who did not feel safe participating in person, these sensory boxes and materials were sent to them so they could fully participate while joining virtually. The boxes included items like: playdough, scented lotion, mindfulness decks, journals, as well as culturally inclusive coloring books. The selected boxes were brightly colored and could be decorated. In addition to having a collection of helpful tools in one place, the boxes also supported survivors' self-determination, as each individual decided for themselves what to include and keep in their own sensory box.

When asked about the experience, a survivor shared:

66

"I'm very blessed to be in a location with monthly meetings with a support group. I get recharged every time. It's a sisterhood. We all know what it is that we've gone through. We understand each other without saying details of what we've been through. We're just there – it gets me emotional. You meet people from different backgrounds and there's this common thing and we're happy... I didn't expect I'd feel good about it, having a coloring book... but it did feel good having something that is mine... When I feel something building up, I can reach out to something like the self-care box... it's in a corner, just the knowledge that I have something."

99



Rest



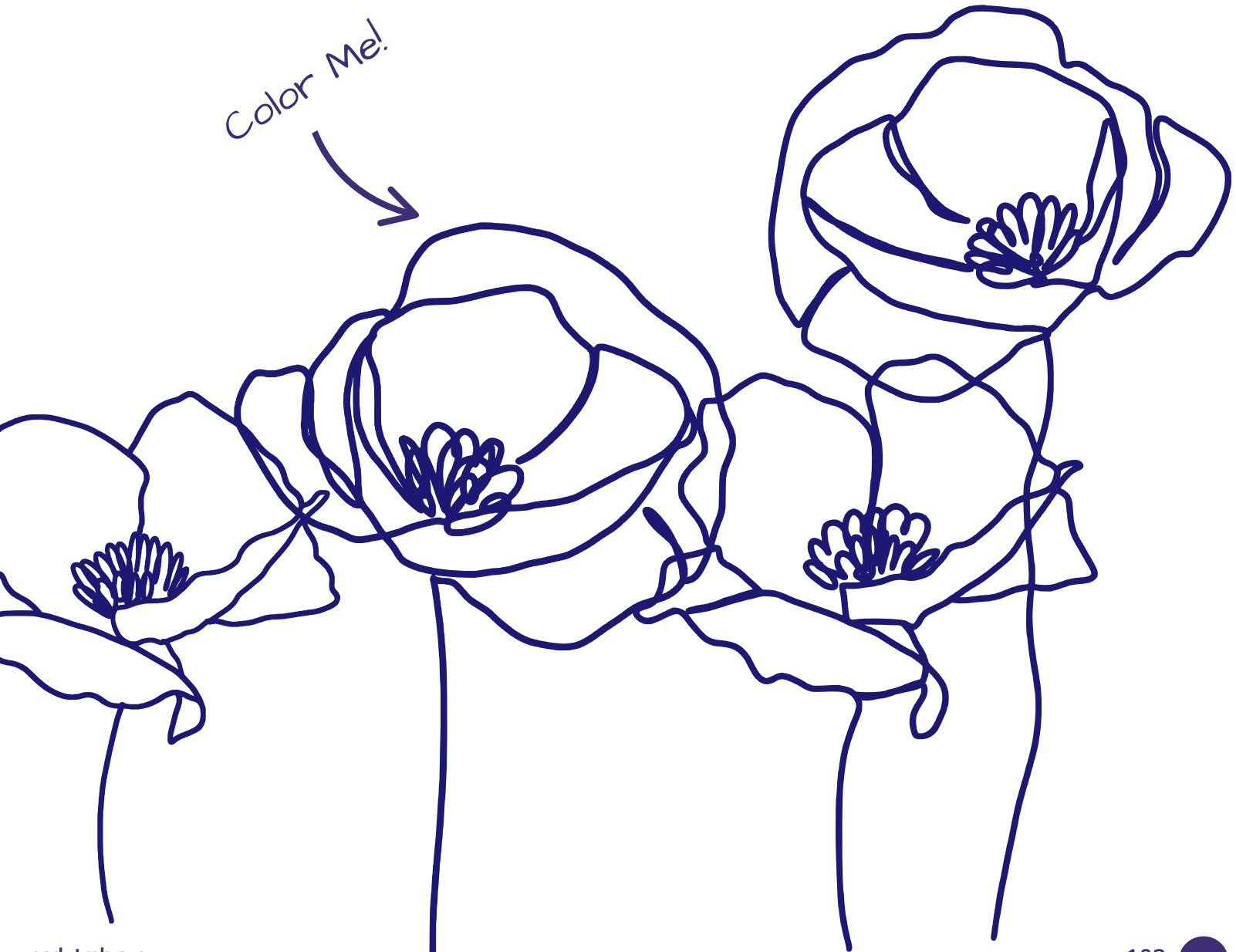
Rest



A flower closes its petals at night, resting before the new day. We, too, need time to pause, recharge, and care for ourselves. Taking this time replenishes our mind, body, and spirit, so we can move forward feeling refreshed and renewed.

In this section:





- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Napping](#)
- [Mindful Eating](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Community Against Violence](#)



Color Me!



Daydreaming

Time: 	Mental Energy:  	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Rest is essential for replenishing our mind, body and spirit - just as a flower folds its petals at night to conserve energy for the next day. While we often associate rest with sleeping, another powerful form of rest is daydreaming. Whether alone or with others, daydreaming allows us to imagine possibilities, explore creativity, and build mental space for reflection and renewal. This practice is especially helpful if you need a break or could use more energy and inspiration.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

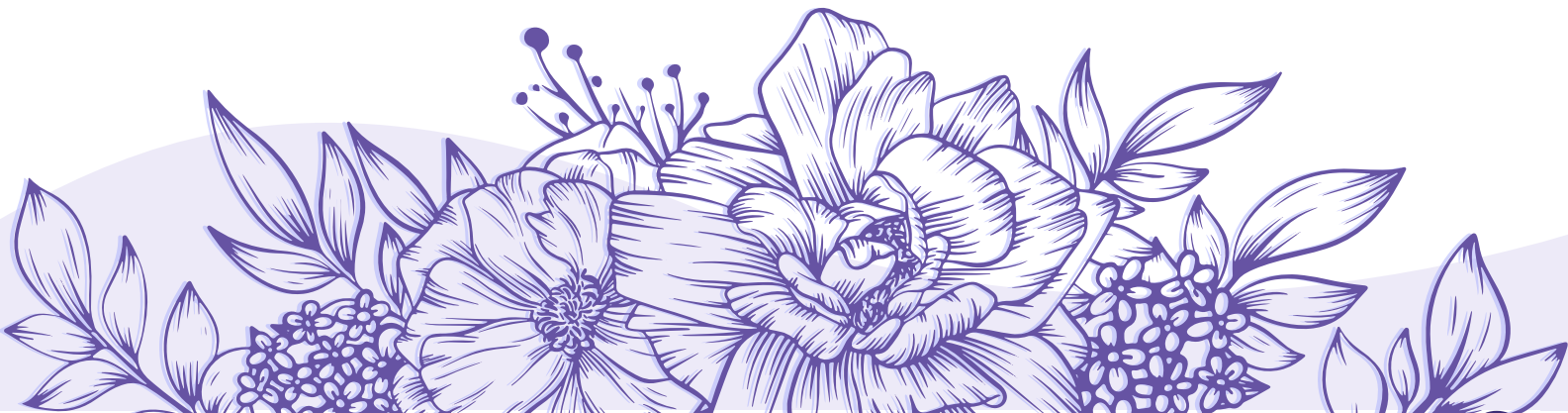
Daydreaming by Yourself

- Find a comfortable, safe place where you can simply be for a few minutes. If possible, sit near a window or go outside. Take a few deep breaths to settle in.
 - If you have a set amount of time for daydreaming, consider setting a gentle alarm to help bring you back.
- Keep your eyes open. Some people prefer gazing out of a window, while others let their focus drift.
- Allow your mind to wander freely. You might imagine:
 - People, places, or experiences that bring you joy
 - A made-up story unfolding in your mind
 - A future you want to create
 - Absolutely nothing - just let thoughts drift in and out
- However YOU daydream is the “right” way to do it.



Daydreaming with Others:

- **Together, individually daydreaming:** In a group setting, everyone can daydream on their own while reflecting on a shared prompt or question. Afterward, if comfortable, people can share what they imagined.
- **Collective daydreaming:** A group can daydream together by sharing what they are imagining and even adding to each other’s ideas. It can be helpful to have a shared prompt or question for everyone. With this approach, a group may choose to share their thoughts verbally or to write or draw out their ideas.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*



Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

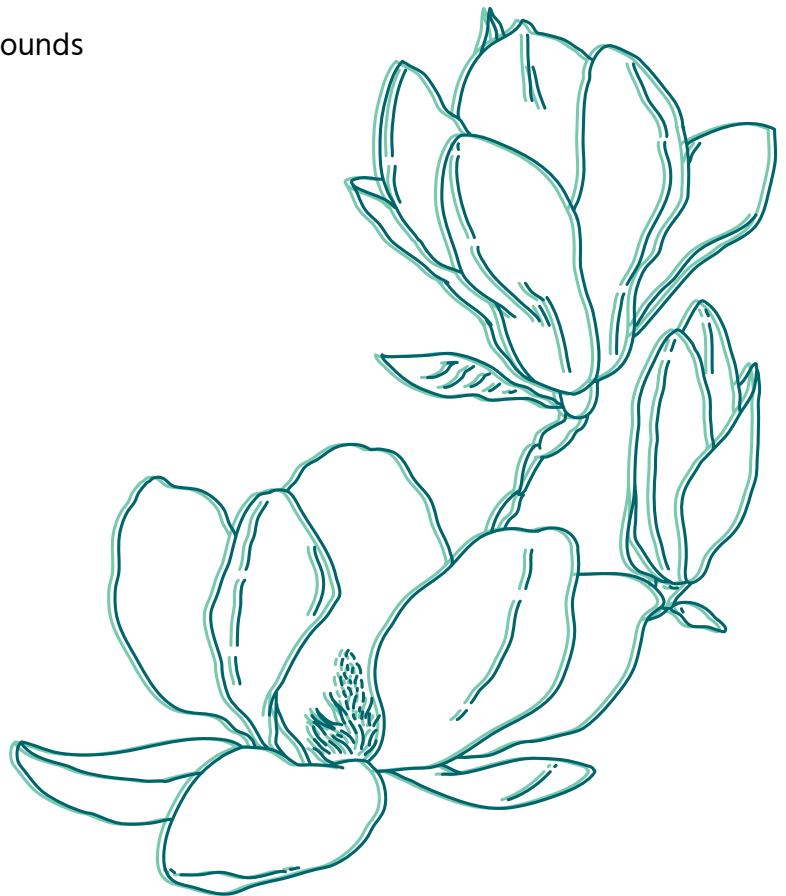
For Children

Daydreaming can be a fun and meaningful way to connect with children and loved ones. Try:




- Looking for shapes in the clouds
- Sitting in nature and listening to the different sounds
- Taking a walk and finding shapes in trees

Alternative Approaches

- If visual daydreaming is not a preferred or accessible option, try daydreaming with other senses - imagining sounds, textures, or emotions instead.
- If resting in silence is challenging, try playing calming background music, nature sounds, or listen to this brief daydreaming guide, [Rest Life](#), by Tricia Hersey of The Nap Ministry (2021).
- If daydreaming feels difficult because of invasive thoughts or stressful feelings, grounding techniques (such as [Sensory Healing: 5 Senses Grounding](#)) can help bring you back to the present moment.



Napping

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: A safe place to close your eyes and rest; a pillow and blanket	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position for resting	

What is It?



Rest helps our bodies integrate experiences and replenishes our minds, bodies, and spirits. It gives us a break from the external world and allows us to relax.

If napping isn't possible, taking short breaks - pausing to do nothing or engaging in something soothing, like sipping tea - can be restorative. Simply sitting, slowing your breathing, and closing your eyes for a minute or two can be beneficial.

When napping is an option, allow yourself to pause in a comfortable, distraction-free space, and rest as deeply as possible. For some people, a 20-minute nap can be just as supportive as a two-hour nap. Because napping can affect sleep cycles, start with shorter naps to learn how they impact you. Rest is a personal practice - find what works best for you.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

Choose a safe, comfortable place where you can be for at least twenty minutes.

- If you have a set amount of time, consider setting a gentle alarm.
- It can help to give yourself a few minutes to wake up so you can slowly transition back into your day.

Sit or lie down and take a few deep breaths to settle in.

Close your eyes and relax, allowing yourself to rest or drift off to sleep.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*



Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children








Create a restful space by dimming lights, reducing noise, and providing pillows and blankets. Children may especially like having a soft toy and reading a book or listening to gentle music together before rest time.

Alternative Approaches

- If napping feels challenging because your mind feels busy, try listening to music, a podcast, or an audiobook - many are available for free through most local libraries.
- If napping feels challenging because your body feels busy, experiment with relaxation strategies like covering your eyes, putting on socks, hugging yourself, or massaging your feet before napping.
- If napping feels challenging because of nightmares, try resting your eyes without actually going to sleep. Other things that can help with nightmares are:
 - A regular sleep routine
 - Creating coziness and comfort in your sleeping area
 - Engaging in a relaxing practice before sleeping (such as [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#))
 - Avoiding electronics and substances (alcohol, etc.) before sleeping
 - Reminding yourself that nightmares are common, especially when experiencing trauma, and are a way to process your stressful and traumatic experiences. If nightmares are very frequent, distressing, and/or impacting your ability to engage with daily life, there are therapies and medications that can help.



Mindful Eating

Time:  to  	Mental Energy:  to  	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Something to eat	Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for eating	

What is It?

Mindful eating involves tuning in with ourselves and being fully present during the experience of eating. It encourages habits like slowing down and savoring meals. Rooted in Ayurveda and other traditional healing methods, mindful eating encourages us to slow down and care for ourselves when cooking and eating to create space for rest, enjoyment, and connection during meals or snacks.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

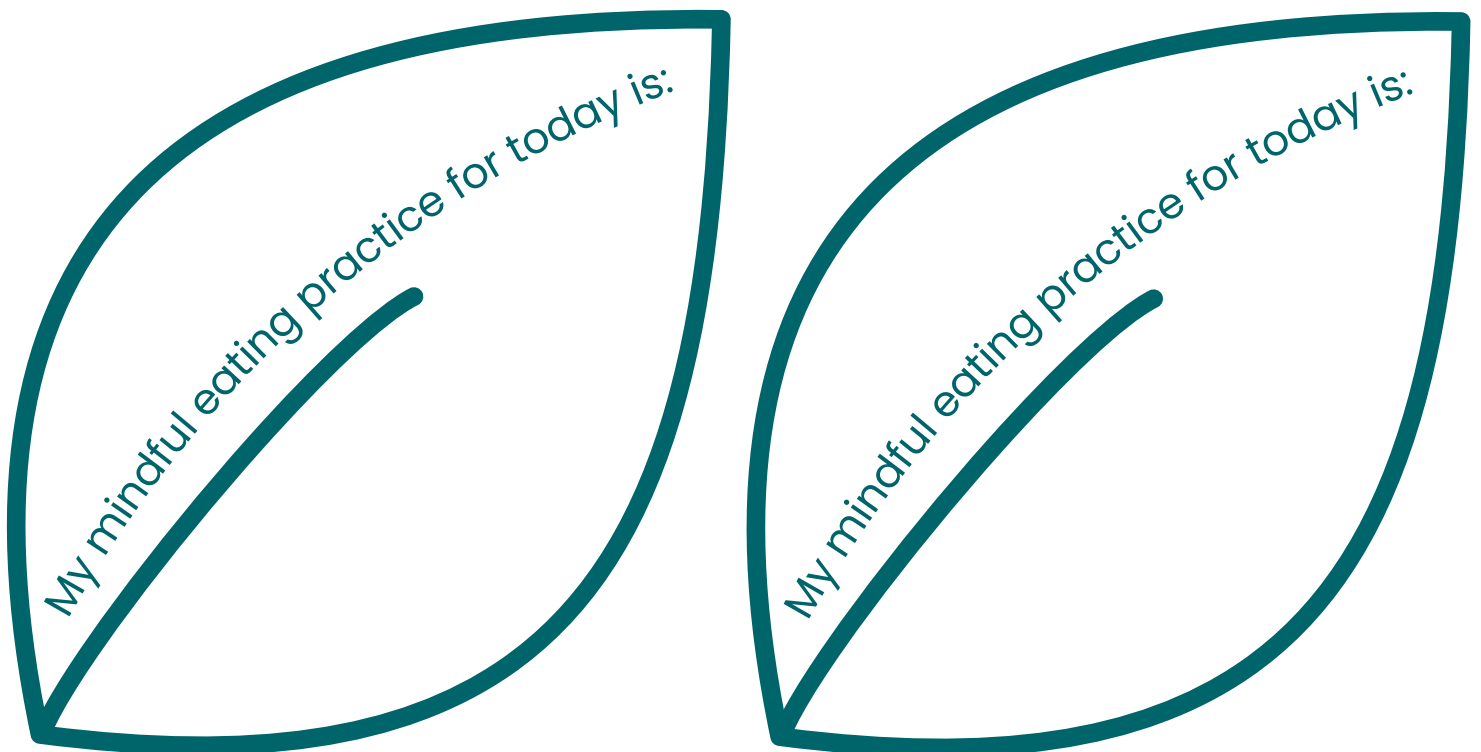
Choose one or two items to try at a time, or dedicate one meal a day or week to mindful eating. Consider keeping a reminder nearby, such as a note that lists what you are working on. Here are some suggestions:

- **Prepare food with love.** Cooking is an act of self-love and self-kindness.
- **Sit while eating.** This supports digestion.
- **Practice gratitude.** Before eating, take a deep breath, say a prayer or a poem, or take a moment to think about the many hands and effort it took to get food to your table.
- **Engage the senses.** Notice the colors, textures, smells, and tastes of your food.
- **Create a quiet space.** Start with three bites in silence or set a one-minute timer.
- **Slow down.** Pause between bites. Put down your food or utensil, take a breath, and appreciate the experience. You may want to use an affirmation like “this food is nourishing my body so that I can feel healthy and strong,” or create a phrase that feels right to you.
- **Engage in encouraging conversation.** Avoid divisive or stressful topics while eating.
- **End with gratitude.** Before moving on, take a breath and mentally thank your digestive system.

Mindful eating is a practice, not perfection. If you forget during a meal, simply start again when you remember. Even afterward, you can still thank your body.

My Mindful Eating Practice

Write your chosen mindful eating practice or practices in the leaf below, then cut out and place it somewhere you can see while eating as a gentle reminder.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Practicing mindful eating with children can strengthen family connections and encourage trying new foods by talking about their sensory qualities (taste, texture, smell, color, etc.).

For Groups

Mindful eating can be practiced in a group without others knowing. Take a deep breath before and after eating, talk about what you're enjoying in your meal, and delay intense conversations until after the meal. Alternatively, you can invite others to engage in mindful eating with you.

Alternative Approaches

- If slowing down and being present during eating is challenging, experiment with making your eating space inviting - adjust lighting, add a candle, play soft music, or display an inspiring image. If your environment can't be changed, find small ways to create a more peaceful atmosphere.
- If eating using a feeding tube, straw, or syringe, focus on gratitude, sensations like temperature and texture, and creating a calming environment to support connection with the eating experience.



Community Against Violence

A Restful Pace for Safety and Support

By Celeste Trujillo, Client Services Program Director, taoscav.org

Reaching out for shelter services can be scary for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Many fears can come up for survivors: how they will be treated, what to bring, whether they will be safe in the shelter, and general uncertainty about shelter life.

Here at Community Against Violence (CAV), we aim to ease this transition by making it as smooth as possible without rushing or overwhelming survivors. We understand that survivors are in crisis when they come to us, so we focus on their safety and security first, making sure they have the opportunity to rest.



Survivors set the pace, letting us know how much they want to share in that initial moment and then we set a time to go over all the other paperwork when they feel rested and secure. We discuss the need for our agency to gather information to help us support them and that they can take breaks whenever the process is too much. Survivors are in control of their information and their healing journey. Our goal is to create an environment where they feel safe, supported and empowered.



Breathwork



Breathwork



Gentle wind blowing through the delicate leaves and petals of a flower creates a subtle dance. As we guide the flow of our breath, we create healing movement within.




In this section:

- [Belly Breathing](#)
- [Alternate Nostril Breathing](#)
- [Box Breathing](#)
- [Rainbow Breathing](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Raksha's Utilization of Breathwork for Healing](#)

Color Me!



Belly Breathing

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Belly breath is a deep breathing technique that promotes relaxation by activating the body's natural calming response. Rooted in yoga pranayama from India, similar breathwork practices exist across various cultures and traditions. Belly breath can be safely practiced throughout the day to reduce stress and enhance well-being.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It:

Practice breathwork in a way that is comfortable. If you experience discomfort, return to your natural breathing pattern. Begin with short sessions - three breaths or one minute - then gradually extend how much time you practice.

Belly Breath

- Find a comfortable position: sit, stand, or lie down. If sitting or standing, maintain an upright posture while keeping your shoulders relaxed.
- Breathe in through your nose, allowing your belly to expand outward. Relax your shoulders and chest.
- Breathe out through your nose, letting your belly soften.
- If it's difficult to feel your belly move, try lying on your back with your hands resting on your belly.
- You can breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth if that feels more natural.

Three Part Breath

For a deeper breathwork experience, try this step-by-step technique:

1

Belly Breath

- Begin by breathing in through your nose, feeling your belly rise.

2

Lower Rib Cage

- Continue breathing in through your nose, feeling the sides of your rib cage expand.
- As you breathe out through your nose, feeling your ribs and belly come back in.
- Repeat until it feels natural, then try step 3.

3

Full Breath

- Breathe in through your nose, expanding your belly and the sides of your rib cage.
- At the top of the breath, allow your upper chest to lift.
- Breathe out through your nose, feel your belly fall, the sides of your rib cage come back in, and your upper chest relax.
- Let go of tension in your shoulders and body as you exhale.
- Practice for 1-3 minutes or as long as is comfortable.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

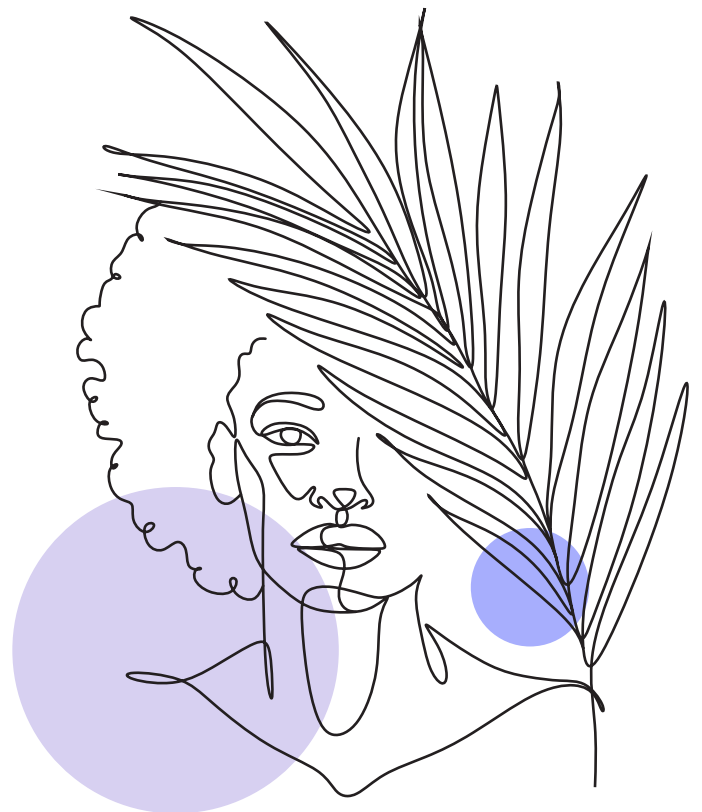
Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children







Introduce belly breath to children when they are already relaxed, so they can become familiar with it. During moments of stress encourage them to imagine inflating their belly like a big balloon.

Alternative Approaches

- Take three deep belly breaths when feeling stressed or overwhelmed.
- Extend your exhale to twice the length of your inhale (e.g., breathe in for three counts, breathe out for six).
- Use visualization or affirmations, such as imagining inhaling a calming color and exhaling stress, or repeating words like “peace”, “I am worthy”, or “love”.
- Try [Rainbow Breathing](#) if you enjoy using colors or [Affirmation Breathing](#) for affirmations.
- For people who prefer to follow along with a recording, try Headspace’s [Breathing Technique to Relax: Belly Breathing Exercise with Dora Kamau](#).



Alternate Nostril Breathing

Time:  to  	Mental Energy:  	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

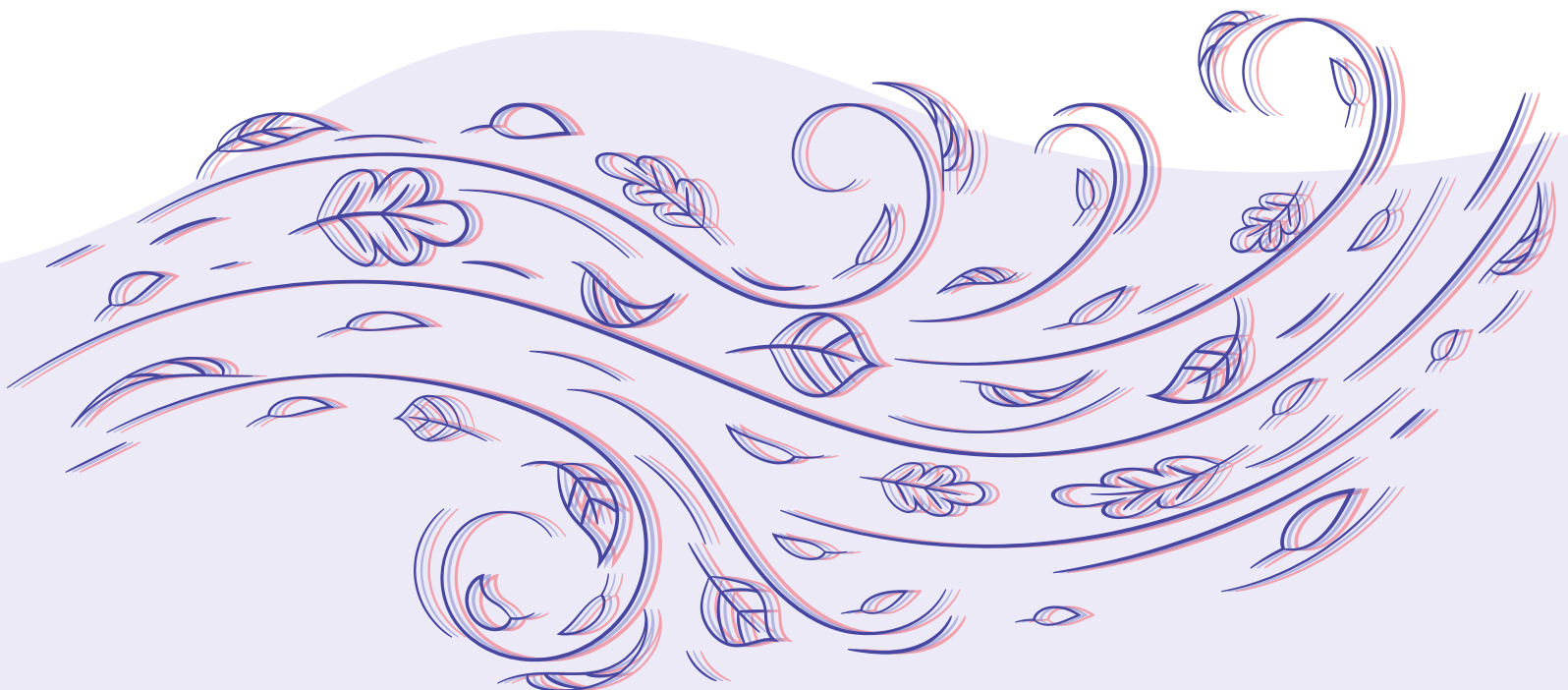
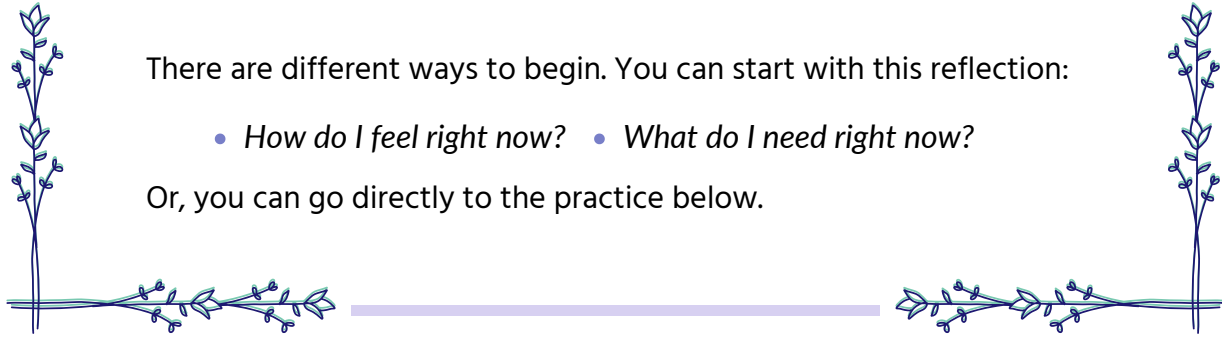
Alternate Nostril Breathing (Anuloma Viloma or Nadi Shodhana) is a calming breathwork practice often used before meditation, relaxation, visualization, or other reflective practices. It has been associated with improved well-being and reduced anxiety and depression (Kaushik et al., 2020). This type of breathwork originated in yogic pranayama from India. Variations of this technique exist across different traditions.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Practice in a way that feels comfortable. If you start to feel uncomfortable, return to your natural breathing. Begin with a short session and increase as you feel ready.

Some people find that gently closing nostrils enhances focus and relaxation. If you would like to try this, place your right hand near your face. Keep your shoulders relaxed and your right elbow down. **Follow the instructions labeled Optional.**

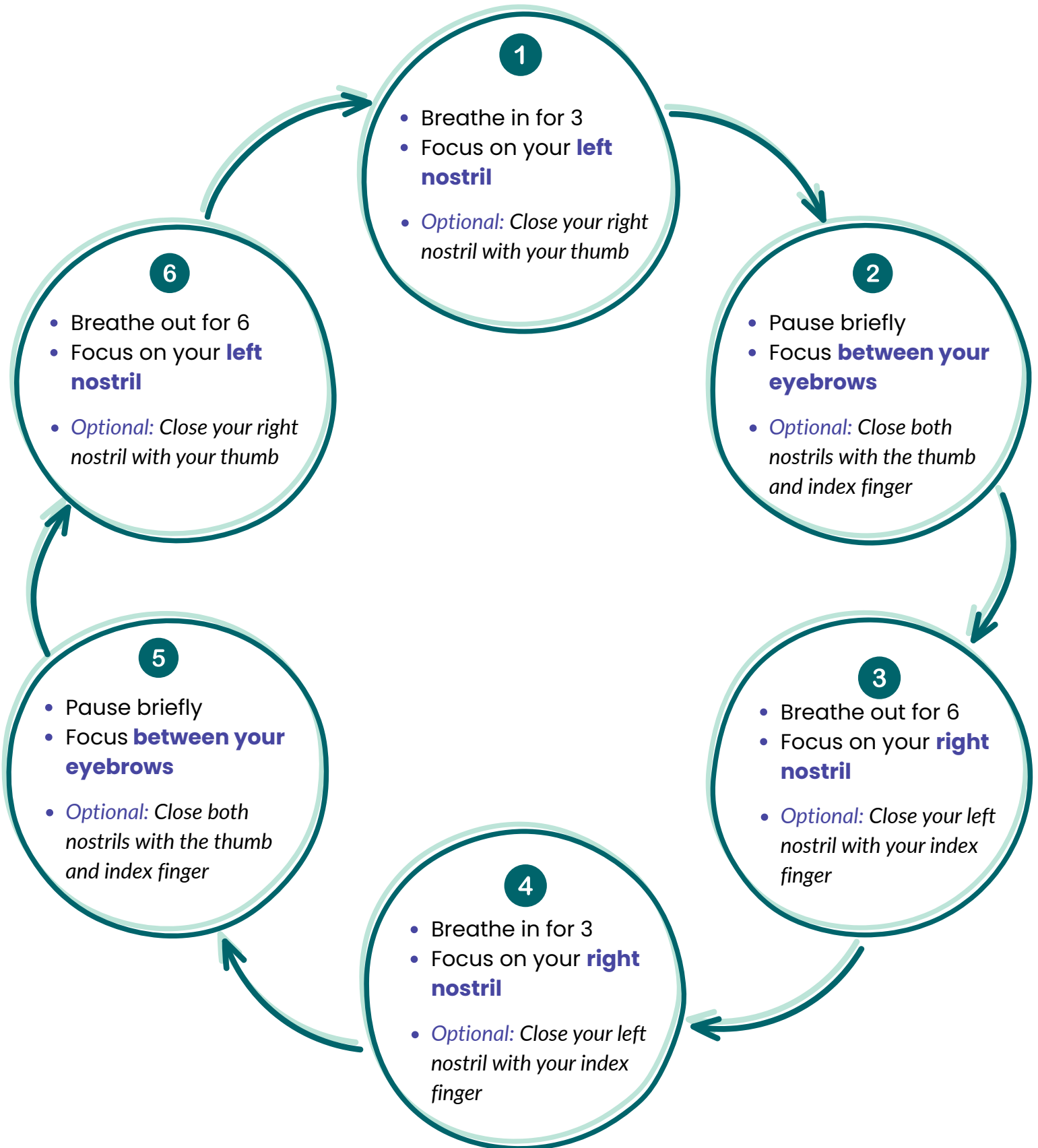
Find a comfortable seated or lying down position. Allow your breath to settle.

- 1 Breathe in** through your nose for a count of three, focusing on your left nostril.
 - **Optional:** Close your right nostril with your thumb while breathing in through your left nostril.
- 2 Pause briefly** (about one second), focusing on the space between your eyebrows.
 - **Optional:** Close both nostrils with the thumb and index finger while pausing.
- 3 Breathe out** through your nose to a count of six while focusing on the right nostril
 - **Optional:** Close the left nostril with your index finger while breathing out through the right nostril.
- 4 Breathe in** through your nose for a count of three, focusing on your right nostril.
 - **Optional:** Close the left nostril with your index finger while breathing in through the right nostril.
- 5 Pause briefly** (about one second), focusing on the space between your eyebrows.
 - **Optional:** Close both nostrils with the thumb and index finger while pausing.
- 6 Breathe out** through your nose to a count of six while focusing on the left nostril.
 - **Optional:** Close the right nostril with your thumb while breathing out through the left nostril.

Try practicing this three times, always starting and ending with the left nostril. If you lose track or feel unsettled, return to normal breathing, and try again when ready.

My Alternate Nostril Breathing Practice

Find a comfortable seated or lying down position. Allow your breath to settle. Try practicing this three times, always starting and ending with the left nostril. If you lose track or feel unsettled, return to normal breathing, and try again when ready.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*




Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

Alternative Approaches

- Breath Length:
 - If it is uncomfortable to count the breath, just breathe in and out for the length of time that feels right to you while focusing on alternating nostrils.
 - As you become more comfortable, try breathing in for a count of four and breathing out for a count of eight, or breathing in for five and breathing out for ten.
- Start and end your Alternate Nostril Breathing practice with [Belly Breathing](#) for calming.



Box Breathing

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Body Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

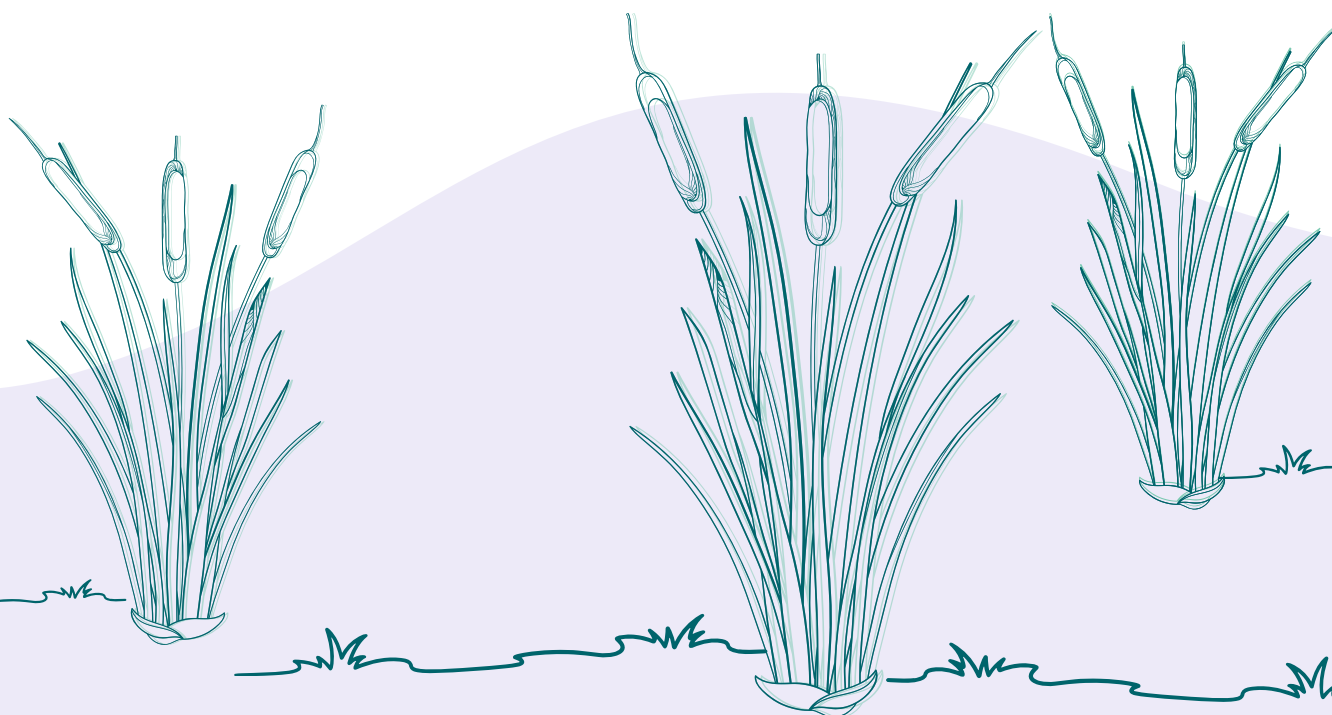
Box Breathing is a simple yet powerful technique to regulate breathing, especially during stressful or challenging situations. Many people find it calming, grounding, and helpful for sleep (Noventi et al., 2022). This breathwork, also known as Samavritti Pranayama, has been adapted from the yogic pranayama of India. You can find similar techniques in many different traditions around the world.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



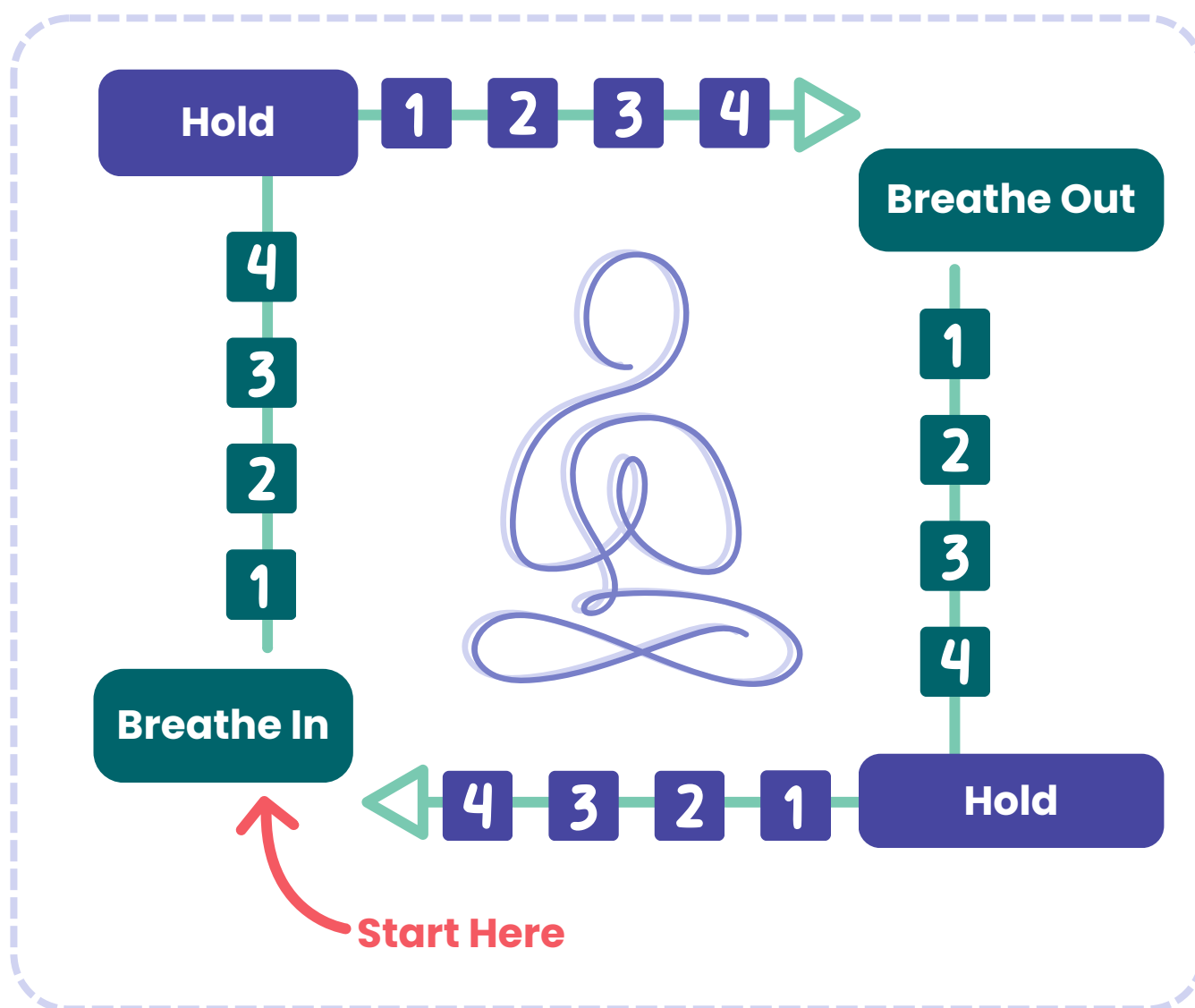
How to Do It

Practice in a way that feels comfortable. If you start to feel uncomfortable, return to your normal breathing. Start with a short session and gradually increase as you feel ready. Start by finding a comfortable position, usually seated or lying down. Allow your breath to settle.

- **Breathe in** for a count of four.
- **Hold** your breath for a count of four.
- **Breathe out** for a count of four.
- **Pause** for a count of four.

Repeat for 1-3 minutes or as long as feels comfortable.

My Box Breathing Practice



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

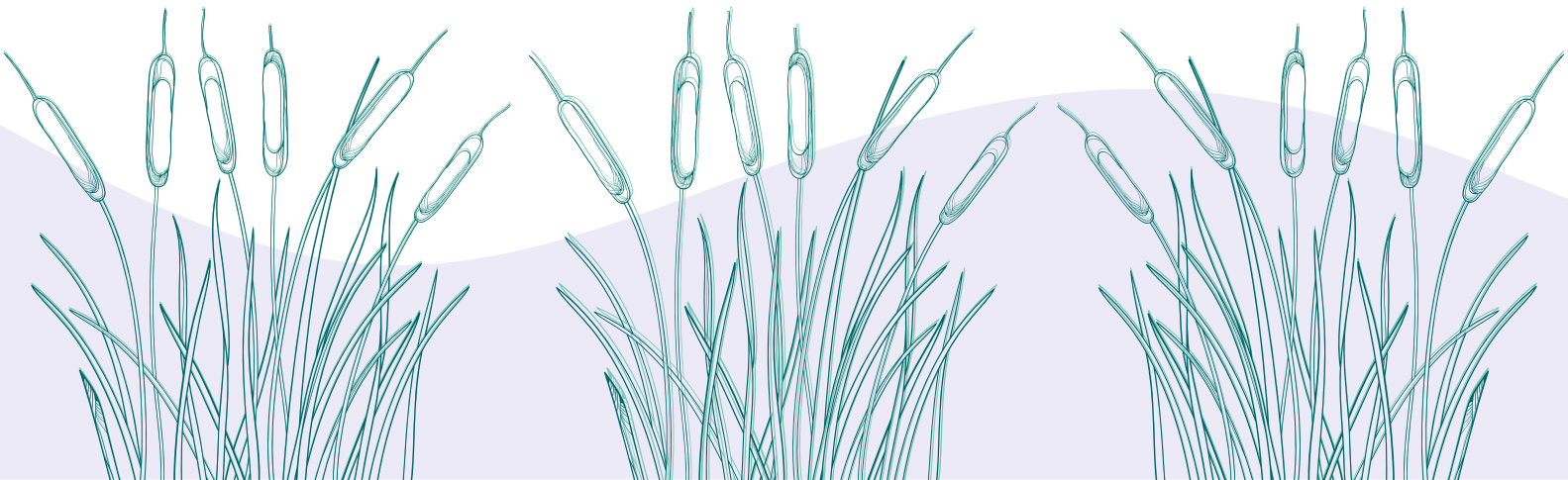
Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children




- If practicing with a child, trace a box together or tap a finger rhythmically to count to four, allowing them to breathe with you rather than focusing on counting.
- Some children may enjoy this as "Bear Breath." Explain that bears breathe slowly, especially when hibernating. Start with inhaling for three counts and exhaling for three counts. Once comfortable, extend to four counts and later introduce breath holds.

Alternative Approaches

- For those who would like a more interactive practice, engage your sense of touch by tracing a box with your finger, drawing one to follow, or using a square object for grounding.
- For those who prefer to follow along with a recording, try Sunnybrook Hospital's [Box breathing relaxation technique: how to calm feelings of stress or anxiety](#).



Rainbow Breathing

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: The included rainbow image (or make your own)	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

Rainbow Breathing is a simple relaxation technique that helps reduce stress and increase grounding (Gonen & Ipek, 2022). It can be used by children as young as four, but older children, teens, and adults may also enjoy practicing. Rainbow Breathing has origins in yogic pranayama from India with adaptation as a kind of mindfulness practice.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Practice in a way that feels comfortable. If you start to feel uncomfortable, return to your normal breathing. Using an image of a rainbow (the one below or your own), trace the colors with your fingertip as you breathe.

Purple Breathe in through your nose (while tracing the purple color of the rainbow).

Indigo Breathe out through your mouth (while tracing the indigo color of the rainbow).

Blue Breathe in through your nose (while tracing the blue color of the rainbow).

Green Breathe out through your mouth (while tracing the green color of the rainbow).

Yellow Breathe in through your nose (while tracing the yellow color of the rainbow).

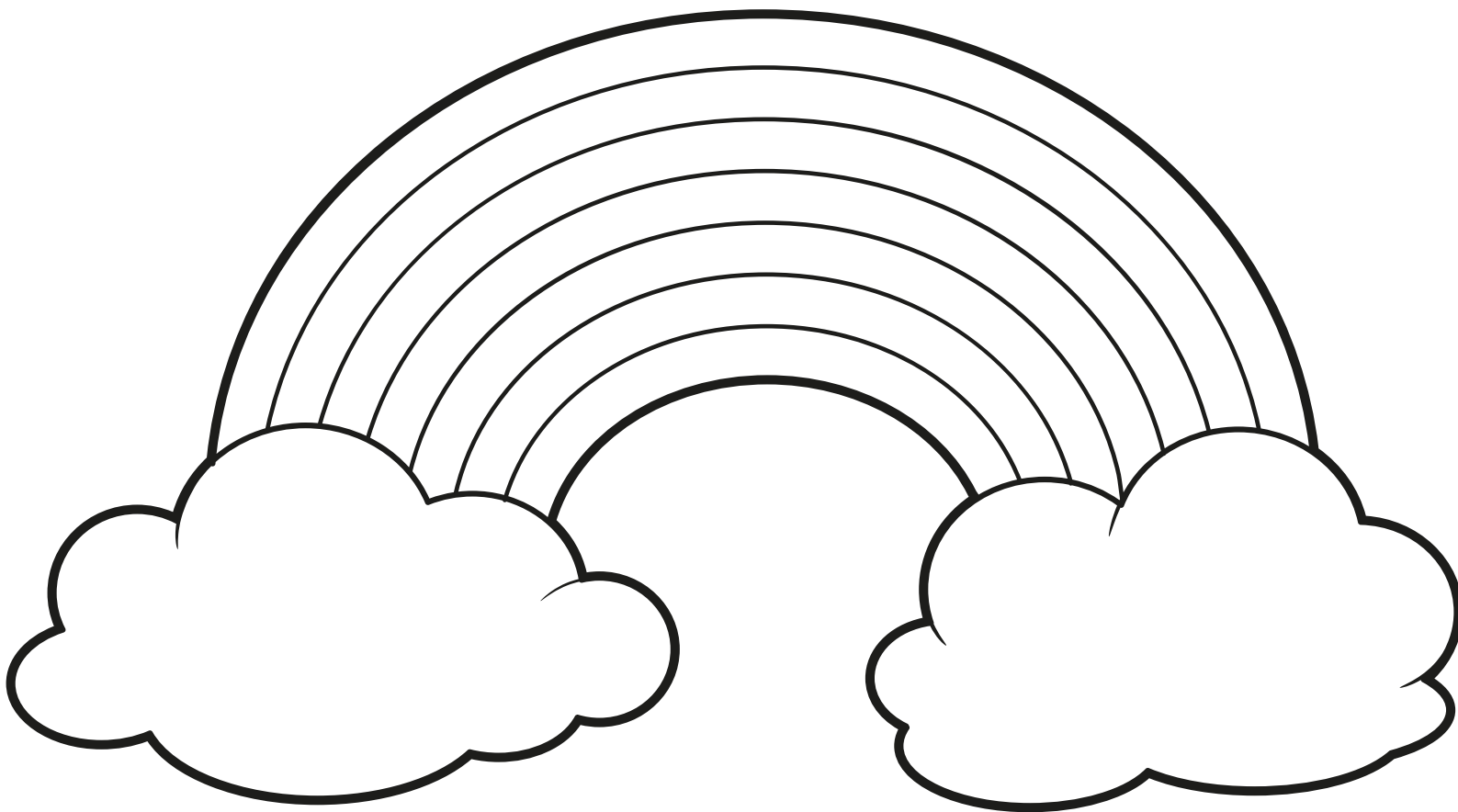
Orange Breathe out through your mouth (while tracing the orange color of the rainbow).

Red Breathe in and out as you like (while tracing the red color of the rainbow).

Repeat a few times and stop when you feel ready.

My Rainbow Breathing Practice

Color your own rainbow for home practice, or use the picture on the next page.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

Have children draw their own rainbow to trace. Tape it to a wall at a height that's easy for them to access.

Alternative Approaches

- When exhaling through the mouth, try making an “aaaaaahhhhhh” sound like a loud sigh.
- Slow down your breathing as you trace each color.
- Imagine breathing in and out each color as you trace.
- For people with visual impairments or differences, create a textured rainbow using glued yarn or similar materials. This can be traced by touch while focusing on slow, intentional breathing.



Stories from the Field

Raksha, Inc.

Healing Breathwork with South Asian Survivors and Communities Impacted by Violence

By Ayah Mostafa, MS, LPC, NCC, Therapist/Advocate, raksha.org

66

Breathwork has been so powerful in managing anxiety and in practicing mindfulness by almost forcing me to return and focus on the present.” - Program Participant

99

Raksha, meaning protection in many South Asian languages, promotes a stronger and healthier South Asian community through confidential support services, education, and advocacy. Its mission is to foster healing, empowerment, and justice for South Asian survivors of violence.

For many of our survivors who find it difficult to verbalize their stressors and emotions, breathwork has been a tremendous tool assisting in reducing levels of anxiety and stress. By engaging in breathwork practices like squared (or boxed) breathing in counseling sessions, we provide a safe space to those who often find themselves in a caregiver role to practice self-care and by extension, self-compassion and grace. By intentionally and consistently incorporating breathwork into therapy, we offer clients a holistic mind-body approach that helps calm the sympathetic nervous system and fosters deeper awareness of their thoughts and emotions. This safe space, combined with breathwork, supports emotional and physical regulation, helping survivors move out of the fight-or-flight state they often find themselves in, and fostering an internal sense of safety.




Squared Breathing
also known as Box Breathing is a well known and effective breathing exercise that can help you relax and refocus.

Keep in mind that a proper deep breath is when you inhale through your nose filling your belly up like a balloon.

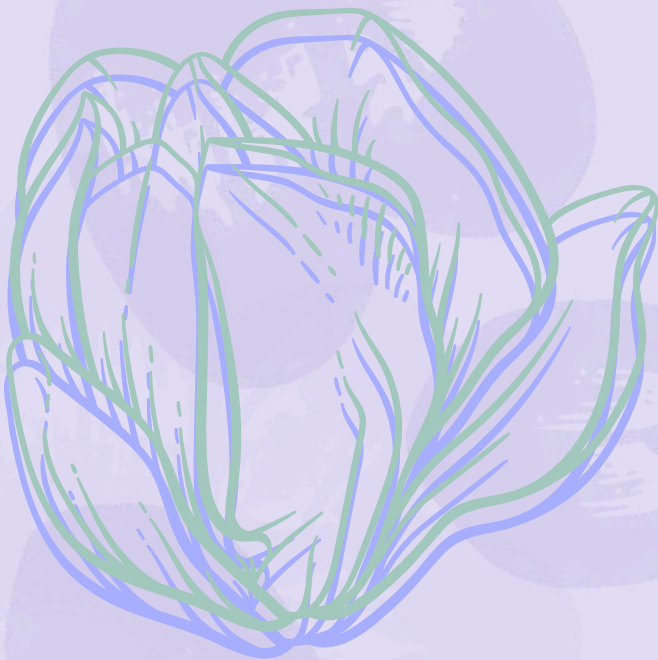
Exhale through pursed lips, while pushing all the air out of your belly.

You can place your hands on your lower abdomen to guide yourself.



To support healing in the broader community, Raksha therapists created and shared a video on the anniversary of the March 2021 spa shootings across Atlanta, which deeply affected our communities. Titled [Message of Healing & Care | Grief, Anniversary Effect & Grounding](#), the video includes grounding techniques and square (or boxed) breathing exercises for anyone impacted.

Self Awareness



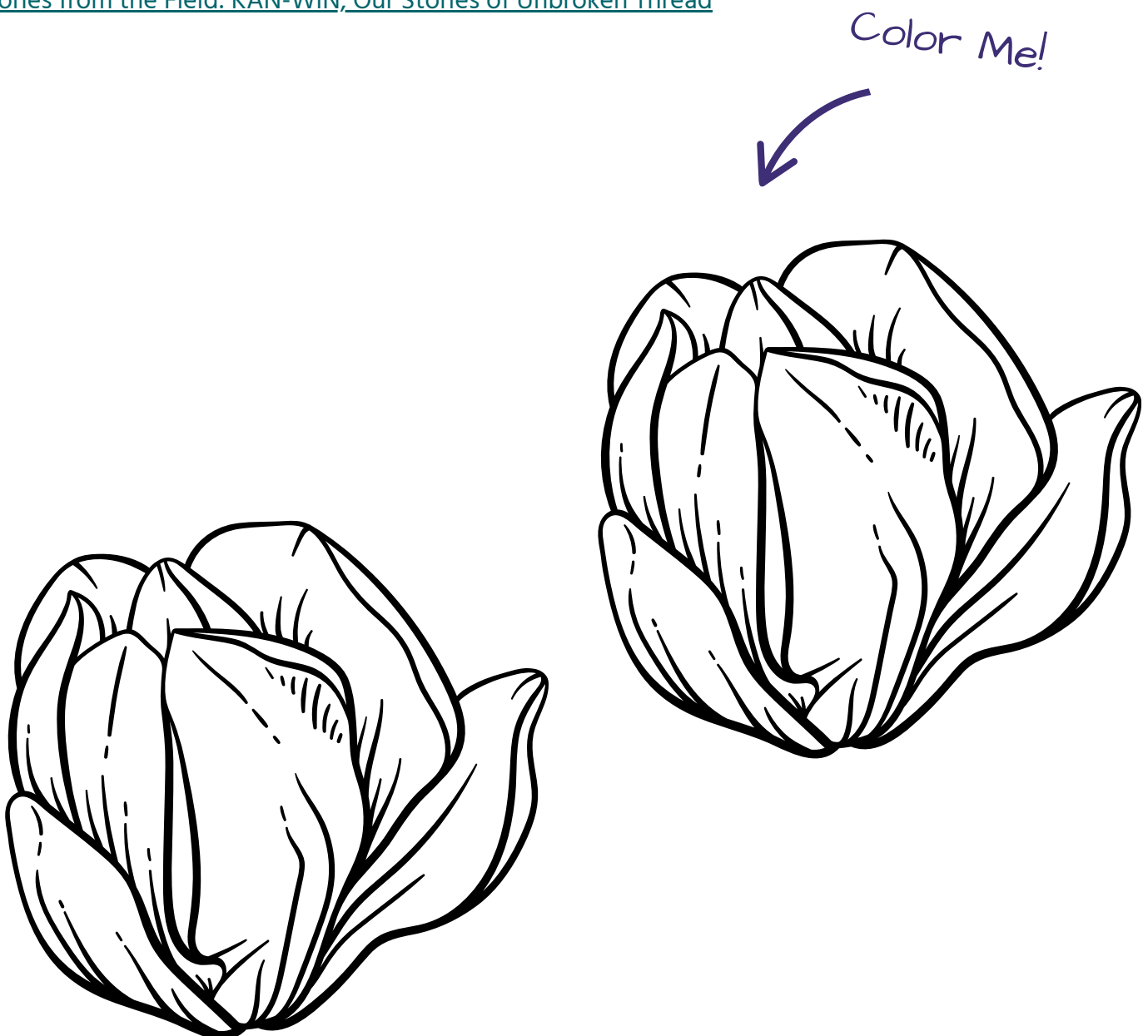
Self Awareness



A tightly furled flower bud takes its time and knows when to open. With self-awareness, we gently unfold our understanding of ourselves, allowing us to fully blossom into our authentic selves.


In this section:

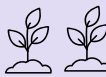
- [Building Emotional Awareness](#)
- [Identifying and Using My Strengths](#)
- [Connecting with My Values](#)
- [Stories from the Field: KAN-WIN, Our Stories of Unbroken Thread](#)



Building Emotional Awareness

Time: 

Mental Energy: 

Physical Energy: 

Materials: Writing materials

Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for writing

What is It?

Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize and express emotions. Developing this skill makes it easier to identify what we need to feel better, communicate effectively in difficult situations, and set healthy boundaries.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Find a comfortable place to sit and write. Reflect on the following prompts, answering as many as feel right to you. You may want to try this as a reflective practice every day for a week, once a week, or to help you respond to a particular situation in your life.

If you need help identifying body sensations, refer to [Appendix A: Bodily Sensations](#). For help naming emotions, consider using an emotion wheel (available online).

Feeling Good

Describe a situation where I felt good.

- What helpful or positive words or phrases did I use?
- What supportive words or phrases did I hear from someone else?
- What sensations did I feel in my body?
- What emotions did I experience?

Notes:

Not Feeling Good

Choose a mildly challenging situation - something like a difficult interaction with a friend, a loved one, or someone else you interacted with as a part of everyday life. Avoid reflecting on a traumatic or overwhelming experience.

- Describe a situation where I didn't feel good or that was difficult.
- What unhelpful words or phrases did I use?
- What unhelpful words or phrases did I hear from someone else?
- What sensations did I feel in my body?
- What emotions did I experience?

Notes:

Practicing Empowerment

Reflect on a challenging situation and imagine how things could have gone differently. Be kind and gentle with yourself.

- If I had felt calmer, empowered, or grounded, what could I have said or done differently?
- What words of support would I have liked to hear from someone else?
- If a similar situation arises, what could I do to take care of or support myself?
- How can I be kind to myself right now?

Notes:



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

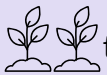




This practice can help children develop emotional awareness when reflecting on difficult situations. A supportive adult can guide the process in a gentle and affirming way. Use child-friendly resources like an emotions wheel or visuals to help identify emotions, or try resources from the Sesame Street Workshop on [Children's Feelings](#).

Alternative Approaches

- If writing isn't accessible or desirable for you, this practice can be done verbally on your own, with a trusted person, or in a small group.
- After reflecting on a challenging situation, try the [Self-Compassion Break](#) or the [Loving Kindness Meditation](#).
- Try [How Would You Treat a Friend?](#) to support practicing empowerment.



Identifying and Using My Strengths

Time:  to 	Mental Energy:  to 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing materials	Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for writing	

What is It?

Experiences of trauma can leave us feeling disconnected from or negative about ourselves. Identifying our strengths helps us reconnect with the good in ourselves, have a more balanced view of ourselves, and recognize what supports our well-being.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It: Identifying My Strengths

Reflect on and respond to the following prompts. It's ok if you don't have an answer for every question or if some responses overlap. You can revisit them later, think about them, or discuss them with a trusted person.

What are three things I like about myself?

1

2

3

What are three things I am good at?

1

2

3

What are three positive things that others have said about me?

1

2

3

What are three things I am proud of or have accomplished?

1

2

3

What's something I'd never want to change about myself?

Try turning some of your answers into affirmations:

I am:

I am good at:

or write your own:

You can repeat these statements as positive reminders when you're feeling down or struggling with self-doubt. You may want to experiment with keeping some of these statements handy so you can remind yourself of your strengths throughout your day. For example, you might try writing them on a piece of paper and taping it to a mirror or saving them as a note on your phone.



How to Do It: Using My Strengths

Reflect on and respond to the following prompts. It's ok if you don't have an answer for every question or if some responses overlap. You can revisit them later, think about them, or discuss them with a trusted person.

What are three activities I enjoy?

1

2

3

What skills am I using when I am doing things I enjoy?

What are three things I do to be kind to myself or to care for myself?

1

2

3

Think about how often you engage in activities that bring you joy. Can you incorporate them into your life more often? Are there other areas where you can apply the same skills?

Reflect on your favorite forms of self-care.

Is there something you can do daily to be kind to yourself?

Empty rectangular box for writing a response to the question: "Is there something you can do daily to be kind to yourself?"

Is there a self-care practice you can commit to weekly?

Empty rectangular box for writing a response to the question: "Is there a self-care practice you can commit to weekly?"



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children and Families

Parents and caregivers help children learn about their strengths by noticing them and talking about them together. Adults are like mirrors, when they point out a child's strengths, it helps the child see those strengths in themselves. Try answering the questions as a family and sharing positive things you notice about each other. This can build emotional awareness, especially for older kids thinking about tough situations. You can also make it a family activity by talking about what makes your whole family strong.






Alternative Approaches


- If writing isn't accessible or desirable for you, this practice can be done verbally on your own, with a trusted person, or in a small group.
- Try [Setting Intentions](#) for more ways to explore your goals or vision for the future.
- Try the [Self Compassion Break](#) for more ways to practice self-kindness.



Connecting with My Values

Time:   to   

Mental Energy:   to   

Physical Energy: 

Materials: Writing or coloring materials

Physical Position(s): Sitting or any position used for writing

What is It?

When we take time to reflect on and explore our personal values, we better understand what gives our life meaning and purpose. This self-awareness helps us make decisions that genuinely match who we are, even during tough times. Understanding our values also helps us to know when our actions or environments don't align with what we believe in, so we can choose other paths. In this way, our values can act like an internal compass.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.

How to Do It

Read the list of values on the next page and circle the top ten that feel the MOST important to you. It can help to cross out the values that definitely don't make your top ten. You can also add values that are missing from the list or write them in your own words.

To help identify your values, think about:

- What's something you would never want to change about yourself?
- What makes you feel proud?
- Who do you admire, and why?
- What would you defend, even when it's tough?
- What makes you mad or upset when you see it happen?
- What makes you feel grateful or relieved when you see it happen?



My Values List



Circle ten values that are the **MOST** important to you or write your own:

Acceptance	Gratitude	Patience
Accountability	Growth	Perseverance
Adventure	Health	Realism
Appreciation	Helping others	Religion
Authenticity	Honesty	Respect
Awareness	Hope	Responsibility
Balance	Humility	Romance
Belonging	Independence	Safety
Bravery	Individuality	Self-determination
Caring	Inner Peace	Self-improvement
Closeness	Intelligence	Self-love
Collaboration	Intimacy	Sexuality
Community	Joy	Sharing
Confidence	Kindness	Spirituality
Curiosity	Leadership	Strength
Doing what's right	Learning	Success
Dreaming big	Laughing	Taking chances
Equality	Listening	Teamwork
Excellence	Living simply	Trust
Excitement	Love	Understanding others
Family	Loyalty	Understanding yourself
Financial stability	Nature	Wisdom
Forgiveness	Neatness	World peace
Friendship	Nurturing Others	
God	Openness	

Values that are important to me, but are not on the list:



Exploring My Values

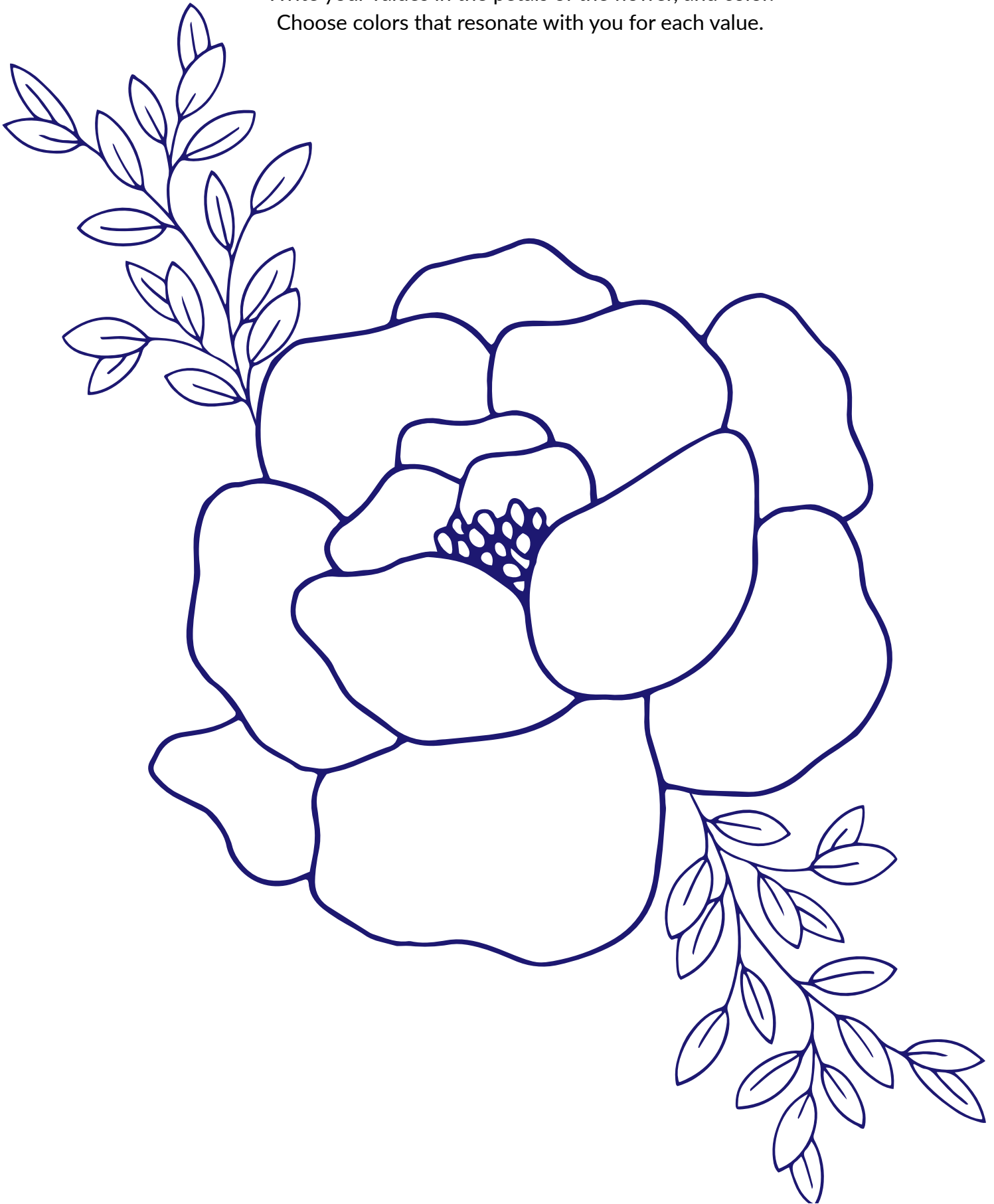
After you've identified your values, explore how they are present in your life. Reflect on the following questions, answering as many as feel right to you.

- What parts of your daily life make you feel like you're living according to your values?
- Can you remember a time this week when you felt your actions matched what's truly important to you?
- Are there areas in your life where different values seem to pull you in opposite directions? What does this feel like?
- When do you find it hardest to stick to your values? What gets in the way?
- What small change could you make tomorrow to better reflect one of your important values?
- Which of your values do you wish showed up more in your everyday activities?
- What helps you remember what's truly important to you when life gets busy?
- When was the last time you felt good about staying true to your values even when it was difficult?
- What support or resources might help you bring more of your values into your routine?

Notes about my values:

My Values

Write your values in the petals of the flower, and color.
Choose colors that resonate with you for each value.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

To explore values, ask younger children simple questions. Try:

- What makes someone a good friend?
- Who is your favorite character from a book or show, and why?
- If you could make one rule that everyone had to follow, what would it be?
- If you had a magical animal as a pet, how would you take care of them?
- What do you do when a friend is feeling sad?

Alternative Approaches

If writing is not accessible or desired, this reflection can be done verbally, with a trusted person, or in a small group. It can also be done visually using collage or other creative materials.



Stories from the Field

KAN-WIN

Our Stories of Unbroken Thread

By Coral Wu, Multilingual Community Advocate, kanwin.org

It's difficult to advocate for gender-based violence prevention and intervention through educational workshops when these are labeled as "taboo" within a community. It's even harder to advocate for healing when we can't safely talk about the harm we're experiencing. KAN-WIN created "Unbroken Thread" to establish a safe, confidential space for community members to openly share their thoughts and experiences without fear of judgment, cultural concerns, or language barriers, all while respecting their boundaries and consent.



Through story circles, members listened to each other's stories as well as shared their own in response to familiar, yet hard, topics such as self-esteem, self-care, personal boundaries, women's health, womanhood, and motherhood. Storytelling became a vehicle for community members to open up with one another and share in healing conversations without having to re-live or define themselves according to their experiences of violence and trauma.



To enhance community members' experience, KAN-WIN added engaging, creative activities to each session, including:

- Community weaving
- Mood boards
- Floral crafts
- Singing and songwriting

By combining storytelling with creativity, community members found empowerment through connection, mutual support, and creative self-expression. Check out their video, [KAN-WIN's Unbroken Thread](#), to learn more.

Spirituality

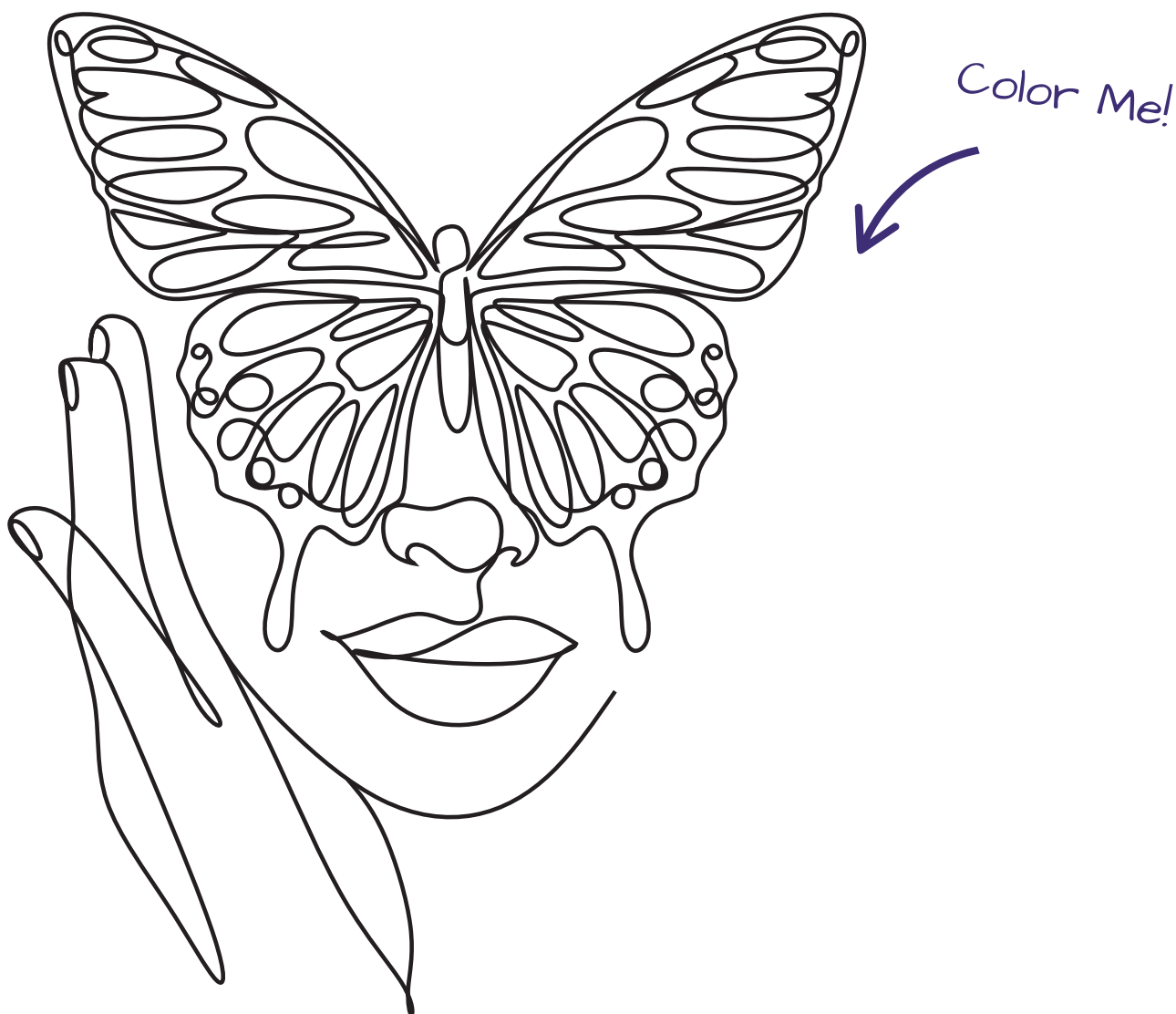


Spirituality











The fragrance of a flower is delicate but still uplifts us. Spirituality gently reminds us of the beauty and meaning beyond what we can sense.

In this section:

- [Sacred Space or Making an Altar](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)
- [Spiritual Advisory Council](#)
- [Stories from the Field: Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Dia de los Muertos Tribute](#)



Sacred Space or Making an Altar

Time:  to   	Mental Energy:  to   	Physical Energy:  
Materials: Depends on the materials you want on your altar	Physical Position(s): You will be gathering items either yourself or with help from a trusted person	

What is It?

Many cultures have traditions of creating altars or otherwise designating sacred spaces in homes, spiritual centers, nature, or other locations. These spaces serve as reminders of our connection to something greater than ourselves, sources of inspiration, and places for healing and reflection. Your altar or sacred space can serve as a reminder to practice self-care, a place to do mind-body-spirit practices, honor loved ones, or simply be a place for peace and rest.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

1

Choose a Location

- Your sacred space can be large or small - a shelf, a table, or even something portable that you can take with you.

2

Set an Intention

- What energy do you want to bring into your life?
- How do you plan to use your altar?

3

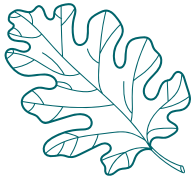
Customize your space with items that have meaning to you. Below are some ideas.

Customizing My Space



Simple Altar

- A piece of fabric (cloth, scarf, doily) to define the space.
- A single object such as a candle, photograph, plant, or special keepsake.



Nature and Elements

- Gather natural objects representing the elements of nature. For example: earth (soil, rocks), water (a small jar, shells), fire (candle, incense), air (feather, leaf), or wood (branch, driftwood).
- Be mindful when taking objects from nature. State and national parks may forbid collecting.



Honoring Directions

- Some traditions, including many Indigenous cultures and paganism, choose objects to represent North, South, East, and West.
- Central elements may represent Earth, Sky, or other significant symbols.



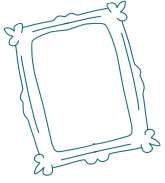
Personal Healing Altar

- Objects that inspire and support your healing journey or that have personal meaning. For example: crystals, statues, ancestor images, or spiritual/religious symbols.



Written Inspiration

- A handwritten phrase representing your altar's purpose.
- Affirmations, poetry, song lyrics, inspirational quotes, prayers, or a wish.



Honoring Ancestors

- Photos, drawings, or objects representing ancestors (even if names are unknown).
- Items that connect to your lineage.



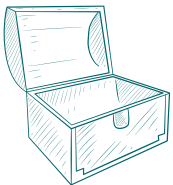
Memorial Altar

- A photo, drawing, or object representing someone you wish to honor and remember.



Drawing as Representation

- If you don't have a picture, create a drawing that represents that person. It doesn't have to look like them.
- Write down the person's name, using colors that remind you of them.



Portable Altars

- A small box or pouch with meaningful items.
- A journal with goals, prayers, or affirmations.
- A designated space outdoors where you feel at peace.

Caring for My Sacred Space

- Keep your space clean and free of clutter.
- Some people may choose to honor ancestors or spiritual figures with offerings such as cornmeal, rice, tobacco, or a little bit of a favorite food.
- Review and consider changing objects every so often to reflect evolving intentions.
- Consider burning incense or herbs significant to your culture.

After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*



Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

- Help children choose special objects that bring them joy.
- Temporary altars may last for an afternoon, a day, or a week.
- A small item near their bed may offer comfort at night.
- A family altar can invite contributions from children.



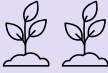

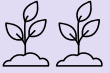

For Communities

- A group or community may choose to create a shared altar space by inviting people to bring an item or write an intention to place on the altar.
- In times of community healing, you can create a space for collective reflection and grief.

Alternative Approaches

- Create multiple small altars throughout your home.
- Use special objects or centerpieces to encourage mindfulness in daily activities (e.g., [Mindful Eating](#)).
- For those who would like more ideas and resources around creating a sacred space, consider checking out the [Inspiring Spiritual Wellbeing Toolkit from Cool Culture](#).
- Create a space to honor and connect with your [Spiritual Advisory Council](#)

Inner Light Visualization

Time: 	Mental Energy:  to 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: Writing materials	Physical Position(s): Sitting or any comfortable position	

What is It?

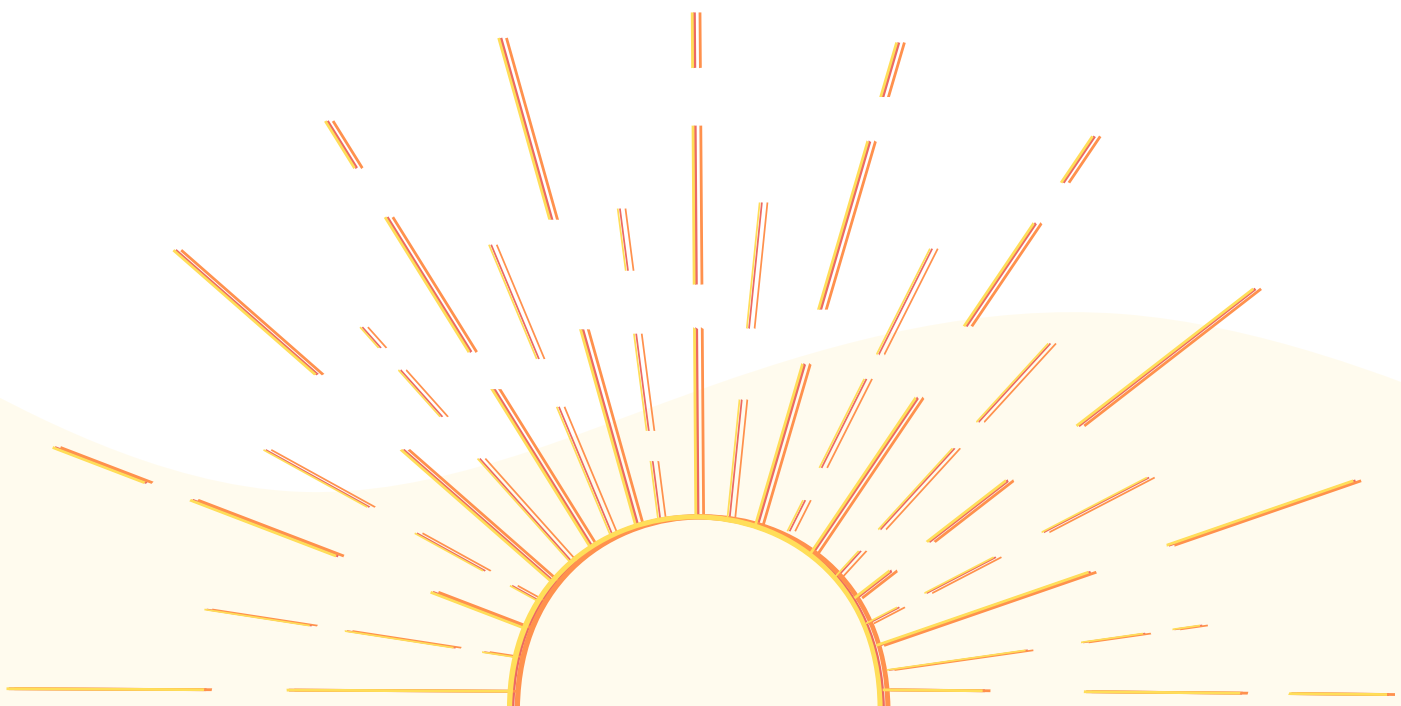
This **visualization practice** involves imagining the boundaries of your personal space and filling that space with supportive energy to promote feelings of safety, love, and healing. This exercise can also be done at bedtime to support relaxation and restful sleep. It can be especially helpful during times of stress or overwhelm, offering a gentle way to reconnect with inner strength and calm.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down.

Set an Intention if it feels good to you. You may choose to say a short prayer, set an intention, or ask for guidance from ancestors or spiritual sources in a way that aligns with your beliefs. Here are some examples:

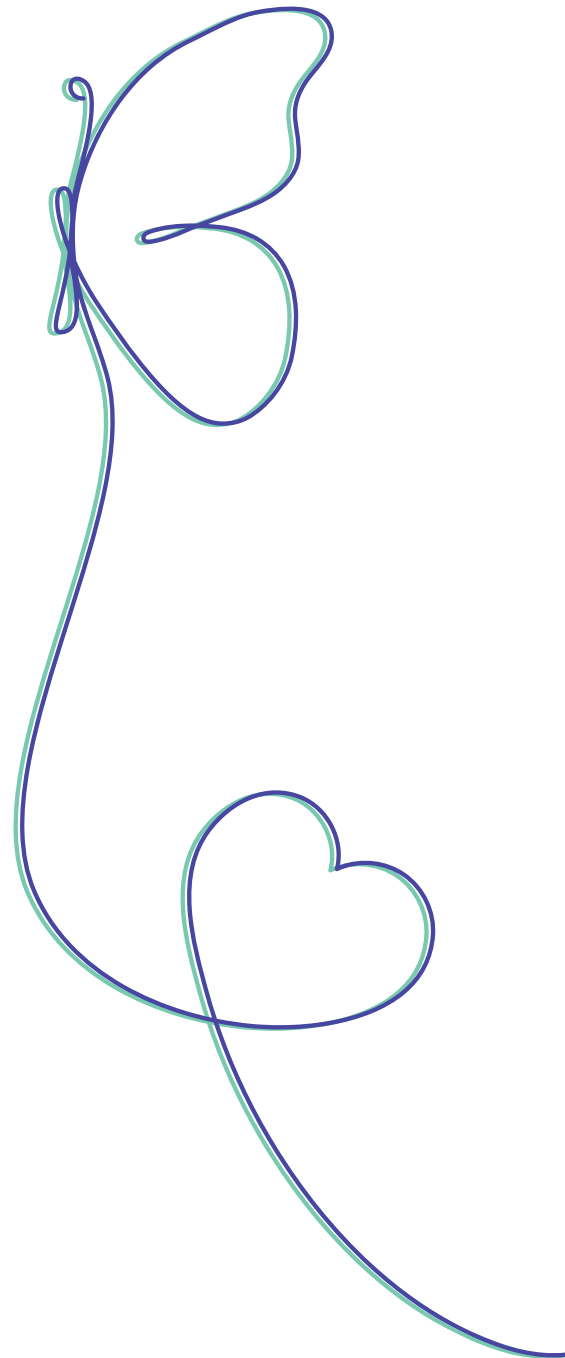
- *Please help me to feel full of love and safety.*
- *I am safe and my love is abundant.*
- *I am protected and surrounded by the love of the universe.*
- *I trust my intuition and my ability to care for myself.*
- *My body is safe, and I am relaxed.*
- *My love heals my body.*
- *My true nature is joy.*
- *I love myself, I honor myself, and I take care of myself.*

You could also choose an inspiring phrase from a book, song, or poem.

Place your hands in a comfortable position - by your sides, on your belly, over your heart, or wherever feels best.

Focus on your breath. If it feels good, allow it to slow and deepen naturally.

Visualize a ball of light at the center of your chest. Choose a color that feels healing, protective, or uplifting - such as gold, white, pink, or green.



Growing Your Inner Light

This is a suggested way to grow your ball of light, feel free to adjust it as needed:

- **Begin with your chest:** Imagine the ball of light glowing brighter and expanding each time you breathe in. As you breathe out, say an affirmation such as “I am safe” or any other that you prefer.
- **Expand through your arms:** Let the light move through your shoulders, arms, hands, and fingertips. Take a few breaths reinforcing your intention or prayer as the light glows brighter.
- **Extend downward:** Allow the light to travel through your torso, hips, thighs, knees, lower legs, feet, and toes. Continue breathing and affirming your intention or prayer as the light glows brighter.
- **Fill your entire body:** Imagine the light filling your body from your toes, feet, legs, hips, torso, arms, shoulders, and now up through your neck and head. Take a few breaths and remember your intention or prayer as the light glows brighter.
- **Expand beyond your body:** As you breathe, visualize the light extending outward - above, below, in front, behind, and to your sides - until you are surrounded in a glowing sphere of light.
- **Complete the practice:** When you feel ready, reaffirm your intention and express gratitude to yourself or the ‘spiritual helpers’ you called upon. If practicing before bed, allow yourself to drift into sleep, or simply carry this energy with you into your day.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

This practice may be helpful for older children at bedtime. Guide them through the steps, encouraging them to find a light color that feels good to them.

For Emotional Connection and/or Safety

- If connecting with love feels challenging, think of a beloved pet, child, or someone who brings warmth to your heart.
- If seeking a sense of safety, recall a time when you felt protected, or imagine how you would comfort a child or pet.




For Ancestral Connection

- You don't need to know specific ancestors - simply ask to connect with a loving ancestor from the past.

Alternative Approaches

- If filling your whole body with light feels difficult, start with just your chest and expand gradually over time.
- It is normal for the visualization to feel incomplete or for the mind to wander. Be gentle and patient with yourself and return to your breathing and intention when needed.
- If certain areas of your body feel difficult to fill with light, simply notice them without judgment. Notice how they might change over time.

Spiritual Advisory Council

Time: 	Mental Energy: 	Physical Energy: 
Materials: None	Physical Position(s): Any comfortable position	

What is It?

A **spiritual advisory council** is a trusted group that you can mentally build and consult for support, guidance, and wisdom through your spiritual practices, such as prayer, dreaming, meditation, journaling, or art. You can select anyone or anything to be part of your council, depending on the support or energy you wish to cultivate. Your council can be as small or large as you like, and you can change its members at any time to fit your needs.

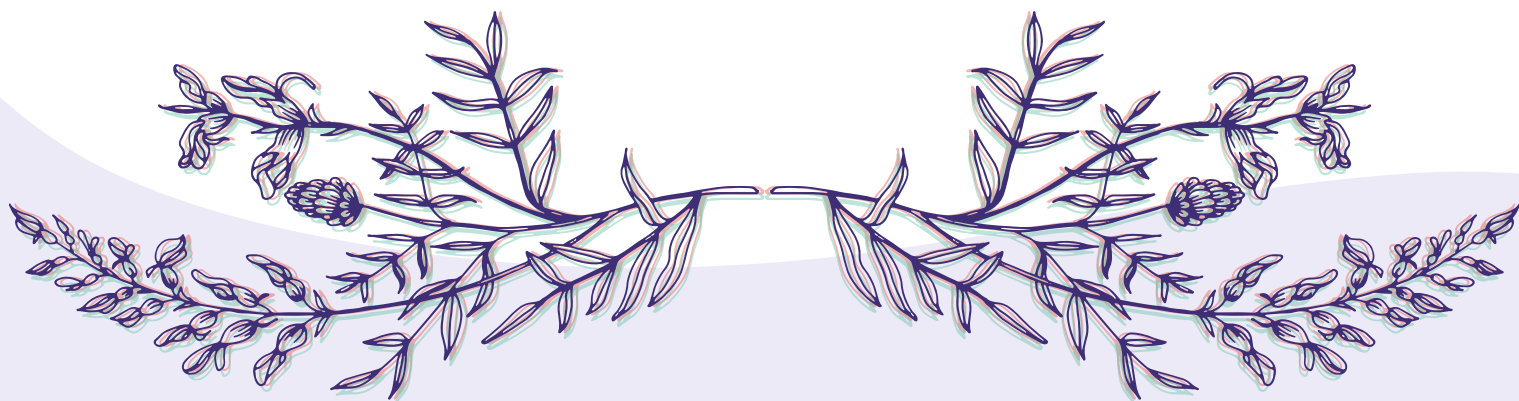
A spiritual advisory council is meant to foster emotional and physical safety for you and those around you. If any guidance from your council does not support safety, dissolve the council and seek trusted support.

Before You Begin: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to begin. You can start with this reflection:

- *How do I feel right now?*
- *What do I need right now?*

Or, you can go directly to the practice below.



How to Do It

This practice can be done in any comfortable position. Feel free to adapt these steps to your needs or create your own approach.

Building your spiritual advisory council

- Take time to consider the type of support, guidance, wisdom, or energy you seek.
- Identify who (or what) represents these qualities and mentally invite them to join your council.
- If you'd like, choose a physical reminder of this presence, such as a photograph or something with personal significance.
- Continue adding members to your council as needed, pausing to reflect on any missing perspectives or energies.

Consulting your spiritual advisory council

- You can consult your council at any time - daily, occasionally, or in times of need. Some may find it helpful to check in regularly, while others may seek guidance during difficult moments or important decisions.
- Engage with your council using any method that resonates with you, such as prayer, meditation, movement, time in nature, poetry, or other forms of creative expression. It's also fine to not do anything specifically spiritual or religious. You can think, write, speak, or sign to consult your council, noticing what thoughts, feelings, and sensations come up for you as you consult your council.
- You may choose to seek guidance from the entire council or focus on one or two specific members. For instance, if you are seeking peace, you may call on the member(s) who represent that peace for you.
- What you're seeking from your council may influence how you consult them. For example, if you are seeking a greater sense of stability, you might lie down and visualize roots growing from your body into the earth as you consult your council. Follow your intuition and use creativity to adjust your approach as needed.
- Modify your council as necessary, adding or removing members based on your evolving needs.
- Remember, a spiritual advisory council is meant to support your emotional and physical safety as well as the safety of the people around you. If their guidance ever feels harmful, dissolve the council and seek trusted support.



After You Practice: An Invitation to Reflect

There are different ways to complete your practice. You can finish with this reflection:

- *How do I feel now?*
- *Would I do anything differently next time?*
- *What did I enjoy about this experience?*
- *Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?*

Adaptations and Accessibility Adjustments

For Children

This practice can be adapted for families and children to align with their cultural and spiritual beliefs. It can serve as a way to discuss family traditions, ancestors, heroes, and significant animals, objects, or places. Younger children may include beloved storybook characters or songs.

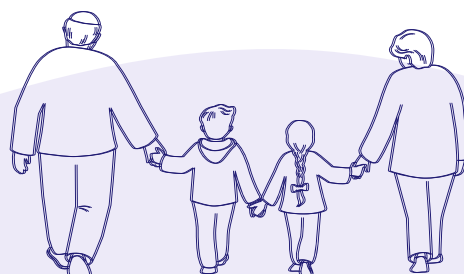
For Communities

This practice can be done in groups, with members selecting and sharing one or two council members. The group can collaborate to create a shared advisory council, reflecting on any missing elements. If resources allow, art materials can be incorporated for deeper engagement.

Alternative Approaches

This activity can be adjusted for those who don't identify as spiritual or for settings where a non-spiritual approach is preferred.

- Rename the practice to something more accessible, such as **Advisory Council** or **Support Circle**.
- Use similar steps with a focus on trusted sources of support and wisdom, including historical figures, cultural heroes, animals, nature, or personal mentors.
- Instead of using spiritual practices to consult the group, incorporate activities such as breathwork, mindfulness, art, movement, or time in nature.



Stories from the Field

Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Día de los Muertos Tribute

icadv.org/diadelosmuertostrIBUTE

Each year, the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) observes Domestic Violence Awareness Month with a Día de los Muertos (Day of The Dead) Tribute in Des Moines, Iowa. Rooted deeply in the Latine cultural practice of Dia de los Muertos – a long-standing tradition practiced by indigenous peoples like the Aztecs and Toltecs – Día de los Muertos views death not as the end of life but a transition to another phase of existence.

At the heart of this Día de los Muertos Tribute is the Ofrenda, an altar collaboratively created with community organizations. Attendees are invited to honor victims of femicide, gender-based violence, and other loved ones in the community by placing photos or mementos on the altar. The Ofrenda features victims' stories and photographs, marigolds, incense, and sugar skulls.



This Tribute event includes interactive activities, live music, and cultural performances, fostering a sense of community support, mutual understanding of identity, and shared knowledge about intimate partner violence. An accompanying resource fair connects attendees with local support organizations, while traditional food and drinks add to the cultural experience. The Tribute serves as both a healing space for those grieving and a platform to raise awareness about gender-based violence, striving to create communities where everyone feels safe and can thrive.

Tending the Practice



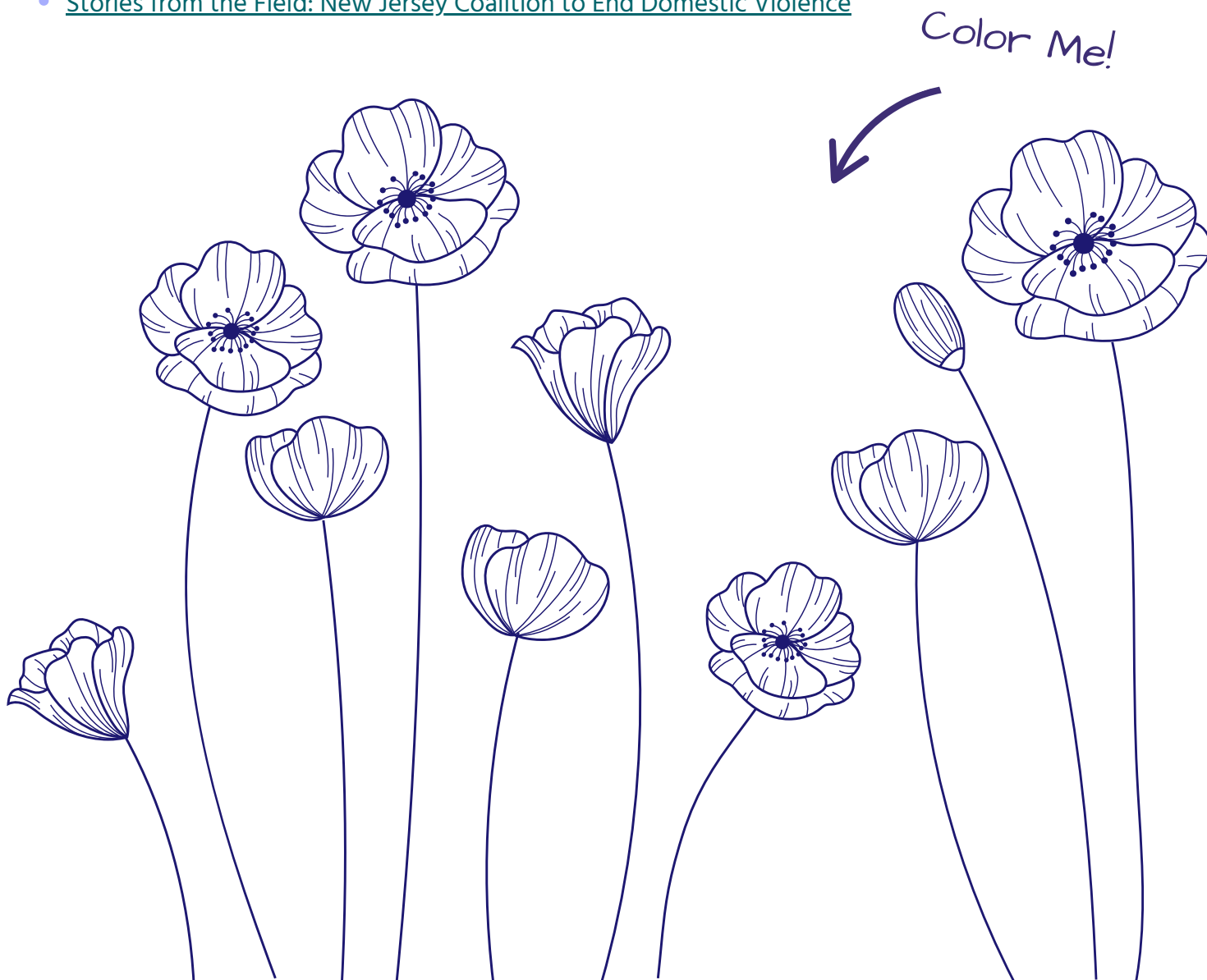
Tending the Practice



Every flower unfurls in its own time, offering colors and shapes that are wholly its own. Together, they weave a landscape of belonging where growth, healing, and connection spread outward like sunlight across the garden.

In this section:

- [Tips for Supporting Practice](#)
- [Building into Routine](#)
- [Stories from the Field - Pouhana 'O Nā Wāhine](#)
- [Organizational Culture and Support](#)
- [Stories from the Field: New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence](#)



Tips for Supporting Practice

Trying something new

Trying something new can spark excitement, fear - maybe even both. It's natural to experience a range of emotions when stepping into the unfamiliar. If you need permission to try something new, grant it to yourself now.

Each of us is an expert on our healing journey. While guidance from trusted individuals can be valuable, ultimately, we are our own compass. As you engage in new practices, approach yourself with kindness, curiosity, and patience. There's no right or wrong way to nurture yourself - only what works best for you.

For Yourself

One of the greatest benefits of these practices is the opportunity to build a deeper connection with yourself. Trusting your body, your emotions, and your intuition. Give yourself permission to explore at your own pace. Moving slowly allows you to notice how a practice feels and determine whether it is a good fit for you.

If a practice feels overwhelming, you can stop and return to it later. Like stretching, you don't want to push yourself to discomfort - just to a place where you can breathe and feel the experience. Every session will be different and that's okay.

You can use the [“Practice Reflection Journal” in Appendix F](#) to record insights before and after practice.

Sharing with Others

Grounding practices can be shared with individuals or groups. For example, [breathwork](#) can be introduced in different ways - through explanation, demonstration, or guided practice. Sharing these practices strengthens both personal and collective well-being.

When Sharing a Practice

- Approach it as an invitation, not an obligation.
- Be curious about others' experiences by asking:

What do you do to feel good? or How do you make time for yourself?

- Offer relatable examples:

Would you like to try something I find helpful for relaxation?

- Extend an open invitation:

Have you tried journaling before? or Do you like to draw?

It's essential that people feel empowered and safe when we're sharing mind-body-spirit (MBS) practices. Before beginning, provide an overview of what to expect and remind them they can modify or stop at any time.

A simple consent check can be:

- *Would you like to try this practice with me?* followed by
- *If you feel uncomfortable during this practice, please let me know. We can stop or adjust as needed.*

Afterward, allow time for reflection. Encourage individuals to notice how they feel and what impact the practice had on them.

You can use the ["Practice Reflection Journal" in Appendix F](#) to record insights before and after practice.

Building into Routine

It's easy to try something a few times and then forget about it. Like any change, integrating a new practice takes time and practice. This section has some tips to help integrate mind-body-spirit practices into daily life.

One way to help establish a routine is to fit it into a daily activity or routine that already exists. Below are some examples to help come up with ideas.

Individual Practices

While brushing your teeth

- [Set an intention](#) for the day.
- Focus on different sensations using the [Five Senses Grounding](#), noticing the flavor of the toothpaste, the feel of the toothbrush, or the sound of the water.

Before sleep

Using one of these practices can help clear your mind and settle into restful sleep. Consider trying [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#), [Belly Breathing](#), or a [Loving Kindness Meditation](#).

Family Practices

During Meals

- Share hopes for the day or affirmations at breakfast.
- Express gratitude before dinner.
- Talk about “roses, thorns, and buds” (highs and lows of the day as well as a hope for tomorrow) at dinner.
- Notice pleasure, joy, and laughter together while eating.
- Practice [Mindful Eating](#) by noticing the food's colors, flavors, and aromas.
- After dinner, try having fun with a freeze-dance, or go for a walk together.

At Bedtime

- [Describe a Peaceful Place](#) out loud.
- [Listen to, sing, or hum](#) a relaxing song.
- [Stretch](#) together before bed.
- Practice [Rainbow Breathing](#).
- Engage in prayer if it aligns with your faith tradition or spirituality.



During Transitions (e.g., school drop-off or pick-up)

- Say affirmations together or back and forth to one another (call and response).
- Try [Box Breathing](#) or bear breath.
- Create a unique handshake or movement for greetings and goodbyes.

Friends, Neighbors, and Community Groups

Friends can check in with each other and make trying out different practices more interesting and fun.

Neighbors may already share some similar routines that they could build on together, such as going out for a walk after dinner.

Community groups (e.g. faith communities, sport clubs, etc.) can integrate practices into their gatherings, creating routines for those already involved with the group.

Teams or Organizations

At Meetings

- Take three collecting breaths at the start.
- Have a standing part of the agenda where staff take turns leading a practice.
- Provide art materials for creative engagement during discussions.

Provide space or other resources

- Create a quiet reflection space that staff can access for breathing, movement, or other practices.
- Offer sensory and crafting materials for staff (and community members) to use in meetings, at their desks, and in common areas.
- Schedule group movement opportunities during times of the day that would be accessible for staff as part of their regular workday.

More team and organizational strategies can be found in the [Organizational Culture and Support](#) and [Building a Retreat or Wellness Series](#) sections.

Pouhana 'O Nā Wāhine

Integrating Mind-Body-Spirit Practices into Staff Meetings

By Dolly Tatofi (Kanaka 'Ōiwi), LCSW, Founding Member & Executive Director, pouhanaonw.org

We begin each meeting with *nō no'ō pono*, a reflective practice rooted in mindfulness and intentionality. Pono can be understood as “living correctly” or “living in a good way.” This sets the tone for our gatherings, encouraging a reflective presence as we approach our work.

To begin *nō no'ō pono*, we may focus on an image, a story, or a song. Staff are invited to take the time to really absorb what is in front of us - we're really taking the time to go deeper. This intentional practice supports us to center ourselves, expand awareness, relate to one another, and inspire our meaningful work in our own way.

This opening ritual helps ground us to be present, connected, and thoughtful for about an hour. We ask ourselves: *How will we carry this reflection forward? How might it connect to our experiences this week?* These reflections are part of an ongoing and evolving process to continue developing our own introspection.

The practice is structured and spontaneous. For example, in one meeting, I shared a photo taken while sitting in a parking lot. That space, now a commercial development, was once the resting place of ancestors - bones unearthed and relocated during redevelopment. The photo served as a powerful reminder of displacement, of how even in death, our ancestors continue to be moved, boxed in, and denied rest. When did they ever get rest?

This moment sparked a deeper discussion about connection to land, ancestry, and the lasting impact of colonization. For many Kānaka 'Ōiwi today, the sense of being “imprisoned” is not just metaphorical—it reflects a history of being confined, both physically and spiritually, in ways that contradict the openness and sacredness of our ancestral lands.

Through *nō no'ō pono*, we aim to create space for conversations that are too often missing from our communities. By encouraging our staff to engage deeply, we hope to form the essence of who we are as a people and nurture a culture of awareness, healing, and collective care.



Organizational Culture and Support

Whether your organization is just beginning or expanding its commitment to healing and wellness, its culture plays a crucial role. Organizations that consistently support and promote wellness make mind-body-spirit (MBS) practices more accessible and meaningful for everyone involved, especially survivors, their families, and staff.

Creating a culture that fosters healing requires leadership to embed these values into the organization's culture. Most grounding practices are free, easy to learn, and widely accessible. Whether they are incorporated depends on the organization's willingness to invest time and energy in shifting norms and expectations.

For example, organizations that proactively provide time and space for breaks and healing practices - without requiring staff to ask - demonstrate a commitment to wellness. Embedding wellness considerations into daily conversations and policy decisions further reinforces this priority. To encourage engagement, organizations can make writing materials, art supplies, pillows and blankets, as well as other resources readily available.

Pause and Reflect

- *How would you describe your organization's relationship to healing and wellness efforts?*
- *How does leadership actively support healing and wellness initiatives?*
- *What are some potential growth areas?*

Community Resources

Many local businesses and organizations may want to support survivors and staff by offering free or discounted services. Here are some ideas for places to potentially reach out:

- Holistic wellness centers (e.g. acupuncture, massage)
- Arts and cultural centers
- Museums
- Gyms
- Community class providers (e.g. dance, yoga)
- Libraries (some offer free passes for community use)
- Sporting venues that offer seasonal tickets

Considerations for Your Physical Space

When incorporating wellness practices into your organization, consider where these practices will take place.

Key areas to consider:

- Accessibility (physical and cultural)
- Lighting (e.g. bright lights, natural light, indirect light)
- Atmosphere and ambience (e.g. spaciousness, sound, temperature, uninterrupted time)
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Materials commonly used in mind-body-spirit practices

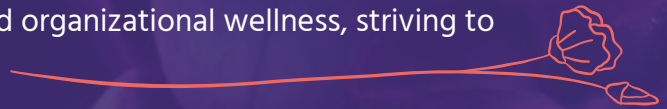
Additional tips on setting up a physical space can be found under [Setting the Space in the Building a Retreat or Wellness Series](#) section.

Stories from the Field

New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence

By Adrienne Gantz, Co-Executive Director, njcedv.org

The New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence (NJCEDV) believes that wellness is the equity work - not an addendum - while affirming that wellness is a way of being. To support this vision, NJCEDV prioritizes advocate and organizational wellness, striving to make it accessible throughout the state.



The Wellness Committee at NJCEDV spearheads many of our wellness efforts and activities. The committee hosts activities, including group outings to pick pumpkins and sunflowers, chair massages, informal coffee break chats, and family-inclusive spaces where individuals and their families can connect. Because not everything resonates with everyone, we intentionally offer a variety to choose from, while remembering to be mindful of the diversity of faith traditions and practices. To better support these wellness initiatives, the committee advocates for wellness to be included in ongoing funding as an essential aspect of our work.

Recognizing the impact of high turnover and burnout among advocates due to the COVID-19 crisis, NJCEDV secured state funding to support advocate wellness. Partnering with NCDVTMH, NJCEDV hosted regional wellness trainings and launched monthly Wellness Wednesday gatherings focused on the eight dimensions of wellness, encouraging organizations to prioritize both individual and organizational well-being.

At the start of NJCEDV meetings, we reaffirm our commitment to social justice and equity by reading our team values and commitments. We listen and learn from one another's experiences to foster a culture of belonging and inclusion. We ensure we live our organizational values through continuous learning and prioritizing the needs of the most impacted communities.

During our external meetings and trainings, we read statements on belonging, anti-oppression, accessibility, and land acknowledgment to honor Indigenous peoples. This reinforces our commitment to disrupting systems of oppression that limit advocates and survivors. When everyone feels seen and knows they belong, we move closer to ending domestic violence and oppression. We deepen connection and build belonging through not only working collaboratively but dedicated meeting time to cultivate belonging. Having leadership that sees this as a priority is vital to creating an organizational culture that sees people wholly. Our previous Executive Director was great at ensuring we had space to do that, and we're proud to carry on that tradition as we work to end domestic violence and oppression.

The Ground Before the Garden



The Ground Before the Garden



Before our garden can grow, we prepare our beds to create the conditions for new life. In the same way, we create spaces for wellness that nurture connection and possibilities for healing that extend beyond our gathering.

In this section:

- [Building a Retreat or Wellness Series](#)
- [Participation Considerations](#)
- [Setting the Space](#)
- [Feedback and Evaluation](#)
- [Stories from the Field: A Single-Day Mindfulness Retreat](#)

Color Me!



Building a Retreat or Wellness Series

DV/SA shelters and organizations can use resources from this toolkit to develop wellness events, series, or retreats. When planning these events, consider key factors such as facilitator selection, who will attend, registration, space setup, scheduling, feedback, and evaluation.

Choosing the Type of Event

When planning a wellness event, consider what format will best meet the goals of your organization and the needs of your community. Whether hosting a single activity, a multi-week series, or a retreat, each format offers unique benefits and considerations.

If your organization is new to hosting wellness events, consider starting with a **single wellness event** to assess potential challenges and identify areas needing additional support. A single wellness event might involve one or more practices from the toolkit. This format can also serve as a foundation for a **wellness series**, offered daily or weekly over several weeks.

Retreats offer extended time for people to focus on their well-being away from daily responsibilities. A **single-day retreat** includes multiple practices and typically requires meal planning. If meals aren't provided, people can bring their own. This format may also be repeated over multiple days without overnight stays.

Single-day or longer retreats can bring up strong or unexpected emotions, memories, or thoughts, which may lead to discomfort. It can be helpful to offer a wellness series in the weeks leading up to the retreat. This gives individuals a chance to become familiar with the practices, understand what to expect, and begin to explore how they might feel during the retreat.

Overnight retreats provide deeper opportunities for rest, connection, and healing. Held in residential settings, they allow people to fully step away from daily life. Meals and snacks should be provided, as well as unstructured time. People may choose quiet, restorative activities like hiking, journaling, reading, or simply resting.

Wellness events and retreats can be structured around themes that reflect the needs, values, or cultural strengths of your community. Consider other practices you could include, such as storytelling, crafts, or songs, alongside practices from this toolkit.

See [Appendix B](#) for sample schedules for a single wellness event or series, a single day retreat, and multiple day retreats.

Event Planning

In-House Staff

- **Designate** a staff member or team as the **event coordinator** to manage scheduling, secure facilitators, and oversee logistics.
- Assign an **event facilitator** to introduce sessions, guide people, and ensure smooth transitions throughout the event
- Have an **advocate** present to support survivors who may experience emotional distress. The advocate should not be the same person as the event facilitator to allow them to step away as needed.

Initial Planning

- Meet as a team to discuss event basics. This might include the type of event, format (in person, virtual, combination, or other), the overall purpose and goals of the event, possible dates and locations, and potentially a theme that represents community values or culture.
- Identify who you might reach out to for support, such as community partners, additional teachers or practitioners, or spirituals or religious leaders.

See [Appendix D](#) for a retreat or event planning checklist to guide your planning process, using the sections that best fit your organization's needs. The [Event Summary](#) can support creating an overview of the event and lay the groundwork for ongoing wellness programming in your organization.

Outside Facilitators and Practitioners

- Consider inviting experts in specialized wellness areas such as yoga, meditation, art therapy, music therapy, or traditional healing practices. If incorporating spiritual or religious elements, partner with trusted local leaders who can offer talks, prayers, or general support.
- When bringing in outside facilitators or practitioners, ensure they:
 - Understand the dynamics of domestic violence.
 - Have experience providing trauma-informed care and avoid victim-blaming language.
 - Know how to protect survivor safety and confidentiality.
- Let attendees know in advance if outside facilitators or practitioners will be present, so they can make informed choices about their privacy and safety. For example, someone may not want to unexpectedly encounter their faith leader at an event without prior notice.

Participation Considerations

Who Should Attend?

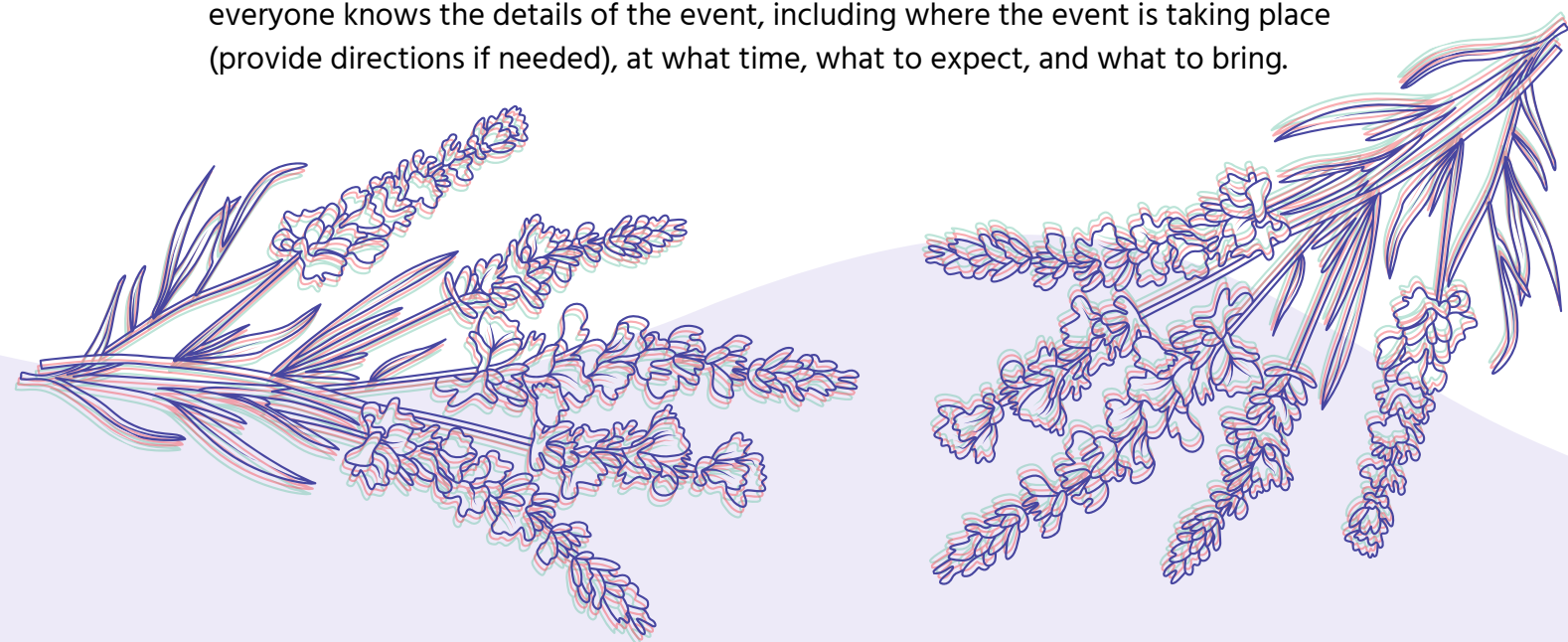
- Invite survivors who are accessing advocacy or support services. Publicly advertising events may compromise safety and confidentiality, so consider direct outreach through community partners.
- If you are hosting a community event, work with your team about safety strategies for sharing the event publicly. For example, keep location details private until after registration to reduce the potential for stalking.

Registration

- Allow people to share their chosen names and pronouns.
- Ask about existing injuries or physical limitations to provide modifications for practice.
- Offer accommodations for disabilities, childcare, translation services, and dietary restrictions.
- Include an open-ended question such as *“What do you need to feel supported and safe during this event?”*

Contact and Communication

- When requesting contact details, prioritize safety. Ask for someone’s preferred method of communication and if they have a safe alternative contact person. Organizations may consider collecting an emergency contact in case of a medical emergency.
- After people register, follow up using their preferred method of communication to ensure everyone knows the details of the event, including where the event is taking place (provide directions if needed), at what time, what to expect, and what to bring.



Confidentiality Protections

- Include a confidentiality agreement as part of registration and review it at the event's start.
- Establish clear guidelines to protect everyone's privacy, and include how people can protect each other's confidentiality.
- Consider photography or only sharing images with explicit permission. People should not feel pressured to have their photos taken or shared.
- Be mindful of digital privacy - ensure location data is removed from any shared images or online materials.

Informed Consent

Participation in the wellness events should be voluntary. Include an informed consent form outlining that:

- People may leave at any time.
- If physical practices are involved, there may be a liability waiver.
- The event is a supportive space, but people should seek additional professional support if needed.

See [Appendix C](#) for sample text for informed consent for practice that includes physical movement.



Setting the Space

Taking time to plan and set up a wellness event or retreat ensures people feel safe and welcome. Organizations should consider the cultural groups within their community and enhance cultural responsiveness and accessibility.

Location Considerations

When selecting a location and setting up the space, consider various factors to promote safety, privacy, and comfort. If using a public space, take precautions to enhance security, such as avoiding event signage to reduce stalking risks, covering windows, keeping doors closed, and having a plan to access additional support if needed.

A decorative border with a green line and blue floral illustrations surrounds the central text box. The floral designs include leaves and small flowers, appearing at the top, bottom, and right sides of the box.

Key considerations include:

- Is the location easily accessible?
- Does it feel safe, private, and welcoming to a range of people?
- Can seating arrangements ensure survivors can choose an option that feels safe?
 - For example, some people may want to face exits without anyone sitting behind them, be able to see the exit, or be near an exit.
- Is there enough comfortable seating that accommodates different body types?
- Are water and other beverages readily available?
- Are bathrooms accessible and gender-inclusive?
- Is there a separate quiet space or sensory room for people who need a break?
- What additional steps can be taken to improve safety, privacy, and inclusivity?

Virtual Programs

- If hosting a virtual wellness event, make sure your technology is as reliable as possible and tested in advance. A dry-run can be helpful to check your internet connection, microphone, camera, and any videos, music, slides, or interactive tools you'll be using. Prepare backup plans in case the lead staff member experiences a tech disruption.
- Require a password for entry.
- Include a brief discussion on technology safety at the start, including how to quickly exit the meeting if needed.
- Designate a staff member as tech support, as well as another staff member for emotional support, and have different ways they can be contacted in case support is needed.
- Establish a stress signal (e.g. password) for emergencies, along with a response plan (e.g., the host ends the meeting and restarts it after five minutes, the host sends out a new link, or the host removes the person sending the stress signal for safety).

For more safety and privacy tips, visit the National Network to End Domestic Violence's [Safety Net Project](#), especially:

- [Communicating with Survivors Using Video: Best Practices](#)
- [Online Support Groups for Survivors](#)

Land Acknowledgment

If your organization doesn't have an established land acknowledgment, take some time to research. Visit [Native Land Digital](#), where you can learn about the Indigenous peoples historically and currently connected to your location. Engage with local tribal organizations to learn about their history, strengths, and contributions. For guidance, see [The Native Governance Center's Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment](#).

Group Confidentiality

Before you start, review confidentiality expectations established during registration. Address questions and discuss any privacy concerns.

Sample questions to guide this discussion:

- Do you have any questions or concerns about confidentiality?
- What would help you feel that your privacy is protected?

Group Agreements

Group agreements help foster a respectful, inclusive, and safe space for participation. Organizations may use pre-established agreements or create them collaboratively. Encourage people to contribute agreements that enhance their comfort. Refer to the National Equity Center's guide for [Developing Community Agreements](#) for more details.

Helpful discussion questions:

- What supports effective communication?
- What gets in the way of communication?
- What would make you feel comfortable participating and sharing today?
- What might prevent you from feeling comfortable participating and sharing today?

Trauma-Informed Practice

Creating a trauma-informed space means fostering safety, choice, and empowerment. Everyone should feel in control of their engagement.

Key guidelines include:

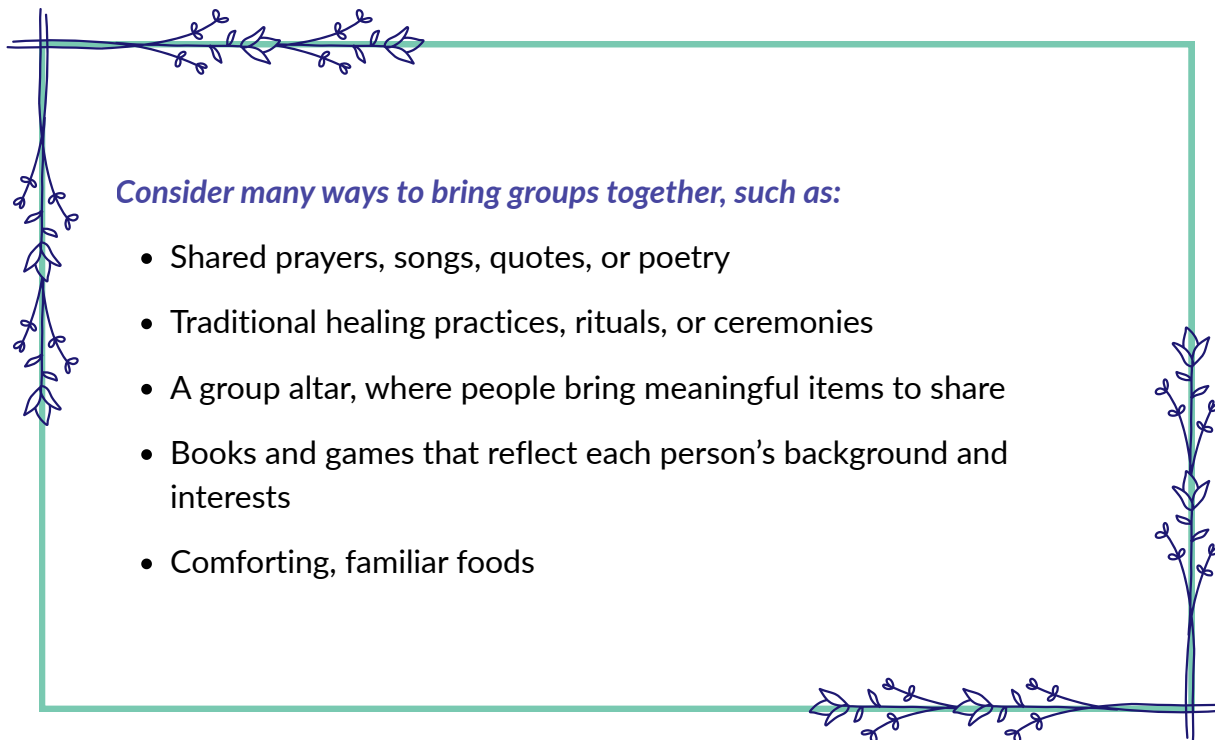
- Some practices may be comforting for some but uncomfortable for others. You are the expert on your body and experiences - rest, take breaks, step away, or modify activities as needed.
- Emotions may come up through the practice, sometimes in waves that rise and fall. Seek emotional support as needed.
- Adjust your participation level based on your needs. You can choose if you need more rest or if you want to be more active during any practices.
- Healing is a personal process. Honor where you are today.
- Ask: *"What do you need to be fully supported in your wholeness and freedom today?"*

Handouts and Other Materials

To support ongoing practice, provide printed or digital copies of activities from this toolkit. Ensure necessary materials (e.g., journals and writing supplies) are available. Provide sensory tools, fidgets, and creative materials (e.g., coloring pages and pencils). For longer retreats, consider offering self-help books, spiritual texts, or cultural resources for people.

Cultural Considerations

Understanding cultural and spiritual needs enhances engagement and builds connection.

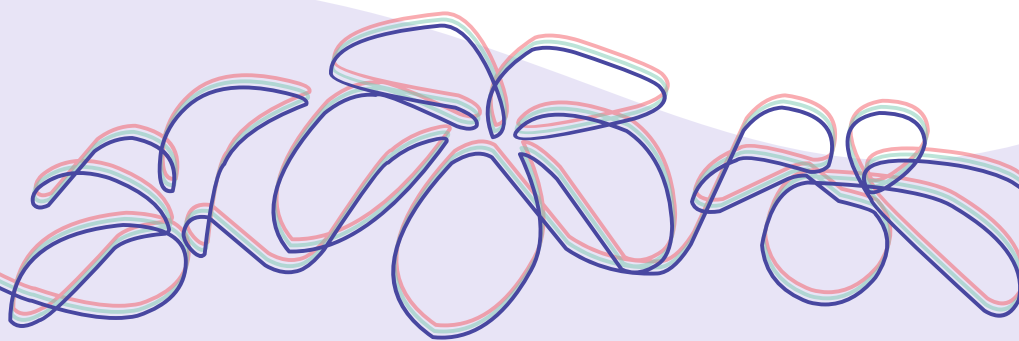


Consider many ways to bring groups together, such as:

- Shared prayers, songs, quotes, or poetry
- Traditional healing practices, rituals, or ceremonies
- A group altar, where people bring meaningful items to share
- Books and games that reflect each person's background and interests
- Comforting, familiar foods

Food

For events requiring meals, consider catering, local restaurants, or grocery stores. Some retreat centers include meals in rental packages. If funding restrictions apply to food purchases, seek local donations or alternative grants. Accommodate dietary restrictions disclosed during registration.



Feedback and Evaluation

Gathering feedback helps improve future events, meet funder requirements, and support grant applications. Participation in evaluation should be optional and voluntary, using written surveys, closing reflections, or listening sessions.



Sample Evaluation Questions:

- I felt like the retreat was confidential.
- I felt safe during the retreat.
- The facilitator effectively presented information on:
- I felt more connected to others through this program.
- I would like to attend more events like this one.
- My favorite part of this event was:
- I would like to learn more about:
- Suggestions for improving the experience.

To encourage evaluation responses, consider incentives like raffles where each evaluation submission earns an entry. Facilitators should review responses to assess outcomes and identify areas for improvement. Consider meeting after the event to review the evaluations and discuss:

- 1 What went well?
- 2 What was challenging?
- 3 What would we do differently next time?

Additional evaluation metrics include attendance numbers, program frequency, and lessons learned to enhance future events.



Stories from the Field

A Single-Day Mindfulness Retreat

In a remote Alaska town, survivors and advocates came together for a single-day Mindfulness Retreat designed to promote healing, connection, and emotional well-being. The retreat was created and led by Amanda Lyon, LCSW, based on her experience in the DV/SA field, as well as her expertise in trauma-informed yoga and mindfulness techniques. Additional teaching support, emotional guidance, and yoga props were generously donated by [Kara Troglin](#), a local yoga instructor with training in advocacy and trauma-informed yoga.



The retreat was made possible through partnerships with local mental health providers and the DV/SA program, which referred people to the event. Advocates volunteered to review confidentiality agreements and registration procedures to ensure a safe and secure space. The Community Library contributed by donating its community room for the day and upholding privacy measures to maintain confidentiality.

“Cultivating a sense of safety to have positive interactions is key when healing from trauma. Your body can feel unsafe, and it is hard to find spaces that feel safe.” - Kara Troglin

“Being in a room with people who understood what it means to be a survivor was therapeutic. I've never had that type of experience in a yoga class, where it is just understood without talking about your trauma.” - Participant

The retreat was built around three core goals:

- Creating a confidential and supportive space for survivors and advocates.
- Ensuring a sense of safety and well-being throughout the experience.
- Teaching trauma-informed mindfulness techniques to promote positive coping, personal empowerment, connection, emotional regulation, and reduced isolation.

The day's activities included:

- A review of confidentiality and informed consent
- Setting group agreements
- Education on mindfulness and trauma-informed practice
- Gentle yoga, meditation, relaxation, QiGong
- Self-Compassion exercises
- Group reflection

Everyone received a booklet summarizing the retreat's teachings, along with guides for home practice and reflection. Attendees were also provided with a homemade lunch, snacks, tea, and gift bags filled with sensory and self-care items. Feedback highlighted the retreat's positive impact. Many expressed a desire for more opportunities to learn, practice, and connect in similar settings.

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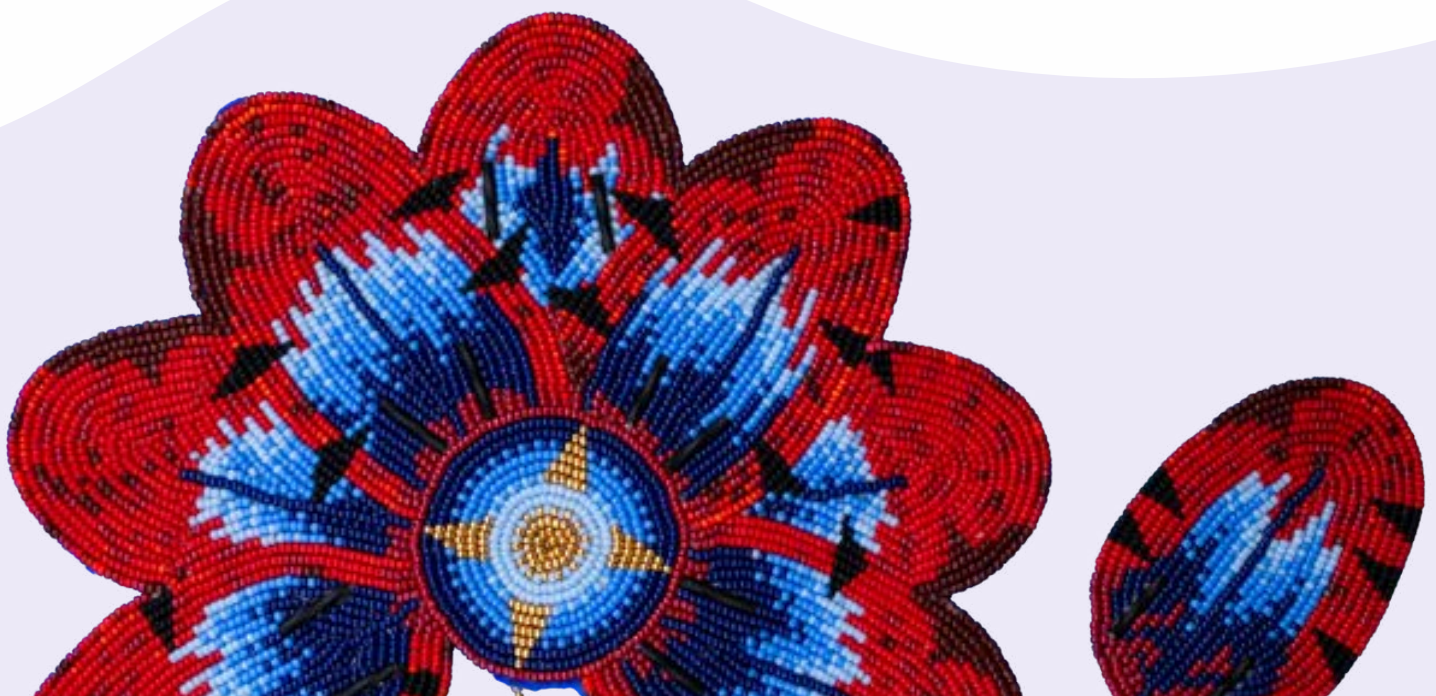
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Appendix A: Bodily Sensations

This list doesn't include every possible bodily sensation, but it serves as a helpful starting point for describing your internal experiences. Using it can enhance your awareness when you ask yourself: "How does my body feel?" or "How does this specific part of my body feel?"



Achey	Floaty	Restless
Airy	Flowing	Rigid
Alive	Fluttery	Sensitive
Antsy	Foggy	Settled
Bloated	Frozen	Shaky
Bouncy	Full	Sharp
Breathless	Fuzzy	Slow
Bright	Gentle	Small
Bruised	Giddy	Sore
Bubbly	Groggy	Spacey
Burning	Grounded	Sparkly
Buzzing	Hard	Squishy
Calm	Heavy	Stiff
Clammy	Hollow	Still
Clear	Hot	Stimulated
Cloudy	Icy	Strained
Coiled	Invigorated	Stuck
Cold	Itchy	Swollen
Compressed	Jittery	Tender
Constricted	Jumpy	Tense
Cramped	Light	Throbbing
Delicate	Loose	Tingly
Disconnected	Nauseous	Tight
Drained	Numb	Tingling
Dull	Pain	Tough
Empty	Parched	Unsteady
Energetic	Prickly	Vacant
Enlivened	Pulsing	Vibrant
Expansive	Quiet	Vibrating
Feathery	Radiant	Warm
Fidgety	Raw	Weak
Feverish	Refreshed	Weighed down
Flexible	Relaxed	Weightless



Appendix B: Sample Event and Retreat Schedules

Single Wellness Event Example

Step 1: Welcome

15- 30 minutes

Areas you may consider integrating:

- Introductions
- [Participation Considerations](#)
 - Confidentiality
 - Informed Consent
- [Setting the Space](#)
 - Land Acknowledgment
 - Group Confidentiality
 - Group Agreements
 - Trauma-Informed Practice
 - Handouts and Materials
 - Cultural Considerations
- Community Sacred Space or [Making an Altar](#)

Step 3: Reflection Circle

15-30 minutes

People share reflections on the practice:

- How do I feel now?
- Would I do anything differently next time?
- What did I enjoy about this experience?
- Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?

Step 4: Closing

5 - 10 minutes

- Thank everyone for attending
- Share additional resources and next steps, if applicable
- [Feedback and Evaluation](#)

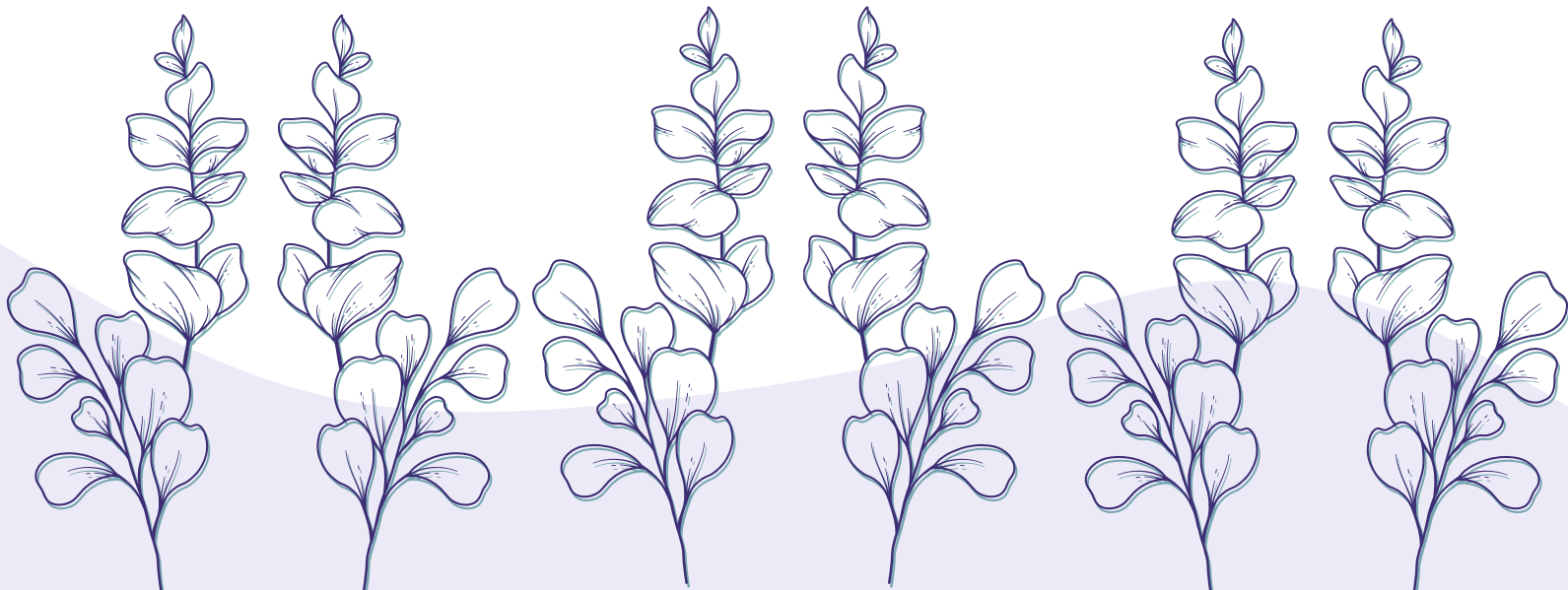
Step 2: Wellness Practice

30 – 60 minutes

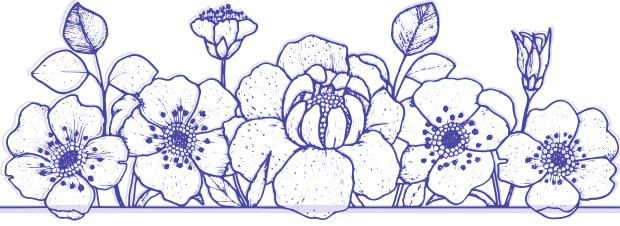
Choose one or more practices from the toolkit depending on the length of time desired

Sample Combinations of Practices by Theme

- **Outdoor Connection:** Take a group of people to a park and practice the [Grounding Tree Visualization](#), get some [Exposure to Natural Light](#), and engage in [Nature Journaling](#).
- **Rest and Relaxation:** Discuss the benefits of rest with [Napping](#) and [Daydreaming](#), then guide the group through [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#).
- **Emotional Awareness:** Practice the [Butterfly Hug](#) together, provide independent journaling time for [Building Emotional Awareness](#), and finish with [Mindfulness Drawing](#).
- **Gratitude:** Practice [Noticing Joy](#) and [Gratitude Journaling](#), share with each other, and build on each other's answers.
- **Mindfulness:** Talk about [Mindful Eating](#), try the [5 Senses Grounding Practice](#), and close with a practice from [Breathwork](#).



Single Day Retreat Example: Morning



Welcome: 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Areas you may consider integrating:

- Introductions
- Bringing the group together through ceremony, songs, poems, cultural practice, or icebreaker
- [Participation Considerations](#)
 - Confidentiality
 - Informed Consent
- [Setting the Space](#)
 - Land Acknowledgment
 - Group Confidentiality
 - Group Agreements
 - Trauma-Informed Practice
 - Handouts and Materials
 - Cultural Considerations
- Community Sacred Space or [Making an Altar](#)



Opening Practice: 11:00- 11:15 a.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Affirmation Breathing](#)
- [Drawing a Safe Space](#)
- [Butterfly Hug](#)
- [Belly Breathing](#)
- [Box Breathing](#)
- [Rainbow Breathing](#)
- [Sound and Vibration](#)
- [5 Senses Grounding](#)

Movement: 11:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Stretching](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Exploring Body Rhythms - Rock and Shake](#)
- Take a walk
- Movement practice with a qualified instructor such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Hula, Zumba, or others.

Lunch: 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Note: If lunch is not provided, a longer lunch break may be needed

Single Day Retreat Example: Afternoon



Creative and Reflective Space: 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Drawing a Safe Place](#)
- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Noticing Joy](#)
- [Gratitude Journaling](#)
- [Mindfulness Drawing](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [Zentangle Method](#)
- [Nature Journaling](#)
- [Self Compassion Break](#)
- [How Would You Treat a Friend?](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Building Emotional Awareness](#)
- [Identifying and Using My Strengths](#)
- [Connecting with My Values](#)
- [Spiritual Advisory Council](#)

Break: 2:30 - 2:45 p.m.

Beverages and snacks provided



Relaxation or Meditation: 2:45 - 3:00 p.m

One practice or combine two:

- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Napping](#)

Reflection Circle: 3:00 - 3:50 p.m.

Group circle discussion:

- How do I feel now?
- Would I do anything differently next time?
- What did I enjoy about this experience?
- Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?

Closing: 3:50- 4:00 p.m.

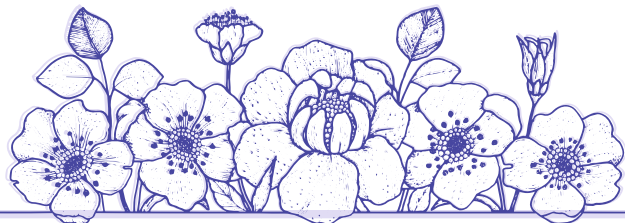
- Thank everyone for attending
- Share additional resources and next steps, if applicable
- Dismantle community altar, if created
- [Feedback and Evaluation](#)

Overnight Retreat Example:

Day 1 of 3: Afternoon

Arrival: 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Beverages and snacks provided



Welcome: 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Areas you may consider integrating:

- Introductions
- Bringing the group together through ceremony, songs, poems, cultural practice, or icebreaker
- Participation Considerations
 - Confidentiality
 - Informed Consent
- Setting the Space
 - Land Acknowledgment
 - Group Confidentiality
 - Group Agreements
 - Trauma-Informed Practice
 - Handouts and Materials
 - Cultural Considerations
- Community Sacred Space or Making an Altar

Opening Practice: 4:00 - 4:30 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- Setting Intentions
- Affirmation Breathing
- Drawing a Safe Space
- Butterfly Hug
- Belly Breathing
- Box Breathing
- Rainbow Breathing
- Sound and Vibration
- 5 Senses Grounding

Movement: 4:30 - 5:00 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- Stretching
- Dance
- Exploring Body Rhythms - Rock and Shake
- Take a walk
- Movement practice with a qualified instructor such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Hula, Zumba, or others.



Overnight Retreat Example:

Day 1 of 3: Evening



Relaxation or Meditation:

5:00 - 5:30 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Napping](#)

Break and Dinner: 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.



Creative and Reflective Space:

7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Drawing a Safe Place](#)
- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Noticing Joy](#)
- [Gratitude Journaling](#)
- [Mindfulness Drawing](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [Zentangle Method](#)
- [Nature Journaling](#)
- [Self Compassion Break](#)
- [How Would You Treat a Friend?](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Building Emotional Awareness](#)
- [Identifying and Using My Strengths](#)
- [Connecting with My Values](#)
- [Spiritual Advisory Council](#)
- This can also be unstructured creative and reflective time. Provide books, drawing, coloring, or journaling supplies; or other creative materials, games, etc.

Rest and Relaxation: 8:00 p.m.

Overnight Retreat Example:

Day 2 of 3: Morning

Meditative Practice: 8:00 - 8:30 a.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)

Morning practice can be optional if people need additional rest.

Breakfast: 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.

Morning Check In: 9:30 - 10:00 a.m.

Areas you may consider integrating:

- Review Group Agreements
- Bring the group together through ceremony, songs, poems, cultural practice, or icebreakers
- Circle Discussion: How am I feeling after yesterday's practices?

Opening Practice: 10:00 - 10:30 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Affirmation Breathing](#)
- [Drawing a Safe Space](#)
- [Butterfly Hug](#)
- [Belly Breathing](#)
- [Box Breathing](#)
- [Rainbow Breathing](#)
- [Sound and Vibration](#)
- [5 Senses Grounding](#)

Break: 10:30 - 10:45 a.m.

Beverages and snacks provided

Movement: 10:45 - 11:45 a.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Stretching](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Exploring Body Rhythms - Rock and Shake](#)
- Take a walk
- Movement practice with a qualified instructor such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Hula, Zumba, or others.

Relaxation or Meditation: 11:45 - 12:15 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Napping](#)

Lunch: 12:15 - 1:15 p.m.

Overnight Retreat Example:

Day 2 of 3: Afternoon



Creative and Reflective Space:

1:30 - 2:00 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Drawing a Safe Place](#)
- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Noticing Joy](#)
- [Gratitude Journaling](#)
- [Mindfulness Drawing](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [Zentangle Method](#)
- [Nature Journaling](#)
- [Self Compassion Break](#)
- [How Would You Treat a Friend?](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Building Emotional Awareness](#)
- [Identifying and Using My Strengths](#)
- [Connecting with My Values](#)
- [Spiritual Advisory Council](#)
- This can also be unstructured creative and reflective time. Provide books, drawing, coloring, or journaling supplies; or other creative materials, games, etc.



Break and Personal Time:

2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Beverages and snacks provided

Movement: 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Stretching](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Exploring Body Rhythms - Rock and Shake](#)
- Take a walk
- Movement practice with a qualified instructor such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Hula, Zumba, or others.

Overnight Retreat Example:

Day 2 of 3: Evening



Relaxation or Meditation: 5:00 - 5:30 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Napping](#)

Break and Dinner: 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.



Creative and Reflective Space: 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Drawing a Safe Place](#)
- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Noticing Joy](#)
- [Gratitude Journaling](#)
- [Mindfulness Drawing](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [Zentangle Method](#)
- [Nature Journaling](#)
- [Self Compassion Break](#)
- [How Would You Treat a Friend?](#)
- [Daydreaming](#)
- [Building Emotional Awareness](#)
- [Identifying and Using My Strengths](#)
- [Connecting with My Values](#)
- [Spiritual Advisory Council](#)
- This can also be unstructured creative and reflective time. Provide books, drawing, coloring, or journaling supplies; or other creative materials, games, etc.

Rest and Relaxation: 8:00 p.m.

Overnight Retreat Example:

Day 3 of 3: Morning

Meditative Practice: 8:00 - 8:30 a.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan](#)
- [Grounding Tree Visualization](#)
- [Self-Compassion Break](#)
- [Loving Kindness Meditation](#)
- [Inner Light Visualization](#)

Morning practice can be optional if people need additional rest.

Opening Practice: 10:00 - 10:15 p.m.

One practice or combine two:

- [Setting Intentions](#)
- [Affirmation Breathing](#)
- [Drawing a Safe Space](#)
- [Butterfly Hug](#)
- [Belly Breathing](#)
- [Box Breathing](#)
- [Rainbow Breathing](#)
- [Sound and Vibration](#)
- [5 Senses Grounding](#)

Breakfast: 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.

Morning Check In: 9:30 - 10:00 a.m.

Areas you may consider integrating:

- Bringing the group together through ceremony, songs, poems, cultural practice, or icebreakers
- Circle Discussion:
 - How am I feeling after yesterday's practices?
 - What did I like about this experience?

Break: 10:15 - 11:15 a.m.

Break and time for people to pack belongings
Beverages and snacks provided

Closing Circle: 11:15 - 11:45 a.m.

Group circle discussion:

- How do I feel now?
- Would I do anything differently next time?
- What did I enjoy about this experience?
- Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?

Closing: 11:45 - 12:00 p.m.

- Thank everyone for attending
- Share additional resources and next steps, if applicable
- Dismantle community altar, if created
- [Feedback and Evaluation](#)



Appendix C: Informed Consent Sample Text

This sample text can be used for informed consent in wellness retreats, events, or series that include physical movement: This sample text can be used for informed consent in wellness retreats, events, or series that include physical movement:

Participation and Safety

- Attending this (retreat, event, series, etc.) is entirely your choice. You may leave at any time.
- While the activities are generally safe, there's always a small risk of injury.
- Listen to your body - do not continue any movement that causes pain or feels uncomfortable.
- You are encouraged to take breaks, rest, or request alternative options at any time.

Trauma-Informed Practice

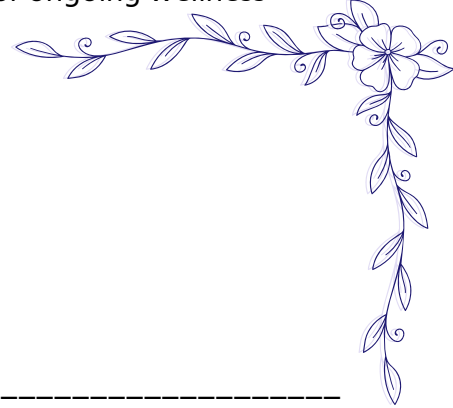
- Instructors will not adjust your position or provide physical touch during movement sessions unless they are qualified to do so and you specifically request assistance.
- Engaging in these practices may bring up unexpected or undesired emotions, sensations, or memories. If you would like support at any time, please ask - we have someone available to assist you.
- We encourage you to discuss any emotions or concerns that arise with your regular counselor or advocate.

Personal Responsibility and Liability

- Instruction is provided with the understanding that people are responsible for their well-being and should seek assistance if experiencing physical, mental, or emotional challenges.
- Your safety is a priority. If you're struggling, please ask for help.
- By checking 'yes' below, you acknowledge that you release (organization name, instructor name, etc.) from any liabilities for injuries that may occur as a result of participating in this event.

Appendix D: Retreat or Event Planning Checklist

Use the checklist below to guide your planning process for wellness events and retreats based on the information provided above. Not all sections may apply - select the ones that best fit your organization's needs. Use the [Event Summary](#) to create an overview and lay the groundwork for ongoing wellness programming in your organization.



What type of event do we create?

- Single Wellness Event
- Wellness Series
- Single-Day Retreat
- Multiple Day Retreat
- Overnight Retreat

Format:

- Virtual
- In Person
- Combination
- Other: _____

Initial Planning:

- Choose event date(s) & duration
- Define Purpose and Goals
- Choose theme(s) reflecting community values or culture (optional)

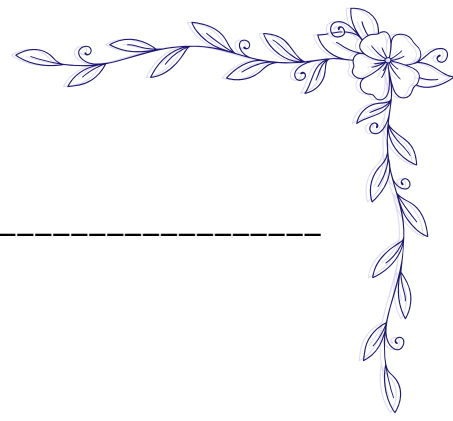
Notes:

Who Will Make the Event Happen?

Event coordinator or team:
Tech support (for virtual programs):
Event Facilitator:
Advocate for emotional support:
Community partner, additional teacher or practitioner, or spiritual or religious leader:
Community partner, additional teacher or practitioner, or spiritual or religious leader:



Who Will Participate?



- Survivors who are known to the organization
- Survivors who are referred by community partners: _____
- Community
- Other

Notes:

Registration

- Name
- Disability accommodations
- Translation or interpretation services
- Dietary needs, restrictions, allergies
- Physical limitations or injury that may require practice modification
- Preferred method of contact; safe contact
- Emergency contact (for medical emergency)
- Confidentiality agreement
- Follow-up communication with event details (location, time, what to bring, what to expect)
- Informed consent form with information about participation, emotional responses, and liability for physical practice

Notes:

Virtual Program Considerations (if applicable)



- Tech is tested (platform, camera, mic, internet, media files)
- Tech support is available during the event
- Orientation or tech walkthrough is provided at the start
- Platform is secure (e.g., password protected)
- Exit strategy in place for emergencies(e.g., "stress signal" and restart)
- Digital safety (e.g., location data removed from photos) discussed

Notes:

Setting the Space: Physical Location Considerations

- Accessible and private space
- Safety measures in place (e.g., covered windows, limited signage)
- Supportive seating arrangements (e.g., door is visible)
- Comfortable seating for different body types
- Quiet space available for breaks or emotional support
- Gender-neutral, accessible restrooms

Notes:

Food and Beverages

- Meals/snacks provided or BYO plan shared
- Dietary restrictions accommodated

Notes:



Handouts and Materials



- Printed or digital copies of practices and other materials
- Creative materials and supplies (journals, coloring, etc.)
- Fidgets and sensory items
- Reflective reading materials and tools (books, card decks, etc.)

Notes:

Setting the Space: Bringing People Together

How will we integrate the following areas:

Land Acknowledgment:

Group Agreements:

Group Confidentiality:

Trauma-Informed Practice:

Cultural Considerations:

Evaluation Process

- Survey
- Reflection Circle
- Other: _____

Notes:



Event Summary

After completing the [Retreat or Event Planning Checklist](#), use this form to document your event and support future wellness programming.

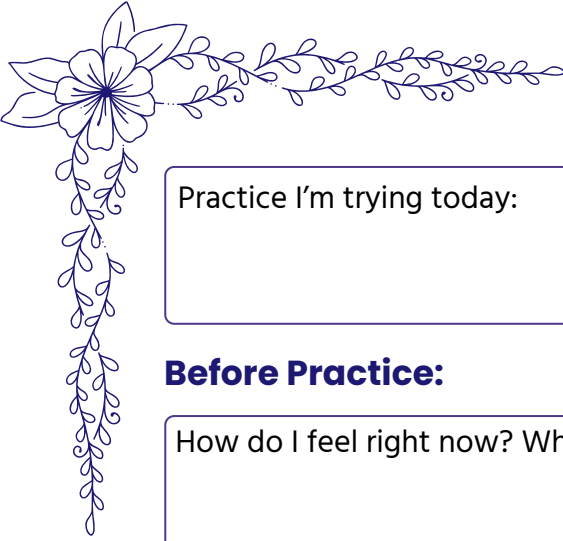
Event Name:
Date/Time:
Location/Address:
Description:
Team Members and Roles:
Community Partners, Collaborators, and Roles
Themes and Practices:
Evaluation Notes:



Appendix E: Additional Resources

- [The Well-Being Model for Young Black Adults by Crystal L. Brandow, PhD, et al.](#)
- [Inspiring Spiritual Wellbeing - Toolkit Resources by Cool Culture](#)
- [Your Care Package by Dear Black Women](#)
- [The Tree of Contemplative Practices by Maia Duerr](#)
- [Health and Wellness Daily Organizer by First Nations Health Authority](#)
- [Wellness Guide by National Organization of Asians & Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence \(NAPIESV\)](#)
- [Manifesting Your Wellness Journey by National Training & Technical Assistance Center for Child, Youth, & Family Mental Health \(NTTAC\)](#)
- [Self-Compassion Practices by Kristin Neff, PhD](#)
- [Just Breathe, A Guide to Wellness by Ohio Domestic Violence Network](#)
- [Emotional Well-Being by Sesame Workshop](#)
- [The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook by Anneliese Singh, PhD, LPC](#)

Appendix F: Practice Reflection Journal



Practice I'm trying today:

Before Practice:

How do I feel right now? What thoughts, feelings, and sensations are coming up for me?

What do I need right now - physically, emotionally, or spiritually?

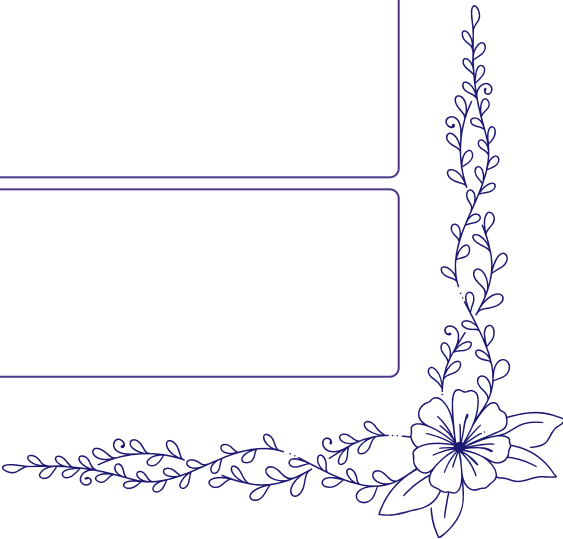
After Practice:

How do I feel now?

What did I enjoy about this experience?

Would I do anything differently next time?


Is there someone I'd like to share this practice with?



Appendix G: Cultivating Seeds of Healing Activity

By Kim Zahne (Tewa|Hopi), Training and Technical Assistance Specialist, National Women's Indigenous Resource Center, niwrc.org

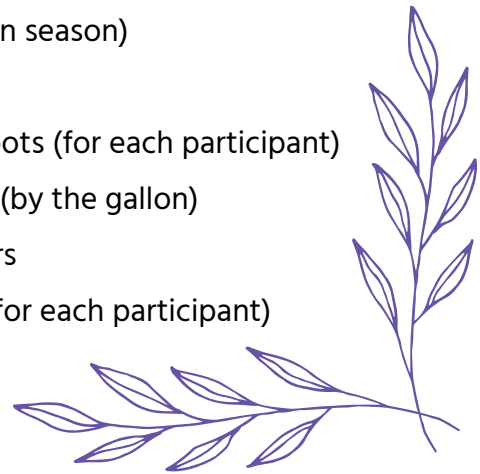
Native nations and healers have a grounded history in looking to land and our plant relatives for answers and strategies in healing, growing, and strengthening communities. One truth and act we have understood is that healing is a process that requires community, humility, and reciprocity. This braid of mending seeks to root stewardship in not just the environment, but also in relationships. As people and communities strive to strengthen their ties to one another, we look to our environment to teach on how connection fortifies.



This activity is designed to see the importance of relationships and the strength of life all around us. Please feel free to change this activity to fit the needs of your community and teachings.

Items and Elements needed:

- Seeds (all types, preferably those in season)
- Soil
- Seed pots (for each participant)
- Water (by the gallon)
- Markers
- Cups (for each participant)

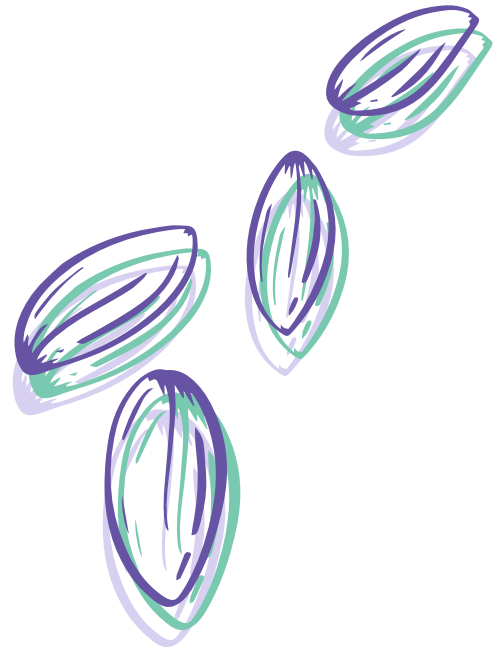


Things to keep in mind:

- Reserve space big enough for participants to share, discuss, and engage with one another, preferably outside.
- Conversation may include topics that can activate trauma. Have an advocate on stand-by to support participants, if needed.
- Remind participants they do not have to share but it's important to respect others and that active listening is a way of being present for others in difficult situations.
- Prayer is an important part of this activity and it is okay to feel uncomfortable, unsteady, or unsure. We are all here to learn from and encourage one another.
- Better to arrange chairs in a circle for discussion and sharing.

Step one:

- **Reading prompt:** Seeds are a powerful teacher. They carry the memories of our relationships, between human and plant life. They record our hardships and they are the family members who teach us discipline, compassion, humility, and responsibility.
- **Directions:** Tell the participants to pick a seed they would like to plant. Tell them to thank the plants (internally) for going on this journey with you.

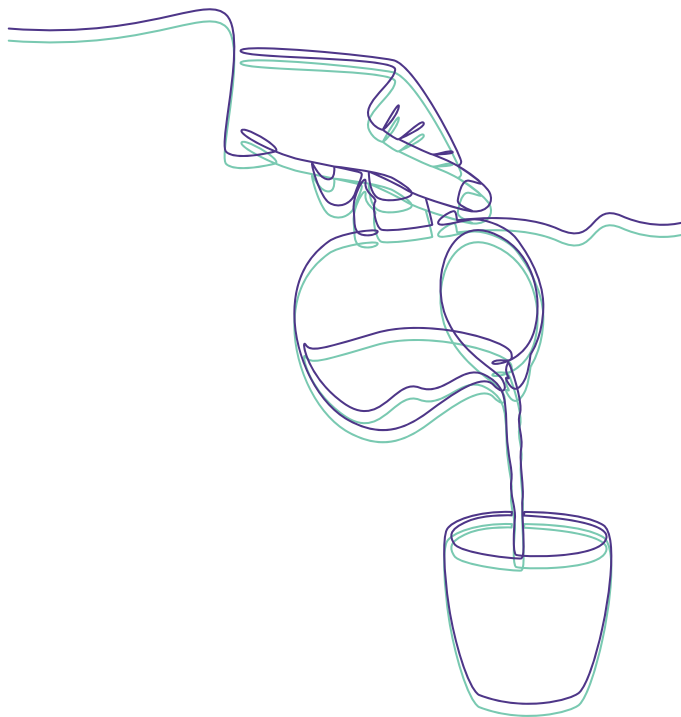


Step two:

- **Reading Prompt:** All living things depend on land. Land is our first mother and her teachings remind us that growth starts with the anchoring of roots. A foundation is where we learn the heart of our being including our histories.
- **Directions:** Tell the audience that they will now be planting their seeds. Direct them to fill their seed pots halfway with soil. As they plant, tell them to think of a person that needs healing. It can be a family member, a friend, a pet, etc. Tell them as they plant to think of all the strength that lies in the soil. Tell them to think of all the power of growth, change, and safety that land gives that seed. As they cover the seed with soil, tell them to channel all that energy and prayer from soil to seed.

Step three:

- **Reading prompt:** Water is prayer. Water is a life source. Water is ancestral strength.
- **Directions:** Pass everyone a cup of water, filled about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way. Tell them to now close their eyes to pray and ask for strength from their water. Tell them to think of all the positive events and happiness they brought in life and to channel those wonderful thoughts, sights, smells, songs, and beauty into the water they hold in their hand. Tell them to think about the strength of water itself. Tell them to imagine water, how it sounds, how it flows, how rain sweeps across land. Tell them to imagine the scent of rain on dirt. Tell them to channel all these strengths into their cup of water. Ask everyone to sit with their plant and water.



Step four:

- **Reading prompt:** Water is interconnection. Water connects people, animals, insects, plants, and land. Water strengthens, nourishes, and sustains for the future.
- **Directions:** Inform the audience if they will be adding the water and their prayers to their seeds and soil. But before they add, tell them only to add half of the water in their cup, and to say a prayer for the seeds to be strong and grow happy.

Step five:

- **Reading prompt:** We do not heal alone. We do not grow alone. We heal, grow, and progress together.
- **Directions:** Now ask each participant to drink a mouthful of the water that is left in their cup. Remind them that long ago, we did live in villages together. That our families in our households extended beyond just our nuclear families. But now for us to care for others, we must also remember to care for ourselves and each other. Remind us that our prayers also impact all people, life, and entities around us. Now ask each participant to add their remaining water to as many seed pots as they can, starting with the person on their right.



Step six:

- **Reading prompt:** Reciprocity is not just a practice or statement but a demonstration of a way of life that roots our existence and relations to each other, land, and all life. As we cultivate our seeds' development and strength, we are also encouraging a harmonious future. As we nurture, protect, and nourish our plants, the seeds also teach us how to be present and encourage each other.
- **Directions:** Encourage participants to show up for one another. Exchange information, even if all we can do is babysit one another's plants or be an ear for listening. Encourage gardening or future group activities to nourish healing environments.

