FAMILY DRAWING AND WRITING: GINGERBREAD PERSON, QUALITIES

From a simple drawing exercise that Iverson learned to do with young children, she adapted this activity to include writing and engage participants from youth to elders.

Materials: Drawing paper, colored markers, pens or pencils, copy of J. Ruth Gendler’s The Book of Qualities.

Activity: Invite one person to be the ‘recorder’ for the group. Compile two lists--one of ‘Feelings We Don’t Like to Have” and one of “Feelings We Like to Have.” Give each participant a sheet of blank paper and instruct them to draw the outline of a ‘gingerbread person’ with two blank boxes on each side (see figure 27.1).

![Figure 27.1 Outline of Gingerbread Person with Blank Boxes](image)

Label each of the two boxes on the right with feelings from the list of “Feelings We Like to Have” and the two boxes on the left with two from the list of “Feelings We Don’t Like to Have.” Choose a color to represent each feeling and color the box to correspond with its label. Each participant chooses the four feelings they will use (see figure 27.2).
Starting with the first box, invite each person to color into the gingerbread outline the places he or she experiences that feeling in their body. (“When I’m happy, my heart feels happy, I have a big smile, my hair feels bright and shiny, I want to reach out to everyone, and I feel like skipping!”; see figure 27.3)
Color into the outline the next feeling: ("When I’m loving, I see love and I can show love through my eyes. I smile, and my heart feels full of love. I feel it in my arms—I just want to hug everyone. And I feel good all the way down my legs right to the tips of my toes.”; see figure 27.4).

Figure 27.4 Loving Gingerbread Person

Use the color in the third box to draw in that feeling. ("When I’m sad I have tears running down my face, and I can’t smile. My heart feels sad, and I feel like have a big weight in my stomach. I feel really heavy—like I have big bricks in my feet.”; see figure 27.4).

Figure 27.4 Sad Gingerbread Person
Finish the drawing with the fourth box. (“My head feels like it’s going to explode when I’m really mad. My ears close up and I can’t hear anything good from anybody. I don’t see anything nice and I don’t say anything nice. My hands clench up into fists. My heart squeezes tight and mean. My stomach feels like it’s burning on fire. My feet feel like they want to kick the whole world.”; see figure 27.5).

After everyone has completed drawing in all four feelings, invite the group members to share their drawings and talk about them. Depending on the size of the group and the age and attention span of participants, decide whether to invite each person to choose just one feeling to share or to encourage sharing of all four feelings in each drawing. If time allows, after everyone has shared, reflect on color choices that people have used for feelings (one person may use black for ‘mad’ while another uses red) and where and how we each experience feelings in our bodies, acknowledging both similarities and differences as demonstrated in this activity.

Ruth Gendler’s The Book of Qualities, in which Gendler personifies 74 qualities, such as resignation, joy, and pleasure, inspires the writing component to this activity. Invite up to three group members to select at random a quality from the book and read it aloud. Starting with the first feeling in this or her gingerbread outline, each participant writes for three minutes, timed by the counselor, modeling Gendler’s style. Continue with the second, third and fourth feelings. Complete this activity with the invitation for participants to read what they’ve written. The counselor participates and shares in this activity as a group member.

Example: An 18 year old hospice patient wrote about despair:

"Despair is an old tigris. She once was strong, but now has seen all the horrors of reality. Her stripes make it easy for her to hide from those who want her gone. She stays with those who feed her, but out of caution she lashes out at them, sometimes taking an arm or a leg of them. This makes her bigger though she does not want power. She hates her self for existing, and yet she still tries so hard to stay alive because she’s afraid of not existing."
Her father, introduced despair in this way:
"Despair is a small stooped gray man. You might see him with the homeless vet in the park. He is often with those who have sold their souls for things. Don’t be deceived, though. He has great power, and he watches you. When he speaks his words can drive into your center and lodge there. They freeze your soul. If you let despair speak to you he will transform you into a cheerless, grumpy, smelly person who has forgotten what it means to live. Despair is a recluse. He hides in the corner at parties and never shares a toast or a drink in celebration."

Her 16 year old brother described confusion and happiness:
"Confusion is easily made and released. It bounces in your head ricocheting off your skull destroying your thoughts. Happiness lifts your head and pushes all bad things out your mouth. It spreads through your chest and arms to break you free."

Her 20 year old sister personified disappointment and joy:
"Disappointment lives downstairs and I have to pass him on the way out. He doesn’t say much, just reminds me that he’s there. Sometimes he stands outside my door. I tell him I’m really busy and we’ll talk later so he goes downstairs and sits in the lobby and waits for a better time. Joy may talk a lot, but I don’t mind. She knows the best stories anyway. She showed me a bird’s nest once and gave me a piece of blue sea glass at the beach. Her eyes are ever so keen."

Her mother wrote this:
"Joy isn’t happiness. She isn’t everything going swimmingly. Joy comes from truth and hope and knowing you are loved. Joy wakes up early in the morning, goes outside and listens to the birds in the morning quiet, and then has the strength to go on and look into the face of tragedy and suffering. Before Joy came into her own she was always disappointed and angry at the world, but now she has a foundation, a timeless underpinning that keeps her anchored in the truth of God’s unfathomable love for her."

And, as part of their circle, Iverson also wrote about joy:
"Joy doesn’t always wear purple, but she does today. She’s wanting to wear something rich and deep so she won’t be confused—as she so often is—with her second cousins Happiness and Acquisition. They often wear royal blue, which Joy would wear too, except she knows it’s important that she stand out more on her own. She’s the one who can always be available. Even if you can’t find her at home right away, you can check with Gratitude. Gratitude always knows how to find Joy. Joy can walk arm in arm with profound Sadness, with setbacks and frustrations, and she generously invites Hope to accompany her on many of her journeys."

GROUP VISUAL ART: COLLAGE-MAKING

The following activity is an example of an expressive arts intermodal approach that is useful for individuals and families dealing with conflict, learning goal-setting, acknowledging accomplishment, and attending to transition and loss. It moves from a guided meditation into an art therapy experiential and concludes with processing and sharing of the experience with other participants.
Materials: Colored construction paper (2 sheets per person), felt-tipped pens or pastels, glue sticks. For alternative collage-making, scissors and magazines, photographs, and cards that can be cut and pasted.

Activity: Set the tone for the activity with a reflection such as:

“Please get comfortable in your seats, place both feet on the floor, and take three slow deep breaths. Give yourself time to just arrive and be in this room. Feel the support of the cushions or seat beneath and behind you. Imagine that with each inhale, you are able to bring in relaxing energy and with each exhale, you are able to let go of any tension or tightness you might be carrying... so that you can become more and more relaxed. Notice each foot making contact with the ground. Imagine that roots have sprouted from the bottom of each foot extending themselves deep into the core of the earth. Also imagine that at the top or crown of your head you are able to open to the wisdom of a universal force or energy that is larger than your individual self.”

Include an invitation to explore more deeply a specific theme to bring focus to the topic of the group. The example below is for bereavement.

1. Pass around colored construction paper and instruct group members to each choose two different colored sheets of paper. Invite each participant to draw the images that appeared or their “internal terrain” during the guided meditation. Remind them that there is no right or wrong way to do this, to simply accept and trust their experience and not worry about whether they have experience or skill in art. What is most important is the process itself rather than the finished product.

2. Upon completion of drawings, ask group members to now draw on second sheet of paper a symbol that represents their thoughts and internal images during the reflection. Give examples such as a boy who drew his grandmother as a tree because she was sturdy and grounded, a girl who drew her father as a chef’s hat because he loved to bake and just opened his own bakery, or an adult who drew an empty barrel to represent the loss of her job at a winery.

3. When second drawings have been completed, ask members to tear them up into several pieces and notice how that feels as they do so. (They should not tear up first drawings of internal landscape). Expect a strong reaction.

4. Next instruct participants to glue the torn pieces of paper onto first drawing of “internal landscape” in any way they wish. They do not need to glue every single piece of torn drawing but should include pieces with significant images.

5. Instruct group or family members to split into dyads or triads to discuss their experiences during the guided meditation, drawing, tearing, and incorporation of torn pieces into original drawing. State the time allotted for this, and, at the end of that period, invite participants back into the group to share collectively. Spread drawings out on table or floor; invite members to walk around and silently view each other’s drawings. Each participant may then describe their experience of witnessing the drawings. Offer guidelines to responses in terms of questions such as “What did you learn about...,” “What inspired you?” “What was hard for you?” and other directed open-ended questions. If a group member prefers to reply nonverbally, movement, sound, and drawing may be alternative forms of expression. If time allows, the group may construct a collective poem or collage. As an alternative, participants may make a collage of images from magazines, cards, photos, etc., rather than from their own drawing.

Example: Following the centering meditation, this reflection may be used to bring focus to loss and transition:

“I’d like to invite you to think about a loss, ending or goodbye you’ve had in your life - recent or from the past. It can be a loss from the death of someone in your life or some other type of loss or transition... the ending of a relationship, a job, a move, changing schools, the loss of health or anything
else. Just notice the emotions that come up for you when you think about this loss. Do your feelings have a color? Shape? Texture? Are they located in a particular part of your body or spread throughout? Do they have a weight? Are they still or do they move throughout the body? Would there be sounds that go with this movement? Are there words? Now imagine your body as a vessel that can hold and carry all these different emotions. What would that look like? Whenever you feel ready now, taking as much time as you need, allow yourself to slowly come back to being here in this room feeling awake and refreshed... and slowly open the eyes.”

With a focus on loss, following the first drawing of their ‘internal terrain,’ invite group members to draw a symbol that represents their loved one who died or the loss with which they are working.

A student whose brother died in a shooting made this collage (figure 27.6) in a San Francisco school-based bereavement group:

![Figure 27.6 Collage of Student Whose Brother Died](image)

Following the death of her grandmother, a granddaughter created this (figure 27.7):

![Figure 27.7 Collage of Granddaughter Following Death of Grandmother](image)
Processing the activity is invaluable. When asked how they felt about or what they learned as they tore up their second drawings and glued the pieces onto their original drawings, group members offered responses such as, “This is about learning to let go of our loved ones”, “Now this person lives inside of us” or “We carry them with us forever”.

GROUP WRITING AND DRAWING: FIVE WISHES

This expressive arts activity is readily adaptable to different ages and is especially suited for multigenerational work.

Materials: Colored construction paper, waterproof Sharpie pens of many colors. For group display, add poster board or fabric and appropriate materials such as glue, thread, stapler and staples, etc.

Activity: Instruct students and/or family members to trace the outline of their hand onto a sheet of colored construction paper. If done within family context, parents/guardians and children, grandparents and children or two siblings can trace each other’s hands onto paper.

Ask them to cut out hand and write a wish inside each digit:

- Thumb: a wish that you have for yourself.
- Index: a wish that you have for a loved one.
- Third finger: a wish that you have for family or friends of loved.
- Ring finger: a wish that you have for people around the world.
- Pinkie: a wish that you have for the earth.

Instruct participants to draw something connected with their wishes in the center of the hand cutout. Next, invite students and families to share their creations with each other and discuss their five wishes. Encourage family members to voice wishes they have for each other and/or guess what each family member might wish for themselves or others.

To conclude with a group display, each participant glues their ‘hand’ to display material (poster board, Tibetan prayer flag, quilt background.) Counselors may choose to include poetry and/or songs about hands to the group display process.

Variations: Write a wish within each finger pertaining to a specific global issue such as world hunger, violence, racism, poverty, etc. Write a hope, dream, or goal on each finger. Invite teams to outline each partners’ hand on the same paper, with fingers interfacing.
Example: Middle school children in San Francisco composed these hands Figure 27.8):

![Collage Made by Middle School Children](image)

Figure 27.8 Collage Made by Middle School Children

Parent and young child team drawing Figure 27.9):

![Parent and Child Drawing](image)

Figure 27.9 Parent and Child Drawing

GROUP MUSIC PRACTICE

Music is an almost universal component of daily life and yet often is conspicuously absent from counseling and therapy practices. Incorporating practices of making music by composing and/or playing an instrument, singing, and moving to sound and rhythm expands the realm of music as a resource. The following activities involve listening.

*Materials:* CD player, recorded music, paper, pens, pencils, markers, paint and brushes.
**Activity:** Choose two contrasting pieces of music, one that is loud and/or dissonant and one that is tranquil and/or harmonious. Ask one person to be the recorder. Instruct group members to listen and notice how they are feeling as they hear the first piece, and then play 1-2 minutes of the loud/dissonant piece. Going clockwise around the group, invite each participant to use one word or a short phrase to describe how he or she felt as they heard the music; the recorder makes a list of each word offered in the circle. Play 1-2 minutes of the tranquil/harmonious piece, and, this time going counterclockwise, invite each participant to relate a feeling evoked by this piece and create a second list. Compare and discuss the two lists, noting the capacity of sound to influence mood, feelings, and body reactions. Depending on time and group composition, replay each piece of music with the instruction to draw, move, or write as inspired by the sound.

**Activity:** Instruct each member to bring a favorite recording to the next session—one that helps them deal with stress, conflict, disappointment, or loss or give voice to their triumphs, passions, gratitudes, and joys. In the group, one member at a time introduces his or her piece in terms of why he or she chose it and what it evokes for her/him. Everyone listens and, depending on the size of the group and time constraints, after the piece has finished, may talk about feelings and responses that came up for them as they listened. The next student or family member shares their selection in a similar fashion until everyone in the group has had a turn. Again, depending on time constraints, replay all pieces without interruption while group members write, draw, paint, or dance.