The Student Nurse’s Handbook for Art-based Interventions

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**GROUND RULES FOR THE STUDENT NURSE**

1. **DO YOUR 3 CHECKS AND 6 RIGHTS**
   Treat an art intervention like any other nursing intervention. Are they in the right place to make art? Is this a good time for them? Would they rather sleep? Is this an appropriate person to try this with? Are you comfortable and familiar with the activity? Always let patients choose if they want to participate in art making.

2. **YOU ARE THE GUIDE FOR YOUR PATIENT**
   *Do not* explain the project, provide materials and leave! The first few brush strokes can be scary. You will need to remain in the room with your patient at least in the beginning stages while he or she becomes comfortable with the project and the medium being used. Depending on your patient, you may need to stay for the whole project. Be your patient’s cheerleader.

3. **SOME PATIENTS NEED MORE GUIDANCE THAN OTHERS…**
   …but they may not want to tell you. If you sense your patient is uncomfortable, be proactive and offer suggestions. Some may feel more comfortable when the attention isn’t all on them. Working alongside your patient while you both create the project separately may help. Some may need you to guide their hand depending on their dexterity. If the patient is searching for ideas, ask them to talk out loud about their ideas. Some people may need step-by-step explanations. Encourage your patient to continue, but let them know they can stop at any time.

4. **THERE IS NO “RIGHT” WAY TO MAKE ART**
   It is always a good idea to tell your patient that there is no certain way to make art. Mistakes can be an opportunity to stretch your creativity and see what you can make of it. Tell your patient to resist the urge to erase or redo something.

5. **GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE**
   When your patient finishes a product, acknowledge it! If your patient is new to art making, completing a project deserves praise. Offer to display the patient’s art within the room or on the unit.

6. **THIS IS NOT AN ART THERAPY BOOK…**
   …and you are not an art therapist, but this doesn’t mean you can’t facilitate art-making with your patients. However, creating and reflecting on art can bring up emotions that you may want to acknowledge. Part of your role will be to create a safe space for patients to feel comfortable expressing emotions that come up, without judgment. Remind your patient: *you don’t need to be an artist to create art!*
Mandalas

A mandala, meaning “circle” in Sanskrit, is a common art form seen in many world cultures. Mandalas feature symmetrical and repetitive geometric patterns that begin in the center of the circle. Creating mandalas can often produce meditative effects for the drawer.

**Step 1** Use a pre-made mandala template (see end of handbook).

**Step 1a**

Use a round object to outline a circle that fills most of the page. Use a pencil to divide the circle into quarters or eights. These lines will help you make your mandala symmetrical and can be erased in the end.

**Step 2** Draw a shape such as a circle or a star around the center. The key is to draw a shape in one section and repeat this same shape in the rest of the mandala. From here, you can draw whatever patterns you want around the circle until you fill it in. Take your time and use your imagination!

**Materials**
- mandala template OR round object to draw circle that fills the page
- pencil
- ruler

**Suggested mediums**
- colored pencil
- marker
- crayon
- chalk pastels or paints to fill in
Step 3

Continue creating shapes, dots, lines and other patterns around the center that build outward. Remember to use the lines on the template (or the ones you drew previously) as guides to help make your work symmetrical. You can make your mandala as simple or as complex as you choose.

Step 4

Once you have drawn your mandala, you may choose to add color using markers, colored pencils, pastels or other mediums. You can outline what you have just drawn or fill in the shapes.
Picture Consequences

Picture consequences is a drawing game involving 2 to 4 people that was popular among Surrealist artists in the 1920s. The object of picture consequences is for each person to draw a section of a body that remains concealed until the drawing is finished. The mix-matched result often sparks laughter among the group.

**Step 1**
Take the sheet of paper and fold it length-wise into thirds for 3 players or fourths for 2-4 players.

**Step 2**
Assign players to draw a section. If 3 are playing, assign the head, torso and legs. If 4 are playing, assign the head, torso, legs and feet. If 2 are playing, each will alternate sections. To begin, fold the paper back into either thirds or fourths so the rest of the page is concealed.

*Hint: place something behind the first section to prevent bleeding through if using markers.*
Step 3

Each person draws their section and then folds the paper to the blank space for the next person to draw. Be creative! For example, the person who draws the head may choose to draw a human head or an animal head. You may draw something realistic, funny, scary, abstract or anything else you think of. To guide the next person as to where the body is on the page, draw your lines slightly over the fold. **Remember to fold the paper to keep the drawing**

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Step 4

When the last person finishes, the final product can be revealed!
Image Cards

Image cards are small collages made on multiple note cards centered around one theme. Images may come from magazines, newspapers, online resources or personal photos.

**Step 1**
Start with 3-4 note cards. Choose a theme that all of the cards will have in common. Some examples you may use are:

- Past, present and future
- Spring, summer, winter and fall
- Specific emotions
- Colors

**Step 2**
Find pictures that you feel represents the theme you chose. Cut out the images with a scissors or rip them out with your hands.

*Tip: magazines like National Geographic are good sources for colorful images*
Step 3

Use a large piece of paper to layout your images before attaching them to the note cards.

Step 4

Use tape or glue to attach the images to the card and you’re done! If there are open spaces on your card, you may choose to fill them in with colored pencils, markers or other mediums.

*Tip: image cards could be useful to someone who has difficulty with verbal expression.*
Ideas for Adapting Interventions

Many patients in hospitals who want to engage in an art intervention may have limitations due to decreased fine motor skills or diminished arm strength. Use these ideas, or create your own, to help adapt interventions for your patients.

1. If using drawing pencils, consider the hardness and softness of the lead. Softer leads, labeled with a “B,” may be easier to draw with for people with minimal arm strength. Drawing pencils labeled 2B, 4B and 6B are good levels of softness that work for most people and can be erased easier.

2. In general, paintbrushes with long and wide handles will be easier to hold. If these are not available, you can wrap foam or gauze around a paintbrush secured with a tape or rubber bands to add width. This can be used for almost any object, including markers, pencils and crayons. If needed, you can help guide the patient’s arm to create the marks on the page.

3. Decreased fine motor skills can make holding small objects like paintbrushes and pencils hard. To increase accessibility to such patients, you can wrap one side of a Velcro strip around the patient’s hand and attach a small patch of Velcro to the paintbrush, pencil or marker. Connect the two and instruct the patient to move his or her arms to create lines on paper.

4. Try using tube watercolor paints for projects involving painting. It is easy to adjust the color from tube watercolors by dipping a paintbrush in water, creating a wide range of shades from just one pigment.

5. Additionally, tube water colors or tempura paints can be mixed with water and put in a plastic squeezable bottle, like an empty dish soap bottle, to be used if dexterity is an issue for a patient.

6. Cutting images out of a magazine or from paper may be difficult. Images can also be ripped out or can be cut out by someone else.

7. If someone does not have the use of their arms, there are still ways to adapt interventions! One option is to instruct the patient to use his or her feet and toes, however, this may be impractical. In this case, you or a visitor can act as the patient’s arms. Position the paper so that the patient can see. Have him or her tell the “arms” to draw or paint the desired lines on the paper.