Healing Bridge Drawing

Gay Walker, Program Coordinator, Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness
gay.walker@wmich.edu, 269-387-3839

This is an art therapy process, but you don’t have to be an artist or able to draw to do this…stick figures and abstract symbols are fine — this is not about drawing ability, talent or skill.

Find a way to express and represent the following aspects in your drawing:

1. On one side of the paper (left or right), represent your loss, grief or sadness. You may use symbols, colors, lines, and/or words to draw an image of the challenge.

2. On the other side of the paper (left or right), draw how your grief would look if it were healed and your life was less stressful and more peaceful.

3. Connect the two sides with a bridge. The bridge represents your support system. What kind of support do you have? Is the bridge strong or shaky, missing some planks? What kind of construction is it? Is it made of rope, stone, steel? What kind of side rails are there, if there are any? You may want to name your significant support people, organizations, or something else. In other words, your support may not be just people.

4. Under the bridge draw the obstacles that you might encounter crossing the bridge to get to the other side of your grief. What might stand in your way? (Sometimes we ourselves are our own obstacle to getting across the bridge.)

5. Look at the bridge and decide where you are on the bridge today and draw yourself there.

Optional Drawings to enlarge your understanding of aspects of moving through bereavement

Do another drawing of the difficulties (sadness, emptiness, etc.) that get in your way. Add to the drawing so you have a good picture of what your grief is made up of.

Do another drawing focusing just on the picture of the peaceful future, when memories make you smile and grief isn’t such a huge burden. Embellish the drawing, adding details and as many aspects of how the future might look.

Do another drawing focusing just on the obstacles. Embellish the drawing, adding details.

Do another drawing focusing just on your supports. Embellish the drawing, adding details of the supports that you may have not acknowledged.
**The Art of Grief Drawing Activities**
Gay Walker, Art Therapist and Program Coordinator
Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness, Western Michigan University
gay.walker@wmich.edu

**Draw your emotions, How do you feel?**
Create a series of simple abstract drawings (without identifiable objects) that represent some of the emotions you are feeling. Use appropriate colors, lines and shapes to convey these emotions.

- sad, mad, in pain, lonely, afraid, confused, heavy, gloomy,
- anxious, forlorn, stuck, etc.
- happy, hopeful, healing, transformed, peaceful, calm, courageous, trusting,
- inspired, confident, brave, etc.

You are creating a drawing vocabulary of emotions. Spend some time using this vocabulary to create drawings expressing how you feel.

Draw your feelings before the loss.
Draw your feelings when the loss occurred.
Draw your feelings now.
Draw how you will feel in the future when grief becomes easier.

**Ying Yang**
Draw a large Ying Yang symbol filling up a page and using symbols or words fill one side with the strengths that will help you get through your grief. Fill in the other side with challenges your grief presents to you. Pay attention to those that may appear or cross both sides.

**Favorite Memories**
Draw or paint a picture that incorporates favorite memories of your loved one.

**Memory Box**
Decorate a box and fill it with trinkets and mementos from your loved one. You may want to paint it with favorite colors, and glue a photo of your loved one on the cover on inside the lid.

**Memorial Garden**
Plant a garden and include special plants, flowers, or trees that were favorites of your loved one. Perennial plants will come up every year. You may want to include a candle, statue, or stepping stones. Mix in a small amount of cremains into the soil of each plant is you wish.

**Glass and Ash**
Work with a glass artist (or do it yourself) to make glass beads ornaments, or paperweight, rolling each piece in a small amount of ashes of your loved one. Cover with a layer of clear glass.
Create a stained glass mosaic in memory of your loved one. Sometimes taking large pieces of stained glass and breaking them with a hammer will help process some strong feelings. (Put the pieces in a fabric bag and wear eye protection when doing this) Glue the pieces onto a sheet of clear glass with about ¼ space between and grout when the glue is dry. Putting the pieces back together to create a new picture can be a healing experience. You may want to add a small amount of ashes to the grout when finishing the piece.

**Quilt**
Create a quilt with loved ones each contributing a square. Squares may be made from T-shirts of your loved one, fabric from their clothing, or created with fabric markers, embroidered, or decals of favorite photographs ironed onto the fabric.
The Art of Grief References

Gay Walker, Art Therapist and Program Coordinator
Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness, Western Michigan University
gay.walker@wmich.edu

Associations

American Art Therapy Association (Journal of Art Therapy)
www.americanarttherapyassociation.org

Association for Creativity in Counseling
www.creativecounselor.org/Journal.html

National Association for Poetry Therapy
www.poetrytherapy.org

National Coalitions of Creative Arts Therapy Associations
www.nccata.org/art_therapy.htm

National Institute for Trauma and Loss for Children
www.starr.org/training/tlc

Articles

Please note that there are very few articles published in the last 5-7 years, several classics were published in the 90s. The Journal of Creativity and Mental Health has several.

Malchiodi, Cathy A. (2003) TRAUMA AND LOSS: Research and Interventions, Volume 3, Number 1, Using Creative Activities as Intervention for Grieving Children


Book

Web-sites

www.recover-from-grief.com/creativity-grief.html