

Keeping a visual journal as part of your self-care practice

Gweinyddu a Gwasanaethau Myfyrwyr
Student Services & Administration



Introduction



This is an activity sheet on how to keep a visual journal as part of your self-care practice. It will guide you through the process of creating a simple visual journal and provide ideas of items to include in it to support your well-being. Before starting the activity, here is a short explanation of self-care and visual journals and how they support our well-being.

Self-care

Self-care is any activity we undertake to look after our mental health, our emotional health and our physical health, and this will be different for every individual. It is essential as it helps to restore strength and consider our own needs, placing less emphasis on the need to feel productive. It can help lift our mood, manage anxiety and maintain good relationships with ourselves and others.

Making time in our day for small acts of self-care can have a significant positive impact on different areas of our lives, including enabling us to feel safer, less anxious or more confident. Self-care doesn't have to be a huge time commitment and it doesn't have to be expensive. It could mean taking a bath, relaxing with a good book, going for a walk or eating a healthy meal. It's about committing to putting ourselves first, even if it's only for a short time.

There are a number of myths associated with self-care, such as that self-care is pampering, but meaningful self-care involves making mindful changes to thought patterns and behaviours that do not contribute to well-being. Another myth is that self-care is selfish, but when we make time for ourselves, we feel more energetic and will be able to do more – for ourselves and for others. Self-care can also be seen as time-consuming, but self-care doesn't necessarily require a lot of time. Short but meaningful activities interwoven into our daily lives can have a significant positive impact on our well-being.

Self-care is simply taking care of yourself.

Visual Journal

A visual journal is just like a traditional journal or diary, but instead of written entries, it contains drawings, sketches, writing, or even clippings of photographs or magazines. It is a collection of your feelings, thoughts and ideas in visual form.

People keep visual journals for many different reasons. The practice is personal and can be cathartic in the same way that talking to a friend about an issue helps us feel better. Visual journals can help release negative emotions, understand a problem, and find possible solutions. Allowing our minds to focus on drawing and creating allows us to slow down our thoughts and acknowledge emotions that surface in unexpected ways.

They also give us an opportunity to get to know ourselves better. What do we like? What makes us feel happy? What inspires us? Purposefully seeking the answers to these questions can help create more peace and balance in our lives, and be a very beneficial exercise as part of our self-care practice.



A kind note before you start

Maybe you haven't done any art for some time and you feel a little nervous before starting to create. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to create a visual journal, the purpose is to give you an opportunity to reflect and express yourself. Give yourself permission to enjoy the process and don't worry about how the work looks or the opinion of others.

Create a booklet using a piece of paper

You can use a sketchbook or notebook for your visual journal, but if you don't have one available it's easy enough to create a simple one using a piece of paper. Click [here](#) to watch a video that shows you how to create a booklet or search for the 'How to Make a Quick and Easy 8 Page Mini-Book From One Piece of Paper' video on YouTube.

Starting your visual journal

To start working in your visual journal, why not create a cover for it and make an image that represents your needs. Use simple materials that can be found around the home. You will need coloured paper, old magazines, wrapping paper or old packaging as well as a pencil, glue stick and scissors.

You may want to focus on one of the following as you create:

- **How you are feeling today and what are your needs.**
- **An unmet need and the feelings you experience as a result.**
- **Three needs that you consider to be the most important in your life.**



Step 1:

Choose some coloured paper to use as a background for your picture. Cut to shape and glue down. Think of images, symbols, shapes and colours to represent your needs and draw them on the coloured papers you have collected.



Step 2:

Cut out your symbols etc and start placing them on the background paper to create your composition. You can glue them straight away or you may want to experiment with your composition before committing to your final design. Work quietly if you can, noting your thoughts and feelings while creating. You can also add words if you like.



Step 3:

Place all your symbols etc on the background paper to complete your composition and glue them down securely. What needs have the picture identified? Were you aware of these previously? How will you be able to meet these needs? You might want to write a little about this on your drawing or on a new page.

Suggestions

Try to create in your journal regularly. It's a good idea to keep your journal somewhere that is easy to access and keep a collection of art materials close at hand – making it as easy as possible for you to start being creative. Why not listen to music while drawing and light a candle to create a peaceful atmosphere? Having a journal that is not too big is a good idea, so that you can carry it around with you if needed.



Just like a diary, keeping a visual journal is a very personal practice, it's not meant to be judged or compared. Anyone can keep a visual journal – it doesn't matter if you're an accomplished artist or haven't picked up a paintbrush in years.

Experiment with a variety of styles and materials. There are hundreds of websites, blogs and videos on the web that offer guidance and inspiration and prompts for visual journals. We have created a dedicated Pinterest board [here](#) to inspire you. Enjoy exploring new art materials and new ways of working. Any art material is suitable for use, stamps, stickers, stencils, felt pens, crayons, ephemera, paint; the list is endless. Everyone has a unique personal visual language, enjoy the practice and being creative.

The Benefits

There are a number of health benefits associated with keeping a visual journal, research shows that it can increase immunity and reduce cortisol levels as well as contribute towards a reduction in anxiety and stress levels. It is a therapeutic exercise that is considered a creative way of expressing a personal narrative and life stories, as well as enabling us to make meaning of life through images, creative writing, and story telling.

Keeping a journal helps you create order when your world feels like it's in chaos. You get to know yourself by revealing your most private fears, thoughts and feelings. Look at your creative time as personal relaxation time. It is a time when you can get rid of stress and calm the soul.



Hopefully you found this art activity useful. **If this activity evoked difficult emotions that you would like to explore, please contact us.** Individual art therapy is available to students at Bangor University. Art therapy, a type of psychotherapy, offers emotional and psychological support during the most difficult periods of life. Working with a qualified art therapist helps people use art materials, discover the creative process and support them as they explore their thoughts and feelings through the images they create.

Contact the Wellbeing Service if you would like support or individual art therapy.

Contact details:

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College Road
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2DF
01248 388520

wellbeingservices@bangor.ac.uk

<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/studentservices/wellbeing/>

Or mental health support is available in Wales by calling 111 and selecting option 2. More information is available at the following link:

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-advice/mental-health-hub/111-press-2/>