



Expressing Emotions through Art

Art can help children express feelings that are difficult to express through words.

Drawing is a natural expression for children. While adults will feel embarrassed and say “I can’t draw,” children are very comfortable with their creativity.

Art can be used to:

- Act as a tool to begin discussion – drawing can be an effective ice breaker into a new counseling relationship or issues that might be difficult to talk about
- Process confusing feelings in the children’s lives – putting thoughts on paper can help the child sort out their feelings
- Strengthen a sense of self – drawings that focus on the child’s interests, values, strengths, relationships, etc. help build their self-awareness
- Release tension – this creative outlet can be calming and relaxing
- Heal from upsetting memories – by helping children visualize and sort out their concerns, drawing can be quite therapeutic
- Learn to overcome hardships – art used in the problem solving process can help the child identify potential solutions to their issues.

Drawing can be valuable during the assessment (information gathering) phase where the counselor is working to understand the child’s feelings...

...and during the healing process, especially when the children find it difficult or impossible to talk about overwhelming events that they have experienced.

Art can be used to replace words.

Art in the Assessment Phase

- The use of drawings is an effective way to communicate with the child. Ask the child to draw specific things such as their role within their family, or how they feel about school, rather than a general drawing. The child will tell you their story with the drawing.
- It is not your role to interpret the drawing. Instead, ask questions of the child such as “You didn’t draw yourself in the family drawing, why is that?” or “You drew that the father is hitting a child, why did you draw that?” or “You drew yourself as standing apart from your friends, why is that?”
- Another strategy is to ask the child to interpret their drawing and explain what they were trying to communicate.

Drawing for Assessment and Information Gathering

In gathering information about the child, many subjects for drawing are possible; any subject that you think is important for the child’s situation might be used. The following are some examples.

SELF-DRAWING

Ask the child to draw him/herself. This may give you an idea about the image the child has of him/herself.

- Pay attention to how the drawing is on the paper: is it very small or big considering the size of the paper?
- Does the picture make a happy or sad impression to you?
- Look at the facial expressions, and if there are none, explore the reasons
- Is the drawing complete or incomplete?

Ask the child to explain the drawing to you, noting these items.

FAMILY DRAWING

Ask the child to draw their family or their family within the children’s home.

- Pay attention to how the child draws themselves in the family: are they close or away from the rest of the family?
- What activities are the family engaged in?
- Does the drawing look happy or sad?
- Is every member in the drawing, and if not, why not?

- Is there anything unusual in the picture?

Again, ask the child to explain the drawing to you.

DRAW A MEMORY

Ask the child to draw a memory that they have about their life; let the child choose which one. It is very interesting to see which memory the child chooses to draw. Or, you may ask them to draw a particular memory.

- Why did the child choose that memory to draw?
- What happens in the memory drawing?
- Is it happy or sad?

Ask the child to explain the drawing to you.

Drawing for Healing

Drawings can be used in the healing process to allow the child to tap into emotions that have been buried or hidden, and express feelings that are difficult to talk about.

Introduce the technique to the child with something like, “Drawings allow us to use pictures instead of words, and sometimes drawings can say more than our words. You do not need to be an artist; anything you do is fine. After you have drawn something, we can talk about your drawing.”

- Begin with Introductory Drawings which are unrelated to the child’s situation, but are designed to make the child feel comfortable with the materials and with creating drawings in this setting. The topics can be general such as pictures of animals, favorite foods, a flower, etc.
- When the child seems ready, move on to Drawings with Direct Meaning - ask the child to make a picture of something specific such as a stressful situation, a dream for their future, a bad memory, loving or difficult relationships, etc. When completed, ask the child questions such as:
 - Can you tell me what you have drawn here?
 - What does this mean to you?
 - What feeling does the drawing give you?
 - How did you feel making it?
 - What part of the picture would you like to change?
 - Can you give a title to your work?

- A Drawing Journal can be used daily, just during counseling sessions, or whenever needed. Drawings can include real life scenes and objects, or they can be more free and abstract to symbolize feelings.
- Not all drawings are meant to be discussed or kept. One activity that can be of great benefit is to destroy/dispose of a picture that is associated with negative emotions. This action can be a great emotional release.
- Group art work can be valuable because it helps the children see that they are not alone – they are not the only person experiencing these emotions. Children can be asked to draw about specific emotions and then share with the group if they are comfortable.

Drawing Activities

The use of drawing in counseling sessions is limited only by your imagination. The following are some sample activities found at

<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Printables/PrintablesThumbs.php>

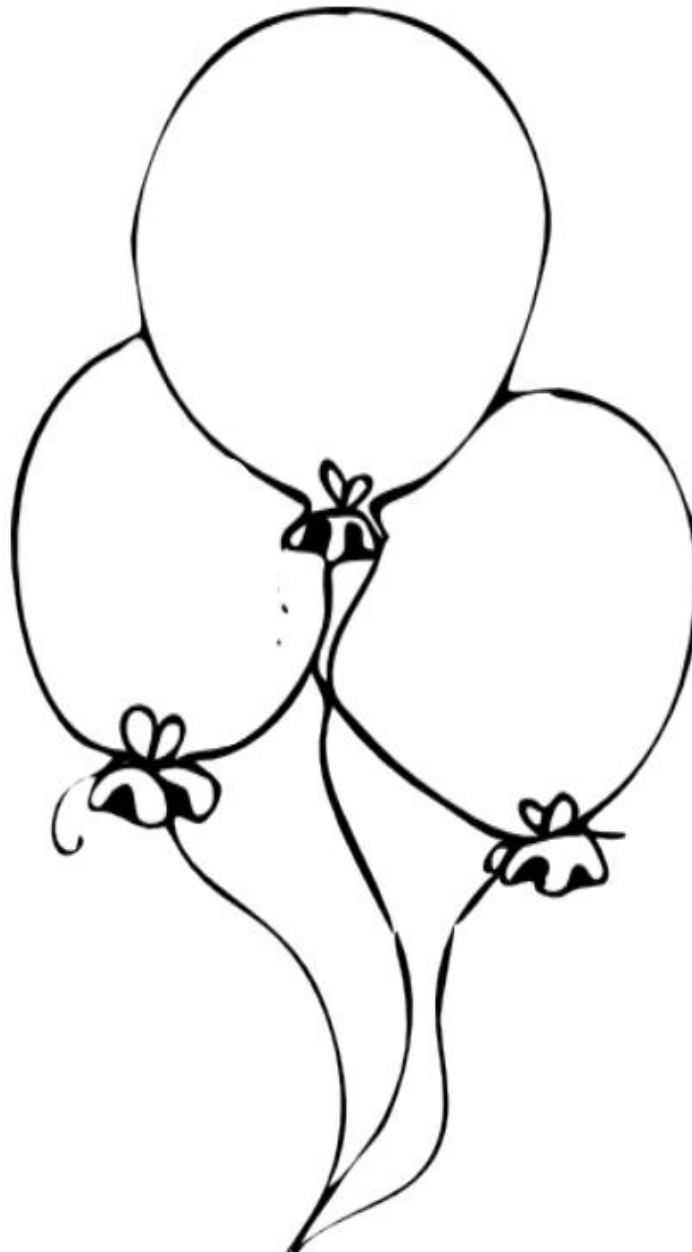
Inside My Heart

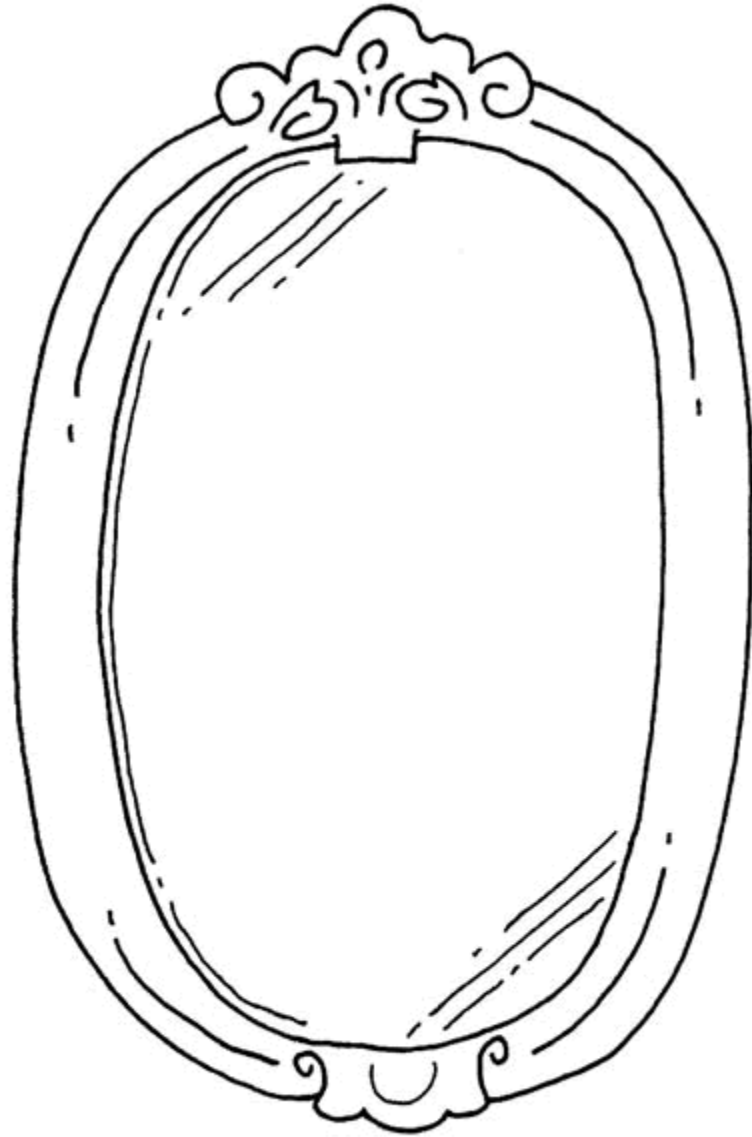
The child draws what feelings are inside their heart



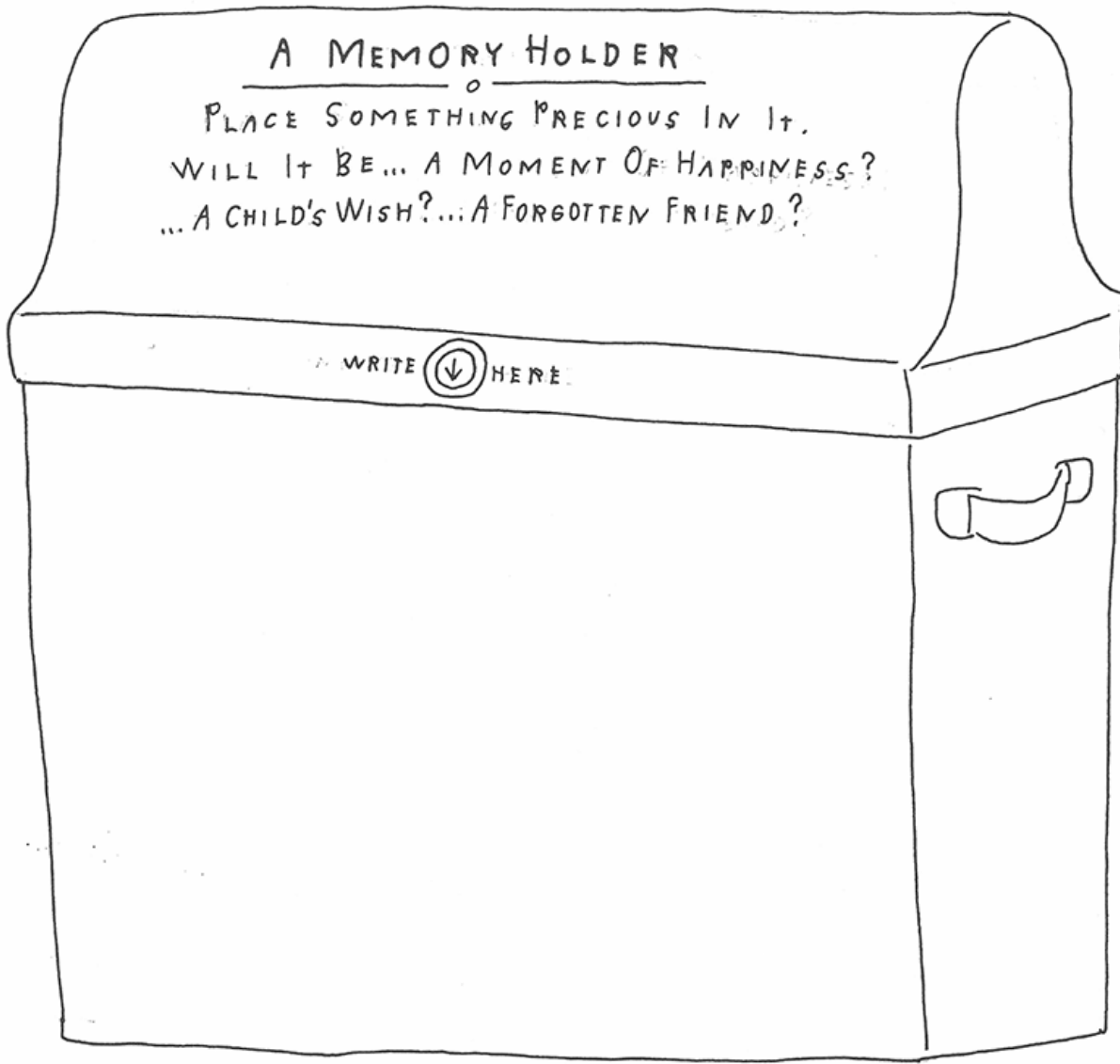
Let it Go

Children draw pictures that represent emotions/memories
they would like to release





YOU GET TO LIVE HAPPILY EVER
AFTER. WHAT IS YOUR LIFE LIKE?



Tip of the Iceberg

This is what you see, but here is what is really deep inside of me.

