

THE ACTIVITY ADVISOR

A weekly newsletter brought to you by Towson University
Occupational Therapy students



TU TOWSON UNIVERSITY Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science



ISSUE 1

Who are we?

Hello! *The Activity Advisor* is a newsletter brought to you by Towson University Occupational Therapy students. Our names are Sarah T., Allison A., and Brandyn G.. For those of you who may not know, occupational therapy is a field that helps individuals across the lifespan successfully carry out activities that are meaningful to them and achieve their greatest potential through the therapeutic use of daily activities, otherwise known as "occupations" (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). We hope to inspire and motivate individuals to take part in mindfulness and craft based activities at home, inspired by nature and our senses. These activities will be catered towards children and adolescents, with suggested parental oversight. However, we encourage everyone to participate in them. We hope you all enjoy these activities and find them to be meaningful and enjoyable!

Mindfulness Moments

Mindfulness Moments features mindfulness based activities that encourage you to be present while calmly acknowledging your feelings, senses, and thoughts. This week's activity will encourage you to integrate your five senses while in the context of nature.

This activity should take at least 5 minutes.

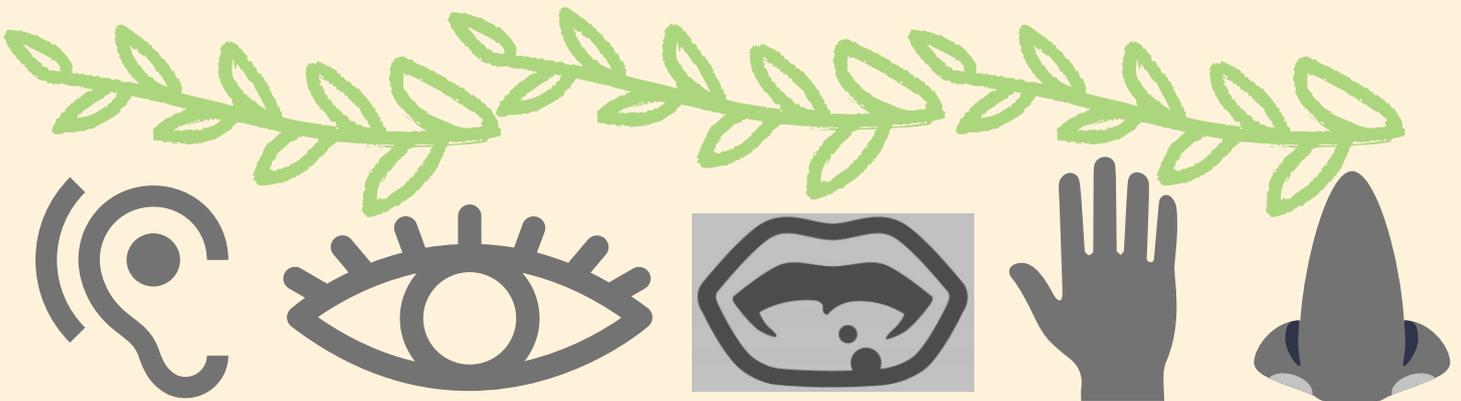
You will need:

- Access to an open window, a balcony, or a backyard

Steps:

1. Stand by an open window in your home, your balcony or backyard. Relax. Sit in a comfortable position, upright, with your back straight and your feet firmly planted. You may also choose to lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Breathe. Take a few deep breaths, and be truly present in this moment. Breathe in deeply and fully exhale. Repeat this a few times.
3. Begin to notice all the sounds around you. Is it the birds chirping? Are the trees blowing in the wind? Take it all in.
4. Next, shift your concentration on what you see around you. Is it the animals around you? The bright blue sky? Focus on the colors, shapes, and sizes of your surroundings.
5. Now, focus on the smells in your environment. Is someone BBQing outside? Can you smell any of the plants or trees around you?
6. Shift your focus to what you can feel. Take a second to feel the texture, sensation, and pressure of anything around you. Reach for the grass that may be underneath you, or a leaf in your balcony. Feel the breeze on your skin, or the sun's heat. Whatever it may be, notice the sensation.
7. Last one! Notice the way your tongue is resting in your mouth. How does it feel when you breathe in and out? Run it across your teeth and inside your mouth. What feelings arise?

How do you feel now? Do you feel different than how you did 5 minutes ago? Try this exercise next time you may feel overwhelmed or just want to feel "in the moment!"



Mindfulness Quote of the Week

"Be happy in the moment, that's enough. Each moment is all we need, not more." - Mother Teresa

Craft Corner

Craft Corner features engaging activities that encourage you to take part in hands-on activities that integrate aspects of nature and your senses. This week's activity is a plant-based sensory bin!

This activity will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

You will need:

- Objects you can find outdoors, such as, but not limited to:
 - Sticks
 - Leaves
 - Pine cones
 - Flowers
 - A container or bin

To craft, you may choose to use, but are not limited to:

- Paint brush(es)
- Paint
- Whipping cream/Shaving cream
- Food coloring
- Paper, cardboard, wood, or canvas
- Trash bag or newspaper (as a surface liner)



PLANT-LIFE SENSORY BIN PLAY

(Vrban, 2020)

Steps:

- 1) Step outside of your home (if applicable/possible/safe), into your backyard, or surrounding area that contains objects found in nature.
- 2) Collect certain objects from outside such as leaves, pine cones, flowers, sticks, and more. Try to diversify the objects that you collect in shape, size, and texture.
- 3) Locate a container or bin in your home that can fit all of the items that you collected.
- 4) Place the objects you found from outside into the container.
- 5) Begin to explore your senses, except for taste, with the items you have collected. Interact with each object individually. How does the object identify look, feel, touch, and sound when you interact with it? Notice the sensations you experience and how they differ from object to object.
- 6) While exploring these sensations, actively consider how these objects make you feel. Are they any positive or negative sensations or feelings that arise? Why or why not?
- 7) Now you will create a masterpiece with the objects you have found. First, line a sturdy surface with newspaper or trash bags to avoid messes.
- 8) Next, utilize the collected objects as "paintbrushes" to paint with. For example, add food coloring to whipping cream. Roll a pine cone in the colored whip cream, roll it on your desired surface and see what happens. How does this look and feel different than using a paintbrush to paint? What feelings arise when switching objects to use?
- 9) GET CREATIVE! Try to create as many shapes, figures, and pictures as possible!

Benefits of Mindfulness & Crafts

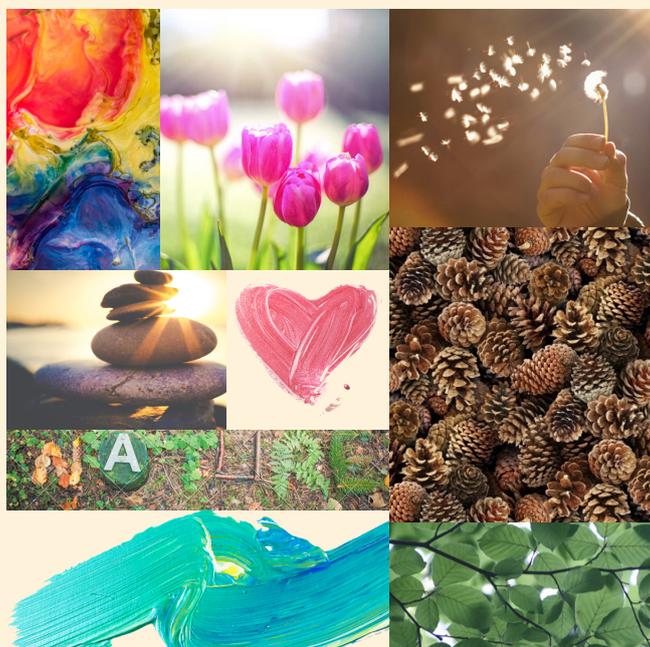
Mindfulness Moments

We must learn to thrive within our bodies and environments. In today's world, we are often busied by schedules and demanding to-do lists. Mindfulness is critical in that it provides a physical, cognitive, and emotional reset. By using the natural environment to relax or calm down, we develop coping skills that can be used anywhere, at any time. The sounds of the birds, trees, or breeze may serve for us to rhythmically breathe. The sights and smells of our environment might instill peace. Mindfulness activities can serve us in the midst of anxiety at school, stress at home, or overwhelming social contexts. Studies have found increased mindfulness, or present-moment awareness, improves our self-confidence in task completion and efficiency in maintaining values in response to stimuli (Donald, Atkins, Parker, Christie, & Ryan, 2016). Thus, over time we increase our happiness, control, and well-being throughout life.

Craft Corner

Nature-based crafts are beneficial in that they incorporate the benefits of feeling sunshine on our skin when gathering materials, physical exercise finding alternative uses of local resources, utilizing creative and flexible thinking, and enhanced sensory experiences (Parkinson, Lowe, & Vecsey, 2011).

These projects can provide the opportunity for various family members to independently create a piece of art and discuss the different materials and approaches used. By doing so, you can learn of the physical, social, and emotional benefits of natural environment engagement and engaging with family members during this time of social isolation. These activities reminds us to appreciate and understand one other's differences in art, thinking, bodies, and environment.



Craft Quote of the Week

"Man, through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health."

- Mary Reilly, EdD, OTR

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). *What is occupational therapy?* Retrieved from <https://www.aota.org/Conference-Events/OT-Month/what-is-OT.aspx>
- Donald, J. N., Atkins, P. W. B., Parker, P. D., Christie, A. M., & Ryan, R. M. (2016). Daily stress and the benefits of mindfulness: Examining the daily and longitudinal relations between present-moment awareness and stress responses. *Journal of Research in Personality, 65*, 30-37.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2016.09.002>
- Parkinson, S., Lowe, C., & Vecsey, T. (2011). The therapeutic benefits of horticulture in a mental health service. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74*(11), 525-534.
- Vrban, M. (2020). Kids sensory activities: Nature exploration. Retrieved from <https://besttoys4toddlers.com/kids-sensory-activities/>

Developed by Sarah Tayel, Allison Adams, & Brandyn Geist (March 31st, 2020)