



Using Play, Nature, and Art with Mothers

Play, nature and creativity are often things we associate with children. PEACE Programs often use these strategies to support children and youth in their experience of the present moment and to meet the program contract deliverables. This section outlines ideas for using play, nature, and art as strength-based tools to support mothers.

Acronym for Encouraging Parental Presence (Not Parental Perfection)

Mindful awareness, as defined by Daniel J. Siegel, is paying attention in the moment with curiosity, openness, acceptance and love for oneself. He uses the acronym COAL to describe this state of presence to make it easier to remind ourselves of it.

- C** – Curiosity
- O** – Openness
- A** – Acceptance
- L** – Love for oneself.

This acronym can be shared with mothers before, during or after any of the PLAY, ART and NATURE activities shared in this section of the guide.

In addition, this article, *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence* has some additional tools to support presence as a resource for relationships and mental health:

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/aware-the-science-and-practice-of-presence/>



PLAY - Sample Activities to Share with Mothers

Play in almost any environment, has myriad benefits for adults and children alike. Play reduces stress, brings moments of joy, enhances understanding and empathy, and improves feelings of optimism.¹ In addition, play can be fleeting; it doesn't have to go on for hours for it to be beneficial. PEACE Program counsellors can share a few playful moments with mothers as a strategy for entering the present moment at the start of a session or to guide a session back to the present moment if dialogue has wandered. This section outlines a few ideas for ways of introducing play to the time PEACE Program counsellors spend with mothers.

- Have a ball or balloon in your office. Either while sitting or standing, invite a few minutes of passing the ball back and forth. This can be done silently and/or while in conversation.
- Sensory Games. This could involve moving hands through sand, clay or shaving cream. Allow them to spread the medium around and sculpt it. There is no right or wrong thing to do here, simply the experience of sensation as a tool for grounding into the present moment.
- Tearing Pages Play. Using an old book or magazine, invite mothers to rip out a few pages and crumple them up and throw them into the recycle bin in your office.
- [Gratitude Scavenger Hunt.](#)

NATURE – Sample Activities to Use with Mothers

'From a stroll through a city park to a day spent hiking in the wilderness, exposure to nature has been linked to a host of benefits, including improved attention, lower stress, better mood and upticks in empathy and cooperation...' (Kirsten Wier)²

¹ Tartakovsky, M. (2015) *The Importance of Play for Adults*. Retrieved October 29 2021 from: <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-importance-of-play-for-adults#5>

² Wier, K. (2020) *Nurtured by Nature*. Retrieved October 29 2021 from: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>



Listed below are some simple and supportive activities PEACE Program counsellors can do outdoors with mothers.

- Go for a walk together. If the weather allows consider walking barefoot for five minutes and slowly to feel the touch of the bare earth on your feet.
- Step outside of your office together at the beginning and end of your check-in and take three deep breaths together.
- Touch a tree with an open palm. Pause and take three deep breaths.
- Contribute to a community garden plot or pick some wildflowers together.
- Create a sound map. Simply stand or sit outside in one place and listen to the kaleidoscope of sounds you hear around you.
- Play the 5 senses game experience: Name 5 things you can see. 4 things you can touch. 3 things you can hear. 2 things you can smell. 1 thing you can taste.

ART - Sample activities to Use with Mothers

For the purposes of this guide, the term art is inclusive of visual arts, music, and expressive writing or journaling. Mothers may be compelled by one form of art-making more than another and PEACE Program counsellors can follow a mother's lead when offering the activities outlined below. Art in the context of the PEACE Program is about engaging with the present moment of the art-making experience with mothers. PEACE Program counsellors can support this experience through [witnessing and listening](#) to the process without analyzing or judging the art-making.

Art-making ideas and activities:

- Create a playlist together. PEACE counsellors could support mothers to make two playlists, one upbeat playlist and one with calm songs.



- Collage together. This activity can be paired with the goal-setting process as a way of creating inspiration through imagery and words.
- Paint together. Providing the space, supplies and the offer to clean up for a mother after she paints can be a meaningful gesture and a way to hold space for her to do something she may never, otherwise, have the time to do.
- Expressive writing. Offer to put on some music and give mothers time to write. Some mothers may like guidance about where to begin. These [trauma-informed writing prompts](#) can be helpful. Other mothers may naturally drop into the space of creative writing.

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This document was published March 2022.

