

Journal Through Grief



Write, Save and Print your Journal

 **Sunnybrook**
PREGNANCY AND
INFANT LOSS NETWORK

*"Find the people you belong
with the ones who will see your
pain, accompany you hold you
close, even as the heavy lifting
of grief is yours alone. As
hard as they may seem to find
at times, your community
is out there"*

Megan Devine It's OK That You're Not OK:
Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture that Doesn't Understand.

About us

Pregnancy and Infant Loss (PAIL) Network is a provincially funded program mandated to provide peer support to families who experience the loss of a pregnancy or infant, and education to health and service professionals in Ontario.

The Mission of PAIL Network is:

To improve care and support for families who experience the loss of a pregnancy or infant through high quality and evidence-based peer support programs, advocacy, and education of health care professionals and the public.

To access Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network's peer-led support services, or to join our Facebook group please see below:

Phone: 1-888-303-PAIL (7245)

E-mail: pailnetwork@sunnybrook.ca

Website: pailnetwork.ca

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/PAILNetworkON

Thanking you

PAIL Network would like to thank those who shared their thoughts and expertise in order to support bereaved families with this journal.

We would also like to acknowledge the challenges that accompany pregnancy and infant loss. While it may feel difficult to do, it can be a helpful part of healing to acknowledge these challenges, and show gratitude to yourself for taking time to move through your grief.

We know this is hard.
We are here for you, and you are here for you, too.

Please Note

While this journal is intended to guide people gently through grief, it does not replace professional health and medical care or advice.

If you are in crisis and would like to be connected with mental health supports in your area, please contact **ConnexOntario at 1-866-531-2600** or by following this link: <https://www.connexontario.ca/>

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Introduction

How to use this journal

This guided journal is intended to be a gentle introduction to self-care and self-compassion practices. We hope the activities found in this journal will help you process your grief in a calm and reflective way, while also bringing awareness to how you are feeling.

Identifying your feelings and writing them down can be very cathartic. There is no right or wrong way to feel in grief, and no “one size fits all” approach when responding to emotions.

Whether you use this journal on a daily basis, or choose to revisit it during difficult days in your grief, try to dedicate at least 15 minutes of quiet, uninterrupted time to your practice.

Now, take a deep breath. You can do this, and you are not alone.



Self-Care and Gratitude

Reflect and give thanks.



Self-Care Checklist

Which activities do you do to take care of yourself?
(Use the extra space provided to add to this list)

- Schedule uninterrupted time, just for me
- Limit my exposure to upsetting media coverage
- Connect with family/friends on a regular basis
- Eat a balanced diet
- Increase physical activity
- Spend time in nature
- Take a warm, candle-lit bath
- Practice deep breathing
- Have impromptu dance parties
- Read a book or literature that isn't work related
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How do you feel after doing these activities? What *(if anything)* stops you from taking the time to practice self-care?

Assessing Physical & Psychological Resilience

Instructions:

X = What you do **O** = What you wish you did more often

BODY

- I eat regularly, and stop eating when full
- I drink at least 8 cups of water or healthy fluids a day
- I use work breaks to stretch or go for a walk
- I make sure to get enough sleep
- I limit the amount of screen time I engage in

MIND

- I am curious and like to learn new things
- I break out of my normal routine or do things out of my comfort zone
- I read literature that is unrelated to work
- I do things that I am not an expert at or in charge of

HEART

- I practice deep breathing during stressful situations
- I have people I can share things with
- I nurture intimate relationships
- I take time for myself everyday
- I know when and how to say "no"
- I accept other people's differences
- I treat myself with loving kindness
- I allow myself to cry when needed
- I smile and laugh daily

SPIRIT

- _____ I take time to self-reflect
- _____ I know what my values are
- _____ I have a sense of purpose
- _____ I am aware of the non-material aspects of life
- _____ I identify what is meaningful to me
- _____ I take time to meditate/pray/contemplate
- _____ I connect with things larger than myself (*i.e., nature, spiritual group, community, etc.*)

Reflection

Which section has more O's than X's for you?

Make a Commitment

Highlight one statement that you indicated you 'wish you did more often' and plan to incorporate that activity / statement into your day.

Use the space below to make your plan.

This check assessment has been modified from Tend Academy (2020), and adapted from: Saakvitne, K. W., and Pearlman, L. A. (1996). *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton. & Loehr, J., and Schwartz, T. (2003). *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. Free Press.

Giving Gratitude

Giving thanks and showing gratitude is often a practice that people show to others. Now it's time to thank yourself.

Follow these steps to write yourself a thank you note, when you feel you are in the right space to be able to do so.

Writing a Love Letter to Yourself

- 1.** Find a quiet space where you are comfortable and won't be interrupted for about 20-30 minutes. Be as open as possible, and know that this may be difficult.
- 2.** If you aren't sure how to start, just start with "Dear (your name), Thank you for always..."
- 3.** Be specific about what you are thanking yourself for, like; getting out of bed this morning, saying yes to something that felt difficult, or saying no to someone important to you. You can include lessons learned, risks taken, and appreciation for the choices you've made.
- 4.** Be kind to yourself. Self-compassion and feelings of disappointment can often go hand in hand. Extreme feelings are normal. Try to remain focused on being thankful to yourself for making positive changes.
- 5.** Give yourself the gift of re-reading this letter anytime you need a little boost of self-gratitude.
- 6.** Put reminders in your calendar to re-read this letter, and write another thank you note 6 months, 12 months, and 24 months from now.

My Letter

My Letter

My Letter

My Letter

Pay it Forward

An act of kindness can go a long way, especially for someone who was particularly helpful during your loss. Paying it forward can also be a positive gesture in memory of your baby that brings both you and others joy.

Build on this “**Pay it Forward**” list, and choose 1 or 2 acts of kindness to participate in.

1. Write a handwritten letter to someone important to you.
2. Pick up in a local green space or park in your community.
3. Plant a tree or wild flowers in memory of your baby.
4. Give an unexpected compliment.
5. Donate to a charitable organization or hospital close to your heart.
6. Write a positive review of your favourite local business or restaurant.
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Make this a monthly practice, or choose a month important to you where you’d like to spread kindness to others.

Mindfulness

Connect with your mind and body.



The Art of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a combination of being present in the moment while also drowning out the background noises of daily life. It can be used as a tool to bring awareness to pain and grief, and can be helpful to finding balance in life when it feels heavy.

You don't always need to be seated in a comfortable position or in a quiet place to practice being mindful. Focused awareness is something that evolves over time, and can be done anywhere by simply asking yourself these questions:

1. *What am I experiencing right now?*
2. *How am I feeling about this? What are my thoughts around this?*
3. *What do I feel in my body? What body sensations are present?*

Mindfulness often focuses on breathing, body awareness, and bringing attention to certain thoughts or feeling. Mindfulness meditation done in a quiet, uninterrupted space can offer the best outcome for a focused practice.

Use the mindfulness trackers with the script provided, or a script of your choice, to note how you feel before and after your practice. There are now many free apps available online to choose from.

Mindfulness Script: Body Awareness

Before you begin, get into a comfortable position. This can be seated in a chair with relaxed shoulders, hands on your knees, or, lying down, palms facing up.

Close your eyes or soften your gaze. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. As you exhale, allow everything to leave your mind except the thought of being relaxed. Do this two more times.

What do you notice about your body? Are you holding tension anywhere? On your next breath, deeply breathe in through your nose. Hold it. And as you exhale, focus on the tension you feel in that part of your body, and let it go.

Now, focus on each body part below. Take a deep breath through your nose. Hold it, and exhale the tension you feel.

Start with your forehead...

Then focus on your mouth and jaw...

Inhale and tense your shoulders...

Lift your arms, going as high as you can, and then let it go.

Now, focus on your abdomen. This area can be challenging to move through and holds a lot of love, energy, pain, and grief.

Take a deep breath through your nose. Hold it. Relax and let go. Breathe in deeply using your diaphragm. And relax and let go. Do this two more times, or as many times as you need to.

Allow yourself to continue becoming more and more relaxed. Breathe in deeply. Hold it. Breathe out. Relax and let go.

Take a final deep breath in through your nose, and as you slowly exhale counting in your head from five to one. Soften or open your eyes and return your focus back to your surroundings.

Thank yourself.

Mindfulness Tracker

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Before I started I felt...

After I finished my practice I felt...

The next time I practice, I would like to change...

Mindfulness Tracker

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Before I started I felt...

After I finished my practice I felt...

The next time I practice, I would like to change...

Mindfulness Tracker

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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Before I started I felt...

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The next time I practice, I would like to change...

Guided Writing

Lead with your hands and your heart.



An Introduction to Guided Writing

Free writing and journaling can be difficult, especially if you are not sure where to begin. Having prompts or a writing theme can help you focus on what you are really feeling, and how you want to express yourself.

If this is your first attempt at journaling, try to dedicate at least 5 minutes to writing, and find a quiet relaxing space to do so. If you feel stuck, try to continue writing.

Even if the words "I am stuck" are repeated on your page, this will encourage your writing in the future.

Use the poem and questions on the next page as a guide for your writing.

"Hope" is the thing with feathers

Emily Dickinson

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –*

*And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –*

*I've heard it in the chillest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet – never – in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of me.*

Emily Dickinson, "Hope' is the Thing with Feathers" from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University press, Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permissions of the publishers and Trustees of Amherst College.

Source: *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* Edited by R. W. Franklin (Harvard University Press, 1999)

“Hope” is the thing with feathers

Emily Dickinson

Guided Writing Activity

1. Choose a line in the poem above that resonates with you, and write it at the top of the next page.
2. Take a brief moment to think about what that line means to you. What does it make you feel?
3. Set a quiet timer for 5-minutes, and begin writing.
4. Continue writing, even if you are feeling stuck.
5. If you are still writing when the timer goes off, finish your thought and then stop writing.

Reflection Questions

1. How did you find this writing experience? Were you comfortable writing, or were you just thinking about when the timer would go off?

2. Were you able to continue writing from your stream of consciousness, or did you find that you were often stuck?

"Hope" is the thing with feathers – Emily Dickinson

Line:

Thoughts

Poem/Writing of Choice

Guided Writing Activity

1. Choose a poem or piece of writing that resonates with you. Then choose a line from it to reflect on.
2. Take a brief moment to think about what that line means to you. What does it make you feel?
3. Set a quiet timer for 5-minutes, and begin writing.
4. Continue writing, even if you are feeling stuck.
5. If you are still writing when the timer goes off, finish your thought and then stop writing.

Reflection Questions

1. How did you find this writing experience? Were you comfortable writing, or were you just thinking about when the timer would go off?

2. Were you able to continue writing from your stream of consciousness, or did you find that you were often stuck?

Poem/Writing of your Choice

Line:

Thoughts

Thoughts

Poem/Writing of your Choice

Line:

Thoughts

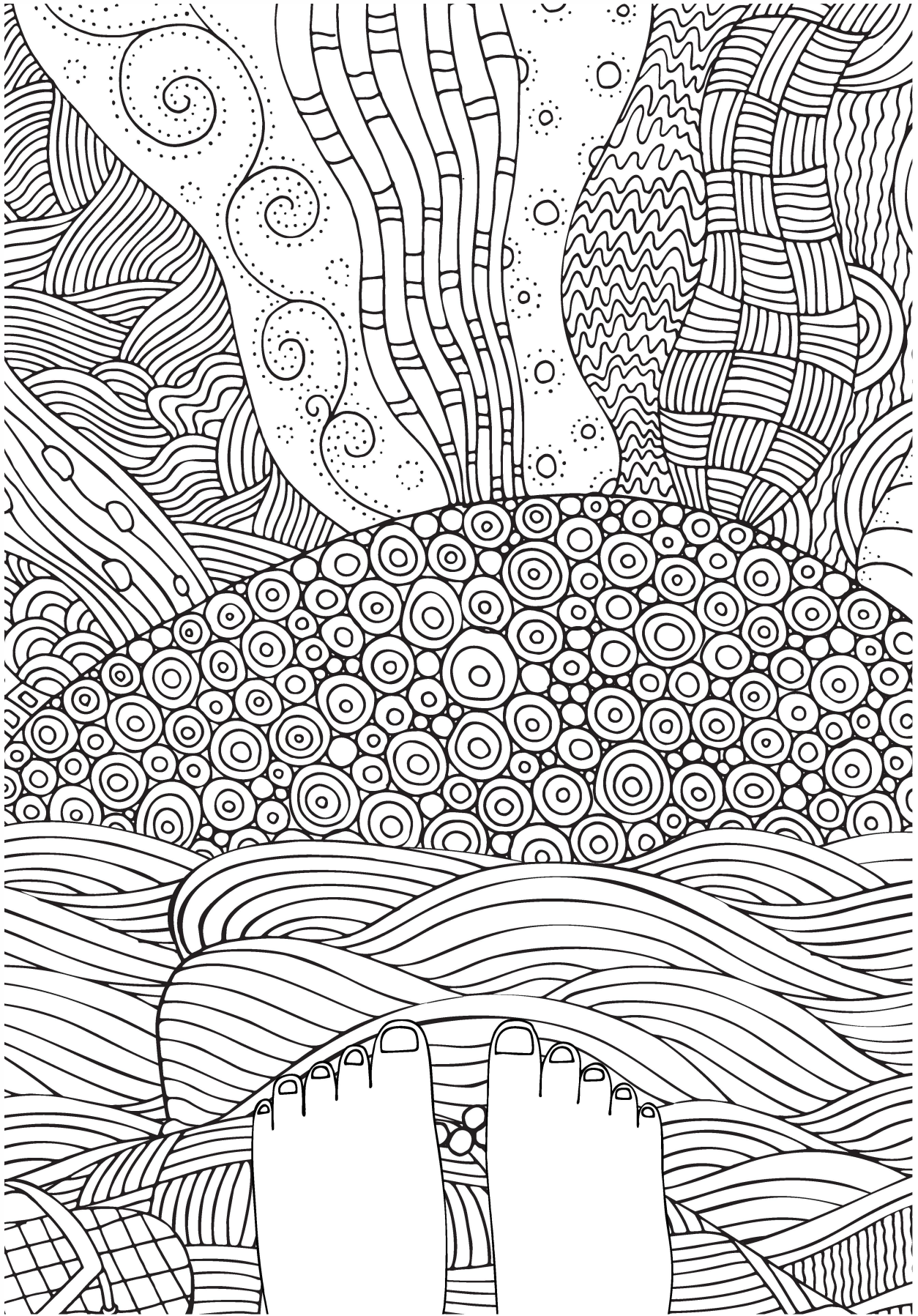
Artful Designs

Get creative & colourful – feed your soul with Mandala art.

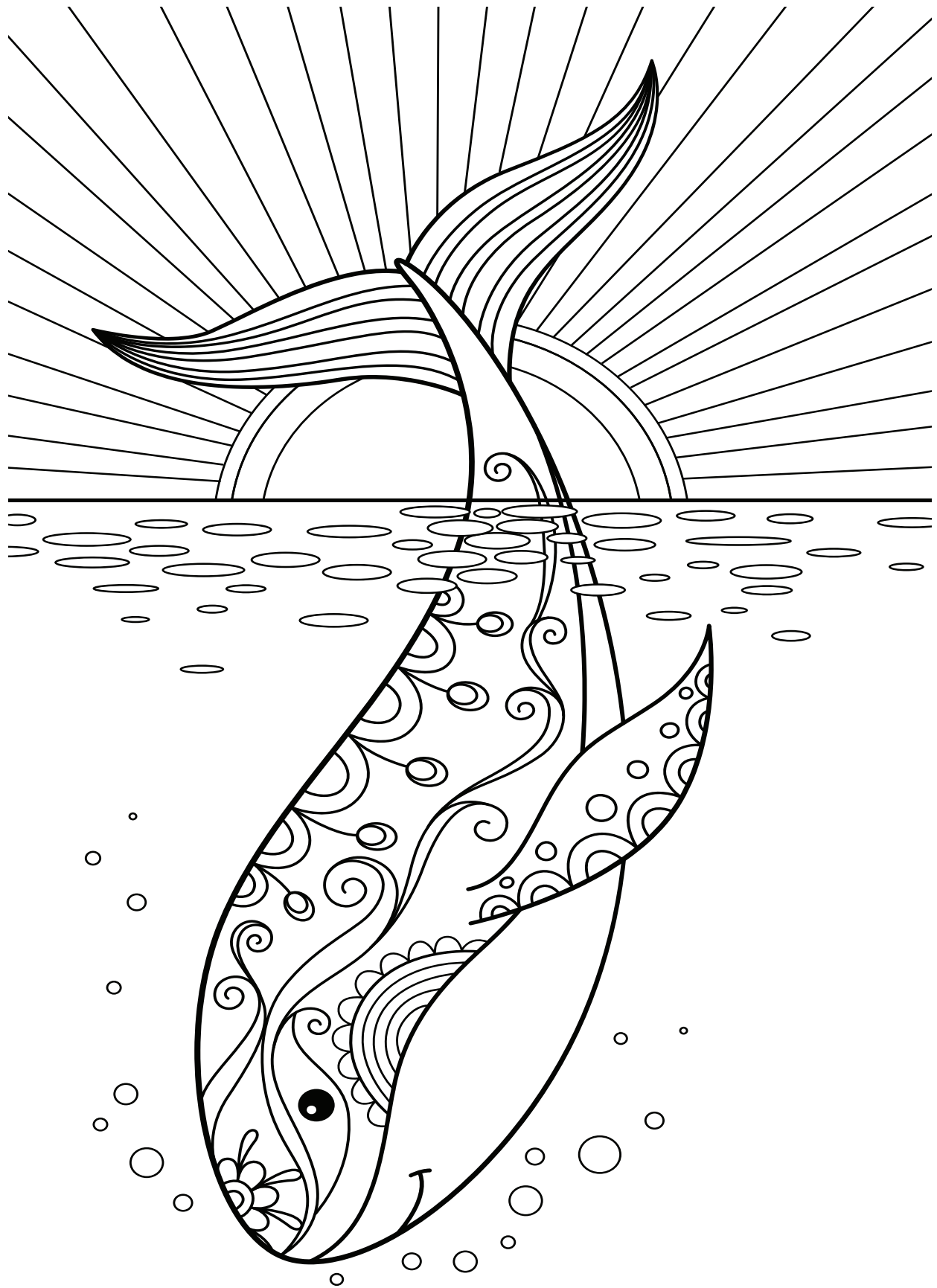




Print this page and colour



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Activities and Rituals

Use your senses. Try something new.



Lavender Playdough

Note: You can substitute other Essential Oils or scents as desired; Rose, Chamomile, Cinnamon, Lemon, or Bergamot for example.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups All-Purpose Flour
- 1 cup Salt
- 4 cups Water
- ½ cup Cream of Tartar
- 10 tbsp Oil (*use any oil you like*)
- 2-3 drops of Lavender Essential Oil, if desired
- (optional) ¼ cup Dried Lavender Flower Buds

Directions:

1. Mix together the flour, salt, water, cream of tartar, and oil in a saucepan and heat over low-medium heat.
2. Stir continuously until a ball of play dough forms.
3. Let play dough cool on the counter or smooth clean surface for at least 10-minutes.
4. Flatten the dough out and add a few drops of oil. Knead the dough and add another drop if needed.
5. Add the dried lavender buds *if you like*, and knead some more.
6. Once the playdough is at room temperature, transfer to an air tight container.
7. Use as desired.

Playdough should last about a month in an air tight container.

Dot Art

Dot art is a type of painting style that emulates the look of beadwork. It has been made well known by the Métis artist Christi Belcourt.

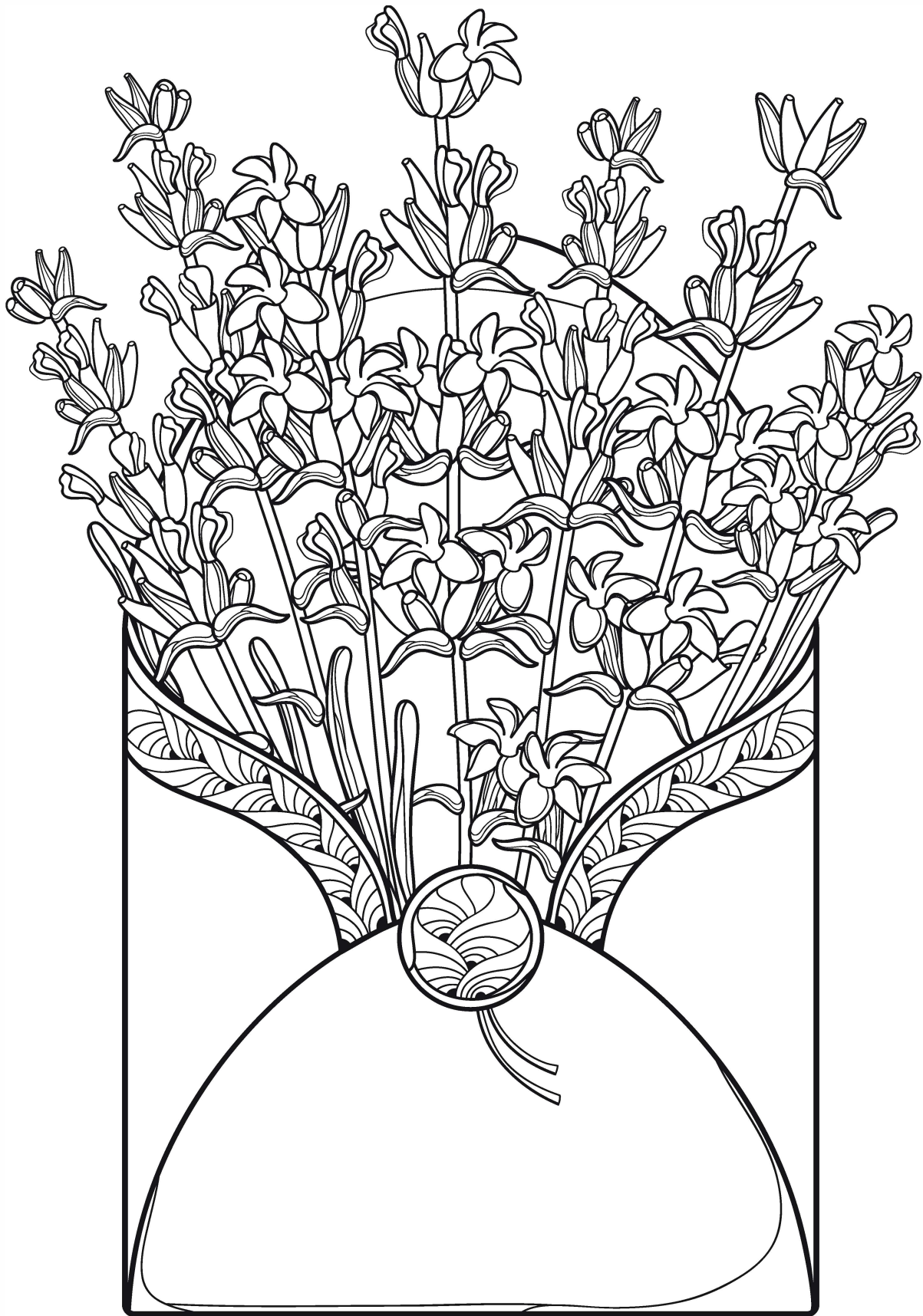
“Beadwork became an expression of Métis cultural identity and served to heighten Métis nationalism and cultural pride. Métis beadwork patterns extracted from nature emphasized symmetry, balance, and harmony.” – Christy Belcourt (Métis artist)

Painting and colouring allows for you to use your creative side, reduce stress, and get in touch with your feelings. Creating art gives you a chance to take your mind off of anything stressful and funnel it into something artistic and relaxing.

In this activity you will colour in the flowers with small dots to emulate the look of small seed beads.

Materials you will need:

- Fine tipped coloured markers



Print this page for dot art

Free Space

Just for you.



Write

Doodle

Write

Doodle

Write

Doodle

Write

Doodle

Write

Doodle



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