

# FOCUSING AND ART THERAPY

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Art therapy involves the use of art materials to work through emotional and psychological distress. Both the process of creating art and the art product itself are used therapeutically. The creative process is in itself healing by virtue of its cathartic effect and ability to bring into consciousness that which is unconscious. The art product can be used for associations, communication, and diagnostic purposes. Combining art therapy with focusing is useful for the focusing therapist and the art therapist. Art therapy can be used in conjunction with the six movements of focusing outlined by Eugene Gendlin or with any part of the focusing round.

What are the advantages of combining art with Focusing?

1. Art can be used to concretize and document the felt sense and felt shift.
2. The physical act of drawing helps the felt sense to move, thus bringing about a felt shift. (While drawing, the body is involved; since the felt sense is bodily, drawing helps to carry the experience forward.)
3. The art product enables both focuser and guide to see the exact same image that symbolizes the felt sense.
4. The visual image is a reminder of where focusing began and where it ended.
5. The visual art product can be used as a tangible reference point to return to in later focusing sessions.
6. Art can be used to clear a space and to bring the focusing round to closure.

## Clearing a Space

Drawing can be used in many ways to clear a space. Here are a few different possibilities:

Free Drawing: The client is invited to draw anything that she wishes to in the moment-shapes, colors, abstract or realistic images, whatever. It is a spontaneous drawing. No specific subject is suggested.

The act of drawing "anything" helps the client to begin to focus in the here and now. Drawing helps to discharge tension that one is carrying in the present, thus helping to come into a clearer state of being.

Draw How You Feel Inside: The client is asked to turn her attention inside to her body and to ask in a friendly way, "How am I right now?" The client is asked to see if there is an image that matches or acts like a handle for the felt sense. When the client gets in touch with an image, she draws it.

This exercise brings the client in touch with her bodily felt experience. This is different from asking the client to draw without checking inside ..

Guided Imagery: The client is asked to close her eyes (unless she doesn't want to), breathe, and begin to relax her body. The therapist continues: "Imagine you are on a peaceful beach. It is relaxing and safe. The sun is gently shining on you. The water is beautiful, crystal, blue-very calm and peaceful." After awhile, the client is asked to draw the scene.

After drawing, the client can proceed to stacking all the things between her and feeling all fine. Stacking the problems can also be incorporated into drawing (e.g. the client can draw each problem, the client can draw putting the problems in a boat that takes them some distance from her as she stays on the shore, etc.).

### The Felt Sense

After the client senses which problem or issue is asking to be worked on, she allows her attention to come down inside her body and gently asks, "What's the whole feel of this?" The client waits. After a felt sense comes, the guide asks the client to see if there is an image that matches or acts like a handle for the

felt sense. Once the image comes, the client draws the image.

### Resonating the Handle and Felt Sense

As the client draws the image, she checks inside the bodily felt experience for a feeling of rightness--Are the colors right? the shapes? the image? If not, keep drawing. The client draws until the handle (art) fits the felt sense.

### Felt Shift

Often, during the drawing of the felt sense, a felt shift occurs. The session may proceed in two possible directions: staying with drawing, or alternating between drawing and verbal focusing.

Staying with drawing: After drawing the felt sense (as above), the client can proceed to another

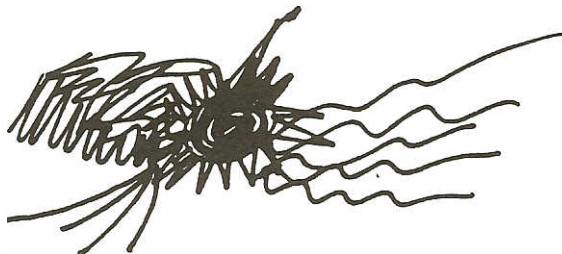
round of focusing checking to see how she is inside now. The procedure is repeated as above: the client finds an image that matches the felt sense, and draws that.

The second drawing concretizes the felt shift that has occurred.

### Alternating between art and verbal focusing:

The client may stay with the first drawing of the felt sense and ask it questions. After asking and receiving, the client focuses inwardly again to get the whole felt sense, and then draws the image of the felt sense. The second drawing concretizes the felt shift.

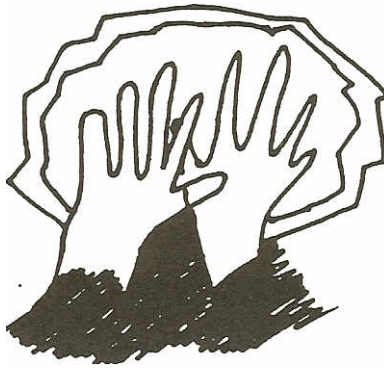
Example: Linda is a thirty-year-old woman.



She clears a space by doing a free drawing:

Afterward, she stacks all the things that are between her and feeling all fine: loneliness, work, mother, pressure to do well. After the space is cleared, Linda takes a moment to be with the "all fine." She then feels a pull to work on her loneliness. She turns her attention inside her body to sense the whole thing about the loneliness.

The following image is her handle (which she draws):



Linda checks the drawing against her bodily felt experience for its rightness. "Yes, it matches."

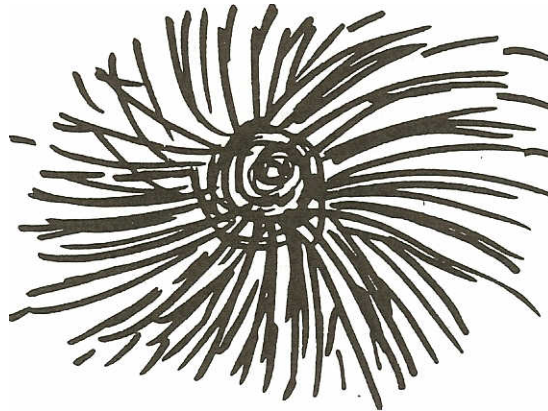
We look at the drawing of the felt sense together. Linda shares: "I feel this pushing away ... a stuckness ... a trapped-ness of energy."

I invite her to focus and ask the felt sense, "So what makes for this pushing away, stuckness, energy trapped-ness?"

Linda senses inside, asking the felt sense. After a few moments, she says, "There's a fear ... a fear of being rejected. So I hold myself back."

I reflect: "There's a fear of being rejected and so you hold yourself back." Linda checks inside again, "Yes, that's it. Something moved inside-it feels different now."

I invite Linda to turn her attention inside again to sense the bodily felt experience. She finds an image that matches the felt sense, and draws it: -



Linda: "The holding back energy, stuck, trapped energy, has been released. I feel it spread through my entire body-to my fingertips and toes." (The original drawing is in brilliant colors-red, blue, yellow).

A closing comment by a client who prefers to combine art with focusing: "With art, the felt sense becomes clearer to me. I am able to see and experience a tangible change both in my art work and in my feeling state. The art also gives me a product which I can refer to at any time."