The Healing Power of Mandalas
Finding Meaning from Trauma

Presented by Holly Cook, LPC-MHSP and Teresa Prendes, Ed.S., LPC-MHSP
Trauma and the Brain

Verbal Expression
The pre-frontal lobe (responsible for language) is adversely affected by trauma, which gets in the way of its linguistic function.

Emotional Regulation
The amygdala (responsible for emotional regulation) is in such overdrive that it often enlarges.

Brain Lateralization
When discussing trauma, significant parts of the left hemisphere (Broca’s Area) shut down and the right hemisphere becomes activated.
Healing from Trauma Involves...

- Interrupting the natural cycle of avoidance.
- Discharging pent-up “fight-or-flight” energy.
- Making connections between feelings and symptoms.
- Learning how to regulate strong emotions.
- Processing and integrating trauma-related memories and feelings.
- Understanding of self and the world in light of the trauma.
- Restoring relationships, connections, boundaries, and trust.
If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

~ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 88

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.”

~ Khalil Gibran

“You desire to know the art of living, my friend? It is contained in one phrase: make use of suffering.”

~ Henri-Frederic Amiel

"Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it."

~ Viktor Frankl quoting Spinoza's *Ethics* in *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 95

“In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning…”

~ Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*
Finding Meaning from Trauma

1. Suffering is part of the human experience
2. We must discover why we are suffering
3. Suffering can be transformed and healed
4. Once you have identified the cause of your suffering, you must find an appropriate path

Buddha’s Four Noble Truths:

1. Life has inevitable suffering
2. There is a cause to our suffering
3. There is an end to suffering
4. The end to suffering is contained in the eight fold path
In therapy, the mandala is any drawing made within the framework of a circle.
Mandalas – The Sacred Circle

At the root of all mandalas is the human longing to understand oneself, experience harmony, and grasp one's place in the universe. Cultures from around the world have used circle drawings to express universal aspects of the human experience.
At the root of all mandalas is the human longing to understand oneself, experience harmony, and grasp one’s place in the universe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandalas – The Sacred Circle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan Mandala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American Medicine Wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labyrinth Walking Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayan Calendar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultures from around the world have used circle drawings to express universal aspects of the human experience.
Natural Mandalas
Carl Jung
The mandala represents the center of personality from which the “Self” develops.

Joan Kellogg
Our unconscious draws us toward certain symbols, colors, shapes, etc. which reflect our mental state or tasks related to our psyche’s current stage of development.
Mandalas in Practice

Creating and interpreting mandalas to develop insight.

Drawing or coloring mandalas as a meditation tool.

Creating mandalas as a form of self-expression and healing.
Let yourself go....the object of mandala drawing is not to make a picture of anything in particular, but rather to let the drawing unfold without conscious direction.

Allow the colors to pick you

There are no mistakes!
Mandala Drawing: The Process...

Take a moment to reflect upon the following questions

1. Imagine yourself inside your mandala
   How does it feel to be inside?
   Where is it the most comfortable?
   What do the symbols look like from this perspective?

2. List the colors you used
   What associations do you have for each color, if any
   (words, feelings, images, memories)?

3. List the shapes used in your mandala
   What associations do you have for each color, if any
   (words, feelings, images, memories)?

4. Give your mandala a title based on your reflections
What feelings does the client attach to...

- Colors
- Black/White
- Shapes
- Numbers
- Thickness and Thinness of Lines
- Strokes
- Border of Circle
- Location of Symbols/Shapes
- Background
The Healing Power of Mandalas

- Circles are centering and provide a protective boundary
- Boundary of the circle provides a safe container for memories
- Reconnecting implicit (sensory) and explicit (declarative) memories of trauma.
- Access trauma memories through right-brain symbolic communication
- Practice relaxation and self-soothing
- Bridge sensory memories and narrative
- Imaginal exposure: trauma is experienced through the art and therefore outside of oneself (externalized)
- The client unknowingly sets the pace of healing
- Suggestive mandalas: Cognitive reprocessing of the trauma providing alternative more empowering outcomes
- Provide a wealth of information: colors, shapes, spacing, and time devoted to the project
- Not biased by culture, class, gender, etc.


