

BODY MAPPING



Body mapping storytelling

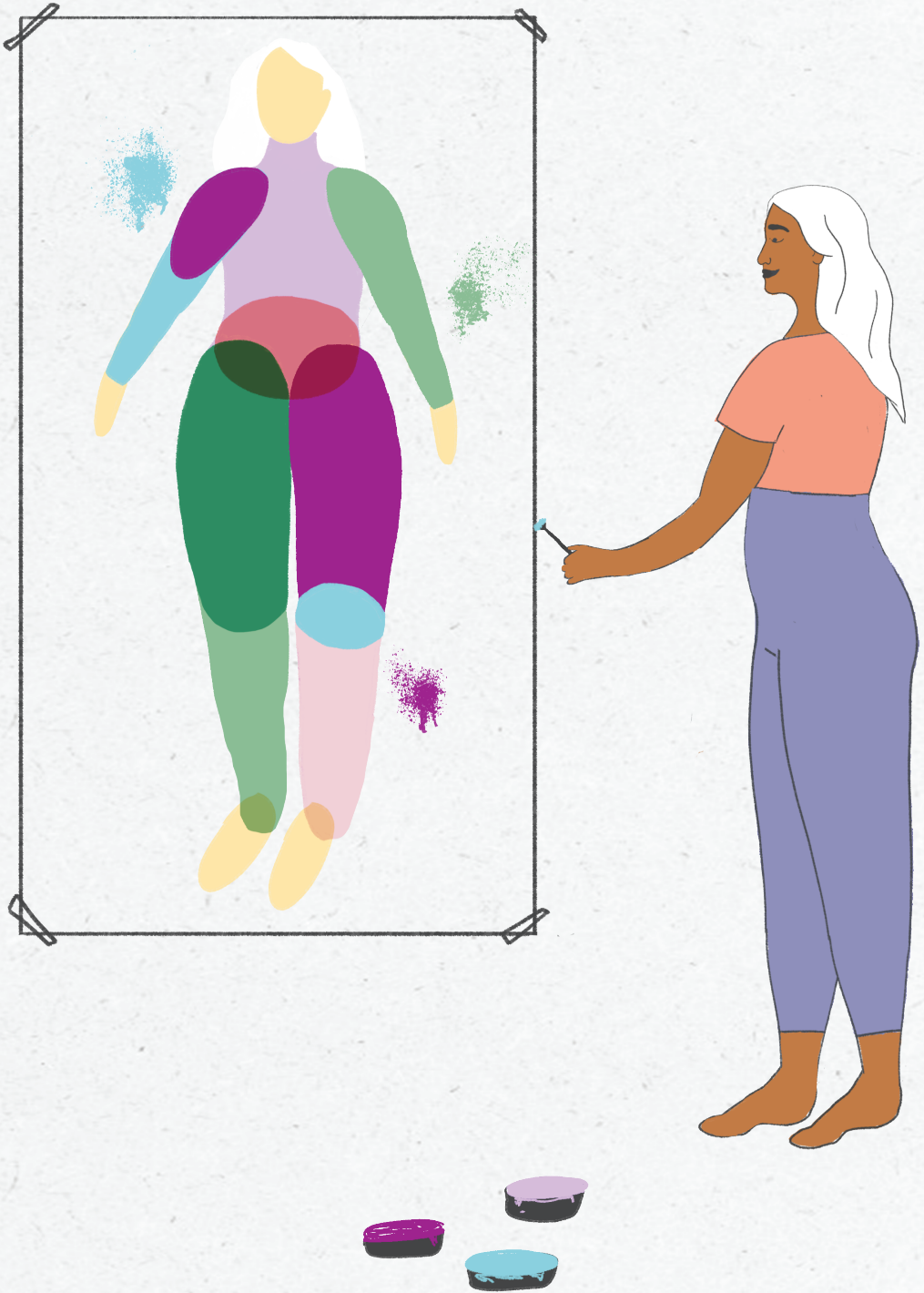
Body mapping is a great way of exploring our response to trauma. Body maps are life-size human body images and are created on paper using colours and symbols to represent aspects of our life, our body and the world we live in. They are like totems. We construct them with symbols that make sense of our overall story and experience¹.”

Body mapping came out of the Memory Box Project in South Africa, an art-therapy for women living with HIV and AIDS². Body maps were used as a therapeutic way for these women to document their stories, and to provide a keepsake for their families after they passed. Since that time, body mapping has been used as a community development and research approach³. Using body mapping can help us to deepen our reflection, and to communicate our experience more fully at this deeper level.

Body mapping and trauma

The very physical act of placing images on paper whilst expressing their meaning and significance enables us to make connections between past events. Over time, we access deeper layers of meaning. In this way, it allows us to reconnect with aspects of our history that remain hidden or silenced.

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- 1 Gastaldo D, Magalhaes L, Carrasco C, Davy C. (2012). *Body-map story telling as research: Methodological considerations for telling the stories of undocumented workers through body mapping*. Toronto. p.5. Available at: http://www.migrationhealth.ca/sites/default/files/Body-map_storytelling_as_research_HQ.pdf.
 - 2 Morgan J. (2003). *The Bambanani women's group. Long life: positive HIV stories*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
 - 3 Boydell, K.M. (2020). *Introduction to body mapping*. In Boydell, K.M. (ed). *Applying body mapping in research: An arts-based method*, (pp1-5). London: UK, Routledge Publishing



Translating lived experience

So, art making activities such as body mapping can be very helpful with complex emotions. They offer a rich and insightful way to explore how we make sense of our worlds.

The creation of images and symbols also has the potential to reveal invisible and thereby previously unspoken issues. Using images to communicate knowledge is something we can all do - we do not need to be artists or academics to create our own personal images, and find in them our own personal truth.

Art-making activities place a high value on personal experience and interaction. They offer an opportunity to pose new questions, gain a deeper understanding and help us to find creative ways to express and communicate our personal truth.

Body Mapping

Materials needed:
colour material such as pencils, multicoloured paper or fabric (+scissors), paint, markers, pastels.
A notebook and a body-size piece of paper

Body mapping usually takes place over a prolonged period of time. Your body is the starting point for you to explore your experience of anxiety. The following steps are guidelines only and can be adapted to suit your needs and the needs of others.

Relaxation and body scan

Take a moment to relax in a quiet environment. You are going to reflect on how your body feels. Start with a body scan, from the toes to the crown of your head. The purpose of this body scan is to locate points of tension where anxiety is felt. If the mind wants to revisit the trauma, gently bring it back to the present moment by taking three deep breaths and by feeling the contact of the floor on your body.

You may or may not find that you need to refocus several times throughout the body scan, and that is OK. After each time, bring your awareness back to your body scan. Notice any points of tension in your body, and continue the scan until you finish at the crown of your head.

Another way to refocus is to go on a meditative walk. For each step, focus on the contact of the ground on the sole of your feet, from the heel to the tip of the toes.

Creative thinking

Now that you have found where anxiety is experienced within your body, think of symbols that represent your experience of anxiety. Draw in your notebook these points of tension. You can also create visuals that represent how you deal with anxiety.

Body tracing

Take off your shoes and extra clothing. Place a piece of paper slightly bigger than your body on the floor. Lie down on it in a posture that represents who you are and your experience of dealing with anxiety. Ask someone to help you tracing the outline of your body using a pencil. Then, pick a colour marker that best represents who you are and retrace your body outline in that colour.

Filling in the body map

Looking at the drawings you made in your notebook, which ones would you like to use on your body map? Where you will place them also holds significance, consider carefully where on the body map they would gain in meaning.

Personal slogan

This can be a statement, a saying, a poem, a song, a prayer, your philosophy of life or your current thinking about your life. It holds specific meaning to you. If you find this difficult, start by writing down in your notebook the first three words that best describe your experiences of anxiety. Then, thinking of the ways that help you to deal with it, write down another three words. These can now be used to form a sentence. Feel free to let go and enjoy the creative writing process. In your own time, draw your personal slogan onto your body map.

Journaling

It is important to describe in your notebook what the process of creating a body map is like for you. Explore the meanings of the images and symbols that you draw, use your notebook as a journal to document these thoughts.

Investigate

What emotions did you notice when you were creating your body map? Where did you feel these emotions in your body? What did they look like or feel like?

Did anything change once you took time to notice your emotion? How can you notice this during your everyday life? When would it be helpful?

Sharing

This body mapping activity can be done in groups. Once the body maps are finished they can be shared with each other. When the sharing begins, the body mappers generally see that although each body map is unique, there are common threads that tie them together. The shared experience is of great value as it shows that we are not alone in our experiences.

Activity for Children

Materials needed:
colour material such as pencils, multicoloured paper
or fabric (+scissors), paint, markers, pastels
A body-size piece of paper
A4 paper sheets

Activity

When body mapping with children and young people, it is important to encourage them to think about a particular experience of an emotion such as happiness, anger, fear, excitement, or sadness. They can then be encouraged to remember where they felt it in their body. Be straightforward and ask direct questions such as what emotion they felt like at the time and where exactly in the body they felt it. To support children in the body mapping process, before starting, describe and clarify the different steps of the creative process.

Step 1 - Relaxation and body scan

Invite them to get in touch with how it feels inside their bodies and to take at least three slow and deep breaths. This step is important as it allows children to be in touch with their bodies prior to actually creating the body map. This can begin with asking them to put their hands on their head, close their eyes and then put their hands on their heart. During this process, they can be asked how each part of their body feels and whether or not they see any colours. Keeping their eyes closed, they can be asked to place their hands on their heart and prompted to share whether their heart was beating fast or slow. They can be asked how their hands are feeling – for example, cool, warm, soft.

Step 2 - Practice

The children are now well prepared for thinking about how they would like to represent their emotions on their body map. For this step, they will draw on the A4 paper sheets you provided. Ask them to think visually about how they want to show the different emotions they are feeling in the body and outside of their body. It is important to 'listen' to and accept the emotions expressed visually. Allow the child to fully express these in their visual expression.

Step 3 - Body tracing

Follow the same steps as for the adult activity on page 20. Alternatively, children can also work in pair and help each other draw the outline of their body.

Step 4 - Body mapping

Invite the children to show you their drawings and explain their meanings. Then, the children can cut out their drawings and place them on their body map. Ask them where on their body map they would like to place these drawings and why? Let them have a play around to find where the most suitable places are. Once they find on their body map where each drawing gains in meaning, they can glue them down. Again, focus on acceptance of the visual expression. Avoid judgement.

Step 5 - Personal slogan

For this final step, the children will focus on creating a personal slogan that will be drawn onto their body map. This slogan can reflect who they are as a person and their experiences. Follow the same prompts as on page 20 if the children find this step difficult.

Note that it is common to choose a slogan in a language other than English, if this is not their first language. They may wish to keep it like this.

