

# Building Your Toolkit:

## *Using Arts and Crafts in Your Practice*



Providing opportunities for the folks you are working with to participate in arts and crafts can be a valuable tool in helping them build practices that support their recovery.

### **Creating Safe Expression**

Arts and crafts provide non-verbal channels for expressing complex emotions that might be difficult to articulate. Many people in recovery struggle with emotional regulation or have experienced trauma that makes verbal processing challenging. Creating art offers a gentler entry point—someone might paint their feelings about cravings, sculpt representations of their recovery journey, or use collage to explore their identity beyond their diagnosis.

### **Building Structure and Routine**

The process of engaging in creative activities helps establish healthy routines and teaches patience. Working on a project from start to finish mirrors the recovery journey itself—it requires planning, commitment, and the ability to work through frustration. Peer Recovery Specialists can use this parallel to highlight transferable skills like persistence, problem-solving, and the reward of delayed gratification.

### **Practical Applications**

**Mood tracking through color:** Have clients choose colors that represent their emotional state and create simple abstract pieces or mandalas. Over time, this creates a visual record of their emotional landscape.

### **Vision Boards**

Help clients visualize their recovery goals and life aspirations through collage work, making abstract hopes feel more concrete and achievable.

### **Gratitude Jars or Journals**

Decorating containers or journals for daily gratitude practice combines creativity with evidence-based recovery practices.

### **Sensory Grounding Tools**

Creating textured art, stress balls, or sensory boxes provides portable coping mechanisms for managing anxiety or cravings.

### **Facilitating Connection**

Group art projects reduce isolation and build community without the pressure of direct conversation. Working side-by-side on individual projects or collaborating on murals creates natural opportunities for peer support and shared experience.



## Actual Scenario

*Walter is a 62-year old man in early recovery. A person with an alcohol use disorder since his late teens, he had never had the opportunity to explore his creative side. He attended a painting class at a local recovery community center with a small group of others in recovery. He discovered that he had a talent for painting, and he kept attending the classes with great enthusiasm. A new recovery practice discovered! "I love it! I don't remember every having these supplies offered to me before, and wouldn't have thought I would enjoy it so much."*

**What are some ideas you or your colleagues have to get started?**

## Key Considerations

Meet clients where they are—the goal isn't creating museum-quality art but engaging in the process. Emphasize that there's no "wrong" way to create. Keep materials accessible and affordable. Be mindful of triggers; some materials (like certain solvents) or themes might be challenging for specific individuals. It is not the role of a Peer Recovery Specialist to unpack past trauma. If something comes up for an individual, be sure to connect them with their current therapist, or help them to connect with one. Remember, you are not trying to offer art therapy which is a specifically credentialed profession. You are really just trying to open some doors for folks to express themselves in new ways.