

CULTIVATING THE FERTILE GROUND OF CREATIVITY

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Playing and making tissue paper collages may seem like creative activities reserved for kindergarten students, however, it's these basic inventive and imaginative actions that have the power to shape lifelong changes in our body, mind and emotions.

The creative impulse is wired into each and every one of us, an impulse that moves all life forward. Its inherent rhythms bring us growth and expansion. Every thing that we can see began with a creative thought; an inspiration. We are no exception.

As human beings, we need an open space for the full articulation of our own essence and not to be confined in boxes. Various forms of imaginative play and artistic creation can bring out of hiding some of the essential properties we were born with but have been neglected and covered over. Unfortunately, our lives have become so busy and complex that what is natural to us has become blocked or completely shut down, because we have had to compete with or copy others. This causes us to become stuck in our lives. Consequently, the unexpressed emotions of anger, fear, grief and sorrow become trapped in the body and the psyche.

Becoming aware of the unconscious material that is held deep within our psyche, we have the opportunity to start cultivating a mindful and creative life. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist (1875-1961) said, "If you have nothing at all to create, then perhaps you create yourself." When fully engaged in creative activity, propelled by an energy that has nothing to do with logic, we begin to move past the critical mind, to restore the unity of body, mind and feelings.

Journeying to the part of ourselves where inspiration, joy and creativity live, we begin to express feelings that are difficult to address in traditional therapeutic contexts through the form of serious play. A child plays and the whole of her learns. In adult life we have to find ways of playing deliberately to restore our original curiosity, and sense of beauty. We need to experiment and re-integrate the adult with the child, the young and old in us.

One avenue of opening the creative channels is through making and engaging with collages, where the hands do the thinking without thought, and play inventively with colorful tissue paper, letting images emerge from deep within. The mutual activity of hands, eyes and brain produces a subtly different kind of awareness. In this process the minds has time to let go of words and plans and relax into the moment.

The Tissue Paper Collage Method Playshop, developed by Jungian analyst Dr. Edith Wallace, is an exceptionally powerful way to access the unconscious. This unique method introduces a new and significant synergy of expressive art and self-discovery, using collage making, meditation, movement and writing as catalysts for healing. This creative fusion acts as a bridge between conscious and unconscious thought in a safe and non-threatening way. Through this kind of work, a dialogue can develop between what is unconscious or unknown and what is conscious or known. This allows for a more holistic intelligence to come into play, bringing meaning and inspiration into our lives and the community around us.

Healing past traumas through "play" is a model successfully used for children all the time, and adults rarely take advantage of this avenue of adventure and creativity for healing. Donald Winnicott, a British paediatrician and psychoanalyst has said "It is only in playing that the individual is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self." Playing invites you into a matrix where unconscious forces allow your mind to wander freely and find a healing equilibrium.

Playing always happens in the moment, providing a transitional space that allows for the emergence of creative energy. An alchemical process begins when you allow the space for creativity to bubble up into awareness, where the imagination can lead

the way. The founder of the Play Therapy Association, Charles Schaefer, has said, "We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything than when we are playing."

Whether you are painting, sculpting, writing or making collages, all creative endeavors take time. This generation has been weaned on fast food, supercomputers and instant gratification; it has become normal to be moving at 120 miles per hour. Our lives are so filled to the brim with activity, it's often a chore to put aside a chunk of time for one's own spiritual, emotional and mental well being. One cannot enter into a creative space while talking on the phone, working and multi tasking everyday responsibilities. It takes time and effort to slow your life down to a pace where you can allow your imagination to cultivate your life. Trust me; the effort will be well worth the wait.

Here are five practices that I have found helpful in cultivating creativity:

1. Stop, Slow down and Take a Breath

Stop! Decelerate from the high speed of your life. Slow down enough to breathe deeply and quiet the body/mind. This is your starting point.

2. Ground your body to the earth.

Find a body oriented practice geared toward developing a deeper awareness of your connection to the earth. For example, with your feet planted on the ground imagine growing roots deep into the earth, allowing the intelligence from the earth to rise through your feet, slowly upwards into your awareness. Or, simply just *touch* something until you really feel it.

3. Tune in to yourself and listen

This is a time for you to pay attention to what is going on in your body, mind and emotions. Find a contemplative practice in which you can locate yourself in your physiology, allowing thoughts to flow freely, your mind to empty and inspiration to enter spontaneously.

4. Trust in the unknown

The natural rising of creativity cannot be coerced. Creativity does not happen on command; it is about cultivating an open and receptive state of mind. Make an appeal to that which is sacred to you and wait.

5. Dwell in what you are doing – give it time.

Now is the time to play! Put ambition and any expectations on hold for a short while and allow your curiosity to roam. See what arises. Don't think in terms of results and don't compare yourself with others.