



Collage.

Useful for:	understanding an individual's emotions about something.
Very good for:	self-discovery, empathy, cohesion.
Good for:	realization.
Type of exercise:	individual.

General description:

In this kind of exercise, participants look at a random collection of images in a search for something that represents, in some way, the feelings they have about a given subject. The most important thing for this exercise is to ensure freedom of expression and spontaneity. Because of this, I always tell participants that, if they prefer they can sketch and write something, but they should still select at least one photo (or more) from the magazines. The reason is simple: there is a difference between thinking about what you want to convey and using a drawing or words to describe it, and having a reaction to a random image. The sketch and words are controlled; the reaction to the random image is (when the exercise is done correctly) subconscious. Once the person has seen an image and felt a reaction, they need to understand why they reacted to it. That process of elaboration, understanding the relationship that the image has with the participant's experience of the subject, is the key to gleaning emotional insights.

A variation of the collage is the 'choose a postcard' exercise. I have a collection of over 200 postcard-size printed colour images. The subject and the style of the images varies wildly. I cover a table with the postcards, image side up, and ask the participants to select one postcard that they find resonates with the subject I have given them. When everyone has a postcard, the participants take it in turns to show their chosen image and explain their choice. This is much faster and easier for the participants because it is less probing than a collage, but it still produces useful results.

Requirements:

A worksheet that forms a frame for the collage and many colour magazines of various types and themes with lots of photographs. To keep the responses uniquely representative of each individual, it is best to perform this exercise towards the beginning of the session. However, for best results you need to have established that the session is a safe place, so I usually place this as the second exercise. I always supply an abundance of colour magazines containing many photographs, together with scissors and tape. The worksheet usually depicts an empty picture frame with the title of the picture (the object of the exercise) written on the frame. When there are two subjects, the worksheet depicts a double picture frame, with each frame having a title.

Example assignments:

- 'Create a collage depicting how you feel about ZYX (a specific situation – for example, in the clinic when you forget to take medication).' The worksheet could be a picture frame (have fun choosing a suitable style) with the title of the picture (also the name of the exercise) written on the frame.

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Example assignments:

- ‘Create a collage depicting yourself as a XYZ (the role we are interested in, for example: caregiver, physician, patient).’ The worksheet could be a drawing of a hand holding a mirror; the empty space inside is for the collage.
- ‘Create two collages, one depicting your emotions towards XYZ (the disease) and the other depicting yourself.’ The worksheet could be a double picture frame with the title of the two pictures written on the frames.
- ‘Create two collages, one depicting the things that give you strength and the other depicting the things that take away your energy (or motivation) regarding managing XYZ (the disease).’ The worksheet could be two drawings of smartphones side by side, one with a full battery icon, the other with an exhausted battery icon. The screens of the two phones are the empty space for the collage.

Outcome:

In this exercise, the participants’ interpretation of the image and the meaning they attribute to the composition when they present it are much more important than the finished worksheet. Often in a collage exercise, an important image will be incorporated but not spontaneously commented upon when presented. Look out for this and ask about it.