

What are you carrying?



Thrive

Counselling and Consultancy

A therapeutic art activity to explore the burdens we carry around with us...

This activity would benefit anyone who does too much and often feels overwhelmed by the burdens and expectations of others. The exploration of a bag and its contents, is a great metaphor for re-evaluating what you hold on to, how many burdens weigh you down and what you may need to let go of...

Materials:

- ❖ A old leather or vinyl handbag
- ❖ Sandpaper, paint brush,
- ❖ Magazines, newspapers, card, small boxes
- ❖ Mod podge or decoupage glue
- ❖ Scissors, pens, colour pencils, paper
- ❖ Decorative items: beads, gems, ribbon etc

Safety statement:

Before embarking on this activity, please be aware that any art process, whilst being a very healing and enlightening experience, can also bring up emotions and memories that can be painful and distressing. Be sure that you have thought about what you will do if you become distressed whilst doing any therapeutic art activity. Do you have someone you can ring to speak to who you trust and will support you?

Remember you do not have to complete this activity in one sitting. If you feel like you are becoming distressed, stop what you are doing and take some time out, breathe, make a cup of tea and ring someone supportive. There are also some support numbers at the end of this activity that you can contact.

Prepare your space

- ❖ Ensure you have a quiet uninterrupted space
- ❖ Play relaxing music or light a candle if that is what you like to do
- ❖ Ensure you have all your materials at hand
- ❖ Ventilate the room and wear gloves if you are sensitive to glues and art materials.

Set your intention

Once you have chosen the bag you wish to work on, notice the qualities of the bag. How big is it, how deep, how strong is the handle? What do you like about the bag, what do you dislike?

In following the theme of exploring how much you carry in your day to day life, how does this bag resonate with you and what you are feeling?

What do you need to do to this bag for it to provide



insight into how heavy a load you really carry? Where do you feel you need to start on the bag?

Sometimes the outside is easier as it allows us to scrape the surface enough without feeling too overwhelmed.

Begin the process...

The outside of the bag:

1. Start by wiping over your bag.
2. Once dry, begin sanding your bag lightly to create a textured surface for the paper and glue to stick to.
3. Select images, words, colours that reflect how you are feeling.
4. Using the decoupage glue, paste these on until you bag is covered the way you want.
5. Glue on any decorative pieces you desire to finish the process.
6. Once complete, paint 2 coats of decoupage glue over the entire bag to seal it.
7. Allow to dry

The inside of your bag...

While the outside of your bag is drying, you may wish to begin exploring the inside of your bag.

What does it hold? How heavy is it? Is your bag overflowing or well contained?

The process for creating the inside of you bag is up to you! You may have items at home that are symbolic and reflect what you see as the contents of your bag. Use them, change them and add to them in whatever way you chose.

If you like to write, you may wish to write down those

items that you carry and put them in small boxes to place inside your bag. These writings could be a letter to someone who has hurt you or placed too many expectations on you. It could be a list of all the burdens you hold that belong to someone else.

If you don't like to write, then maybe you could draw the contents of your bag? Again you could place these drawings in little boxes, or even fold them and secure with tape or ribbon.

Once you have filled your bag with all the contents, reflect on what is there. What is missing? What stands out to you? Are there positive items in your bag or just negative items? How do you feel after exploring the contents of your bag?

Reflection...

Creating the contents of your bag can be an insightful process. It can tell you a lot about yourself, your relationships, and what changes you may need to make...



The power of creating this bag and exploring its contents, is that it is YOUR BAG... you have the power to remove, change or add anything you like to it.

In reflecting on the contents of your bag, you may like to ask yourself the following questions...

- ❖ What contents of my bag are important to me?
- ❖ What is serving me well and what is weighing me down?
- ❖ What am I willing to let go of?
- ❖ If there are contents that I cannot let go of, can I alter them so they take up less space or hold less weight?
- ❖ Can I replace any of the contents with items that support and nurture me, that help me to be more authentic and compassionate to myself?
- ❖ If I am going to let go, replace or change some items, how can I do this on my terms, and in a way that is safe and supportive of my needs?

Making changes...

Once you have reflected on the contents of your bag, what each item means to you and what you are willing to let go of, replace or change, you can begin to think about how you might do this in a way that supports you.

Remember that change is an ongoing process. Don't attempt to make all the changes to your bag in one session. Be sure to give yourself breaks in between. Small steps make for longer lasting changes and are less overwhelming.

Start by selecting something from your bag that is small and manageable and work from there. It could be that you want to strengthen your bag by adding something positive to it, something self-nurturing and validating first. Something that you know will give you some extra strength to carry you through the more difficult challenges.

Remember...

The bag in this activity is a metaphor for what you may be carrying in your life. How you let go and reduce the burdens that weigh you down, can take many forms. Here are a few practical ways you can lighten the load in your everyday life...

Literally clean out your closet! De-cluttering your home can be a great way to reduce the chaos and create space in your life for more positive things. Letting go of old items and things we don't need can be very symbolic.

Let go of dysfunctional and toxic relationships: Some are easier to let go of than others, but to really begin to lighten the contents of your bag, there may be relationships that need to go in order for you to be who you really are.

Put some firm boundaries in place: Decide what is and isn't negotiable in your relationships with others, your work and your life in general. If you are finding that you feel constantly exhausted and that most of your relationships are one sided, then it is the perfect time to think about putting some boundaries in place to look after yourself. Saying no when you mean it can be difficult, so maybe start small. Instead of saying 'yes' automatically to every request you get, maybe say 'I will think about it', or 'I'm not sure at this stage, I'll get back to you'. Drawing a visual picture of your boundaries, what you are willing to do for people and what you are not, is a really useful way to give yourself a foundation for which to build strong boundaries with people who take advantage of your generosity and kindness.

Develop your own personal mantra: No one else has to know what it is, but it can be anything that helps to remind you in vulnerable times what you stand for and what you will and won't accept. It could be something as simple as "I deserve better than this" or "I will only take on what I can manage at this time". It's up to you...

Keep a journal of your progress and setbacks: A journal is a great way not only to get your thoughts and feelings out on paper but to track how you are going. Recording your achievements helps you to recognise how well you are doing, even if it's only small steps. Recording any setbacks give you the opportunity to reflect on how you could do things differently next time. Keep a journal for a year, and when you read back over it, you will more than likely be surprised at just how far you have come.



Thrive

Counselling and Consultancy