Art Journaling, A Beginner’s Consideration to Use as a Wellness Skill

By John Friday, M.Ed., CPSWS
What is Art Journaling?

Art Journals have been around for ages. Early on, art journals were used by artists, such as Leonardo de Vinci and others, to record their ideas and studies of images as they developed their craft. Artists still practice art journaling today.

More recently, art journals have been used by trained mental health professionals in art therapy treatments. Some practitioners hold up C. G. Jung’s “Red Book” as an example of the development of the art journal as a means of exploring the mind, and a tool of art therapists.

(Cathy Malchiodi, 2013)
My own introduction to art journaling

- I am not a therapist, or a psychiatrist, or counselor. I am a certified peer support and wellness specialist. Like those who I serve, I have mental health struggles, as well as a history of trauma.

- In 2012 a friend of mine where I worked shared her art journal with me. She noted that it was a testament to her life journey. It told her story. It helped me realize that, for me, my artwork was a witness to my own life journey. As a result, I created a series of paintings depicting traumas I had experienced as a child, and adolescent.

- I noticed that several peers we served who had been introduced to art journaling were very enthusiastic about how it was helping them manage the state of their wellness. My friend offered to guide me through an art journal entry any time I wanted.
In 2014 I had a particularly difficult time with Veteran’s Day. My thoughts centered on a young man I served with in the Air Force. He was killed in Vietnam with the rest of his aircrew, while trying to rescue a downed pilot.

I asked my peer support specialist friend to guide me through the technical aspects of my first art journal entry, and she did. Since that time I have found it useful in managing my wellness.

At times I have found that I turn to my art journal instead of a regular watercolor composition. The art journal has the added element of the written word, which is lacking in my regular paintings. The art journal speaks to my heart and soul and my mind. I engage the intellect, and explore my memories, as well as delve into my emotions. Often there is a sense of relief and purging...peace...validation...
The key rules of art journaling

There are no rules.
The dynamics of art journaling are as unique as the individuals who are engaged in art journaling.
A Sampling of Materials Used in Art Journaling

Anything goes!!!
My Art Journal

Music helps to set the mood.

I use free-writing to engage the prompt and record my thoughts and feelings.

I use images and color to better express the depth of my emotions related to the prompt.
My first entry: Veterans’ Day, “Angel”

I use paint, my written words, as well as images cut or torn from old books and magazines;... much like a collage.
Fallen Brother...

Self-Sacrifice:
that Others May Live...
Art Journal Prompt:

“What haunts me...”
Art Journal Prompt:

Flashback...

“Where have I been?”

“Where am I now?”
Art Journal Prompt:

Memorial Day...

“Grandpa I miss you...”
Veteran’s Day...

...a year later..
Art journaling exercise 1

Choose one of the following art journaling prompts and make an entry in your art journal:

1. What haunts me? Why?
2. Who do I miss the most, and why?
3. What is on my heart and soul?
Benefits of art journaling

Personal:
Wellness skill for managing my mental health struggles.
Explore my thoughts and feelings in response to a given prompt.
Process my feelings.
Nurture my recovery journey.

Professional:
Sharing a wellness skill for working on one’s recovery journey.
Strengthen peer-to-peer relationship.

Additional Resources:
Mary Ellen Copeland, Ph.D. (2002)
Cathy Malchiodi, Ph.D. (2013)
Tips

I record whatever thoughts pop into my mind (free-writing). I do not censor myself.

I do a variety of entries; for example, a sensitive subject like “What haunts me?” I also do entries that explore uplifting subject matter, such as “What do I admire about my closest friend?”

My art journal is private, for “my eyes only”. In turn, I respect other people’s rights to privacy with their art journal.

I record the date and prompt of the entry on the art journal page for future reference.
Art Journal Prompt: “What is on my mind today?”

I google an image on my computer, print it, cut it out, and glue it in my art journal entry.

I use old photos I have.
Art Journal Prompt:

“My Pride and Joy is...”

I printed images from Facebook, cut them out, and used them as part of my art journal entry.
Art Journal Prompt:

“What I want most for my recovery journey is…”

(Pathways to Recovery)
Art Journal Prompt:

“What are some of my strengths?”

I used rubber stamps and ink pads to accent my art journal entry.
Art journaling exercise 2

Choose one of the following journaling prompts and make an entry in your art journal:

1. What was I doing during the happiest moment of my life?

2. What are my greatest strengths?

3. If I could be any kind of animal, what would it be, and why?
Question and Answer

What would you like to know?
References and Resources


Copeland, Ph.D., Mary Ellen *Wellness Recovery Action Plan* (Peach Press, 2002) [www.mentalhealthrecovery.com](http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com)


Fox, Rossi *365 Journal Writing Ideas* (Rossi Fox, 2013) [www.rossifox.com](http://www.rossifox.com)

Malchiodi, Ph.D., LPCC, LPAT, ATR-BC, Cathy A. *Visual Journaling as Art Therapy & Self-Help* (in Arts and Health @ psychologyToday.com, October 23, 2013) [www.cathymalchiodi.com](http://www.cathymalchiodi.com)

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Thank You for Participating.

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