

Summary Notes

CREATIVE MINDFUL ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT PMLD AND SENSORY LEARNERS' WELLBEING

A webinar presented by Sonya Mould.

- an experienced PMLD practitioner
- 27 years' experience of teaching children and young people with PMLD
- currently working on a freelance basis supporting young people with PMLD and or brain injury to access education, structure, exciting opportunities, and adventures. Either with in their home through home schooling or in collaboration with school to achieve consistency of approach and continuity when not able to attend school
- passionate about empowering young people with PMLD to be the best they can be, and to have the best adventures possible, to access the world around them, use their own skills and abilities to experience and explore, and most of all to have control over their own choices, environment, and their world
- Senior Mental Health Lead Coach and support SEND SMHL's to progress through the early stages of their SMHL journey

I wanted to deliver this webinar as part of this deep dive conference as I feel there are some lovely activities around art and creativity out there for our learners to explore respond to. Through this webinar I will mainly be referencing those with profound and sensory need, although the activities and information will also be relevant for those across the SEND and mainstream world. Please think about your learners individually and how these ideas or activities may support them, or could be tweaked for them.

There is no right or wrong way to do something or to be creative. There are just suggestions, ideas, things to try and discoveries to be made. With all the creative and art activities or strategies that I may suggest the important elements are the process, the engagement and focus, and the responses both physical and emotional, and not the creative outcome. Art and creativity are very individual and personal, it is very subjective and often a personal journey of discovery. It is important to perceive the creative outcomes in this way. Allowing freedom to explore, discover and make choices whilst creating, and then celebrating achievements and outcomes allowing pride, confidence and self-esteem to grow.

It is also important to allow the learners to lead the discovery and the journey and allow them the space to do so. Without directing or prompting too much, just supporting and guiding in a gentle way.

Through this webinar I am going to look at some creative and mindful activities that you can share with your learners. I will also look at ways you may be able to create regular spaces within your daily routine to allow time for mindful activities. With these activities it is important to develop a space and routine that your learners feel comfortable within, I will discuss how through sharing, having fun and creating positive experiences you can develop this with and for your learners.

Ideas: practical creative mindful ideas and activities

Dictionary Definitions from Oxford Languages ·

mindful

adjective: mindful

1. conscious or aware of something.

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2. focusing one's awareness on the present moment, especially as part of a therapeutic or meditative technique.

"tune in to your body and be mindful"

Quote:

A Definition of mindfulness:

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention...on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally, to things as they are.

(Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zinn 2007)

'By paying attention in a non-judgmental way to your experiences, and the experiences of your mind, body you can experience almost anything thing in a mindful way – and by doing this you may experience things differently, developing confidence and acceptance, as well as enhancing the ability to relax and experience things without pressure or judgement.'

For our learners we want to encourage them to being present in the moment, focus on and paying attention to what you are doing – all the small movements, reactions, expressions, feeling, sounds, smells, feelings etc that you experience.

For the purpose of this webinar, I am looking at and discussing being mindful through creative activities. You may be aware that when you are doing something like drawing, painting, model making, baking, knitting, sewing, and you are really enjoying it the time just disappears. Often it is more about the process of doing creative activities that is the fun and enjoyable thing rather than the finished outcome or result.

By being present, focussing on the process, feelings, reactions while doing creative activities allows you to become immersed in what you are doing in a mindful way.

When we look at offering mindful activities for those with SEN and in particular those with PMLD, I would think about how to support this in a way that includes the senses and find a way to ensure I offer sensory experiences. These learners explore their world through their senses and make reactions and responses to the experiences they have, they will experience in a receptive way and in turn be able to express their responses to their experiences. By exploring creative activities in a mindful way it will help develop greater confidence within their own abilities, expressions and communication.

It is important that you know your learner and what they like and do not like. If we want to offer a mindful activity it would not be a good start if it is something that they really do not like. It is also important to think about how your learners may need to access certain activities – do they have sensory impairment? If so, I would recommend, initially exploring activities that they can explore using their dominant or preferred sense or senses. It is important for the activities that are explored to be engaging, motivating, gentle and enjoyable. It is also important to ensure that you establish a good routine and some consistency about the time and place this will help to establish a sense of safety, comfort and predictability – I will discuss this in more detail later on in the webinar.

Ten ideas

What can we do with our learners to help support mindfulness through offering creative activities?

Creativity includes a wide range of activities and as such opens us up to a breadth of possibilities such as: arts, craft, sculpture, model making, tactile art, visual arts, writing, photography, film, kinetic art/sculpture the list goes on. I will suggest a few ideas that you could try:

1. Messy play – could be as simple as a tray of paint to move your hand through and in. A good way to start this would be to feel the bottle of paint – you could offer a choice if you felt this was appropriate, although if choosing is a very challenging, perhaps discuss colours and choose one. Remember to think about the sensory elements of the items – shakes the paint, smell the paint, squeeze the bottle, splat the paint on to the tray – can you hear it? Encourage the learner to put their hands in to feel – or their feet, different types of exploration can be made – splatting, squeezing paint with in their fingers, moving fingers through the paint, scooping and dripping, maybe add different colours, move and mix them, encouraging your learner to watch how they combine – depending upon the paint used it may mix or may not – what colours can be created. Maybe add textures to feel within the paint. The adult could use their hands too and massage the learners hands or feet in the paint. You could use the painty hands and feet to create hand or feet prints using different texture papers – how do they feel? This could be done with food stuff with food colouring, or massage oil with food colouring in. If your learner is not keen on getting their hands painty then you could explore paint bags – using sealed food bags with paint in – pressing, squeezing, squelching.

For tactile play there are so many things to choose from – do not be afraid to use foods like – tinned spaghetti, baked beans, mushy peas, pasta – cooked and raw, jelly, chickpeas, marshmallows of different sizes, dry beans or pulses, custard – cold and warmed slightly, cornflour dry and with water – there is a great recipe that combines equal quantities of corn flour and yoghurt that creates a gelatinous dough with is great to explore as well as offering aroma if flavoured yoghurts are used- again you could add food colourings to this, mash, doughs.

When using tactile play, it is good to think about the senses and incorporating different experiences – as well as differences in textures I would think about offering different temperatures, consistencies, colours, aromas, using tools – spoons, scoops, brushes, cups, bowls etc

There is so much scope with tactile play and so many different options – but I would emphasise that for this sort of activity – one where we are asking our learners to be in the moment, be aware, be focused, I would recommend choosing one or two elements to explore, keeping your language limited and quiet, allowing time for the learners to feel, react, respond, move, explore – be led by them, using words to describe what they may be feeling but keeping it simple – cold, wet, warm, rough, smooth, soft, like, dislike, not sure etc

2. Sensory bottles – are wonderful things to explore and these can be made together to create different effects, colours, weights, visual effect, sounds. By creating the bottles together you work through a process and can explore and experience the different substances that you will be putting in the bottle – you can also offer choices if your learners is able to do so.

You may want to theme the bottles maybe creating single colour ones, ones with lights in, ones with glitter in, or fluids. It maybe that you create textures on the outside of the bottles.

When creating different effects think about how they may be explored and experienced – what senses they will engage. Here are just a few examples:

- Weighted bottles – these could be used for deep pressure – gently rolling them over the learners, this could be done through turn taking – encouraging them to help to roll it on you
- Glitter/sequin and water bottles or creating thicker like lava lamp type bottles with oils – visually watching the glitter move and slowly settle with offer a lovely calming feeling, they also show nice examples of how we feel inside – shaken up and then as we calm down and feel more settled
- Lights in bottles – colours slowly changing creating a relaxing and calming environment. Changing the area around the bottle, this may be nice to experience or share under an umbrella
- Textured bottles – these are nice to find favourite textures, or soft furs or flock, this can be experienced with repeated actions or movements to rub or stroke preferred textures

- Water filled bottle – gently rocking or rolling – listening to the gentle sloshing of the water, watching the bubbles and movement, feeling the weight change as the water moves inside – these can also be cooled down or warmed up – it will give the learner strong physical feedback as well, allowing them to focus on the experience and sensations
 - We have used small toys such as fish with blue colouring in the water to create aquariums or hung items from the lid on the inside to create that sense of movement. There are so many ways to be creative with sensory bottles and they are a lovely way to use the senses to explore and engage with.
3. Clay or dough – again with doughs and clays there are many different ways to explore them in mindful ways. There will be difference in temperatures, weights, consistency, adding water or liquid to change the consistency, feeling the differences, squashing, pressing, gripping, pulling, pushing, patting, shaping, cutting, rolling, combining, dividing - lots of options and sensory feedback for the learners. Ensure that it is the process that is focused on and talking about how it feels and what they are doing, cool, soft, pressing, tapping etc
 4. Colouring in – now this is not in the sense that the learners are creating master pieces – it is again the process of putting colour on to paper and creating pattern and shapes. Using things like bingo markers or water colours are quite nice here, I found that the bingo markers are quite watery and go on to the page like a water colour, which allows print to show through. I have in the past printed out some lovely black and white patterns – like the ones you get in the mindful colouring books. I used these for my learners by sticking one on their tray, then encouraging them to mark make over the top – looking at the colours appearing on the page. The colour can go anywhere and the pattern will still show through. The bingo markers and quite fat markers and nice and easy to grasp for many of our learners. For some we had sponges with water colour or rollers, through supporting under the arm or wrist, were needed they were able to use their independent movements (no matter how small they are) to create the effect on the paper. These could also be done with the paper one a light box and the outlines show up nicely.
 5. Nature art – using nature is such a wonderful thing to do, as you can have the added bonus of being outside in nature, even if it is just to collect items to create with once you are back inside. There is so many things to see, feel, smell, hear. There is movement to see, the wind to feel, leaves, herbs and flowers to feel and smell. Light wispy grass to tickle us, rough bark to scratch us, again its offering that sensory feedback to be aware of and experience. Some activities that you could explore mindfully with your learners
 - Leaf or flower printing
 - Mud painting/pies, using flowers, leaves, sticks to create colours on paper – squashing and rubbing
 - Making pictures or sculptures with leaves, twigs, pebbles
 - Weaving with leaves or grasses, sticks
 - A rainbow walk - Creating a nature rainbow – double sided tape and collecting colour flowers and leaves to represent the rainbow – encouraging the learners to drop the found items on to the paper with sticky tape on
 6. Texture art and collage – this could be an extension of tactile play, moving and exploring texture on paper or card with paint and glue, or double-sided tape to collect the textures you feel and move in top. The learner could be feeling and exploring different textured fabric – different thickness, weights, texture, smooth, woven, furry – showing preferences and creating texture sheets or patterns – the sensory feed-back coming from the process or feeling and experiences the differences.

7. Bubble painting – there are different ways of doing this, if your learners are able to blow through straws etc then that will work well, blowing through water with food colouring or inks and soap to create bubbles, this could be whisked using different types of handheld or electric whisks. You could set up any of the electric whisks with a switch for your learners to control the whisk – either on a timed or latch setting depending upon their abilities. The bubbles can then be experienced and explored with hands or feet, paper can be laid on them or handfuls of bubbles can be placed on the paper. This will add awe and wonder to the session as the colours appear on the paper and the bubbles disappear. If you add fragranced soap, you will add an aroma to the activity, you could choose familiar scents to add to the feeling of calm and safety. You can repeat this once they are dry and add different coloured bubbles to create multicoloured designs. Another way to do bubble painting is to use a screen or washing line to hang your paper from, then use a fan with a switch to blow coloured bubbles on to the paper, as they pop they will leave bubble patterns on the paper. This is a lovely one as they will be able to be at eye line and create an engaging visual effect.
8. Marbling – this is more of a visual experience or a water experience. It is lovely to experience the water first – pouring it into the container you are using, moving our hands through it, splashing etc. Then adding the inks chosen, drip drip drip - It will offer awe and wonder as with the bubble as the colours appear on the paper or objects. You can cover objects with papier mache and dip them in marbling ink water and this will transfer on to the object – this may be a better way to experience this as it gives a greater visual experience than flat paper and will offer a different tactile experience of the papier mache.
9. Rock painting – experiencing different size, shape, textured pebbles. Feeling the temperature of them, dry or in water, how do they feel, are they cold, can you feel the weight on your hand/arm/leg/foot, can you roll it on you etc – then using different paint to decorate them, this could be as easy as feeling the paint with our hands, then feeling the stones with our painty hands. Maybe adding different colours in this way. Or dropping them in swirled paint
10. String art and balloon art – this is an extension of the tactile play again. In its simplest form you can do this by putting string in thick paint – the learners can drop it in, move their hands in the paint, see the colour change as it gets coated in paint, then with help as needed dropping it on to paper, grasping one end or tying another piece of string in the middle to hold, and then pulling it down and off the page, will create wonderful colours and shapes on the page. Another way would be to jiggle the string on the page. Or just allowing the learner to feel and explore it on the page with create fabulous patterns. If you add scents to the paint this will add an element to the tactile and visual experience.

Creating creative spaces within daily routines to support mindfulness and general wellbeing

It is really important to create a predictable routine around your creative mindful sessions. Not only having a regular planned time to explore these activities but having a clear routine through the session. I would recommend always beginning and ending the sessions in the same way. Maybe start with a gentle hand deep pressure massage – this will signify that we are beginning, and we are going to be connecting, using our hands, or feet, maybe choose a set piece of music to play quietly in the background, so that your learners begin to associate this over time with these sessions. It only has to be a short session, or a space created within their day to stop, engage, feel, and be in the moment with creative activities. Once you have done a short hand massage I would recommend having maybe only one or two activities to experience, and explore thoroughly. Taking your time and not rushing, being led by the learners on their journey of discovery. I would also recommend ending each session in the same way – this could be a repeat of the beginning or something different – maybe use of vibration or sound bath for a few moments to end the session in a way that the learners will move on with their day feeling relaxed and settled, safe and secure.

This sort of session could quite easily be added as part of the hello and registration, or after lunch before going on to the afternoon sessions. New routines are always difficult to add to the day, but once you have done so a few times you will soon find that it becomes established and the learners will become more open

and aware over time. Please ensure that you set mindful targets for your learners for these sessions focussing on feelings, emotions, being calm, attention to now, awareness, use of senses.

Sharing activities, having fun and creating positive experiences

Something that is also very important during these sessions, is to be positive role models and engage and be in the moment yourselves, show your responses, share your experiences, and feeling. Share the activities, interact and communicate with your learners in a calm and gentle manner. It is important for you to try things, new thing can sometimes be scary but if you can share the experience this can help reduce any anxiety that may be there, be reassuring, be respectful and accepting of their movements, interactions, responses, expressions, explorations. Praise their successes, be happy and joyful. These things will all go towards ensuring your learners feel confident, safe, secure and relaxed.

Links and suggested reading

There are lots of ideas accessible on the internet where you can find different suggestions and ideas that can fairly easily be adapted to be accessible for your learners. Don't be afraid to try new and different things with them, things may not go the way you expect but the learners will gain a lot from the sensory experiences that can be gained. I will add some links to the course notes although I would suggest you think about your learners and what you want for them, then do a few searches to find the right activity for them. You may want to search art techniques – and then see how you may be able to break them down to be more sensory and things that you could do in a mindful way with your learner.

I am very aware that I have only just hit the surface of this and have shared a lot of information with you, but I hope you will be able to take something away and be inspired to look try some creative mindful experiences with your learners. And remember the outcome or the finished creative piece is not the important bit, it is the process and that awareness of the moment and what is happening, what is being felt, how we feel during that experience and, there is not right or wrong way to experience things, everyone will experience things differently and have likes and dislikes, feel differently, so be gentle and respectful and accepting.

Thank you for listening.

Reading and links:

<https://sites.google.com/view/flolonghornsensorybooksfreedow/home> Flo Longhorn Art for very special learners

<https://sendat.academy/students/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/03/Creative-Development-Ideas.pdf>

ideas and good practice guide

the arts forum – the arts for PMLD

NAC: <https://www.nacwellbeing.org/guidance/arts-creativity/>

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