



THE HOLISTIC ACADEMY

How to Deal With Emotions

IN A CREATIVE WAY



Basic Emotions



Emotions are a part of every human experience and can determine the quality of our lives in either a positive or negative way. Emotions help us deal with traumatic events and also provide enjoyment.

Both of these types of experiences can be short lived or impact our lives over a long period of time. Some of the ways in which emotions help in our life are:

- They help us deal with traumatic event
- They help enhance enjoyable moments
- They help us adapt to circumstances
- They initiate a change in behaviour where necessary for both our safety and pleasurable events
- They create a change in physiological responses
- They can enhance memories
- They help us negotiate interpersonal interactions
- They help us evaluate ourselves in situations
- They enhance learning

When our emotional development is healthy, we exhibit appropriate emotions for appropriate events and learn to regulate the intensity and frequency of emotions so that our lives can return to normal after an emotional triggering event. Emotions in these situations are viewed as constructive to our experiences.

However, if our emotional development has been negatively impacted in early life, the expression of emotion can be excessive in intensity and occur erratically with a destructive effect on our lives.

There are a lot of words that are called emotions, however, for the purposes of this workbook, we are narrowing our discussion down to 6 basic emotions:

- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Disgust
- Surprise
- Happy

This list of basic emotions describes the foundation of human emotions, however, in some situations, human behaviour is more complex. There are a number of complex emotions that have been identified over time, however, research indicates that not all of the complex emotions can be found amongst the majority of cultural populations.

The primary emotions that can be found across multiple cultures to date have been narrowed down to the 6 previously mentioned – fear, anger, sadness, disgust, surprise, happy.

Included below are some complex emotions that can be mapped back to the 6 basic emotions.

BASIC EMOTIONS	COMPLEX EMOTIONS
Fear	Embarrassment, worry
Anger	Envy, jealousy, contempt
Sadness	Grief
Disgust	Guilt, shame, embarrassment
Surprise	Shock
Happy	Joy, love, nostalgia

Emotions are analogous to the concept of an art colour wheel whereby a small number of basic emotions can be blended or compounded to form more complex emotions.

This blend is also influenced by personality traits and other factors such as age and personal experience.



Historical Perspective of Emotions



As the field of psychology has developed, different theories have developed that explore the different functions of why emotions occur and what purpose they play in human development.

■ Evolutionary Perspective

This era was dominated by Darwin's theories who saw emotions as an adaptive function where emotions act as signals. In the case of negative emotions, these signals prepare humans to take action that would ensure their safety and chances of survival.

In the case of positive emotions, such as happiness, which extends to love, this encourages humans to strengthen their tribe and procreate to expand the number of people in their family.

■ Psycho-physiological Perspective

This era was heavily influenced by the James-Lange theory which stated that emotional experience is initiated by physiological arousal. This was an extension of Darwin's evolutionary theory that explained when a human is confronted by a threat (scary tiger), the body initiates a physiological response that creates an emotional response of fear.

Below is an example of how James-Lange theory worked as well as the commonly held view on how emotions and physical reactions interacted.

- Common View:
Event (scary tiger) > Emotion (fear) > Arousal (release adrenaline)
- James-Lange:
Event (scary tiger) > Arousal (release adrenaline) > Emotion (fear)

■ Neurological Perspective

The neurological perspective of emotions begins to see the mapping of areas of the brain and their influences on how we react emotionally to situations. This was evident in the case of Phineas Gage who experienced significant emotional and personality changes as a result of a brain injury. The most important area of the brain that relates



to emotions is the limbic system. Some of the most important parts of the limbic system that play a part in emotional experiences are:

- **Thalamus** - central hub to process data obtained through the five senses
- **Hippocampus** - connection of experiences with memories which influence emotions
- **Amygdala** - determining levels of emotional significance
- **Hypothalamus** - creates the appropriate hormonal response to emotional situations

■ **Psychodynamic**

The psychodynamic approach has a heavy influence on art therapy treatments with a focus on the subconscious and unconscious and how these influence emotional expression. The psychodynamic approach is helpful in working with clients who repress emotions and use other defense mechanisms as a coping strategy to deal with negative emotions.

■ **Cognitive**

The cognitive approach focuses on the thoughts and beliefs held by the client that influence the emotional experience. The cognitive approach heavily focuses on how people perceive events and interpret their environment through the lens of their personal experiences in life. The cognitive approach focuses on challenging thought processes in order to reframe beliefs around events so the client can develop a new belief system about their ability to deal with stressful events.





What Are Emotions

Emotions are typically described as an outward expression that occurs as a response to an external stimulus.

In the context of how emotions are developed there is typically a process of three main components:

- **Neurological components** - where the brain evaluates the event and creates the emotional response
- **Experiential component** - once the event has entered the neurological component, experience beings to influence how these emotions will be interpreted and actioned
- **Behavioural components** - after the brain has processed the event, humans then react with appropriate or maladaptive behaviours to help cope with the emotional overflow

None of the above components work in a binary manner as all components influence each other through feedback loops. These components are sensitive to changes in internal and external environments which result in an emotional shift in the person.



How Emotions Happen



Emotions are created as a response to events. These responses can be automatic or reflective. Automatic responses occur because we are constantly assessing our environment for danger or safety.

As part of this assessment, our brain uses our 5 senses including sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste to evaluate situations. The senses send processing information to our brains and then we interpret the events and respond with an emotional response.

Our assessments are not always accurately based on judgments of safety and pleasure. We all have human experiences that create memories which then act as triggers that are uniquely based on our personal experiences. Universal triggers also exist that are shared by all humans such as the immediate threat of danger such as a car accident.

Reflective responses are closely related to memories as we actively engage in recalling information when assessing situations. We have more control over reflective memories and therefore have the ability to influence our emotions in these circumstances.

Talking about emotional events can cause us to re-experience emotions which allows us to structure the conversation and influence the perception of more positive memories. This is particularly important during therapy sessions where a therapist can help their client reframe memories in content and therefore help promote more positive emotional connections.

Re-experiencing these emotions can have positive benefits as we can influence the outcome of how we experience emotions again.

Reflective assessment is less automatic and instead requires purposeful recall by us which then initiates an emotional response. This could occur when looking at photos or hearing a song from our past.

It may seem like our brain is processing that photo or song and providing an automatic response to them, however, in this case, reacting to the stimulus of the photos or song often requires us to recreate previous experiences and therefore our involvement is more active.

Aside from our automatic and reflective personal emotional responses, emotions can also be felt through events that someone else experiences. Observing someone else's experience can initiate empathy as our own emotional response.

Emotional responses that are instigated by empathy are much easier and quicker to resolve as the person does not have a personal connection to the dynamics of the situation that are to be resolved.



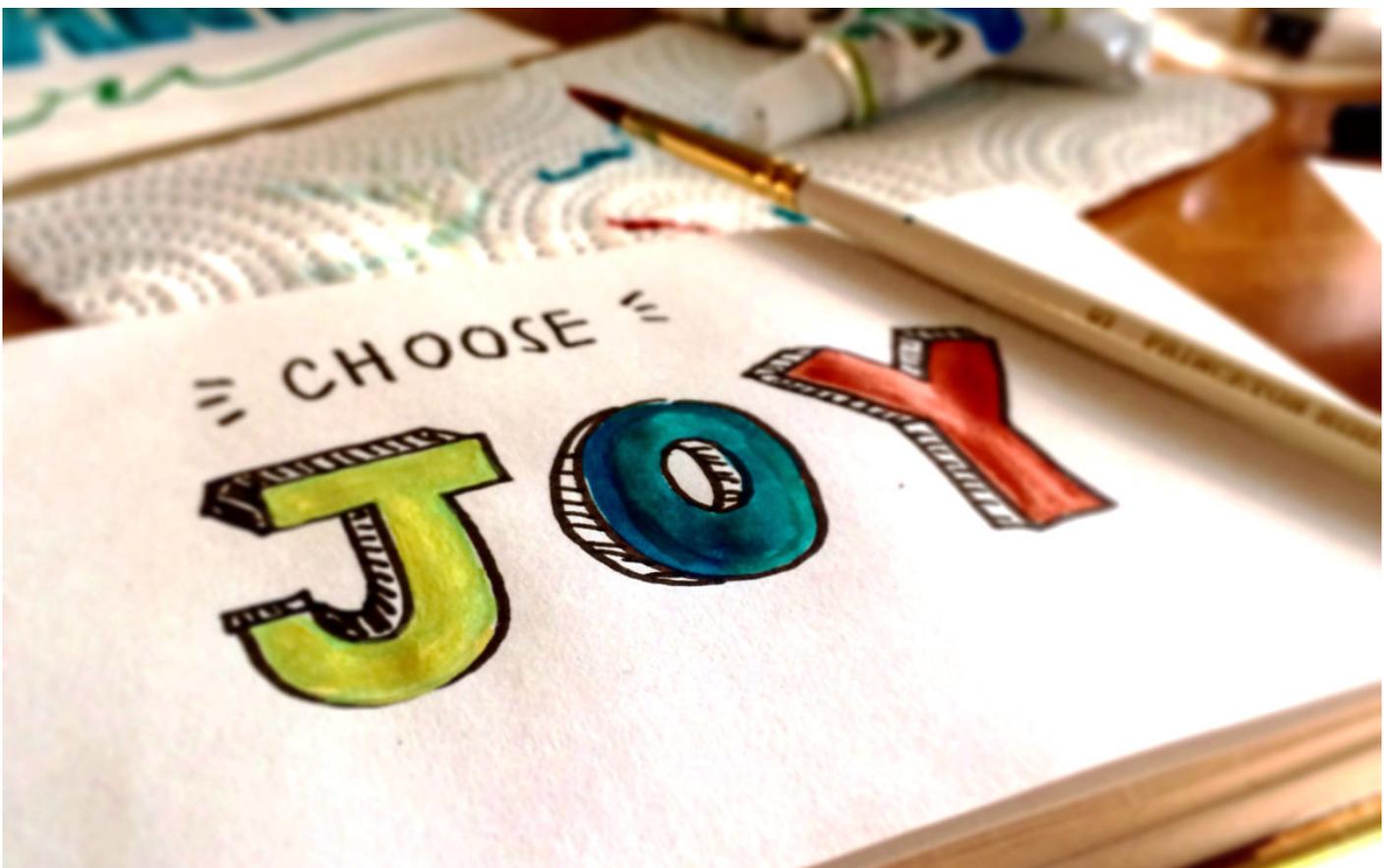
Emotions influence three main areas of our lives:

- Personal experience
- Physiological responses
- Behavioural responses

The interaction of these three areas dictates the frequency, duration and intensity of the emotional experience. In addition to these primary areas of influence, emotions also activate other emotions that affect the overall emotional experience.

An initial response of fear mixed with a specific personal experience can then activate anger. This is often seen in the simple case of pranking, whereby someone may throw a toy fake spider on a person which originally initiates fear from the spider. Once the person recognises the fear was fabricated by another person, the personal experiences in the relationships can then initiate an emotion of anger towards the person who instigated the prank.

The case of a prank is a simple example; however, this also extends to interpersonal relationships where patterns of behaviour between two people can act as a trigger for emotions to occur. This can become a complex issue to resolve where the client has to determine whether detaching from the emotion will improve the relationship or whether improving the relationship will help improve the emotional response. In most cases, the lines are not clear and a process of unravelling multiple layers of emotion and personal experience, physiological response and behaviour response needs to occur.





When Emotions Become Problems

An emotional response can become problematic when we lack the appropriate coping behaviours to self-regulate our response. If we can develop the skills to cope with emotions, then we won't be susceptible to developing maladaptive behaviours. Having the coping skills in place may not always eliminate problems, however, it may help lessen the time in which we spend in abnormal vs normal functioning.

The four most common maladaptive coping strategies are:

1. **Avoidance** - avoiding painful memories and thoughts, suppression
2. **Rumination** - engaging in obsessive thoughts using critical judgment, trying to find perfection
3. **Masking** - masking the emotions by not showing any outward displays of emotion in order to avoid judgment
4. **Impulsivity** - wanting immediate relief. Eg. Drugs/alcohol. Using these coping strategies usually creates long term negative effects

One example of when emotions become problematic is in the case of PTSD. The primary emotion of PTSD is disgust and is based on what the person sees. First responders such as ambulance officers and police officers experience a significant level of PTSD. This is a result of the daily exposure to events such as murder, suicide, assaults, accidents and other similar events.

Military personnel also experience PTSD due to the experience of similar events in combat. This is in addition to the constant threat of an "enemy".

Although disgust is considered a negative emotion, it also indicates a healthy emotional response in many situations such as those mentioned above. If an individual experiences a lack of disgust in these events, this may indicate antisocial behaviour.

■ Emotional Responses

Emotional responses are physically manifested through outward behaviours. As emotions often have a limited natural lifespan, most behaviours can be experienced with limited impact. However emotional responses can often become ingrained patterns of behaviour when similar events occur.



Emotional responses are an individualised and depend on the following criteria:

- Age (lifespan development)
- Life experiences
- Personal values
- Cultural expectations
- Societal norms
- Personality development

Some reactive behavioural responses based on each emotion are:

- Fear - withdraw, stop an activity, cry, run away, avoidance
- Anger - attack, hurt, reject
- Sadness - cry, withdraw, avoidance
- Disgust - reject, withdraw, retreat
- Surprise - stop activity, retreat, investigate, embrace
- Happy - welcome, embrace, celebrate, encourage, socialise

There are 4 main components of an emotional response:

1. **Affect** - your personal experience of the emotion and how it influences your overall perspective
2. **Cognition** - usually results in either prediction (what ifs) or judgment (should have been).
3. **Physical** - physical manifestations can create a feedback loop whereby multiple emotions develop from a single event
4. **Behavioural** - emotions initiate the urge to act, whether that be through celebration or an imperative to create a safe environment

These components are illustrated in the below example of a relationship breakdown:

1. **Affect** - sadness
2. **Cognition** - nothing ever goes right for me
3. **Physical** - crying
4. **Behavioural** - avoid other interpersonal relationships and social settings

Emotional responses are generally considered either automatic or reflective. We've discussed many of the automatic responses so far. Now we will look at the reflective aspect of an emotional response.

For reflective emotional responses, the pathway is based on the occurrence of a situation, followed by attention and appraisal and finally resulting in a response by the individual.

The Reflective Emotional Response Pathway

SITUATION > ATTENTION > APPRAISAL > RESPONSE

Below is a summary of how an individual can be more purposeful with an emotional response that is reflective:

- **Situation** - modify the situation by changing behaviour or leaving. Choosing not to engage in encouraging the situation to develop further.
- **Attention** - the individual can choose their attention level. This includes whether to remove them from the situation or purposefully not encourage any more mental attention to the situation
- **Appraisal** - the individual can make cognitive changes to how they perceive the situation and therefore influence their behaviours that might further develop the situation
- **Response** - the individual can modify their initial response which may change the outcomes of a situation further encouraging negative emotional responses

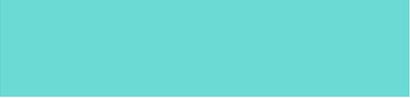
In both automatic and reflective emotional responses, we react with an initiate defence which is then followed by a strategy of coping. The defences used are usually unconscious, rigid and have limited scope for healthy emotional development.

After an initial defence, we then engage in coping strategies over the long term. These coping strategies are often conscious and involve methods of problem solving.

Coping strategies are usually flexible to the situation and allow for adaptation to circumstances or the individuals perspective changes.

Some of the defences and matching coping strategies are included below:

DEFENSES	COPYING
Repression	Avoidance
Denial	Substitution
Displacement	Seek help
Compensation	Improving personal shortcomings
Intellectualisation	Justifications
Projection	Blaming
Reaction Formation	Reversal



The most immediate emotional response that many people participate in is avoidance. This also includes the defensive position of repressing emotions.

The most common types of avoidance are:

1. **Situational** - staying away from people, place, things, activities that can trigger an emotion
2. **Cognitive** - avoiding or suppressing thoughts, using mental distractions as replacement
3. **Protective** - engaging in excessive safety behaviours, the pursuit of perfectionism, engaging in overpreparation and over checking, procrastination
4. **Somatic** - avoiding physical feelings. Development of physical pain as a replacement to feeling emotional pain
5. **Substitution** - replacing distressing emotion with another. Example: using food, drugs, alcohol to initiate feelings of comfort and pleasure instead of distress.

All of these avoidance type behaviours can provide an individual with short term relief, however, over the long term, the initial behaviours still need to be addressed as well as any further maladaptive behaviours that the individual may have initiated as a distraction or replacement of the emotion.

Treatment for emotional problems is dependent on the circumstances in which the emotional problems began. Emotional issues that relate to a singular event such as death are viewed differently than emotional issues that are tied to ingrained behavioural components of personality development.

Regardless of the antecedent of the emotions issues, it is important to cultivate emotional awareness and emotional regulation techniques that your client can use on an ongoing basis.

A part of the treatment is developing a therapeutic relationship where psychotherapeutic change can occur. Developing this relationship helps your clients experience an emotional deepening and develop skills for emotional regulation.

As a therapist, it is important to collaborate with your client and guide your client's emotional experience. This includes following your client's personal emotional growth.

Discovering The Emotion



As part of the process of assessing emotion, it may be difficult for your client to understand the emotions they are experiencing. What may feel like frustration on the surface may instead reveal deeper feelings of anger towards an event or person.

You can help guide your client through the process of discovering the emotions they are experiencing in order to find a way forward for recovery.

Some of the ways in which discovery can occur include:

- Identify the stimuli that trigger emotion
- Redefine the stimulus by exploring your client's perception of how the stimulus triggered their response
- Identify the stages of the event where your client feels conflicting emotions
- Examine your client's initial impulses to act
- Look for ambivalence or avoidance that may indicate your client is experiencing conflicting emotions with how they feel and how they perceive the event or the people involved
- Explore your client's reluctance to consider alternative perspectives and fear of being "wrong"
- Explore the judgment your client gives to their feelings. Eg. I am feeling angry, therefore I must be wrong
- Explore your client's capacity to express a range of emotions or if they stay stuck in one emotion
- Encourage your client to use metaphors verbally or through art if they are struggling to verbalise their thoughts

Main phases of therapy:

The process of working with your client will naturally evolve through 3 main phases (CAT):

1. **CONNECTION** - initially the primary task between yourself and your client is building a therapeutic alliance.
2. **ACTION** - the next phase will involve undertaking activities that will represent the process of "working" through the psychological challenges. This may involve many stages of reframing as well as changing behaviours and thoughts
3. **TERMINATION** - this phase is focused on the termination of intensive therapy and involves preventing relapse, engaging in self therapy and using social networks

The timing of each phase is subjective and based on many individual factors specific to your client.



Type of Treatment

The process in which a therapist chooses a counselling approach is influenced by the exposure of therapy models in the course of their education. This also extends to how the therapist develops their network after their formal education has been completed.

The counselling approach that is chosen should best suit the client and their needs along with the skillset you have developed. Although you may come across an approach that has a high rate of effectiveness, it is important to have the appropriate levels of training to ensure the therapy objectives are met correctly.

Your client may come to therapy with a variety of different problems. Some of these problems may be short or long term. Some may be related to a specific situation such as a divorce or physical illness. Some may be related to trauma events that occurred many decades ago. Some may be related to developmental issues that are enduring and will not change.

Clients arrive with a variety of life experience and events. Therapists are required to conduct an intuitive assessment of the client’s needs, as well as their responsiveness to therapy.

This is also relevant to the demographics of the client including their age and emotional and cognitive development.

Below is a list of some treatment approaches used in conjunction with art therapy practices. DBT (dialectal behaviour therapy)

- Mindfulness and acceptance
- Distress tolerance
- Self soothing
- Doing the opposite
- Emotion regulation
- Interpersonal effectiveness

ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy)

- Mindfulness
- Observing and accepting emotions
- Defusion - observing and distancing from thoughts
- Values based committed action

CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy)

- Mindfulness
- Emotion awareness and acceptance
- Cognitive restructuring
- Changing emotion driven behaviours
- Emotion exposure

EFT (emotion focused therapy)

- Derived from humanistic psychotherapy
- Based on theories of emotion and attachment
- Process of acceptance, empathy, focus on the present moment and self soothing system

A part of the therapy process will entail helping your client to develop the ability to self-regulate emotions. Self-regulation can be developed so that your client has techniques available to them in the moment of a crisis as well as in later reflective situations.

The aim of self-regulation is to gain control over:

- Quality of the emotional response and whether the emotional response is typical of the situation.
- Frequency of the emotional response. Is your client able to self-regulate if a situation frequently presents as an emotional trigger.
- Intensity of the emotional response.
- Duration of an emotional response. Is your client able to return to an emotional “homeostasis” after an initial emotional response.

As part of the self-regulation process, it is integral for your client to be able to observe an emotion they are experiencing and use a process of labelling to help clarify the techniques they can use to help regulate their emotion.

An important part of helping your client to develop self-regulation techniques is by helping them to tolerate negative emotions and reduce the heightened level of fear surrounding the experience of feeling emotions.

This entails developing the skills that will help your client confront negative emotions and reframe their perception of control over their emotions.





Weaken Emotional Triggers

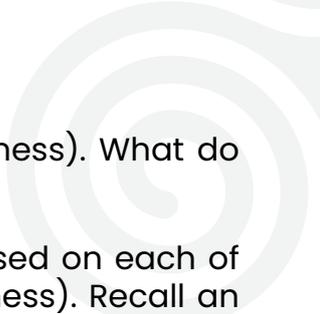
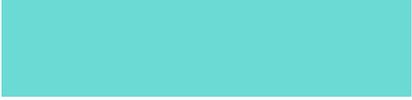
As your client works through the process of discovering their emotions, they will become aware of the triggers that may occur that precede an emotional response.

An important part of treatment, and self-regulation is for your client to understand the foundation of the trigger and how it can be weakened.

- Is the trigger similar in theme to the old one?
- Does the trigger resemble the original events?
- How early was the trigger event? The earlier it is, the more ingrained. Reactions learned in early life are less rational and not as developed.
- The intensity of the emotions experienced - mild, moderate, strong.
- The frequency of trigger events - every day or just once?
- Recovery from the original event and how it was handled.

Below is a summary list of art therapy exercises that may assist in your client in dealing with negative emotional responses, develop emotional awareness, and establish effective coping skills for emotional events.

1. Feelings may develop like a wave where the wave rises, peaks, crashes and then recedes. Understanding this flow of nature can assist in dealing with the flow of emotional responses.
2. Think of events when the following emotions occurred: Anger, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, Surprise, Happiness. Visualise the scene and recall how you felt. Notice the feelings in your body and observe how emotion builds up. Recreate a drawing, painting or collage showing where you felt the emotion in your body.
3. Draw the word anger or an image that represents anger on a card. When you are feeling angry, look at the card, turn it over to represent the action of letting go of the anger.
4. Draw a representation of your negative emotion. Draw the opposite.
5. Participate in a 7 day challenge where you create a small artwork that reflects the emotion/sat the start of the day.
6. Participate in a 7 day challenge where you create a small artwork that reflects the emotion/sat the end of the day.
7. Participate in a 6 day challenge where you create a small artwork based on each of



the 6 basic emotions (fear, anger, sadness, disgust, surprise, happiness). What do these emotions mean to you?

8. Participate a 6 day challenge where you create a small artwork based on each of the 6 basic emotions (fear, anger, sadness, disgust, surprise, happiness). Recall an event based on each basic emotion. Draw a body and identify parts of the body that increase in sensation when recalling an event.
9. Create an emotional weather chart that illustrates the patterns of your emotions over the past week. Eg. Sunny (happy), rainy (sad), etc
10. Draw/ paint a vinyl record or use a real vinyl record to identify repetitive emotions that you feel control or overwhelm you.
11. Create an emotional barometer to help get perspective on how intense an emotion feels at the time of a negative event. Create the same emotional barometer after using coping skills to self-regulate your emotions.
12. Create a staircase of events that are ranked by the intensity of emotional experience. For eg, an argument compared to a relationship breakdown, compared to job loss, compared to being sick, compared to death.
13. Create an emotional iceberg where the top part of the iceberg that is above water shows the emotions that you feel on the surface. The bottom part of the iceberg shows the emotions that are hidden away or suppressed.
14. Create decorated rocks with words that represent positive emotional words. When you are experiencing emotional difficulties, you can use the rock as a symbol of practicing mindfulness to work towards positive emotions.
15. Create an emotional rollercoaster that describes how your emotions have been over a period of time eg. 7 days, 1 month, 3 months.
16. Create an emotional well to describe the depths of a specific emotion. Use the image to consider how you might get out of the well. Add any additional imagery to illustrate how you can emerge from the well.
17. Create an emotional garden that describes the emotions you are currently feeling. Maybe the garden is wilted (sad) or blooming (happy).
18. Collage a visual representation of a happy day. Either a happy day you have experienced or how you imagine your happiest day would be.
19. Create a self-portrait of how you feel emotionally.
20. Create a Super-Emotion-Hero that you visualise can help you deal with negative emotions.

