

art therapy activities for depression

****Art Therapy Activities for Depression: Healing Through Creativity****

art therapy activities for depression offer a unique and powerful way to express emotions, process difficult feelings, and foster healing. Unlike traditional talk therapy, art therapy taps into the creative process, allowing individuals to communicate what might be hard to put into words. For those struggling with depression, these activities can provide a safe outlet, reduce stress, and promote a sense of accomplishment and self-awareness. Whether guided by a therapist or practiced independently, engaging in art therapy can become a vital part of managing and overcoming depressive symptoms.

Understanding How Art Therapy Helps with Depression

Art therapy is more than just making pretty pictures. It's a therapeutic approach that uses creative methods—painting, drawing, sculpting, collage, and other artistic expressions—to improve mental health. For depression, art therapy helps by activating different parts of the brain, encouraging emotional release, and providing a distraction from negative thought patterns.

Depression often leads to feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and difficulty communicating inner turmoil. Art therapy activities for depression create a nonverbal way to explore these feelings. This can reduce anxiety and improve mood through the pleasure of creating something tangible. The process itself, rather than the final product, is what holds the power to heal.

Popular Art Therapy Activities for Depression

There are numerous ways to engage in art therapy, each offering its own benefits. Here are some

effective activities that have been widely used to alleviate symptoms of depression:

1. Expressive Drawing and Painting

Using colors and shapes to express emotions can be incredibly freeing. With no need for artistic skill, expressive drawing encourages individuals to paint or draw whatever they feel inside. Abstract art, in particular, allows for emotional expression without the pressure of realism.

****Tips for getting started:****

- Choose colors that reflect your mood or emotions.
- Don't worry about rules or "correct" techniques.
- Set a timer for 15-30 minutes and focus entirely on the process.

2. Collage Making

Cutting out images and words from magazines or printed materials to create a collage can be a therapeutic way to visualize thoughts and feelings. This activity stimulates creativity and helps organize scattered or overwhelming emotions.

****Why it helps:****

- Collages can symbolize personal stories or goals.
- The tactile nature of cutting and pasting can ground anxious feelings.
- It encourages mindfulness by focusing attention on the task.

3. Clay Modeling and Sculpting

Working with clay or playdough is a tactile and sensory experience that many find calming. Shaping

and molding allows for physical engagement with emotions, helping to release tension and promote relaxation.

****Benefits include:****

- Enhancing fine motor skills and concentration.
- Offering a physical outlet for frustration or sadness.
- Helping to build self-esteem through creation.

4. Journaling with Art

Combining writing and drawing in a journal encourages deeper reflection. Instead of just writing words, adding sketches, doodles, or color-coded emotions can make it easier to explore complex feelings.

****How to approach it:****

- Dedicate a few minutes each day to this practice.
- Use it as a private space without judgment.
- Experiment with mood tracking through colors or symbols.

Incorporating Mindfulness into Art Therapy

Mindfulness is a key element that enhances the impact of art therapy activities for depression. When creating art mindfully, you focus on the present moment—the textures, colors, and movements—rather than ruminating on negative thoughts. This can reduce stress and provide clarity.

Try these mindfulness art exercises:

- Slow, deliberate brush strokes while paying attention to sensations.
- Observing the shapes and colors you create without judgment.
- Breathing deeply as you work on your project.

Mindfulness combined with art can help break the cycle of depressive thinking and promote emotional balance.

How to Get Started with Art Therapy at Home

You don't need a professional studio or fancy supplies to begin exploring art therapy activities for depression. Here are some practical steps to start your creative healing journey at home:

- **Create a Comfortable Space:** Find a quiet, clutter-free area where you feel relaxed and undisturbed.
- **Gather Basic Supplies:** Pencils, markers, watercolors, magazines, glue, scissors, and clay are all great starting points.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Aim for short sessions—15 to 30 minutes—to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- **Let Go of Perfection:** Remember, the goal is expression, not creating a masterpiece.
- **Reflect After Creating:** Spend a few minutes considering what your artwork reveals about your feelings or thoughts.

Working with a Professional Art Therapist

While self-guided art therapy can be beneficial, working with a certified art therapist can provide deeper insights and support. These professionals are trained to help interpret your artwork, guide you through therapeutic techniques, and tailor activities to your specific needs.

Art therapists often use a variety of materials and approaches, adjusting based on your mood, progress, and comfort level. They can also integrate art therapy with other treatments, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or medication, to create a comprehensive plan for battling depression.

What to Expect in an Art Therapy Session

- A safe, nonjudgmental environment to explore feelings.
- Structured or free-form art activities.
- Discussion about your artwork and emotions.
- Techniques to manage stress and negative thinking through creativity.

The Science Behind Art Therapy and Depression

Research shows that engaging in creative activities can decrease cortisol levels—the hormone associated with stress—and increase endorphins, which boost mood. Art therapy also stimulates the brain's right hemisphere, linked to creativity and emotion, helping to balance the often overactive left hemisphere involved in logical and negative thinking typical of depression.

Moreover, art therapy can improve neural pathways associated with emotional regulation and self-awareness. This makes it a promising complementary approach alongside traditional treatments for depression.

Tips for Maximizing the Benefits of Art Therapy Activities for Depression

To get the most out of your art therapy practice, consider these helpful strategies:

1. **Be Consistent:** Regular creative sessions can build momentum and deeper emotional insight.
2. **Stay Open-Minded:** Allow yourself to experiment with different materials and methods without judgment.
3. **Combine with Other Self-Care:** Pair art therapy with exercise, healthy eating, and social support for holistic healing.
4. **Share When Ready:** Showing your artwork to trusted friends or therapists can foster connection and understanding.
5. **Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge small victories, whether it's completing a piece or simply feeling better after a session.

Art therapy activities for depression are not a quick fix but rather a journey toward self-discovery and emotional resilience. Over time, they can build a powerful toolkit for managing symptoms and nurturing mental well-being through creativity. Whether you pick up a paintbrush, mold clay, or create a collage, each stroke and cut can help illuminate a path out of darkness.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is art therapy and how can it help with depression?

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses creative art-making to improve a person's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. It helps individuals with depression by providing a non-verbal outlet for expressing feelings, reducing stress, and promoting self-discovery and healing.

What are some simple art therapy activities for managing depression?

Simple art therapy activities for managing depression include journaling with drawings, creating mood boards, painting or coloring mandalas, collage making, and sculpting with clay. These activities encourage self-expression and can help improve mood and reduce anxiety.

Can art therapy activities be done at home for depression?

Yes, many art therapy activities can be done at home. Using basic art supplies like paper, colors, and clay, individuals can engage in guided exercises such as drawing emotions, creating gratitude journals, or painting feelings, which can help alleviate symptoms of depression.

How does creating mandalas help in art therapy for depression?

Creating mandalas helps in art therapy by promoting mindfulness and relaxation. The repetitive patterns and symmetry can induce a meditative state, reduce anxiety, and improve concentration, which are beneficial in managing depression.

Are group art therapy activities effective for people with depression?

Yes, group art therapy activities can be very effective for people with depression as they provide social support, reduce feelings of isolation, and encourage shared expression. Group projects like collaborative murals or themed drawing sessions foster connection and understanding among participants.

What role does guided imagery play in art therapy for depression?

Guided imagery in art therapy involves using visualization techniques to inspire art-making. It helps individuals with depression by accessing positive memories or calming scenes, which can reduce negative thoughts and promote emotional healing through creative expression.

How often should someone engage in art therapy activities to see benefits for depression?

Consistency is key; engaging in art therapy activities several times a week can help reinforce emotional expression and coping skills. Even short daily sessions of 15-30 minutes can lead to noticeable improvements in mood and stress levels over time.

Can children with depression benefit from art therapy activities?

Yes, children with depression can greatly benefit from art therapy as it provides a safe and accessible way to express complex emotions they might not be able to verbalize. Activities like drawing, painting, and storytelling through art can enhance emotional understanding and resilience.

Do art therapy activities require professional guidance for treating depression?

While some art therapy activities can be done independently for mild symptoms, professional guidance is recommended for effective treatment of depression. Licensed art therapists can tailor activities to individual needs, provide therapeutic support, and ensure a safe environment for emotional exploration.

Additional Resources

Art Therapy Activities for Depression: An Investigative Review

Art therapy activities for depression have garnered increasing attention within mental health circles as both complementary and alternative approaches to traditional treatment methods. Depression, a complex and pervasive mental health disorder, often demands multifaceted interventions. Art therapy, by engaging creative processes, offers unique pathways for emotional expression and cognitive processing that can be particularly valuable for individuals struggling with depressive symptoms. This article examines the efficacy, mechanisms, and practical applications of art therapy activities for

depression, analyzing the evidence and exploring various modalities that therapists and patients alike can utilize.

Understanding Art Therapy in the Context of Depression

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that integrates creative art-making with psychological theory and therapeutic practice. Unlike conventional talk therapies, art therapy harnesses non-verbal communication, enabling individuals to externalize feelings that may be difficult to articulate. Depression, characterized by persistent sadness, fatigue, and impaired cognitive function, often limits verbal expression, making art therapy a compelling alternative or adjunct treatment.

Research indicates that art therapy activities for depression can reduce symptoms by promoting emotional release, improving self-esteem, and fostering mindfulness. According to a 2020 meta-analysis published in the **Journal of Affective Disorders**, participants engaged in art therapy reported significant reductions in depressive symptoms compared to those receiving standard care alone. This suggests a promising role for creative interventions, particularly in cases where medication or talk therapy may be insufficient or inaccessible.

Mechanisms Behind Art Therapy's Impact on Depression

The therapeutic benefits of art therapy in depression stem from several psychological and neurological mechanisms:

- **Emotional Expression:** Art provides a channel to express complex emotions such as grief, anger, or hopelessness, which are often suppressed in depression.
- **Cognitive Restructuring:** The creative process can help individuals reframe negative thought patterns by visualizing alternative perspectives.

- **Mindfulness and Flow State:** Engaging in art can induce a meditative state, reducing rumination and anxiety.
- **Neuroplasticity:** Art-making stimulates brain areas associated with reward and motivation, potentially offsetting depressive neural patterns.

These multifaceted effects illustrate why art therapy activities for depression are not merely recreational but serve as vital therapeutic tools.

Popular Art Therapy Activities for Depression

Art therapy encompasses a broad range of creative practices tailored to individual needs and therapeutic goals. The following activities are commonly employed in clinical settings and have demonstrated effectiveness in alleviating depressive symptoms.

1. Drawing and Painting

Drawing and painting are among the most accessible forms of art therapy. Patients are encouraged to use colors, shapes, and lines to depict their feelings or tell personal stories. The tangible creation provides a sense of accomplishment and externalizes internal struggles.

- *Pros:* Requires minimal equipment; adaptable for all ages and skill levels; facilitates symbolic expression.
- *Cons:* Some individuals may feel self-conscious or judge their artistic ability, which can inhibit engagement.

2. Collage Making

Collage involves assembling images, text, and objects from magazines, newspapers, or found materials into a cohesive artwork. This activity enables symbolic expression and allows individuals to explore themes such as identity, relationships, and hope.

- *Benefits:* Encourages reflection and storytelling; less reliant on drawing skills; can be a powerful metaphor for piecing together one's life.
- *Considerations:* Requires access to diverse materials; may take more time to guide effectively.

3. Clay Modeling and Sculpture

Working with clay or other malleable materials provides a tactile and sensory experience. This kinesthetic activity can ground individuals in the present moment and facilitate emotional release through physical manipulation.

- *Advantages:* Enhances sensory integration; promotes mindfulness; can be cathartic.
- *Limitations:* May require supervision due to mess or materials; not always feasible in all therapy environments.

4. Journaling with Artistic Elements

Combining written journaling with illustrations, doodles, or graphic elements can deepen self-exploration. This mixed-media approach bridges verbal and visual expression, helping individuals process thoughts and emotions.

- *Strengths:* Supports narrative development; customizable; fosters introspection.
- *Challenges:* May require literacy and willingness to write; some may struggle with consistent practice.

Incorporating Art Therapy into Depression Treatment Plans

Integrating art therapy activities for depression into broader treatment plans requires thoughtful consideration of individual preferences, symptom severity, and therapeutic goals. Licensed art therapists often collaborate with psychiatrists, psychologists, and primary care providers to ensure a holistic approach.

Individual vs. Group Art Therapy

Both individual and group formats have distinct advantages. Individual sessions allow for personalized attention and deep exploration, while group therapy fosters social connection, reduces isolation, and encourages peer support—critical factors in depression recovery.

Structured vs. Freeform Activities

Some therapists employ structured tasks with clear objectives, such as drawing a “safe place” or creating a timeline of life events. Others prefer freeform expression, encouraging clients to create spontaneously. The choice depends on therapeutic intent and client comfort.

Measuring Efficacy and Progress

Monitoring changes in depressive symptoms through clinical assessments and client self-report is essential. Art therapy outcomes may also be evaluated qualitatively by observing changes in artwork themes, complexity, and emotional tone over time.

Challenges and Considerations in Using Art Therapy for Depression

Despite its benefits, art therapy is not without limitations. Accessibility can be a barrier due to the need for trained therapists and materials. Additionally, some individuals may initially resist creative activities due to stigma, low motivation, or self-doubt.

Moreover, art therapy should not be viewed as a standalone cure for depression but rather as a complementary modality. Severe depression with suicidal ideation or psychosis requires comprehensive medical intervention.

Addressing Potential Barriers

- **Stigma and Misconceptions:** Educating patients and providers about the legitimacy and evidence supporting art therapy can increase acceptance.
- **Cost and Availability:** Expanding insurance coverage and integrating art therapy into community mental health programs can improve access.
- **Customization:** Tailoring activities to cultural backgrounds and personal interests enhances engagement and outcomes.

The Future of Art Therapy in Depression Treatment

Advancements in neuroscience and digital technology are expanding the scope of art therapy. Virtual reality art programs and digital painting applications provide new platforms for creative expression, particularly relevant in teletherapy contexts. Ongoing research aims to delineate optimal protocols and identify which subgroups benefit most from art therapy activities for depression.

As mental health care evolves toward integrative models, art therapy stands poised to remain a vital component, offering innovative ways to heal emotional wounds through creativity.

In the landscape of depression treatment, where the complexity of the disorder demands diverse interventions, art therapy activities for depression offer a promising, patient-centered approach that harnesses the transformative power of art to foster resilience, insight, and recovery.

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art therapy activities for depression: Group Therapy Activities for Psychiatric Nursing Mabel Stephanie Hale , Keeran Launcelot Mitchell, Master Group Therapy for Psychiatric Nursing Practice Transform patient outcomes with evidence-based group interventions designed specifically for psychiatric nurses. This comprehensive guide provides everything needed to implement therapeutic groups across all psychiatric populations and settings. Inside You'll Find: 18 detailed chapters covering major psychiatric conditions 50+ ready-to-use clinical worksheets and assessment tools Crisis management and safety planning protocols Cultural competency strategies for diverse populations Complete documentation templates and outcome measures From CBT and DBT groups to specialized interventions for adolescents, geriatric patients, and dual diagnosis populations, this practical resource bridges the gap between theory and real-world application. An essential resource for every psychiatric nurse seeking to enhance their group facilitation skills and improve patient care through evidence-based interventions. Perfect for psychiatric nurses, mental health professionals, nursing educators, and healthcare administrators developing therapeutic group

programs.

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art therapy activities for depression: *Art Therapy Exercises for Kids* C H King, 2021-10-31 Art Therapy Exercises for Kids The purposeful act of making art can be more than a creative outlet. It can also help individuals gain self-awareness, process difficult thoughts, and even ease the effects of past traumas. Essential Art Therapy Exercises, a cognitive behavioral therapy workbook, offers a range of creative activities to help you better understand yourself, develop control over your emotions, and aid the healing process. Dealing with school, friends, and thoughts of the future can be challenging for teenagers. This CBT workbook can help, with simple strategies for overcoming tough feelings and living with more positivity and optimism. Find activities and writing prompts that will help you determine your values, boost your self-esteem, and learn to let thoughts come and go

without getting stuck on them. Interactive exercises and questions—Understand your feelings with quizzes and write-in prompts that help you turn negative habits into more productive ones. Manageable goal setting—Learn how to break down overwhelming tasks and challenges into small steps that make it easier to move forward. Real therapy methods—Explore exercises built on the latest strategies from CBT, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and mindfulness. This CBT workbook gives teens the strategies to be who they want to be

art therapy activities for depression: The impact of art therapy on mental health and well-being Helena José, Joao Apostolo, Luciano Vitorino, Luis Manuel Mota de Sousa, Martina Giusti, 2023-12-22 In 2019 the WHO came out with a scoping review related to the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being. In the last yeast, in fact, literature has recognized the direct and indirect benefits of art in the prevention and promotion of mental and physical health and in the management and treatment of disease. Although some countries have made progress in developing policies that make use of the arts to support health and well-being, many have not yet addressed the opportunities that exist for using the arts to support health, and for others policy activities have been time limited. Nonetheless, the relationship between art and health has existed since the birth of medicine itself and has strongly influenced its history and its evolution. Art therapy is the main expression of art in health care. The integration of art in traditional health assistance paths sustains the need to have a holistic approach to health, wellness, and well-being both of patients and other stakeholders, including caregivers and healthcare professionals. Currently the main area of art therapy application is mental health with especially regards to disability, both in developmental age and in elderly and both to cognitive and physical impairment and dementia. However, it is important to remark that mental health does not only refer to mental illness, but also to people's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. These last cases have particularly worsened with the long lockdown periods due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

art therapy activities for depression: Essential Art Therapy Exercises 2022 The Books of Pamex, 2022-02-14 The intention of my art therapy practice is to create a safe place for clients to experience and creatively express their emotions, as well as to cultivate new opportunities for navigating life. Art has been an outlet for me during turbulent times, and it has been my first defense when dealing with life's challenges. Art is also a part of my daily regimen of keeping my life in balance. I practice what I preach. My mission is to support others in finding a way to connect body, mind, and soul through creativity. It's incredibly satisfying to help a person realize their true potential and live a life free of suffering. As a registered, board-certified art therapist (ATR-BC), I run a private practice that provides these services to all age groups, both in person and online. My experience with adolescent clients ranges from working with at-risk youth in crisis shelters and juvenile jails to kids in public schools. I also have vast experience working with adults who have anxiety, depression, and trauma. Outside of my private practice, I have also worked in psychiatric facilities and women's shelters. My clinical experience has been using the cognitive-behavioral art therapy approach to treat depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Cognitive-behavioral approaches, including mindfulness practices and meditation, are also a part of my art therapy method. Art therapy is a way for clients to visualize what's going on in their mind and learn new ways to change their thinking patterns, which can lead to a new perspective. This book provides creative techniques for dealing with depression, anxiety, and PTSD. If you are a mental health professional, try the exercises yourself before doing them with your client. If you are doing these art exercises independently, give yourself time to reflect by journaling the discussion questions. My hope is that this book will provide a springboard for insight, self-expression, mindfulness, acceptance, and self-compassion. Specifically, the exercises are designed to provide visual representations of thoughts and feelings. When people learn that they have control over their thoughts, and how they choose to feel, it will affect their behavior. Everyone can learn new ways to respond to situations in their lives. Art therapy isn't solely for people with an artistic disposition. It can also be helpful to those who consider themselves nonartistic. Anyone open to learning techniques that foster self-awareness can gain something from the experience. hose who are new to

creating art should focus on the process rather than the product. To accomplish this, they must let go of critical thoughts because judging whether artwork is good or bad will stop the creative process. The act of expression is what is valuable because it provides insight into emotions and behaviors. Creating art to express emotions can be truly cathartic and liberating. Everyone should take the time to loosen up by trying the warm-up exercises I've included at the end of chapter 1. When an individual is open to looking inward and finding new ways to cope with life events through creating art without judgment, transformation happens. The world begins to change. If thoughts of judgment come up, just witness them and do not respond. They are only thoughts. Keep the intention clear to use these exercises to heal and to learn new ways to exist comfortably in the world.

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art therapy activities for depression: *Introduction to Alternative and Complementary Therapies* Terry S Trepper, Anne Strozier, Joyce E Carpenter, Lorna L Hecker, 2013-01-11 Discover creative new ways to facilitate the therapeutic process Therapeutic modalities that psychotherapists usually rely on--such as psychodynamic, humanistic, systems, cognitive, narrative, analytic and solution focused--are all verbal interventions. Introduction to Complementary and Alternative Therapies presents a comprehensive overview of complementary and alternative therapeutic

interventions that go beyond the standard verbal approaches. The therapies presented in this book—including mindfulness and meditation, spirituality, poetry therapy, art therapy, psychodrama, dance/movement therapy, music therapy, animal-assisted therapy, and touch therapy—provide the reader with creative non-traditional modalities that are effective in conjunction with traditional treatment, or as substitutes. They may enrich talk-therapy, especially when therapists and/or clients get stuck, or they may provide healing on their own. Introduction to Complementary and Alternative Therapies explains the basics about how these nontraditional therapies work and provides vivid examples for utilizing them in treatment. Each chapter is written by an expert in the field of expertise, and includes a description of the approach, research evidence about its effectiveness, guidelines on how to use the therapy in practice, and case examples. This excellent volume also provides practitioners with a wide range of resources, including Web sites, information on state and national organizations, accrediting board info, and more. Topics in Introduction to Complementary and Alternative Therapies include: the mind-body relationship ways to integrate spirituality in counseling the healing components of poetry research studies on art therapy different techniques available in Psychodrama using body movement as a means of expressing conflicts and desires how music therapy promotes positive changes in the client the healing aspects of animals and much more! Introduction to Complementary and Alternative Therapies is a horizon-expanding guide for therapists, social workers, psychologists, counselors, physicians, educators, and students.

art therapy activities for depression: Arts Therapies in Psychiatric Rehabilitation

Umberto Volpe, 2021-07-28 This book explores possible approaches to and uses of art therapy in mental health settings. Reflecting the latest scientific evidence, it represents a major step toward the harmonization of practices in the field, filling the gap between the theory and practice of art therapy. The book is divided into four major sections, corresponding to the main artistic domains: visual art therapy, music therapy, dance movement therapy, and drama therapy. Gathering the research and insights of leading professionals from around the globe, the book offers a diverse and balanced mix of perspectives. Accordingly, it will appeal to a broad readership including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, psychiatric rehabilitation technicians, nurses, educators, art therapists, and students.

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2011-11-30 Providing a complete overview of art therapy, from theory and research to practical applications, this is the definitive handbook in the field. Leading practitioners demonstrate the nuts and bolts of arts-based intervention with children, adults, families, couples, and groups dealing with a wide range of clinical issues. Rich with illustrative case material, the volume features 110 sample drawings and other artwork. The inclusion of diverse theoretical approaches and practice settings makes the Handbook eminently useful for all mental health professionals interested in using art in evaluation and treatment. New to This Edition*Incorporates the latest clinical applications, methods, and research.*Chapter on art materials and media (including uses of new technologies).*Chapters on intervening with domestic violence survivors, bereaved children, and military personnel.*Expanded coverage of neuroscience, cultural diversity, and ethics.

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Powe Runde, 2025-06-17 Discover the healing power of art Painting a seascape or sculpting a clay pot is more than just a fun way to spend an hour—it can also be therapeutic. Explore art's healing potential with this compelling art therapy activity book. You'll pair mindfulness with different creative projects, using self-expression and introspection as tools to work through difficult emotions, stressful situations, and self-doubt. Rooted in mindfulness—From drawing to digital photography, explore a variety of relaxing and beginner-friendly activities designed to help you improve your focus, awareness, and self-compassion. Dive into different art projects Find deeper meaning in God's Word with thoughtful commentary that speaks to issues all married couples face, from establishing

good communication to remaining faithful. Reflect on your work—Every project concludes with thoughtful prompts that encourage you to view your art through the lens of mindfulness and connect it to the present moment. Find serenity through self-expression with Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy Activities.

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