

Illuminated Collage - Youth Group Guide

About the Project

The illuminated collage activity uses collaborative art making as a vehicle to share feelings in a creative way. A collage is a type of art that is made up of lots of different pieces. You'll be making this collage together, each person contributing their own unique pieces to the whole.

This activity is the result of an 8-month partnership between multimedia artist Elisa H. Hamilton (www.ElisaHamilton.com) and The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital (www.mghclaycenter.org). The Clay Center is a practical, online educational resource to help prevent, reduce, and de-stigmatize youth mental health conditions and illness through education.



By sharing our feelings together through art, we create an entrypoint for conversations about mental health, and we bring dialogue about mental health out of the shadows and into the light!

To learn more about the project visit:
<https://mghclaycenter.org/illuminating-mental-health>

This activity is for educational purposes and not intended to be used for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any health-related questions.



Preparing for the Activity

Space Needs

You will need a window that is easily accessible and a comfortable workspace near the window.

Time 30-90 minutes

Participants 3 or more, Ages 5+

Materials Needs

- Vellum paper in assorted colors
- "Wall-Safe" Scotch Tape
- Markers and/or Pens
- Scissors

Optional Stencils, rulers, a piece of cardboard as a drawing surface if you're working on the floor.

You can find all of these materials at your local art supply store, or online. Note that some markers will smudge when used on vellum paper; test your markers in advance to ensure best results.



Note for Facilitators

Depending on the age of your group, we recommend you be familiar with support resources in or near your organization. Activities like this can sometimes bring up additional feelings for young people. Remind your group that if they or someone they know needs support, there are resources.

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or Text - **988** | Chat - <https://988lifeline.org/>



Instructions

With your students or in advance...

Step 1 - Watch the video tutorial.

Artist Elisa H. Hamilton walks through the activity in this short YouTube video: **Illuminated Collage Activity Guide** - bit.ly/ICYGG (full URL - <https://youtu.be/qBxc1Hua4BM>)

Step 2 - Choose a window for your collage.

- Which windows in your space get the most light and at what times of day?
- Do you want your collage to be in a place that you see it all the time?
- Do you want your collage to be visible to people outside can see it?

With your young people...

Step 3 - Get to know the art-making materials.

Ask them to touch and hold the vellum paper and to feel the smoothness of the vellum and the way it can flex and fold; it's a flat piece of paper, but can become three-dimensional depending on how you use it. With them, hold the vellum up to the light, it appears to glow - isn't that beautiful?

Step 4 - Think about feelings recently experienced.

As they are holding or playing with the vellum, ask them to consider the feelings they've had over the course of the day or week. Some questions: Can you identify a specific feeling that you had or are having? What made you feel that way? How did you feel when you woke up this morning? How are you feeling right now?

Step 5 - Express these feelings by creating a collage!

As they consider feelings they have had, tell them to use the art materials to express those feelings by creating a collage on the window. They can write on the vellum paper in words or drawings, cut and fold the vellum paper in to shapes, overlap colors of paper. Have them tape their creations to the window as they go. They can add as many pieces as they want to express themselves. Connect pieces to other pieces on the window to grow your collage together.

Step 6 - Admire your collective creation, and talk about the process.

When everyone feels like the collage is done, step back to view your beautiful creation. Take a few minutes to talk about how it felt to share feelings this way, and ask students to share something that they notice about one or two of the collage pieces on the window. Take pictures of your favorite parts of the collage to remember them. Consider leaving the collage up for a few days to reflect on again later. You can also make your collage over the course of a week, adding a few pieces each day, and reflecting on how your feelings change over time.

Step 7 - Share your work!

Take photos of your collage creations, and share them on **Instagram** to inspire others! Use the **hashtag** [#illuminatedcollage](https://www.instagram.com/illuminatedcollage) and to **tag us at** [@mghclaycenter](https://www.instagram.com/mghclaycenter).



Conversation Starters

You know your group best. But we have included some talking points below that may be useful in your activity. Use any that make sense for the developmental age of your group.

What is "mental health"?

Mental health is linked to how our brain functions, just as physical health is linked to our bones, organs, and muscles. Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It is a state of well-being that helps us to cope with stress in our lives, to feel confident in our abilities, to learn well, and to contribute in our communities. When we have poor mental health, it can make it harder to do these things.

What is "stigma"?

Stigma is the result of negative stereotypes of certain groups of people. People who are labeled negatively can experience discrimination or othering, or feelings of shame or being misunderstood. Stigma around mental health issues can lead to low self-esteem and make it hard for people struggling with mental health to talk about it with others.

Why the Illuminated Collage?

Talking openly about our feelings - the good and the bad - can help to reduce mental health stigma. Feelings are something we all have! The more we talk about our emotions, the easier it gets and the more normal it becomes. It can feel really good to share a positive emotion with someone else. Likewise, it can feel really good to share a difficult emotion with someone else if we're not worried about how they will react. When we feel safe opening up about our feelings, it makes us more connected to others and more able to ask for help when we need it.

The Illuminated Collage is a fun, creative, and colorful way to get started.

General prompts.

- How did you feel when you woke up this morning?
- How did you feel leaving school today?
- How do you feel right now in this moment?
- What is your favorite feeling?
- What is something that makes you feel calm?
- What is something that makes you feel nervous?
- What is something you are grateful for?



Feelings List

Here's a list of some feelings you may have had before.

Some of these words you may have heard, and some of these words may be new to you.

Use this list to help you think through your own feelings.

alert	excited	pleased
amused	frazzled	proud
angry	friendly	puzzled
annoyed	generous	relieved
ashamed	grumpy	restless
bashful	guilty	sad
bored	happy	scared
brave	helpful	shy
calm	hopeful	silly
carefree	hurt	sorry
confident	inspired	stressed
confused	irritated	supported
creative	jealous	surprised
curious	joyful	thankful
delighted	lonely	thoughtful
disappointed	loved	triumphant
discouraged	patient	wistful
embarrassed	peaceful	worried
energetic	playful	weary

Feelings Brainstorm

Use this space to write down the feelings you have experienced recently.