

Understanding Impacts Through Body Mapping Art

INTRODUCTION

This Activity is one way to understand how women are experiencing maternal and infant health care, childbirth away from their home communities, and becoming mothers. Body mapping is a creative tool that is art-based and focuses on the body as a way to represent experiences lived through the body. Rachel Olson developed this Activity in Manitoba, and conducted this body mapping workshop with mothers from Norway House Cree Nation.

Body mapping is a way of telling stories and can be used for multiple purposes. It is up to you and your community to define what the goal of a body mapping workshop will be. Body mapping can be used as a research tool, an advocacy tool, a starting point to begin an inter-generational dialogue, and as a way of recording people's life stories. In the following example, body maps were used to gain a better understanding of current experiences of childbirth for women living in a community with no birth services, their experiences of becoming mothers, and articulating the goals and priorities of the mothers in the community

The following outlines the workshop format, the tools you need, and some of the questions we explored. This workshop can be adapted to better suit your own community and situation as necessary.

MATERIALS NEEDED

To run this activity, we suggest you have the following:

- A space big enough to allow participants to spread out their body maps, and a comfortable space for people to work on the floor with their maps.
- Paper. Large rolls of paper that you can measure according to each person's height and width.
- Black markers and pens. Enough for each participant.
- Crayons: both pencil and wax. Markers of all colours as well.
- Paints, all colours.
- Paint brushes, cups, and other materials for cleanup.
- Any other supplies to use for the body maps. Be creative!

EXERCISE ONE: BODY TRACING

Working in pairs, each participant will take turns getting their body traced on their paper. Take turns on each person's body map. Once you have your body traced, trace your partner's body onto your body map. This will mean that you will have two outlines on your map. One of these is you, and the other we will paint in later to explore your support.

Words to consider reading out

"Today we are going to do an activity called body tracing. We are going to work with partners because it is impossible to trace around yourself. When you express your own experience, you are the one who knows best. No one else knows how it feels to live inside your body, so don't be scared to make the wrong mark. There is no such thing as a mistake."

EXERCISE TWO: BODY HIGHLIGHTING

Choose a colour and highlight your body tracing. Make sure you only highlight your body tracing, and not your partner's outline. This will be done later in the workshop.

EXERCISE THREE: DRAWING WHERE YOU COME FROM

Along the bottom of your map, draw using a symbol or picture where you come from. You can also write the name of the place you come from beside it

Words to consider reading out

Where do you come from? What comes to mind when you are asked this question? Is it the village or place where you were born? Is it a symbol to show your culture? Or is it both?

EXERCISE FOUR: DRAWING WHAT YOU ARE MOVING TOWARDS

In the top left hand corner of your map, draw what your goals are and what you are moving towards. Choose a colour that you think represents that goal, and paint around what you have drawn. You can also use arrows or lines to connect where you are from to what you are working towards. These lines can cross your body outline.

Words to consider reading out

What is your vision, your goal or your dream for yourself and your family? What are you striving towards? It can be something material, physical, emotional or spiritual. You are on a journey. What are you moving towards?

EXERCISE FIVE: PAINTING YOUR SUPPORT

Now it is time to paint in your support. Choose a colour and paint the outline of the other body tracing on your map. In this exercise, think of the people who support you, and write their names onto their body maps. This support is very important and can be individuals (either someone living or someone who has passed away), groups, organizations, or belief systems.

CHECK TIME/GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask the participants to share and explain the following to the group:

- Explain the symbol or picture you have drawn to show where you come from. Tell us something about the place where you were born.
- Explain how the colour you have chosen for your body map symbolizes how you are feeling.
- Explain the symbol you have drawn to show your vision, goal or dream.
- Say who supports you, how they show their support, and what this means to you.
- Talk about anything else you have felt or experienced during the day's activities so far.

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EXERCISE SIX: JOURNEY MAP

This exercise gives you the chance to map out the physical journeys you have made. In this exercise, we want to map out the journey we have made both in our lives, physically moving from place to place, and the journeys we've made to give birth to our babies. We will start with where we were born, and where we grew up, and then map the journeys we took when we had our babies. We can use symbols, maps, and words to express these journeys, and choose a colour that would represent your feelings during these journeys. Draw these wherever you want to on your body map.

EXERCISE SEVEN: DRAWING UNDER YOUR SKIN: PREGNANCY

READ THE FOLLOWING OR USE YOUR OWN WORDS:

Think about your pregnancy. Imagine your pregnancy inside your body. Think about your body when you were pregnant. How was your pregnancy connected to all the other parts of your body? This does not necessarily have to be scientific, just think about the connections your pregnancy had to other parts of your body, whether it be emotional, spiritual, or physical. Have pregnancies changed how you feel about your body? Use words or symbols or pictures to show internal marks or connections between your pregnancies that are unseen or underneath your skin. After you are done, think about how your pregnancy is connected to the other parts of your body map from earlier exercises. You can connect your pregnancy to other sections of the body map, including where you come from, your journeys, and your support. Think about what colours you would use to make these connections. You can use words to describe these connections as well.

EXERCISE EIGHT: MOTHERHOOD

During this exercise, participants are invited to draw their experiences of motherhood on their maps. What is important to them? Where is this located on the map? What has changed since they became mothers? What are the connections between motherhood and the other parts of their maps? Draw these places on the body and connect them to other parts of the map.

EXERCISE NINE: CARE

In this exercise, how women care for themselves while they were pregnant and as mothers is explored. Make connections between how women felt during their care, their support network, and their journeys.

Consider reading out

You've marked points of your pregnancies in your body. How do you look after yourself? Have you been to the doctor, or do you see a nurse, or a midwife, or another type of healer or health care provider? What kind of care did you have during your pregnancies? Think about what shape and colour could represent the care you had while you were pregnant and as a mother. Did it help you? Also, draw or write about the other things you do to take care of yourself and support your health

Exercise Ten: Finishing Up

At this point, there are a few things we can do to finish up the body maps. We have not drawn our faces on the maps. If you want, you can also choose to make hand and footprints on your body map. Decorate your body map with paint, colours, and anything else to make it feel finished for you. To finish, allow everyone to sit together and tell their story of their body map.

