

Creativity Is a Tool for Raising and Maintaining Hope

By Jessica Isom, MD, MPH

Artistic endeavors can support our emotional regulation and resilience. Our creativity can help us express ourselves and manage emotional responses that might otherwise turn us away from our identified goals, pathways to achieve them, and a sense of personal agency. Artistry can also communicate how much we understand new concepts or skills.

You may be wondering, “What does this process really look like for me?” When adversity shows up, there are strategies you can use to maintain or increase hope as you work to achieve goals that matter to you. Here’s a breakdown on how these creative strategies can help you to restore hope when your reserves run low.

1. If you face difficulties setting and maintaining a clear goal and you feel hope fading, these strategies can help you regulate your emotions and find clarity as you process your feelings.

- **Pause to reassess a situation** and let yourself shift your perspective or reframe an experience in a way that feels more actionable. Try expressing yourself through journaling, creative writing, or collage with your challenge as the theme.
- **Seek help or comfort from people you trust** to find the emotional support you need to lower stress and gain perspective. Try a creative activity, such as dancing, creating music, or playing video games to connect with others.
- **Do something you enjoy to relax** instead of trying to solve a problem immediately, which can reduce emotional stress enough to let you return to goal-setting with a clearer mind. Try

a 10-minute doodling exercise in your notebook connected to a freedom dream you cherish. Or create a drawing or collage that highlights your favorite relaxation or joy-filled activities.

2. When you’re struggling to find or maintain pathways toward your goals, here are a few ways to help you reset and uncover new routes forward.

- **Think about something else that occupies your attention** to free enough emotional space for your mind to identify paths you had not considered. Try a meditative coloring page, walk in nature, or write a creative to-do list using colorful markers or doodles to turn chores into something visual and engaging.
- **Engage in a demanding activity** to refocus your emotional resources on a productive outlet. This may reveal new insights relevant to your pathway. Try dancing energetically or rearranging your bedroom or work area to create a more peaceful or inspiring environment.
- **Express your feelings about the setback through creative outlets** to find immediate emotional relief, which can make it easier to return to problem-solving. Try writing a poem that reflects your experience, painting or coloring your feelings, or using movement to express your emotional state.





3. If you're uncertain about your ability to influence an outcome that's important to you, here are some affect-regulation strategies that can increase your sense of control and agency.

- **Take an action step to solve the problem**, no matter how small, to help reinforce your ability to tackle challenges and create the future you seek. Try creating a vision board or collage that creatively and colorfully represents your goal and selected pathway.
- **Do something relaxing to recharge emotionally** and increase your ability to act with a sense of focus and determination. Try creating a playlist of calming music and listen to it while drawing or journaling. Take a walk and photograph beautiful things in your surroundings, like flowers, trees, or architecture. Or, create a collage that represents your strengths.

The Takeaway

The bottom line is this: Your creativity is your key to raising levels of hope in your daily life. No matter what challenges arise, remember that your creativity is a powerful tool you can use for emotional regulation, mental health, and resilience. Start small, stay open, and trust in the process of creating your own path forward.



About My Digital Sanctuary

My Digital Sanctuary brings information and creativity together to support soul care, a holistic approach to emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being from the Steve Fund. Created by mental health experts who specialize in serving young people of color and their families, My Digital Sanctuary shares the help, hope, and healing we need to not just survive but to thrive.



Embrace Hope and Healing through Creativity

Creating art is a powerful way to regulate your emotions and support your resilience. The arts and your creativity can help support your mental health and give you a practical way to manage your emotional responses to challenges in healthy, culturally relevant ways. Artistry can also communicate how much we understand new concepts or skills. .

Here are eight creative ideas to support your emotional well-being and explore the science of hope. Use paper or any medium you like, including the Shuffles app from Pinterest, which can help you create, publish, and share your art. Download [Shuffles](#).

1 Create a Visual Summary:

Draw or digitally create a summary of key ideas connecting the science of **hope** to your emotional well-being and mental health.

2 Journal Reflection:

Write a journal entry about what you learned from the blog or about how the information can apply to your home, work, or student life.

3 Doodle Your Understanding:

Create a doodle or collage that highlights a key idea you appreciated or that you want to learn more about.

4 Design a Social Media Post:

Design a Pinterest pin or Shuffles post that explains a key idea from the blog in a creative way.

5 Create an Emotional Strategy Collage:

Use materials or a digital application to find images to explain what emotional strategy works best for you when you are in a low mood or highly stressed.

6 Draw or Paint Your Emotions:

Take a few minutes to tune into the emotions and physical sensations you are experiencing right now. Then draw, doodle, or create a Shuffles post that explains what you noticed.

7 Affirmation Board:

Collect affirmations and quotations that affirm your freedom dreams, or your desire for more emotional balance and greater well-being. Write or draw them, or use Shuffles to create a collage that can become a touchpoint for daily soul care.

8 Soul Care Collage:

How do you take care of your well-being? Create a collage or piece of art that captures the ways you practice soul care and support your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Try [Shuffles](#) for a creative tool to help.



Setting Emotional Creativity Goals

By Jessica Isom, MD, MPH

Before engaging in a creative activity to support emotional resilience and regulation, you must understand your needs and identify the ideal outcome. You can consider your emotional goal, choose a creative tactic, decide on the emotional approach that works best for you, and then determine how this activity will help you process what you are facing.

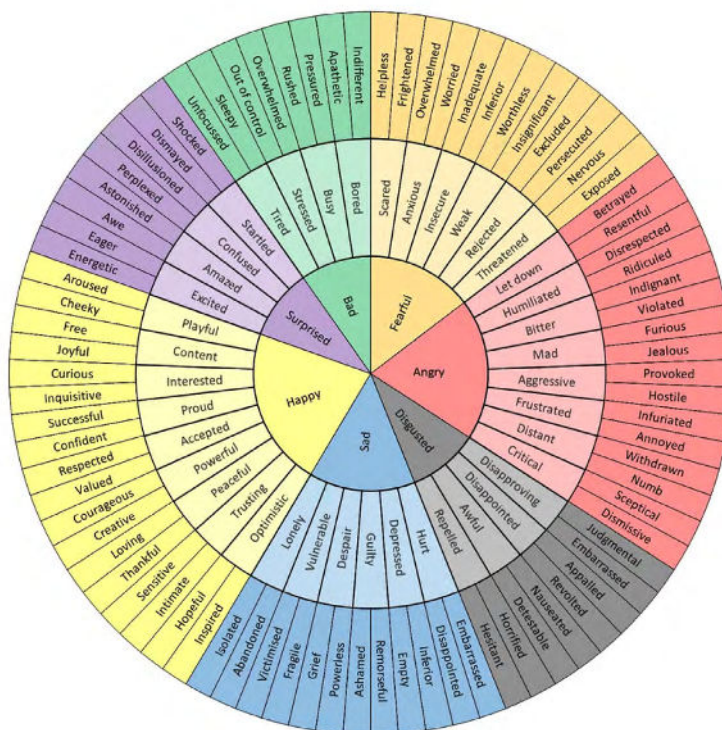
Here is a four-step strategy to help set you on the path toward managing your emotions and mental health productively.

Step 1. Set your emotional goal.

When we're in the middle of a situation that lowers our level of hope, we can begin by better understanding the mix of emotions that comes with our circumstances. Next, consider what emotional state might help you overcome this challenge.

Reflect on what you want to achieve emotionally by asking yourself:

- **What emotions am I currently feeling?** How intense are the emotions for me right now? What sensations do I feel in my body, and where are these located? How intense are these feelings in my body? **Tip:** Use the [feelings wheel](#) to help you clarify what emotions are coming up for you.
- **What emotional state am I hoping to reach?**
- **Once I achieve this emotional goal, how do I expect my body to feel?** Will I feel more at peace, energized, or less tense?



Step 2. Choose your creative outlet.

When you're in the middle of a situation that lowers your level of hope, remember that you have options available to use creativity as a tool. This step works best if you reflect on which creative outlets have helped you in the past. If this is your first time trying a creative outlet, you may benefit from detailing how it works or did not work for your emotional goal.

Decide on the artistic activity that matches your emotional goal by asking:

- **What creative outlets are available** to me at this moment or later today?
- **Which of these options do I want** to engage in?
- **Which of these options can I realistically engage in** based on my bandwidth of time, emotional energy, and access to resources?

Step 3. Identify your emotional strategy.

When we are in the middle of a situation that lowers our level of hope, we can choose from a few different strategies to raise our awareness of our goals, pathways, and ability to take action. We can choose strategies to cultivate hope, such as changing the situation, choosing where to focus our attention, changing the thoughts we have about the situation, or managing our emotional response to the situation directly.

Reflect on how this chosen activity can help you to process or regulate the emotions you are faced with.

- **What emotional strategy do I hope to achieve** at this time? .
- **What past experiences or emotions make this strategy feel most effective** for my current situation?
- **Why do I believe this** is the best strategy right now?

Step 4. Evaluate the effectiveness of your strategy.

When we are in the middle of a situation that lowers our level of hope, we can try to determine what emotional process this creative outlet should generate for us.

- How will I know when my emotional strategy is working for me? What signs will I notice in my emotions, thoughts, or body that show this strategy is helping?
- How will I know when my emotional strategy is not working for me? What signs will I notice in my emotions, thoughts, or body that show this strategy is not helping?
 - **Tip:** If your creative outlet isn't helping, consider trying a different activity, taking a break, or adjusting your emotional goal.



Meditating on Creativity for Hope and Healing

Your creativity can be your guide for finding hope, strength, and healing. Historically, creative artistry has shown us that we don't have to accept the world as it is. We can each use our creative gifts to express our feelings about the present reality and to imagine a healthier, more just world.

As you color the image below, meditate on how your creativity can help you express yourself, find hope, and work through challenges. You can dream big or start small. Reflect on ways to support your mental health in support of your dreams. Use this quiet time to consider new goals, map a few paths toward them, and take action.

