

## Guidelines for Social Emotional Writing/Poetry

Adapted from the Medical Social Emotional Arts Toolkit – a training program developed by UCLArts and Healing with Perie Longo, PhD, LMFT, PTR, Jennie Linthorst, MA, CAPF, and Ping Ho, MA, MPH

**Serve as the scribe as needed:** Scribing can be enormously helpful for participants for whom writing is at all a challenge. As you write down what they are saying, their thoughts and ideas can flow more easily. The easiest way to get the flow going is to ask for the first word that pops into their mind and what comes to mind when they think of that word, and then what comes to mind after that, and so forth. It's okay just to list words! This free association technique can also be used to facilitate journaling.

An effective way to come up with words is to ask participants to write three images that they noticed in the past week as they went about their business. The images that we pick reveal how we are feeling and have something to do with what we are experiencing internally.

After you have scribed for a participant, give them what you have written down for them.

**Contain the assignment if it feels overwhelming:** If a whole blank page of paper feels overwhelming to an older child or an adult, have them draw a container in the middle of the page and write within that container. (With young children, their printing is so big that it doesn't make a whole lot of difference containment-wise.) Participants can give their poems a shape – like a long skinny poem – and playfully see how long they can make it. Or participants can write a really short poem, like the Haiku-Like Poems activity.

Showing pictures can also be helpful. The participant can identify an image in a picture that leads to something about her or himself (e.g., “Horse don't run at me so fast I am only 8 years old”). They can be asked, “What do you think of when you see a bird flying? I wonder where it is going?” It is a good idea to have images from nature handy. These have universal appeal and are less likely to offend or trigger stress responses. Speaking through images encourages expression of feelings that are difficult to communicate because of aesthetic distance (e.g., Do leaves feel pain when they fall to the ground? Does the tree reach out to her children?). Some people don't share their feelings because they believe that it is wrong to complain.

**To rhyme or not to rhyme:** Poetry does not need to rhyme. Prose or poetry can also be broken up into different lines for effect.

**What needs to be written will be written:** Regardless of the activity instructions, participants will write what they need to write. Some participants may express concern that they are not doing the activity “the right way”. Assure them that they should write what they want to write because that is what needs to be written, and that there is no wrong way to express oneself creatively.



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**Social/Emotional Goals:**