



**I AM BROKEN**

## Using Artistic Coping Skills to Make Brokenness a Strength

### What is Brokenness? How can it be a strength?

People's first question for us is usually: What is "broken" and why would you want to call people broken? Doesn't that degrade people or mean that they are less than other people? I don't think that brokenness must mean that the person is weak or less than. Brokenness changes someone in a way that can either make them unusable, or help them find the hole they were meant to fill and the strength to fill it. It is through the brokenness that a person's way of looking at the world changes in ways that

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ARTISTIC COPING SKILLS

Painting - Writing - Music - Photography - Maker Arts

no one else could see it. Not only this, but the brokenness only makes a person stronger and ready for other challenges that will come up in their lives.

Of course, for this to be true, the broken need to find and develop the skills they need to make the brokenness a strength. There are many coping skills that a person can have, but artistic coping skills work on multiple levels for them to *find their story* in ways that they couldn't see, *tell their story* in ways that words couldn't change, and *help others* to tell their story by working together on a project. For this e-book, we will focus on painting, music, writing, photography, and jewelry making.

## Painting as a Coping Skill

Whenever most people think about art therapy or using art as a coping skill, painting is usually one of the first mediums that come to mind. Painting has a lot of advantages when it comes to telling a story or helping the broken find what they can't express through words. Whether it is colors expressing different emotions, pictures and shapes telling so much more than words ever could, or the ability to focus on one thing long enough to calm the mind and the soul. Even though each person responds to different coping skills better than others, depending on their personality or proclivity, painting can help those who cannot express themselves through words or have hidden feelings or memories they don't want to face head on.

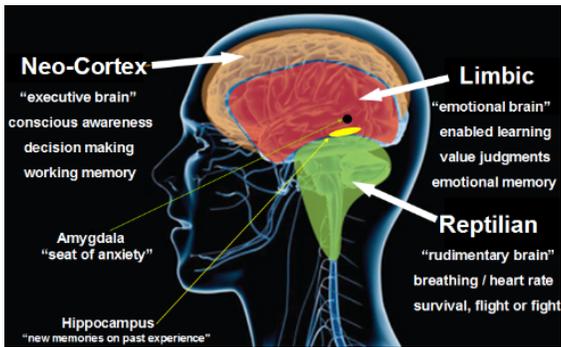
*Colors can express different emotions* even when the painter isn't aware of the emotions they are feeling. For example, red often symbolizes passion, anger, aggressiveness. On the other hand, yellow often symbolizes happiness and friendliness. Helping the broken understand they can explore their emotions in the safety of a canvas which isn't going to lash back at them, judge them, or blab about it to others who aren't safe

- **COLORS REPRESENT EMOTIONS**
- **FOCUS ON BRUSH STROKES FOR STRESS RELIEF**
- **COLLABORATION BRINGS MANY STORIES TOGETHER**

can be exactly what the person needs. Most of the time, those who are experiencing brokenness

can't even understand the emotions that are coming through them, so providing a way they can explore what is going through them in a safe way is essential.

Another way that painting can be a powerful coping skill for the broken is through the *repetitiveness of strokes and focusing on only one thing at a time*. Psychologists and scientists who look at the brain understand that when someone is under large amounts of stress or anger, the neurons in the brain are firing in



so many different directions that the brain starts to get tired and shuts down. However, if the neurons can focus on one thing, instead of haphazardly in multiple locations, the brain can start to slow down and relax, therefore relieving the stress or anger in the person. Even though this can also be accomplished through exercise and/or meditation, painting can be a more palatable and fun way of doing this for the broken (especially the child or teen who doesn't understand meditation and has never been taught the value of walking or running). This fact is why coloring books have become so popular recently not only amongst children, but adults as well.

As we have stated before, community is another important piece of achieving health for the broken. Painting can be a powerful tool to achieve this through *collaboration and combining the stories of others together into one larger story*. Even for those who do not quite know how to express themselves to other people, painting helps them by focusing purely on their story (at first) and then adding their story into other's paintings without having to understand the other person's story. This can especially be powerful for those on the autism spectrum or are going through a developmental delay. One great way to do this is through what we call "Round Robin Painting". Each participant has a canvas and is told to start painting their story. Then, after about a minute or two, the participants are told to change canvas' and add onto the other painting. Do this a couple times and what you are left with is multiple paintings that show how each person can connect with everyone else's story.

"PAINTING EMBRACES ALL THE TEN FUNCTIONS OF THE EYE; THAT IS TO SAY, DARKNESS, LIGHT, BODY AND COLOR, SHAPE AND LOCATION, DISTANCE AND CLOSENESS, MOTION AND REST." – LEONARDO DA VINCI

### For Further Reading:

<http://www.kinderart.com/painting/emotion.shtml>

<http://www.creativeblog.com/web-design/12-colours-and-emotions-they-evoke-61515112>

<http://www.stress-relief-choices.com/art-therapy.html>

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352289514000101>

<http://www.bebrainfit.com/the-health-benefits-of-art-are-for-everyone>

# Expressive Writing as a Coping Skill

We all know how much better it feels after talking with a friend about a situation that frustrates us or is stressing us out. But what if you can't talk to someone about what's going on? What if every time you have talked to someone about it they either make fun of you, yell at you, or use it against you? This is why expressive writing can be so beneficial for those coping with abuse, depression, foster care, or adoption. If they cannot talk to someone about what is going on, for whatever reason, writing is down and expressing it through a creative writing outlet can help them process what is going on.

Even when they start off not knowing how they are feeling or what is happening around them, processing it through poetry, a short story, or writing a letter to their future self can lead them to coping with the situation and/or feelings.

1. Poetry
2. Short Story
3. Letters to Self

**Poetry:** "Poetry is where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words." This quote by Robert Frost explains well the effectiveness of poetry to connecting an emotion to a thought, and a thought to words. Once the person can pinpoint the emotion they are feeling and processing this emotion, they can put into words something that they couldn't before. Poetry is something which requires the person to open themselves up and look inside what is happening, so it is not for someone who isn't interested in this, but for those who are open to digging inside themselves this can be a very powerful tool. Of course, they don't have to know they are open to it in the beginning. We have plenty of stories about people who started off not sure if they would like it or not but are all for it, now. The other beautiful thing about poetry is that you don't have to be good at it to benefit from it. Rhyming isn't important, finding the right words isn't important, but all poetry requires is being open to whatever happens.

Another section of poetry which is becoming more beneficial to those otherwise closed off to emotions and being open to expressing the pain is rap and hip-hop. At the core of all rap and hip-hop lyrics

"CAN'T CLOSE MY EYES CAUSE ALL  
I SEE IS TERROR. I HATE THE  
MAN IN THE MIRROR CAUSE HIS  
REFLECTION MAKES THE PAIN  
TURN REALER." - TUPAC SHAKUR

is poetry, but creates a different use for poetry as a coping skill. The hurt and pain found in rap and hip-hop lyrics can make it a powerful tool to express their emotions while keeping their tough exterior. Tupac did it best and there's no quote better to prove this than:

"Can't close my eyes cause all I see is terror. I hate the

man in the mirror cause his reflection makes the pain turn realer.” We see many teens suffering from drugs, alcohol, abuse, and neglect using free-form rap as a coping skill and they are often surprised to see what does come out of their mouths. Someone who comes in mad and angry at the world can end up relieved and the weight of the world off their backs. We understand there is a lot of ugliness and vulgarity which should be minimized in some demographics, but the broken often already come with a lot of ugliness and finding a positive way to get it out can be healing if it does not end that way.

**Short Story:** What makes people spend hours watching Netflix instead of something more productive or even enjoyable? It cannot be laziness, alone. One of the biggest reasons people watch movies or TV shows are for the escape from reality. Obviously, watching a movie can't be a long-term coping skill but writing short stories can, fiction or non-fiction. The same escape from reality people enjoy in movies or TV shows can also be found in writing short stories. The beautiful thing about writing a short story, however, is the writer can also find a way to safely process the situation they find themselves in.

*Escape from reality.  
Find the story within the story*

**Characters**

**Setting**

**Climax**

**Characters:** What are some characters in the story? Having the broken design the fictional characters will build a world for them that helps them understand the thoughts and feelings of those involved without admitting that they are a part of the story. If the writer is brave enough to make it a real story, it can do the same thing but in a much more direct way.

**Setting:** What does the world look like around the story? If the goal is to process a situation they don't want to confront head on, making the setting in a faraway land can be helpful. Also, looking at the details of the setting can help the broken come to grips with their situation and be in control with the details they process and which details they aren't ready to process yet.

**Climax:** Since the writer often still finds themselves in the situation or they can't see the ending yet, having them look at the situation and how it could possibly climax to the end can either help them visualize the best-case scenario, or workshop the worst-case scenarios which often shows how it isn't as bad as they thought it was. Let the writer determine which of these it is so they are in control with how they are processing everything.

## DEAR FUTURE SELF:

**Letters to Self:** One last tool for expressive writing we want to highlight is writing letters to the future self. This can be a powerful activity to use to help the writer think through who they want to become and visualizing themselves past the situation they find themselves in. It can be as simple or as involved as the broken decides to make it, as well as the age of the writer. The letter can be set aside to be opened in a specific number of years or torn up as soon as it is finished. The fate of the letter is totally in the hands of the writer.

## DEAR YOUNGER ME:

The letter could also be to their past self. Focusing on a traumatic event or the scared little person that the younger writer was could help them process where they were and where they are now. It can also help give them the chance to say what they wanted to their younger self, processing the trauma and providing some closure. This letter should be torn up, burned, or whatever other method they want to use to get rid of it afterwards.

### For Further Reading:

#### Expressive writing:

<http://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/writing-about-emotions-may-ease-stress-and-trauma>

<https://www.verywell.com/cope-with-your-symptoms-through-expressive-writing-425394>

<http://www.psychreg.org/coping-expressive-writing/>

#### Poetry:

<http://affinitymagazine.us/2017/02/24/poetry-as-a-stress-reliever-how-to-try-it/>

#### Short Story:

<http://www.encourageplay.com/blog/how-to-write-a-social-story>

#### Writing a Letter to Future Self:

<https://medium.com/personal-growth/join-me-and-write-a-letter-to-your-future-self-514fa62c0beb>

# Music as a Coping Skill

“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything.”

This quote by Plato shows the role music can play in the mind, development, and even life itself. This is why the first coping skill that most teens run to in the group homes and facilities we work with is listening to music. They cling to it, but listening to music isn't always the best coping skill they can end with. Luckily, there are other ways to use music as a coping skill which work much better than merely listening to music. Obviously, there are many ways to make music and each one can be therapeutic, but here are a couple of ways we have found to be affective for different reasons.

**SONGWRITING:** As we have pointed out before, writing poetry can be a strong coping skill to use and there are similarities between songwriting and poetry, but there are

other differences. Songwriting includes writing lyrics, a melody, drum beat, and guitar/keyboard chords.

Each part of the songwriting process can be therapeutic and an artistic coping skill. The storytelling expression that lyric writing brings, the repetitive strumming of a guitar and drum beats to relieve stress, and the sound of the melody all can help to reduce stress, anger, and/or processing abuse/neglect. We don't have enough space to go through all the songwriting techniques, but there are some sites we have attached that can go into more details about how to write a song.

**SCRAP METAL DRUM CIRCLE:** Another helpful activity that deals with music is what we like to call “Scrap Metal Drum Circle”. This activity combines the repetitive rhythm of a drum circle with the creativity which comes from finding out how different scrap metal pieces' sound when beat on with sticks. The participant picks out a piece of scrap metal: hubcap, metal trashcan, lawn chair, etc. They then sit around in a circle of other people and find a rhythm they can all create together. The beauty of it is there is very little skill that is needed and can build community in a non-confrontational way. Simple enough for anyone to understand, yet can be the beginning of using music as a coping skill and a safe way to be in community to share the situation they are in.

**JAM BAND:** One of the core activities we use is what we call “Interactive Concerts” where we invite a band to come and play, but also allow a time where participants to play along with the band so that they do not only listen to the concert, they are a part of it. The first event we ever had included an interactive concert with a board member's band and the confidence boosting that we saw in the participants was powerful. A musician

- ❖ **SONGWRITING**
- ❖ **SCRAP METAL DRUM CIRCLE**
- ❖ **JAM BAND**

can only get better by playing with musicians who are better than them. Even if it is only a group of musicians of the same skill level who get together and play, it builds community and comradery enough to let the musicians express themselves together and better cope with the situation they find themselves in. It doesn't need to be complicated, but just opening up a garage or a basement to a group of the broken who use music as a coping skill can be a huge start. Most foster teens, and even at-risk teens, do not have the space available to them to make this happen, so someone who is willing to open up to them in this way can be huge.

### For Further Reading:

<http://robinfrederick.com/learn-how-to-write-a-song/>

<http://www.songwritersonprocess.com/>

<http://blog.dozmia.com/songwriting-tips-techniques-ideas-exercises/>

<https://www.uberchord.com/blog/songwriting-tips-art-of-stealing/>

## Photography as a Coping Skill

A picture is worth a thousand words. Therefore, photography can be such a powerful tool for self-expression. For someone who can't yet put into words the pain, trauma, and loss they have been experiencing, taking a picture which symbolizes their thoughts and feelings can be all that they have. The beauty of photography as a coping skill is that it doesn't take much equipment or skill level. Every smart phone now comes with a camera, every tablet, every household has at least two or three. It doesn't matter the quality of the picture, but in the process of taking it. It allows the person taking the picture to express themselves but also to become more aware of the world around them and see the beauty in everything.

“the camera is an instrument that teaches people to see without a camera.”

**POSING FOR A PICTURE.** One of the ways that photography can help the broken express and explore their emotions is by posing for a picture describing what they are going through. This could be lying on a bed to describe depression, being in a corner to describe loneliness, or taking a picture of what is left of the family to describe loss of a loved one. Exploring emotions in a safe and controlled way can be huge for the broken by bringing up emotions to the surface enough to deal with them.

**PHOTOGRAPHY FOR SOCIAL GOOD:** Photography can be good for more than just exploring emotions, however. With the popularity of social media and social engagement, taking selfies that express various social issues can also be a good coping skill for the broken. It doesn't have to even be a selfie, but taking a picture that can be used for a social cause. One of the ways that people find worth in life is through social justice. Expressing the need for justice in a certain need can be a good way for the broken to take their mind off their own emotions and instead on someone else's social needs. This can be a good way for those on the autistic spectrum to learn about empathy and those who feel like they don't have control over their own lives to gain some control over something.

**VIDEOGRAPHY:** Like the photographic posing, video can be another good coping skill used for self-expression. Video can be used to tell the story of the broken, express the emotions that they have, or to

promote a social cause. Whatever the focus of the video, it can help the broken express themselves and work through issues that they are facing while communicating the needs of others. Youtube has become very popular for this reason. Obviously there needs to be some safety and boundaries taken if the

video is to be used for social media, but depending on the needs and safety requirements of the broken it can be freeing to show other people their story and to help others see what they have gone through and survived.

### For Further Reading:

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/photographing-emotion/>

<https://usergeneratededucation.wordpress.com/2013/08/25/photography-for-enhancing-social-emotional-learning/>

<http://www.picturecorrect.com/tips/9-amazing-benefits-of-photography/>

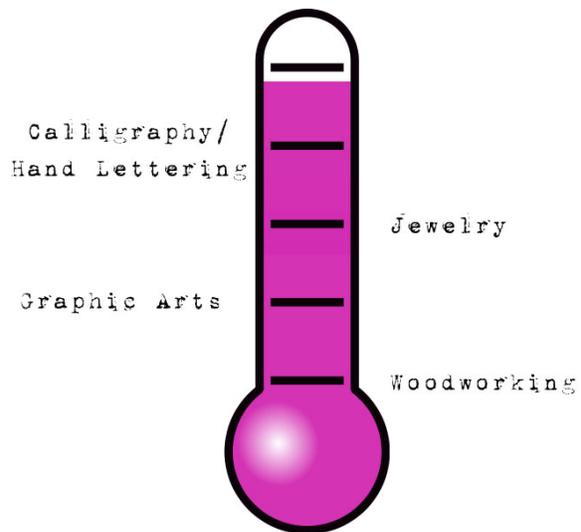
[https://www.bestthinking.com/articles/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/art/photography/photography-as-a-healing-art](https://www.bestthinking.com/articles/arts_and_entertainment/art/photography/photography-as-a-healing-art)



# Maker Arts as a Coping Skill

This may seem like a strange coping skill to include with the arts, but if you look closely at the self-expression that can come from jewelry making and the other maker arts than it can be a powerful coping skill. Not only this, but the repetitive process and focus that the maker arts take can help the broken to cope with anger, stress, and even depression. Not only are the maker arts a coping skill, but also a non-traditional career source for those who think differently and need a different kind of job than the traditional job structure offers. The old way of thinking would try to have the broken conform to the traditional job structure, but we look at the unique way of thinking that the brokenness brings to people and the need to work with their hands that they have which makes them perfect for entrepreneurial maker jobs.

**ANGER:** The best way to help people cope with anger issues is through finding something calm, repetitive, simple, and working with their hands. Therefore, the maker arts can be huge as a coping skill for anger issues. These characteristics are all a part of the maker arts, such as jewelry making and woodworking. Obviously, with woodworking the anger level should not be so high that they are not thinking clearly but they could do certain other parts of working with wood, such as painting or sanding.



We have come to explain the levels of anger by using a scale, 1 through 10, to describe the stages of anger. If a person is at a one, they are just starting to get irritated but still thinking clearly. At a 10, however, the person is not thinking clearly and often results in some sort of violence toward themselves or others. The goal is for the person to notice when they are going up the scale and to calm themselves using a coping skill before it gets too high up the scale. Usually a 5 or higher is when the thought process starts to diminish. Therefore, certain maker art coping skills can be utilized safely at different levels. Someone who is at a 7 or 8 certainly does not want to have any sharp objects or power tools near them, but they could have a marker and paper. The safety level of having objects near them is unique to every person, but the point is that different types of products and coping skills can be used for different stages in the anger scale.

**STRESS:** Stress is another one of those areas where the maker arts can help as a coping skill. Like with anger, coping with stress needs repetitive focus so that the neurons in the brain can start to fire in only one direction instead of every direction and eventually calm down. Activities such as sanding, painting, looping jewelry, and other parts of maker art projects all fall under this category and can therefore help the broken to cope. Not only this, but the satisfaction which comes from completing the project and admiring the work that is done can also help to relieve stress and pressure that may be built up.

**DEPRESSION:** As you can imagine, if a task is good for anger and stress then it could also be beneficial when dealing with depression. One specific benefit of using maker arts as a coping skill for depression giving them control over the project and the confidence boosting which comes from creating something useful, creating value in the world. Over and over, the broken have been told (or they have told themselves) that they are useless and that they were better off not being around. If they have purpose in life and something they can create that is of value, this combats the thought process of being useless. Also, one of the biggest obstacles to overcome with depression is laziness. There just isn't the energy to do anything and therefore spirals further and further into the depression. Activities such as jewelry making or calligraphy are simple tasks which do not require a lot of energy, but which can be built upon to give them more energy through the process. The key to using maker arts as a coping skill for depression is just doing something. They can express themselves through something while creating something worthwhile in the process.



### For Further Reading:

<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/jewelry-making/?!p=true>

<https://www.craftsy.com/blog/2015/04/beginner-jewelry-making/>

<http://makezine.com/2013/07/06/10-maker-jobs-that-didnt-exist-10-years-ago/>

<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3758336>

<http://time.com/104210/maker-faire-maker-movement/>

Created By:



If you are in the Knoxville area, we have:

**WORKSHOPS:** We are here to help support the broken and their families, giving them the coping skills they need to learn, heal, and grow together. We have workshops for the parents and teens with the artistic coping skills described in this book.

**INTERACTIVE CONCERTS AND SHOWS:** As a way for our participants to build relationships and hands-on ways to use what they have been learning, we provide interactive concerts/shows with bands and artists where the broken can also have a time to play with the band or do art with the artist.

**TRAININGS FOR HELPING THE BROKEN AND LEFT OUT:** If you are an artist or musician and want to know more about how you can use your skill to help someone who is broken and left out, we provide trainings on what it is like to be a foster parent, how to best reach the broken and left out, as well as ways that you can serve your community and make it a place where everyone belongs.

[www.cityofrefugeknox.org](http://www.cityofrefugeknox.org)



CITYOFREFUGEKNOX

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