



Art Action Tip Sheet

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act when facing life's situations. Like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life. Children experience a wide range of feelings every day.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) created the Awareness Day Art Action—"My Feelings Are a Work of Art" to aid parents, teachers, and caregivers in encouraging young children to recognize and better understand their feelings. By conducting "My Feelings Are a Work of Art" on May 6, 2010—Awareness Day— you can help to enrich the social and emotional development of the children in your home, childcare facility, school, and numerous other child-centered places across the country.

The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) is proud to be a sponsor of Awareness Day 2010 and, in collaboration with SAMHSA, offers the following tips for conducting your Awareness Day Art Action on May 6, 2010.

1. Choose an art activity that is appropriate for:
 - the age of the children who will be participating;
 - the time available on May 6 for the activity itself and a discussion about each child's creation that should take place during and/or after the children complete their works of art; and
 - the participation of parents, caregivers, or other caring adults, if possible.
2. Make Awareness Day a celebration of feelings! Have books on feelings and emotions available for adults to read to children throughout the day or show movies that feature stories about children and their emotional lives. Check with your local library on appropriate titles.
3. Decorate the space in which you will conduct the art activity with pictures, posters, and other items that express emotions. Download the "My Feelings Are a Work of Art" materials available from AATA and have children discuss what the title means to them.
4. Encourage participating children to understand the wide range of feelings by creating a piece of art for each emotion, for example, creating a painting that means happy and one that means sad.
5. Appreciate the effort that each child puts into his or her art by taking the time to look at and discuss what the art work means to each little artist.
6. Listen to each child when he or she shares their feelings with you about their art or about the process of creating art about feelings.

7. If a child creates a drawing or paints a picture that causes concern, don't panic. Children often recreate scenes from television or other media that do not reflect their personal experiences. However, do let participating children know that everyone experiences pain, fear, anger, and anxiety. Try to learn the source of these feelings by asking about what their artwork means and why they chose to create it. If you continue to have concerns, contact the participating child's pediatrician.

"My Feelings Are a Work of Art" Throughout the Year

- Find out more about enriching the social/emotional development of young children by visiting SAMHSA's Web site at www.samhsa.gov/children. You can find a complete listing of the collaborating organizations for Awareness Day 2010 and the links to their Web sites at the SAMHSA Web site or the AATA's Awareness Day Web page at www.arttherapy.org/chmad.asp.
- Create opportunities throughout the year for young children to express their feelings by encouraging them to create a piece of art each week that expresses how they are feeling. Use this opportunity each week to discuss why they are feeling that way.
- Find out how your child's day care, preschool, or school system uses art as an opportunity to discuss feelings and emotions with children. Take time to look at the art that your child and his/her classmates create in a childcare or school setting.

SAMHSA invites you and your children to have fun learning more about social/emotional development and positive mental health on Awareness Day and throughout the year. Please remember to fill out the Awareness Day participation form at www.arttherapy.org/chmad.asp to ensure that you have access to all of the information and resources on children's mental health made available by the Awareness Day collaborating organizations throughout the year.