


# How to Relieve Stress by Drawing

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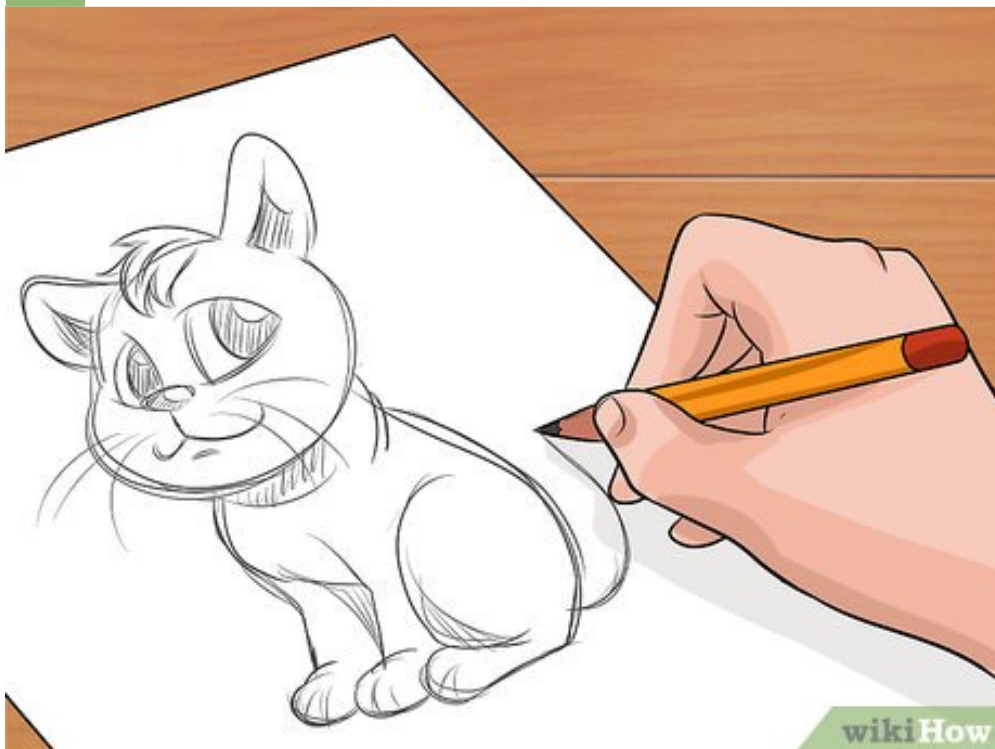
Co-authored by Jessica Elliott, ACC, CEC  and 36 contributors

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One of the easiest and most satisfying ways to express your creativity is by drawing. Further, drawing can calm you down in multiple ways. It can help distract you from negative thoughts, clear your mind, and provide you with a constructive way to release emotion.[1] Most simply, the enjoyment derived from drawing allows the chance to refocus mentally and relieve your stress.[2]

## Method 1

### Method 1 of 3: Relieving Stress With Illustration



**1 Draw something that comforts you.** Content does not matter as much as the connotations you associate with whatever you choose to draw. If you find mountains or trees relaxing to be around, try your hand at drawing your very own. Other likely candidates include:

- Your pet. Or your imaginary pet.
- Flowers, leaves, or bumblebees.
- Fruit, or other particularly attractive edibles.
- A building or place you admire or have positive memories in.
- Made-up combinations of animal parts. For instance, draw a dog's head on a pig's body with a turtle's legs and tail.



**2 Just draw.** Experiment drawing with different colors, patterns, and moods.<sup>[3]</sup> Believe it or not, drawing can help induce physical relaxation by decreasing your blood pressure, slowing your respiratory rate, and lowering your pulse.<sup>[4]</sup>

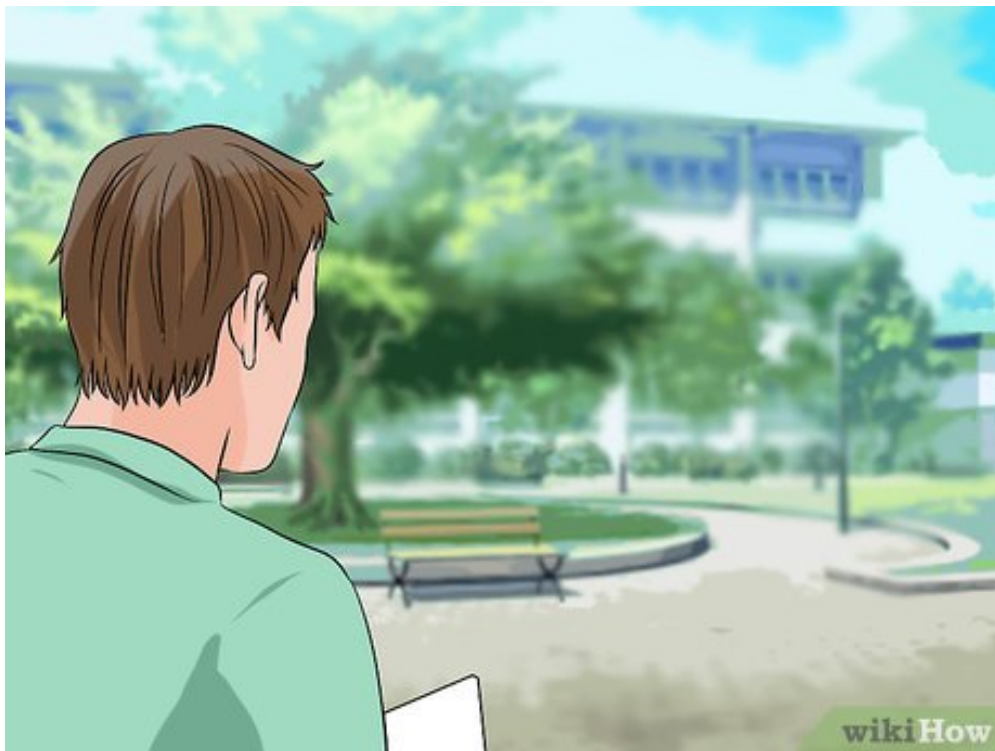
- Color your illustration with bright, exciting colors.
- Draw patterns. Start with variations of circles, as they're easier and more soothing to draw. Simply cover a page in a pattern. Losing yourself to abstraction can be a very effective method of providing yourself with a healthy distraction and can boost creativity and memory too!<sup>[5]</sup>
- Draw your subjects smiling. Whether mountain, human, or animal, add a smiley face. Sure, it's silly – but you'll probably smile back.

#### EXPERT TIP

"Making art is a great way to distract yourself from something that's causing you stress."



**Laura Horne, MPH**  
Health Education Specialist

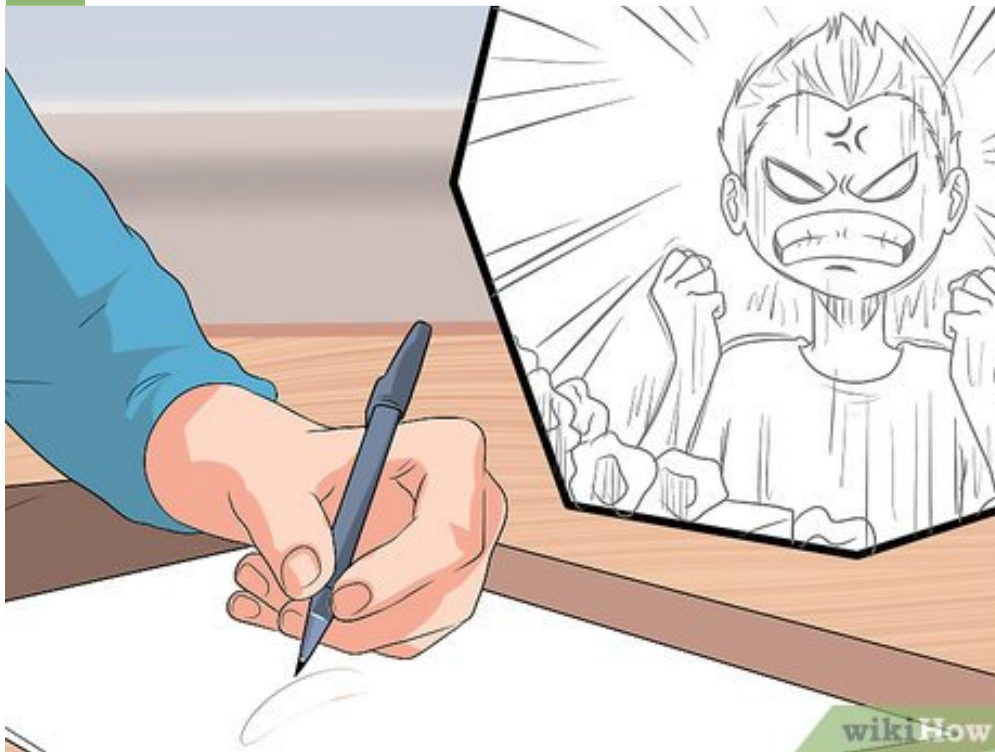


- 3 Be somewhere where you feel calm.** Choose somewhere with minimal distractions. Definitely switch off your phone, and avoid areas with television or computers.
- Somewhere private is best, as your drawing will not be inhibited by the presence of others, and you will be less likely to be interrupted.
  - Get outside. Simply being outside will calm you down. Drawing outside can also give you inspiration and ideas of things to draw.



- 4 Have fun.** Let yourself enjoy the process. Don't worry about the final product and don't judge your artistic abilities. Lose yourself in the experience of creation!<sup>[6]</sup> <sup>[7]</sup>
- Sitting down to draw for just a few minutes can rekindle your youthful spirit. You'll get a boost in energy and may even feel more open-minded for the rest of the day. Expressing ourselves visually allows us to circumvent some of the barriers we put up as we age, and to access our less critical, less judgmental side more easily.<sup>[8]</sup>
  - Mount your work. Hang it up somewhere it will catch your eye. Put it in your room or near a doorway you use to leave your house for unexpected boosts in your mood.

## Method 2 of 3: Drawing Your Stressors Away



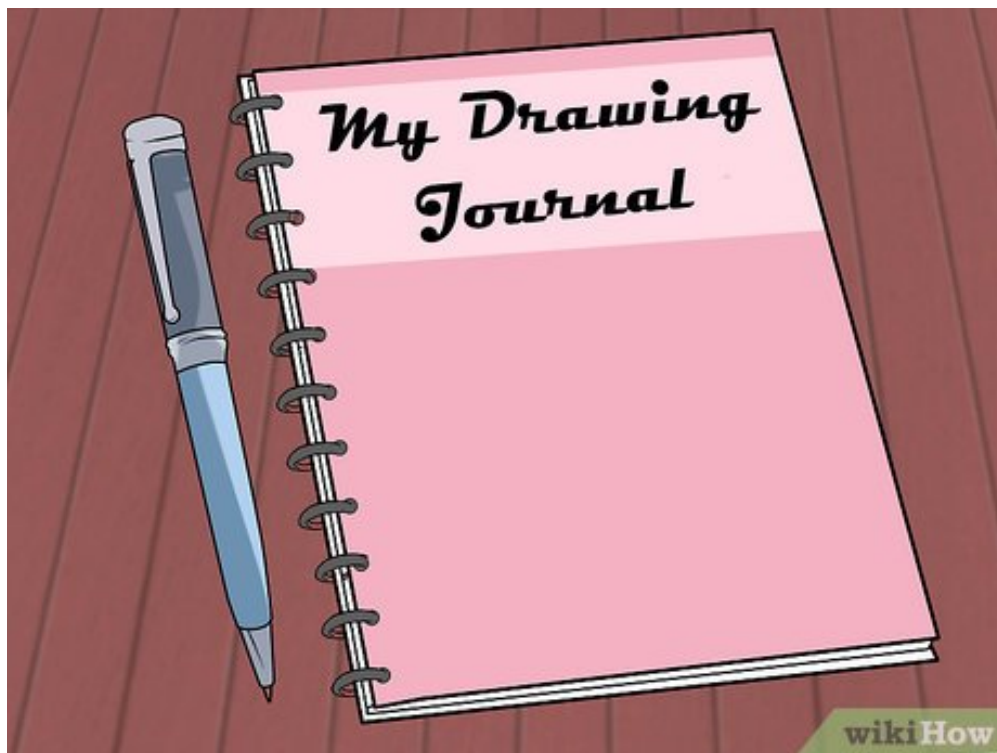
**1 Draw whatever is stressing you out.** Be detailed and don't hold back. Draw literal or metaphorical representations of scenarios that indicate the sources of your stress. Creating a visual equivalent of what you're facing is a powerful way to affect your feelings, and even help conceptualize solutions.<sup>[9]</sup>

- Destroy the representation of your stress. Scribble all over it, or tear the page into tiny pieces. Use your hands to make the act of destruction especially satisfying.
- Throw it all away! Just the act of metaphorically throwing your stressors away can be powerfully therapeutic.





- 2 Release emotion onto the page.** Without intending to draw anything in particular, simply apply your drawing utensil to a blank sheet of paper. Close your eyes. Focus on whatever emotions you're feeling and would like to get rid of.
- Once you're focused on an emotion, allow it to pass through your arm and hand onto the sheet of paper. Allow your emotion, not your mind, to dictate the movement of the pen or pencil. Whatever comes out on the page is simply an expression of what you're feeling.
  - Since visual art is nonverbal, you don't have to struggle to try to express yourself with words. Evoking feelings through creative expression can literally help you release emotions you're holding in.<sup>[10]</sup>
  - Recognize that the illustration itself is insignificant. Focus purely on the act of drawing. By doing this, you'll be more mindful of the present moment. This allows your mind to clear itself and calmly begin to recalibrate your emotions.<sup>[11]</sup>



**3 Keep an illustrated journal.** You can conceptualize the journal in a certain way, or as a catch-all for your drawings. You may want to focus on drawing everything you feel positively about in life. Alternatively, you may simply want to draw everything that frustrates you. Or you can simply attempt to draw things that you find aesthetically pleasing. [12]

- Keep a specific version of an illustrated journal in which you draw about feelings or ideas that come to you in specific contexts. For instance, keep a dream diary by your bed and attempt to draw what your imagination conjures in your dreams.

### Method 3 of 3: Maximizing Illustration-Based Stress Reduction



- 1 Listen to music while you draw.** Music can powerfully affect your mood by relaxing and inspiring you. Consider your music selection. Soft, rhythmic music (ideally without lyrics) will be especially effective in putting your mind at ease.
  - Vary the music depending on your mood – faster music can energize you as long as it doesn't distract you or make you uncomfortable.
  - Play songs you know well. Lyrics can be welcome if you already know them. Singing along or mouthing the words without thinking can have a calming effect that distracts you from whatever has been stressing you out.





**2 Take a drawing class.** You don't need to achieve a certain level of ability to benefit from the mood-improving and calming aspects of drawing, but getting better can make drawing even more rewarding.[13]

- Community colleges often have low cost classes taught by well-qualified teachers, and classes often meet in the evenings.
- Lots of communities also have arts councils that will also offer fun-oriented, open-enrollment classes in drawing and other creative mediums.



**3 Keep your drawing materials with you.** Keep at least a note pad and pen or pencil with you so you can draw whenever inspiration (or stress) strikes. As you go about your day, jot down ideas of what you'd like to draw later on. Simply visualizing yourself drawing will both calm you down and increase the satisfaction you derive once you get the chance to do so!



## Expert Q&A

### Question

How can drawing help you relax?



**Jessica Elliott, ACC,  
CEC**  
Certified Executive Coach  
Expert Answer

It's simple: just start drawing! Gather the tools you need and try making art for the process, not the outcome. Most of us try to craft an outcome from the beginning, such as wanting to draw the perfect landscape, but when we can't, we feel negative about the result, which creates more stress.

Helpful 1 Not Helpful 0

### Question

My teacher got angry with me because I bring a lot of drawing books to class. He thinks that I'm just drawing all day. What should I do?



Community Answer

Explain to your teacher that drawing is a stress reliever, and ask during what parts of the day (or the class), if anyway, it would be okay for you to draw. Most teachers are okay with kids doing something quiet once they're done with their work, so make sure you do everything required of you and pay attention when you need to be paying attention, and it shouldn't be a problem.

Helpful 66 Not Helpful 18

### Question

How do you express yourself through art?



Community Answer

Draw what or how you are feeling.

Helpful 19 Not Helpful 7

### Question

How can I draw what I feel?



**Cosmic Teal**  
Community Answer

If you don't really know what you're feeling, or you do but you don't know how to draw it, just start drawing random things, like abstract shapes, people, animals, whatever you like. Let your emotions control what you draw, not your brain. Just the simple act of drawing is beneficial, your drawings don't have to correspond exactly to your emotions.

Helpful 13 Not Helpful 5

#### Question

**Why do I feel stressed to draw well? Is it normal to be worried about how good it is?**



Community Answer

It's really normal to want to be good at drawing, but try to keep in mind that you are doing it to relieve your stress, not add to it. Have separate sessions for drawing to improve and practice, and other times where you're only drawing for the fun of it, and the result won't really be shown to anyone. That's what I do!

Helpful 9 Not Helpful 3

#### Question

**Why does it relieve stress?**



Community Answer

Stress is brought on by lots of things in peoples lives. Creating art can be a way for people to vent or express their feelings. It can also be a way to visualize happy memories. Drawing or making art is a very personal experience, especially when used to relieve stress.

Helpful 5 Not Helpful 2

## References

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## About This Article



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Certified Executive Coach

This article was co-authored by **Jessica Elliott, ACC, CEC**. Jessica Elliott is a Certified Executive Coach and multi-passionate entrepreneur. She's the founder of LIFETOX, where she hosts mindful experiences and retreats, and J Elliott Coaching, which she provides executive consulting for professionals, teams, and organizations. Jessica has had over fifteen years experience as an entrepreneur and over five years of executive coaching experience. She received her ACC (Associate Certified Coach) accreditation through the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and her CEC (Certified Executive Coach) accreditation through Royal Roads University. This article has been viewed 103,353 times.



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