GENERAL

out of your mind a journal and coloring book to distract your anxious mind

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Out of Your Mind: A Journal and Coloring Book to Distract Your Anxious Mind

When stress feels like a relentless tide, finding a way to calm the mind can seem impossible. Yet, simple, creative practices can turn the tide and help you regain control. One of the most powerful tools in this arsenal is a combination of a journal and a coloring book—an “out of your mind” strategy that invites you to pause, reflect, and release anxiety in a gentle, artful way. This article explores how writing and coloring together can transform your mental state, offers practical steps to get started, and provides tips for making the most of this calming duo.

Why Journaling and Coloring Work Together

Both journaling and coloring tap into different parts of the brain. Journaling engages the analytical, language centers, encouraging you to articulate thoughts, identify patterns, and gain clarity. Coloring, on the other hand, stimulates the visual and motor cortex, providing a rhythmic, meditative activity that lowers heart rate and reduces cortisol levels. When paired, they create a holistic experience that addresses the mind’s chatter on multiple fronts.

The Science Behind the Combo

- Mindful Writing – Research shows that expressive writing can reduce stress hormones and improve emotional regulation. By putting thoughts onto paper, you externalize worries, making them easier to manage.
- Coloring as Meditation – Studies have found that coloring for just 10–15 minutes can lower blood pressure and promote a state of relaxation similar to that achieved through yoga or meditation.
- Dual Engagement – Simultaneous use of both activities creates a “flow” state, a psychological condition of complete immersion that is linked to increased creativity and reduced anxiety.

How It Helps Your Anxious Mind

When you’re anxious, thoughts often spiral into repetitive, negative loops. Journaling helps break these loops by forcing you to externalize and reframe them. Coloring provides a sensory outlet, allowing you to focus on shapes, colors, and patterns rather than intrusive thoughts. Together, they form a safe, non-judgmental space where the mind can rest, reflect, and heal.

Getting Started: Choosing the Right Journal and Coloring Book

Not all journals and coloring books are created equal. Picking the right tools can enhance the experience and make the practice sustainable.

Choosing Your Journal

1. Size and Portability – A 5”x7” or 6”x9” journal is easy to carry and fits into a bag or backpack, encouraging daily use.
2. Paper Quality – Look for thick, acid-free paper ("e 100 /lb) that resists bleed-through if you prefer using pens or markers.
3. Layout Options – Some journals come with lined pages, bullet points, or prompts. If you’re new to journaling,

a guided journal with prompts can be especially helpful.

4. Personal Connection – Choose a cover that feels inviting—maybe a calming color, a nature scene, or a subtle pattern. Your journal should feel like a sanctuary.

Choosing Your Coloring Book

1. Complexity Level – If you're a beginner, start with simple designs (large shapes, fewer details). More advanced books feature intricate mandalas or nature scenes.
2. Theme Alignment – Select a theme that resonates with you: botanical, animal, abstract, or inspirational quotes. A theme that feels meaningful can deepen the therapeutic effect.
3. Paper Thickness – Similar to journals, use a thick paper ("e 80 /lb) to avoid bleeding and to support a variety of coloring tools.
4. Tools Included – Some books come with colored pencils, pens, or markers. If you prefer a minimalist approach, bring your own set of high-quality colored pencils or gel pens.

Designing Your Routine: How to Use the Journal and Coloring Book Together

Consistency is key. Below is a step-by-step guide to creating a daily or weekly routine that incorporates both journaling and coloring.

Step 1: Set a Dedicated Time Slot

Choose a time that fits your schedule—morning, lunch break, or before bed. Consistency signals the brain that this is a safe, predictable activity.

Step 2: Start with a Quick Mind Check

Before diving into writing or coloring, spend 1–2 minutes noting what's on your mind. This could be a quick list of worries, emotions, or simply "I feel anxious."

Step 3: Write to Release

- Free Writing – Write continuously for 5–10 minutes without worrying about grammar.
- Prompt Writing – Use prompts like "Describe a place that feels safe," or "What does anxiety look like to me?"
- Gratitude List – Write three things you're grateful for; gratitude can shift focus away from anxiety.

Step 4: Transition to Coloring

After journaling, pick up your coloring book. The act of moving from words to colors can signal a shift from analysis to relaxation.

- Choose a Pattern – Pick a design that feels soothing. If you're feeling restless, go for a simple pattern; if you're calm, a more detailed mandala can deepen the meditative state.
- Mindful Coloring – Focus on the sensation of the pencil on paper, the colors you're using, and the rhythm of your strokes.
- Limit Time – Set a timer for 10–15 minutes to keep the activity brief yet effective.

Step 5: Reflect on the Experience

After coloring, return to your journal. Write a brief reflection: "I felt calmer after coloring," or "I noticed my breathing slowed." This reinforces the connection between the two practices.

Integrating Mindfulness: Enhancing the Experience

Mindfulness amplifies the benefits of journaling and coloring. Here's how to weave mindfulness into each step.

Mindful Breathing During Journaling

Before you write, take three deep breaths. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 2, exhale for 6. This simple breathwork reduces physiological arousal and primes your mind for reflective writing.

Mindful Observation While Coloring

Notice the colors as they appear. Observe how each shade influences your mood. If you notice tension, gently redirect your focus to the color's hue or the texture of the paper.

Body Scan Post-Activity

After journaling and coloring, lie down for a quick body scan. Start at your toes and move upward, noting any tension. This helps you release residual stress.

Practical Tips for Maintaining the Habit

1. Use a Dedicated Space – Set up a cozy corner with good lighting. A consistent environment cues your brain that it's time for calm.
2. Keep Supplies Accessible – Store your journal, coloring book, and tools in a drawer or bag so you can easily pull them out.
3. Track Progress – Use a simple calendar or app to mark days you completed the practice. Seeing a streak can motivate you to keep going.
4. Mix It Up – Alternate between different journals (e.g., gratitude journal, dream journal) and coloring books to keep the routine fresh.
5. Share with a Friend – Invite a friend to join you. Sharing your creations can add a social element that boosts well being.

Advanced Techniques for Deepening the Practice

Once you're comfortable with the basic routine, consider these advanced strategies to deepen the therapeutic effect.

Guided Journaling Prompts

Use prompts that focus on anxiety triggers, coping strategies, or future goals. For example: "What is the root cause of my anxiety?" or "What coping skills can I practice next week?"

Color Therapy

Colors can influence mood. Experiment with color psychology: blue for calm, green for balance, yellow for optimism. Keep a color log to see how different hues affect your anxiety levels.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) + Coloring

While coloring, tense and release muscle groups. For instance, as you color a leaf, tense your forearm, then relax. This integrates physical relaxation with creative focus.

Digital Journaling and Coloring Apps

For those who prefer digital tools, apps like Day One (journaling) and Procreate (coloring) offer flexibility and the ability to store entries securely.

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

Like any new habit, journaling and coloring may present obstacles. Below are frequent challenges and practical

solutions.

Procrastination

- Solution – Set a 5 minute timer. The commitment is low, and once you start, you often continue.

Perfectionism

- Solution – Remind yourself that the goal is relaxation, not artistry. Embrace imperfections as part of the process.

Limited Time

- Solution – Even 5 minutes of coloring can lower cortisol. Use micro sessions during breaks.

Feeling Stuck in the Journal

- Solution – Try “sentence starters” or “bullet point lists” to break the block. If writing feels too difficult, switch to sketching or doodling for a few minutes.

Success Stories: Real People, Real Relief

Here are brief anecdotes from individuals who integrated journaling and coloring into their daily lives.

Emma, 32, Graphic Designer

“I started using a guided journal to track my anxiety triggers. After each entry, I colored a mandala. Within a month, my nightly anxiety dropped by 40%.”

Michael, 45, Teacher

“During lunch, I color a quick pattern and jot down a gratitude note. It’s my ‘reset button’ before the afternoon class rush.”

Linda, 27, Freelance Writer

“I use a sketchbook for doodles and a separate journal for thoughts. The combination keeps my mind from spiraling during deadlines.”

Conclusion: Your Path to Calm Starts Here

When anxiety feels overwhelming, the simple act of turning a page or filling a shape can be a powerful antidote. By combining a journal with a coloring book—an “out of your mind” approach—you give your anxious mind a structured, creative outlet that nurtures reflection, relaxation, and resilience. Start small, stay consistent, and watch as these mindful practices transform your daily experience. Your mind deserves a break; let the pages and colors be the gateway to peace.

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