



**Creative
Resilience**

BY DR. REEM KASSEM

My Creative Window

A guide for parents and caregivers

Supporting children aged 7 to 12 through creative expression



Recovery • Sustainability • Growth

Offer time, choice and a listening presence.
Let your child decide how to create and what to share.

Dr. Reem Kassem
www.reemkassem.com



Supporting creative expression at home

My Creative Window is an undated planner and creative journal that offers children space to draw, imagine, tell stories, explore feelings and make small plans. This guide helps you offer time, choice and a listening presence, without turning the journal into another task to complete.

You do not need to be an artist or a therapist. Your role is to help your child feel able to begin, choose their own way of responding and decide what they want to share. A short, enjoyable encounter is enough.

Start with three simple choices

- Ask whether your child would like to use the journal today. Accept “not now”.
- Offer a choice of two pages or invite them to find their own. They can draw, talk, write or make marks.
- Ask whether they want company, practical help or time alone. Finish whenever they are ready.

What this resource can offer

The journal is designed to invite expression, connection and reflection. It is not a test of ability, a behaviour chart, a diagnostic tool or a substitute for professional care. There is no requirement to work daily or complete every page.

Read this guide in any order. The sections that follow offer practical ideas, explain the research context and provide further reading.



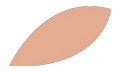
Creative Resilience in everyday life

My Creative Window is a resource within Creative Resilience by Dr. Reem Kassem. It draws on a framework developed through doctoral research on hybrid cultural engagement in contexts of crisis. Its three dimensions are recovery, sustainability and growth. They overlap and can be revisited; they are not stages a child must pass through.



Recovery

At home, this can mean making space to pause, express something or reconnect after a difficult day. Offer familiar materials and a manageable invitation. A child might draw an imaginary place, tell a story or simply sit beside you. Do not require them to revisit a painful event.



Sustainability

This can mean finding a creative practice that fits family life and remains available over time. Keep a pencil and journal within reach, return to favourite pages and allow breaks. A small routine should support the child rather than create pressure.



Growth

This can mean noticing a new interest, trying a different material, asking for help or choosing a small next step. Growth need not appear as better artwork, greater productivity or consistently cheerful feelings.

Connection makes room for expression

Research on resilience highlights the value of stable, supportive adult relationships. [1] The journal offers one possible occasion for that relationship: shared attention, a child's choice and an adult who responds with interest.

A useful question is: "Is this giving my child room to express something in their own way?" If the answer is no, simplify the activity, change the way you participate or leave it for another day.

The examples in this guide are practical adaptations for family use. They are not clinical measures of recovery, sustainability or growth.



Create a routine that fits your child

Prepare a welcoming space

Choose a place with enough light and a surface your child can use comfortably. A pencil is enough. Offer colouring pencils or other familiar materials if wanted. Avoid making an elaborate setup a condition for beginning. Supervise scissors, small parts and unfamiliar materials as appropriate.

Try a flexible ten minute invitation

- Arrive together: ask, “Would you like to create, plan or just look today?”
- Choose: let the child pick a page, response method and whether you join in.
- Create: give quiet attention without correcting or asking constant questions.
- Close: ask, “Continue another time, share something, or put it away?”

Ten minutes is a starting suggestion, not a target. Some children prefer two minutes; others stay absorbed longer. Let everyday needs, energy and interest guide the ending.

Adapt by readiness rather than age alone

Around ages 7 to 9, offer one invitation at a time. Read a prompt aloud, let the child dictate their words or use drawing and storytelling. Around ages 10 to 12, offer greater independence, flexible prompts and more control over privacy. Children of any age may prefer either approach.

Make participation accessible

Use the child’s preferred language, including Arabic, English or a mixture. Offer thicker pencils, larger paper, a quieter place or a movement break if useful. A child can point, speak, use their usual communication system or ask an adult to write their exact words. Ask before touching their work or physically guiding their hand.

For siblings, provide separate pages or materials and avoid comparing work. If a shared activity causes tension, return to individual choices. There is no need to catch up on missed days.



Listen without taking over

Your response can help a child feel heard without requiring an explanation. UNICEF recommends attentive listening, accessible language and time for children to express themselves. [2, 3] In creative activities, follow the child's meaning rather than assigning one yourself.

Words you can use

- To invite sharing: "Would you like to tell me anything about your page?"
- To acknowledge a choice: "You decided to try a different ending."
- When asked for help: "Which part would you like me to help with?"
- When feelings emerge: "That sounds difficult. Would you like me to listen, help or give you some space?"
- When they decline: "That is okay. You can keep it to yourself."

Notice the process

Describe something concrete rather than grading the result: "You kept experimenting with those shapes." Avoid comparing their work with yours or a sibling's. Do not correct spelling on a creative page unless they ask. If they ask whether a picture is good, ask what they like about it and respond with a specific observation.

Leave interpretation with the child

Colours, monsters, broken lines or imaginary battles do not by themselves establish a child's emotional state or a diagnosis. You can say, "I notice this character is hiding. Is there anything you want me to know?" Accept their answer and avoid repeated probing.

Agree on ownership and privacy

Decide together where the journal lives and who may look at it. Ask before photographing, displaying or sharing pages, including with relatives, schools or on social media. If an adult helps with writing, check the words with the child. Explain the safety exception simply: "I respect your privacy. If I think you are not safe, I will get help and explain what I can."

Keep the journal separate from rewards, punishment and school performance. Sharing a page should never be the price of receiving your attention.



Creative invitations to try together

These optional ideas can sit alongside the journal. They are invitations, not exercises to assess your child. Offer one at a time and let the child change the subject, materials or rules.

Draw an imaginary weather forecast

Invite your child to invent today's weather for a character, place or feeling. It can be sunny and stormy at once. Ask, "Would the weather change later?" They need not connect it to their own life. If the invitation feels too personal, draw weather for an imaginary planet instead.

Make a map of things that help

Draw places, people, objects or activities the child enjoys or finds comforting. Let them decide what belongs on the map. Ask whether there is one thing they would like access to this week. Do not turn the map into a checklist of coping strategies they must use.

Tell a story with two possible endings

Start with a playful character who faces a small everyday problem, such as losing a hat. Take turns adding details. Invent two endings, including a silly one if wanted. Follow their story rather than directing it towards a lesson or a happy ending.

Choose one small plan

Invite the child to choose something they want to make, notice or try. Ask, "What is one small first step?" and "Would you like help?" Drawing a comic panel, borrowing a book or gathering leaves can all count. Plans can change; unfinished plans are not failures.

Create side by side

Each person makes their own picture while sharing materials and time. Ask before adding to the other person's page. At the end, each person can share one detail or choose to say nothing. Working together does not require producing a joint picture.

End with a practical choice: keep it, continue later or put it away. Some children enjoy revisiting their work; others prefer starting again.



When feelings or difficulties emerge

If the child refuses or becomes frustrated

Pause rather than persuade. They may be tired, uncertain or simply uninterested. Offer a blank page, an easier material, company or another day. If they say “I cannot draw”, try “You can use words, shapes or a story instead.” Avoid insisting that the journal will make them feel better.

If they become upset

Stop the activity and give calm, familiar support. Ask what would help now, such as sitting together, getting water or moving to a quieter place. Do not insist on eye contact, touch, breathing exercises or explaining the page. Return only if they want to. You can say, “We can leave this here.”

When to seek additional support

Seek advice from a qualified child health or mental health professional when distress is persistent, severe, worsening or interfering with sleep, school, relationships or everyday activities. A paediatrician or primary care clinician can be a starting point; a school counsellor can help coordinate school support. Persistent anxiety that disrupts daily life warrants help. [4] Do not wait for the journal to resolve the difficulty.

If there is immediate danger or an urgent medical concern, contact your local emergency service or go to the nearest emergency department. Keep the child with a safe adult while arranging help.

Care for your own response

If you react sharply, repair the moment: “I spoke too quickly. I am sorry. You did not do anything wrong by telling me.” Seek support for yourself when needed, without making the child responsible for your feelings.



Notice what helps without scoring

The most useful feedback is often whether the child wants to return, can make choices and feels their boundaries are respected. You do not need to score resilience, count completed pages or examine drawings for hidden meanings.

A brief caregiver reflection

- What did my child choose today, including choosing not to participate?
- When did I follow their lead, and when did I take over?
- What seemed comfortable or difficult? What did the child actually say?
- What could I simplify next time?

Keep any notes brief, factual and separate from the child's journal. Respect their privacy. These observations are for improving your support, not diagnosing a condition or measuring treatment outcomes.

The research behind the resource

The Creative Resilience Framework emerged from Dr. Reem Kassem's doctoral work, *Hybrid Cultural Engagement in the Context of Crisis*, at the University of the West of Scotland. The original research concerned young women in shelter settings and hybrid cultural participation. My Creative Window is a new adaptation for children and families; findings from the original study should not be assumed to demonstrate benefits for children using this journal.

Broader research offers useful context. A WHO scoping review describes evidence linking arts engagement with health and wellbeing across varied settings and study designs. [5] It does not establish that this particular journal produces clinical benefits. Harvard's resilience research emphasises supportive relationships and opportunities to develop skills. [1] These ideas inform the guide's emphasis on connection, choice and manageable creative participation.

Use alongside ordinary family life

Keep room for unstructured play, rest, friendships and enjoyable experiences beyond the journal. Creativity can happen in conversation, music, movement or everyday making. The journal is one option, not the only way to support expression.

This guide offers educational guidance. It does not provide diagnosis or a treatment plan. External sources inform the guidance; their inclusion does not imply endorsement of this resource.



Resources and references

The numbers in the guide refer to the sources below. The UNICEF pages offer accessible starting points; the Harvard paper and WHO review provide broader research context. NHS guidance is UK based, so use local health services where you live. Links checked 15 October 2026.

[1] National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2015). Supportive Relationships and Active Skill Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience. Working Paper 13. Harvard University.

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/working-paper/supportive-relationships-and-active-skill-building-strengthen-the-foundations-of-resilience/>

[2] UNICEF Parenting (no date). How to communicate effectively with your young child. Practical listening and communication guidance.

<https://www.unicef.org/parenting/child-care/9-tips-for-better-communication>

[3] UNICEF Parenting (no date). How to talk to your kids about mental health. Guidance for conversations across different ages.

<https://www.unicef.org/parenting/mental-health/how-to-talk-to-kids-mental-health>

[4] NHS (no date). Anxiety in children. Information on recognising difficulties and seeking support.

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/anxiety-in-children/>

[5] Fancourt, D., and Finn, S. (2019). What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well being? A scoping review. Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67. WHO Regional Office for Europe.

<https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553>

Framework source: Kassem, R. (2025). Hybrid Cultural Engagement in the Context of Crisis. Doctoral thesis, University of the West of Scotland. The journal's family activities are adaptations; they are not reproduced clinical protocols.

Creative Resilience by Dr. Reem Kassem

My Creative Window is a resource within Creative Resilience.

www.reemkassem.com

© 2026 Dr. Reem Kassem. All rights reserved.