Creative Resilience

BY DR. REEM KASSEM

My Creative Window

A guide for parents and caregivers

Teen edition • Ages 13 to 18

Recovery • Sustainability • Growth

Offer time, choice and a listening presence.
Let the young person decide how to create and what to share.

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Companion guidance within Creative Resilience
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Supporting creative expression in the teen years

My Creative Window Teen Edition is an undated planner and creative journal for young people aged 13 to 18. It offers twelve flexible weeks of planning, creative practice and personal reflection. This guide helps you support its use while respecting the young person's ownership. It can be read on its own.

Offer an invitation rather than an assignment

Ask whether they would like to use it and what kind of support they want. There is no daily requirement, no need to work in order and no expectation to show you a finished page. Writing, drawing, patterns, fictional characters and spoken reflection are welcome. Leaving a prompt blank is also a choice.

Begin with three choices

Would you like to create, plan or simply look? Would you prefer company, practical help or time on your own? Would you like to keep this private, share a detail or talk without showing the page? Accept "not today" without asking them to justify it.

Respect growing independence

For younger teens, offer help reading a prompt or finding materials if wanted. Older teens may prefer to organise their own time and seek support elsewhere. At 18, ask how they want you involved and respect their independence. Readiness, access needs and preferences matter alongside age.

What the journal can offer

The journal invites expression, choice and connection. It is not a behaviour chart, diagnostic tool or treatment programme. Do not tie completion to rewards, grades, device access or proof that the young person is doing well.

Creative Resilience in everyday life

Creative Resilience is Dr. Reem Kassem's public-facing body of work. Its research framework connects adaptive capacities and community support through a participatory, process-oriented creative hybrid approach. Recovery, sustainability and growth describe adaptive outcomes; the examples here are proposed applications, not clinical measures.



Recovery

Offer space to pause, reconnect or return after a difficult day. A young person may sketch something fictional, listen to music while making patterns or choose quiet company. They do not need to revisit a painful experience or explain their feelings to take part.



Sustainability

Help keep valued creative opportunities available over time. A notebook within reach, a favourite material or an agreed time without interruption may be useful. Twelve weeks can unfold slowly, with breaks. The aim is continued access rather than an unbroken habit.



Growth

Make room for a new idea, a changed plan, asking for help or sharing a skill. Growth does not mean better artwork, constant productivity or cheerful feelings. Let the young person identify what matters rather than deciding the meaning for them.

Relationships and context

Supportive relationships and opportunities to build skills are central themes in broader resilience research [1]. Creative practice can provide one occasion for connection. It cannot remove pressures such as lack of resources, exclusion or family difficulties; adults should attend to those conditions too. The blue, peach and maroon icons identify recovery, sustainability and growth, which can overlap.

Make creative time workable

Keep materials ordinary

A pen, pencil and paper are enough. Offer other materials if wanted without making elaborate preparation necessary. Ask what space feels comfortable and whether interruptions can be reduced. Check the safety of any tools or materials used.

Try a flexible invitation

Begin by asking what they want to do. Let them choose a page and response method. Offer quiet company or work on your own activity nearby if invited. Close with a practical choice: continue later, keep it private or share something. Ten minutes can be a starting suggestion, never a target.

Make planning manageable

The weekly pages can help notice priorities, support and rest. If asked, help break an idea into one manageable action. Include a way to revise or abandon the plan. Reflection does not have to produce a goal or solution, and missed weeks do not need to be caught up.

Adapt access and communication

Use the young person’s preferred language or mixture of languages. Offer larger paper, accessible tools, speech-to-text or their usual communication system. Ask before writing for them and check that you captured their words. A school-related writing difficulty should not make creative participation inaccessible.

Leave room for other relationships

A trusted mentor, sibling or friend may be welcome company. Parents and caregivers do not need to join every invitation. Ask how you can make participation easier without organising every detail or requiring a report afterwards.

Listen while respecting privacy

UNICEF's guidance encourages listening and asking how a young person wants you to respond before offering advice [3]. A conversation can happen without opening the journal. Choose a calm moment and keep your invitation brief.

Words you can use

"Would you like me to listen, help you think or give you some space?"
"Is there anything you would like support with this week?"
"Would you like to tell me about that choice?"
"We can talk without looking at your page."

Leave interpretation with the maker

A colour, symbol, fictional conflict or unfinished page does not establish an emotional state or diagnosis. If they choose to explain, follow their meaning. Avoid repeated probing, correcting spelling on creative pages or comparing their work with another person's.

Agree on ownership

Ask before reading, photographing, displaying or sharing pages, including with school staff, relatives or online. Agree where the journal is kept. If you write something for them, check the wording. Sharing should never be the price of receiving attention.

Explain the safety exception

Do not promise secrecy. You might say: "I respect your privacy. If I am concerned that you or someone else is unsafe, I will help involve someone who can support us and explain what I can." Use the agreed support route if a concern arises. Keep privacy boundaries separate from disagreements over journal completion.

Creative invitations and digital life

Offer one idea at a time. These activities are newly proposed invitations informed by the framework. The young person may change the materials, subject or rules, or choose not to participate.

Make a page with more than one possibility

Invite a fictional character facing a small everyday problem, such as a cancelled outing. Sketch two different responses or endings. They can be playful, unresolved or surprising. Do not turn the story into a test of the young person's coping or ask whether it is secretly about them.

Map a week with room to breathe

Use words, shapes or colours for commitments, interests and rest. Ask whether there is one thing they want more space for. If a plan becomes crowded, explore what could change or what help is needed, rather than adding a productivity target.

Share a skill by choice

Invite the young person to show you one technique they enjoy, if they want to. Let them decide how to demonstrate and how much help to offer. You can each create your own piece. Teaching and public sharing are opportunities, not measures of confidence.

Approach digital life with curiosity

Use digital prompts to discuss attention, connection and privacy without demanding access to accounts. Ask what feels useful online and what feels tiring. Do not record passwords, private messages or identifying details in the journal. If an online experience causes concern, discuss appropriate support rather than treating disclosure as a reason for punishment.

Close without grading

Ask what they want to keep, change or return to. Accept a decision to put the journal away. The value of an activity is not determined by how polished or shareable the result becomes.

When difficulties or feelings emerge

If they decline or become frustrated

Pause instead of persuading. Offer another material, a blank page, company or another time. If they say they are not creative, remind them they can use words, marks, patterns or fictional ideas. Do not insist that an activity will improve their mood.

If they become upset

Stop the activity and offer calm, familiar support. Ask what would help now. Do not require touch, eye contact, breathing exercises or an explanation of the page. Return to the activity only if they choose. A difficult response is not a failure of participation.

If they tell you about harm

Listen calmly and take the concern seriously. Avoid leading questions or investigating through the journal. Explain what help you will seek and follow the relevant safeguarding arrangements. Do not promise to keep a safety concern secret or ask the young person to manage the situation alone.

When to seek additional support

Seek advice from a qualified health or mental health professional when distress is persistent, severe, worsening or disrupting sleep, education, relationships or daily life. NHS guidance similarly identifies interference with daily life as a reason to seek help for anxiety [4]. A primary care clinician or school counsellor may help identify suitable local support; do not wait for the journal to resolve the problem.

Urgent concerns

For immediate danger or an urgent medical concern, use the local emergency service or nearest emergency department and help the young person reach safety. Identify local support routes before they are needed.

Care for your response

If you react sharply, acknowledge it and repair the moment. Seek your own support without making the young person responsible for your feelings. You can remain available without needing to solve everything in one conversation.

Notice what helps without scoring

Look at the quality of the opportunity you offer: choice, accessible materials, welcome and respect for privacy. Do not count pages, grade resilience or treat willingness to share as evidence that the young person is doing well.

A brief caregiver reflection

What did the young person choose, including choosing not to participate?
When did I follow their lead, and when did I take over?
What did they actually say was useful or difficult?
What could I simplify or change next time?

Keep reflection proportionate

Keep any notes brief, factual and separate from the journal. Ask before collecting or sharing creative work. These observations help you improve your support; they are not a psychological assessment or a measure of treatment outcomes.

The research behind the resource

The Creative Resilience Framework emerged from feminist Participatory Action Research with 35 young women aged 18–25 in three Alexandria care shelters. It combined craft-making, non-formal education and locally supported digital engagement. The teen journal and caregiver guidance are new applications; the doctoral study did not evaluate them.

From framework to family use

Broader research on arts engagement spans varied settings and study designs [5]. It offers context, not proof of benefit from this journal. This family application needs its own practitioner review and piloting. The companion handbook explains the research and proposed practice, but this guide is usable independently.

Keep creativity part of ordinary life

Leave room for friendships, rest, unstructured activity, music, movement and making beyond the journal. This resource offers creative and educational guidance, not diagnosis or treatment. External references do not imply endorsement.

Resources and further reading

These sources provide broader context and practical guidance. They do not establish benefits from this particular journal or imply endorsement. NHS service information is UK based; use appropriate services where you live. Links checked 2 November 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.

Read the source

[3] UNICEF Parenting (n.d.). How to talk to your kids about mental health.

Read the source

[4] NHS (n.d.). Anxiety in children.

Read the source

[5] Fancourt, D., & 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.

Read the source

The framework and companion handbook

Kassem, R. (n.d.). Hybrid Cultural Engagement in the Context of Crisis. Doctoral thesis, University of the West of Scotland. Author-supplied corrected manuscript; degree completed in 2025.

Creative Resilience: Crafting Our Way Forward — A Practical Handbook is in development. It explains the framework, its research origins and proposed practice applications. This guide can be used independently; reading the handbook is not required.

Explore Creative Resilience and companion resources

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