



Creating Honor Chairs
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Halito! As an art therapist working with clients who may be moving through traumas, working through the metaphor of an image or object can be a less intimidating way to process difficult experiences. From a strength-based perspective, I have used an “Honor Chair” art directive as a way to give honor to the loved one the client has lost and hopefully provide them a way to grieve in a healthy way. The chair is such a significant symbol as it represents a place to rest that keeps us properly aligned, a place to elevate a person’s position in life, and the important significance of proxemic design – how it inhabits a room.

I began using “Honor Chairs” as a way to explore and highlight the strengths and values of the one who is being honored. The chairs are usually “found” chairs from various places. The symbology of it being a used chair seems important – it has already lived a long life. The process of sanding (preparing) and embellishing the chair reminds me of our tribal rituals and the intention used in caring, preparing, and respecting those who have passed on.

Once the chair is ready for painting, there is a discussion with the individual or group about what would be important to paint on the chair such as the person’s favorite colors, favorite phrases, important images and symbols. I encourage the client to cover the entire chair (the legs and even underneath the seat). It has been surprising what clients choose to put underneath the seat; a secret space.

The process takes several sessions and is an opportunity for the therapist and the client to focus on loss through the beauty of the chair. When it is finally complete, it can be a great “gestalt” opportunity during the final session. There is usually a discussion of where it will be placed in the client’s home and the significance of that space. Grieving can be such an isolating process however, rituals, traditions, and new ways of making-meaning can bridge us back to community.

Yakoke.