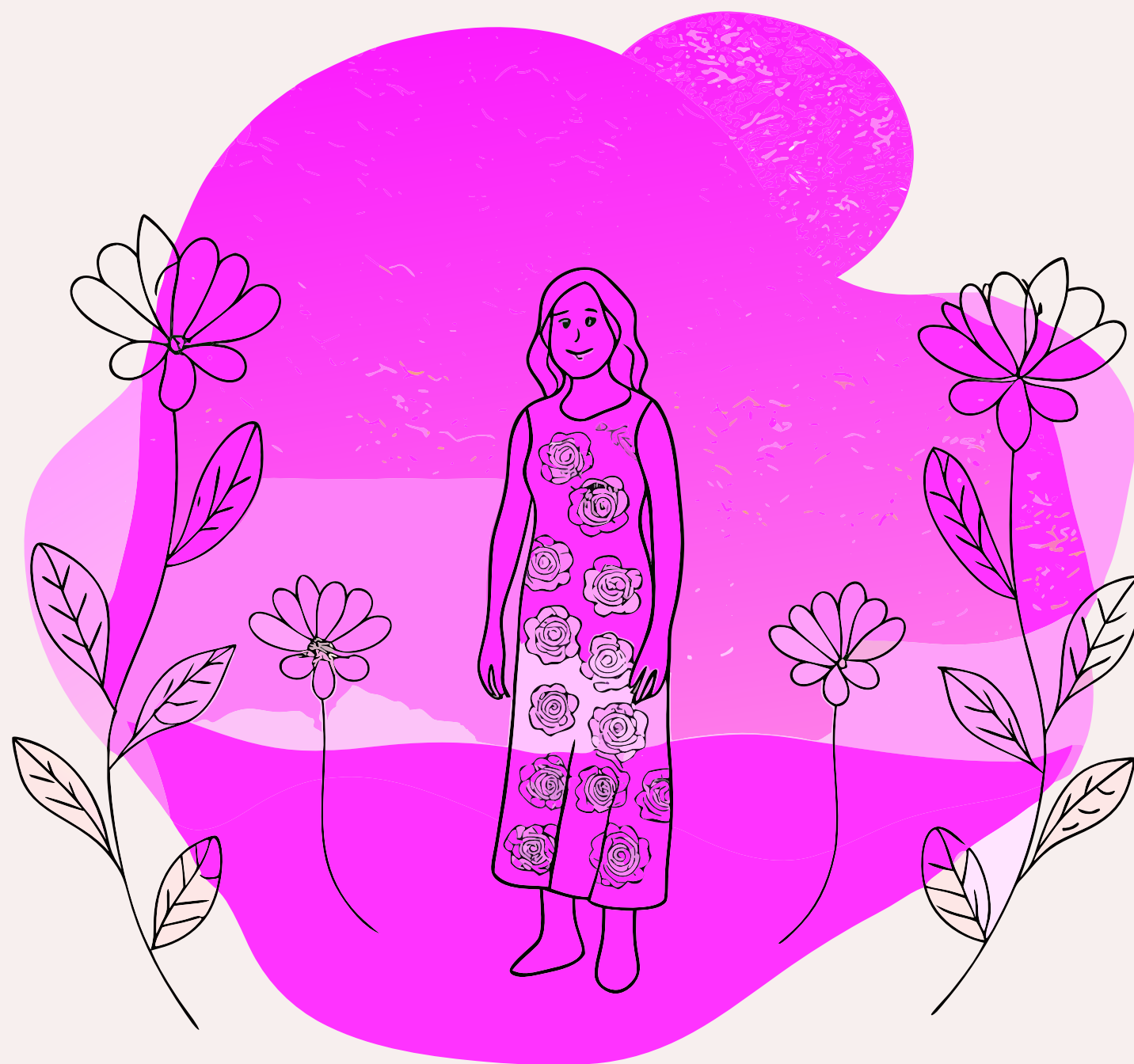




Painting

Women's

Strength

The Art of

Women's

Resilience

Painting Women's Strength: The Art of Women's Resilience

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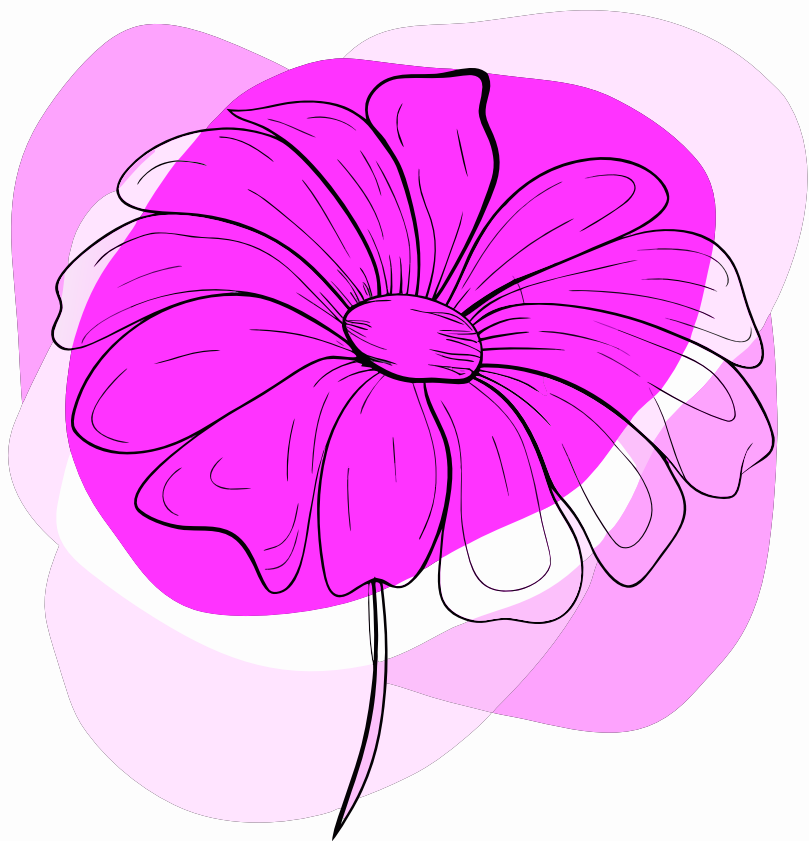
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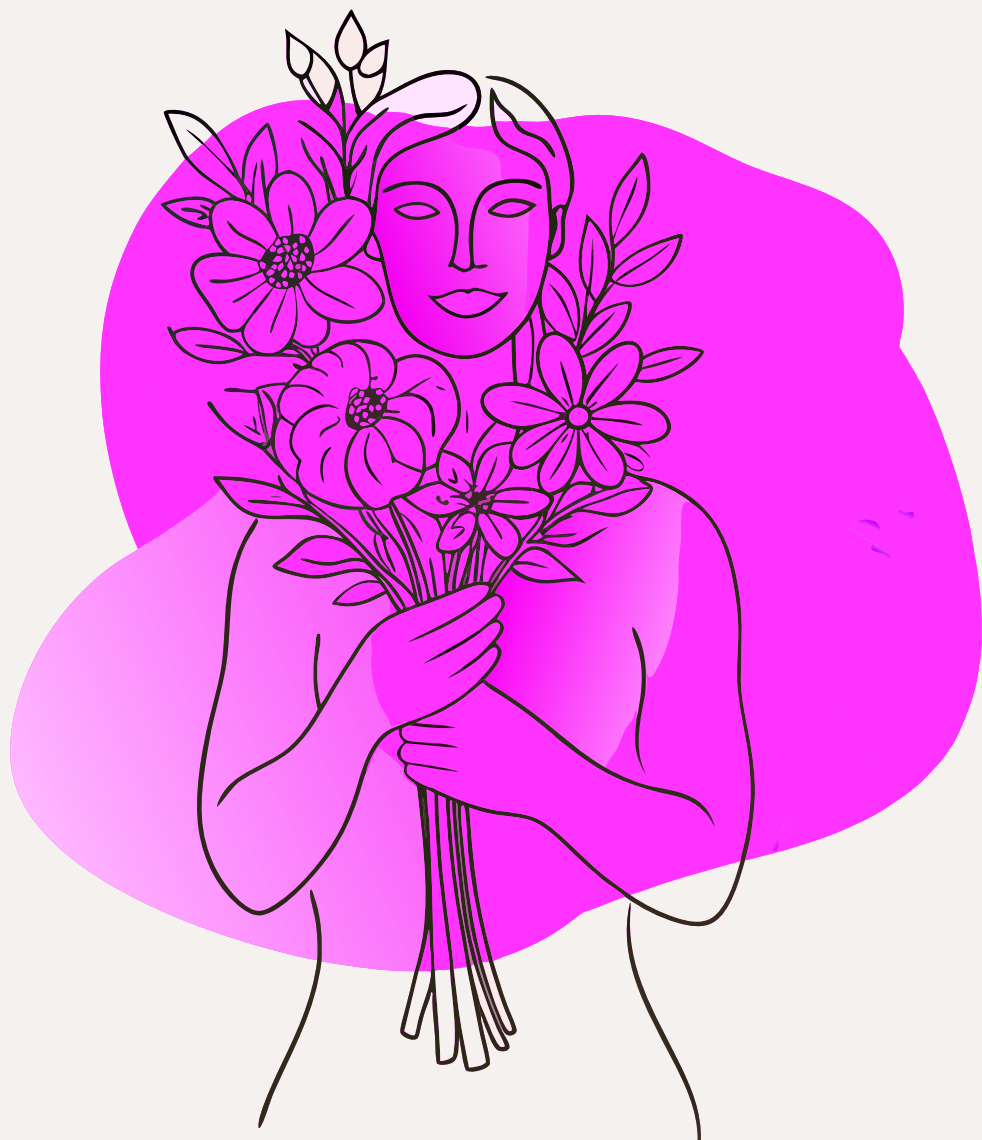
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Cancer is an experience that does not end when treatment is completed. The body may slowly return to balance, doctors may declare remission, and test results may begin to give hope – but the life of a woman who has gone through this will never be the same again. What affects her body goes much deeper – into her psyche, into the way she sees herself, into her relationships with others, into her everyday life, which suddenly seems different, more fragile, and at the same time requiring enormous strength.

It is at this point, when the seemingly 'worst' is behind her, that the real journey begins – a return to herself, to her sense of self-worth, to a sense of meaning, to living life to the fullest.



Many specialists reiterate that remission is not the end of the disease, but its next stage. And indeed, many women admit that it is only after intensive treatment that they realise the enormity of what the disease has brought them. It is as if there was no room for reflection during treatment – there was a struggle, there were procedures, there were test results. Only then does silence come. And in that silence, questions arise: who am I now? Can I still trust my body? Can I find my place in the old world – at work, at home, among people who expect me to be ‘already healthy’?

This turning point is extremely delicate. It requires care, time and wise support. And yet it is still often overlooked – both by the healthcare system and by society.

Women who have had cancer often feel left to their own devices, lost between the world of the “patient”

and the world of the “healthy”. What seems to others to be the end of a difficult chapter is, for them, the beginning of a completely new, often very lonely journey.

This is where the meaning of our actions begins – to create space for recovery. Not only physical health, but also inner strength, self-esteem, agency and dignity. It is about returning to a life that is not just functioning, but truly being.

Contemporary psychology, sociology and art therapy practice clearly show that a person cannot return to wholeness without harmony in the psychological and social spheres. And it is precisely this harmony that matters – the opportunity for women to find themselves in a new reality, no longer defined by illness, but also without forgetting what they have been through.

It is impossible to separate the body from the soul, or the past from the present. All of this is intertwined in an experience that demands to be heard. And when women are given the space to tell their stories – through words, images, breath, gestures – then the process of true healing begins. Healing that is not limited to test results, but encompasses the whole person.

Our project was born out of the conviction that we need new, more sensitive support tools. Tools that combine psychological knowledge with artistic practice, that draw on the resources of the community and allow women to feel that they are not alone. We need an approach that does not stop at diagnoses and procedures, but sees the person in their entirety – with their history, emotions, relationships and dreams.

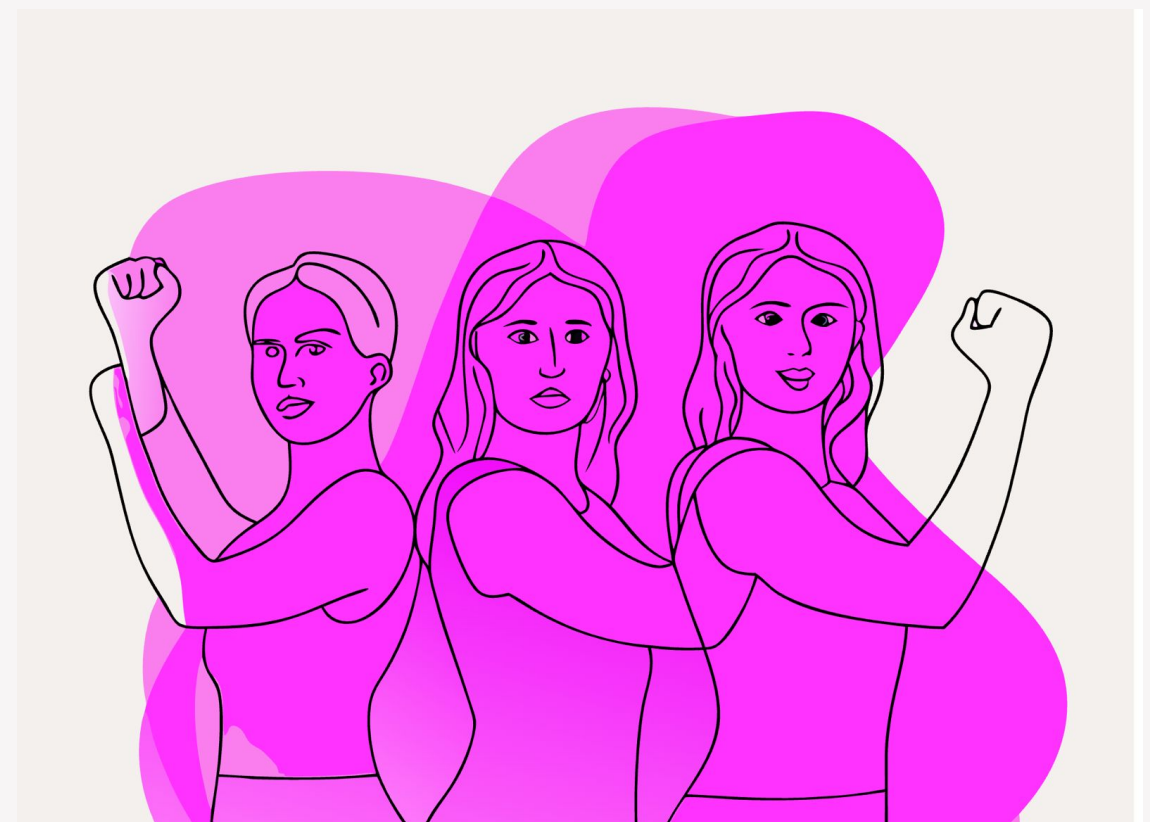


That is why we talk about art therapy, motivational photography, breathwork, and sociotherapy. We talk about everything that opens doors where there used to be silence and closure. It is not an easy path, but it is possible. And every woman who has survived cancer deserves to regain the feeling that her life does not end with the disease, but can take on a new, deeper meaning.

In the publication you are holding in your hands, we take a closer look at several important areas – real statistics showing the situation of women in Poland, the barriers that prevent them from returning to a full life, and the opportunities offered by art therapy and sociotherapy. We want to look at this topic holistically – because only then can we truly understand the enormous challenge facing women in remission and how much depends on whether they receive the right support.

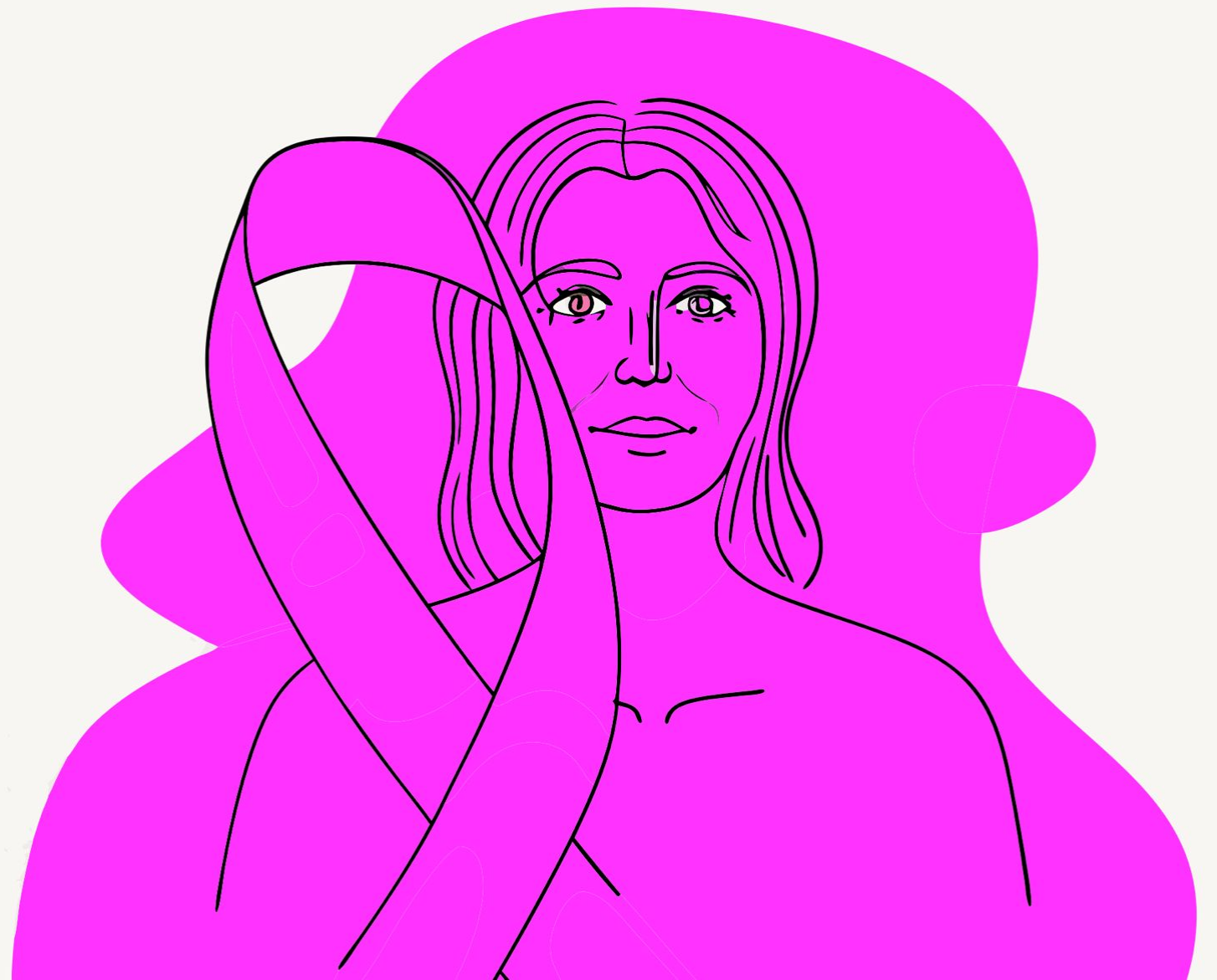
This is not a text about illness – it is a text about life. About life that bears scars, but also possesses enormous strength. About life that is searching for a new form. About life that demands attention, empathy and space in order to blossom anew.

Have a wonderful adventure with art!



Introduction –

Barriers and
needs of women
in remission
from cancer



The face of cancer in Poland – current statistics and challenges

When we talk about cancer in Poland, we are not just talking about numbers – we are talking about lives that are changing, bodies that bear scars, and souls that need time to find themselves again. The statistics are relentless – they show the scale, but also the challenges that must be faced when we think about supporting women in remission.

In 2021, approximately 171,558 new cases of cancer were reported in Poland, and the number of deaths due to cancer was approximately 93,652. These are huge numbers, but they also paint a picture of the fear that the disease spreads every day. Among women, the most commonly diagnosed cancers

are breast, lung and colorectal cancer. Among men, the most common cancers are prostate, lung and colorectal cancer. This means that many people, including many women, will at some point find themselves on the path to treatment, and then, if the disease is successful, on the path to remission. The indicator that shows the percentage of patients who live 5 years after diagnosis – the so-called five-year survival rate – has improved significantly in the last two decades for many types of cancer. For example, breast cancer – women in Poland have a five-year survival rate of about 80%. Prostate cancer – even more. But there are also cancers where survival rates are much lower and which leave a greater psychological burden: ovarian cancer and lung cancer. Statistics also show a very large difference between regions. For example, in some provinces of Poland, women have a five-year survival rate of over 60%, while in others it is close to this threshold or lower.

In urban areas, which are better connected and have better access to specialists, diagnostics and cancer treatment, the situation is better. But where hospitals are further away and access to specialist clinics is poorer, the effects of the disease are also more severe – statistically, physically and mentally.

The years 2020–2021 also showed the effects of the pandemic. The incidence rates increased, but so did the number of deaths – partly due to delays in diagnosis and partly due to limited access to treatment. Patients waited longer for biopsies, operations and chemotherapy. Many preventive programmes – screening tests – were delayed. This means that some cases were diagnosed at a more advanced stage, which worsened the prognosis and increased pain – both physical and mental.

Incidence statistics show that among women, approximately 24% of new diagnoses are breast cancer; lung cancer accounts for approximately 10% of cases; followed by endometrial cancer, colorectal cancer and ovarian cancer. This translates not only into the number of survivors, but also into the number of women who face bodily changes, anxiety, the need to reconstruct their identity and emotional needs.

Five-year survival rates also vary between types of cancer. For example, survival rates for cervical cancer are moderate - lower than in many Western countries - which places an additional burden on women in terms of suffering, stress from diagnosis and treatment, and later, when they return to their normal lives, frequent anxiety about the future.

In the paediatric population (0-19 years), data show that the number of new cancer cases is increasing or at least not decreasing, and that certain types of diseases – leukaemia, nervous system cancers – remain the most common. This means that oncological and rehabilitation care are moving towards multi-generational needs, as people who survive cancer in childhood also enter adulthood with a need for emotional, social and economic support.

Although survival rates are increasing, Poland still faces a very high number of deaths. In 2021, approximately 93,652 people died of cancer — a huge shadow that continues to loom over the statistics. Many of these deaths could be reduced if diagnosis were faster, treatment more accessible, and rehabilitation and psychological support more developed.

Another challenge is the significant differences in survival rates between the sexes. On average, women have a better chance of surviving five years after diagnosis than men. This difference is not huge and still depends heavily on the region of residence, the availability of treatment and the stage at which the disease is detected.

Where diagnosis is delayed, survival rates drop dramatically.

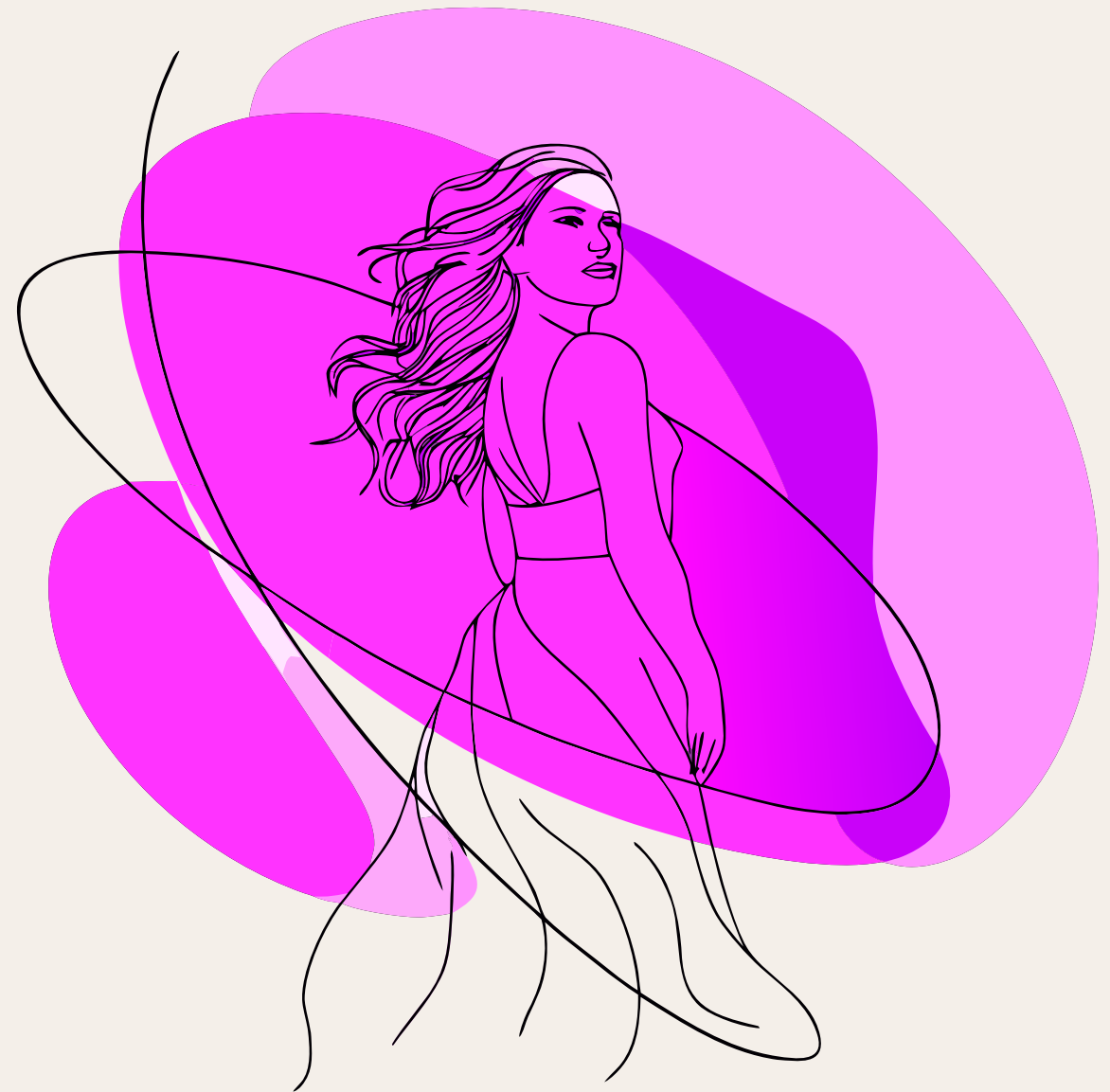
Another challenge is age – older women are more often diagnosed later, more often have comorbidities, which limits the possibilities of aggressive treatment and increases the risk of complications. Younger women often have a better prognosis, but they may experience specific difficulties – related, for example, to fertility, maintaining their appearance, anxiety about their child, and their identity as a mother. This gives rise to further needs – not only treatment, but also psychological support tailored to their age and life situation.

Statistics also show that the five-year survival rate in Poland – for all cancers – among women is approximately 58.9%.

The challenges that arise from these data are very specific. It is not enough to say 'we will improve our actions'. Action must be taken on many fronts: better and earlier diagnosis (so that women have a chance to catch the change before it is too late), better access to treatment in all regions of Poland – not only in large cities, but also in the provinces; faster launch of psychological and rehabilitation clinics; development of psychosocial support programmes; educational activities to ensure that women and the community are aware of their rights and the support available to them; greater integration of the healthcare system with social activities and non-governmental organisations.

Cancer in Poland today is a picture that has more and more positive aspects - more women survive for 5 years, there is more screening, and public awareness continues to grow.

What the data says loudest is not only how many people are ill and how many die, but how many women who have survived need someone to look at them not only as 'patients' but as people who have been through trauma - with a history, hopes and fears. And for the healthcare system and the social environment to give them the support that the data shows is still sorely lacking.



A voice in the silence – women in remission from cancer and their journey to recovery

Remission. When a doctor utters this word, silence falls over the room, and then tears often appear – sometimes of relief, sometimes of exhaustion, sometimes of disbelief.

From a medical point of view, remission means that the disease has been stoppead, that the treatment has worked. But in a woman's heart, this word does not sound like the end of the story. More often than not, it is the beginning of something that cannot be predicted. It is not a triumphant return to one's former life, but the start of a completely new journey, for which there is no map or guide.

From the conversations and surveys I conducted with women participating in local activities, one common picture emerges: remission is a time of suspension.

On the one hand, there is enormous gratitude for the life that has been saved, and on the other, a feeling of confusion, as if the old identity has fallen apart and the new one has not yet been formed.

'I look in the mirror and don't recognise myself,' said one participant. Another added: 'People say: you're lucky, you're healthy. But I don't feel healthy. My body is not my body, and my head is still full of fear.'

This experience is not unique. International studies confirm that the period after the end of cancer treatment is associated with many psychological, emotional and social difficulties. According to a publication in BMC Women's Health, almost half of women who have had breast cancer rate their self-esteem as "significantly reduced".

A 2023 report by Cancer Research UK indicates that as many as 70% of women experience problems with their sense of attractiveness and femininity. Similar results are found in studies conducted in Scandinavia, where as many as two-thirds of respondents declare that after completing treatment, they feel less confident in social and professional interactions.

Behind these figures lie specific stories.

In surveys conducted in Poland, women wrote:

- “I can no longer look at my scars. I know they prove that I am alive, but for me they are a stigma.”
- “My partner says he loves me the way I am. But I cannot touch myself without feeling disgust.”
- “I avoid social gatherings. Everyone looks at me differently, even if they pretend not to.”

These are the barriers that begin where treatment ends. Invisible to the doctor during

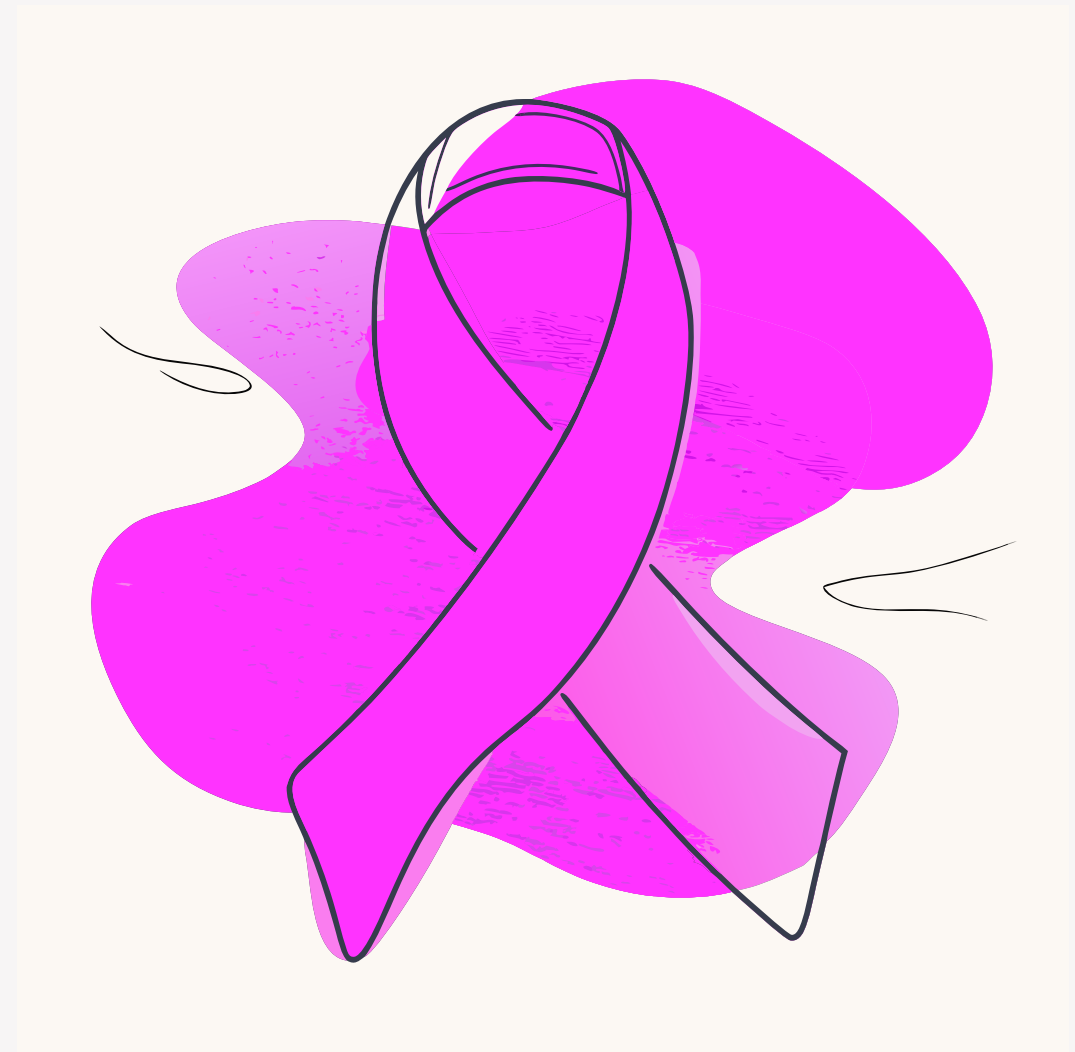
the examination, but felt by the woman at every step. Barriers that prevent her from fully enjoying her victory.

The most common problem is low self-esteem. The body, which until recently was a battlefield, is now full of scars, asymmetry, weight changes, loss of breasts or hair. Each of these changes becomes a source of pain. A woman who has survived the disease suddenly feels that she has lost more than her health – she has lost her former self-confidence, her sense of femininity, and sometimes even her own identity.

The second barrier is social isolation. Women often say that after completing treatment, their friends expect them to be happy and grateful. 'You should be happy, you won, after all' – this phrase echoes in their ears. But inside, the struggle continues – with the fear of recurrence, with a sense of loss, with a lack of strength to form relationships. This discrepancy between the expectations of those around them and their actual mental state causes many women to withdraw from contact, to shut themselves off, feeling that their emotions are 'uncomfortable' for others.

The third, extremely important barrier is the lack of psychological support and education. The medical system focuses on check-ups and results. A woman hears: 'Everything is normal, please come back for another appointment in six months.' But who answers the questions: 'How am I supposed to live now? How can I learn to love my body again? How can I cope

with the fear that the disease will return?' International reports (e.g. International Psycho-Oncology Society, 2022) emphasise that only 25% of healthcare systems provide patients in remission with access to comprehensive psychosocial support. This means that the vast majority of women are left alone with these questions.



This loneliness can be the most painful. 'The disease took my hair, my breast and my sense of security. But the greatest loss is that no one teaches you how to find yourself after it's all over,' said one of the participants in our activities. Her voice is echoed in many other stories.

It is also important to remember that these barriers do not exist in isolation. Low self-esteem is linked to isolation. A lack of psychological support deepens the feeling of loneliness. The expectations of those around us intensify our inner conflict. Everything is woven into a single knot that women try to untangle on their own, often without tools or guidance.

That is why it is so important to name and describe these barriers. When we give them shape and language, we take away some of their power. What was hidden and shameful becomes a shared experience. A woman

who hears another woman's story begins to understand that she is not alone, that her emotions are a natural part of the healing process.

Remission is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a journey on which every woman has the right to ask questions, search, make mistakes and, above all, rediscover herself. The barriers that stand in the way are not insurmountable walls. They can be circumvented, dismantled and sometimes transformed into a source of strength. But the first step is to realise that they exist. So, here is a story about barriers – about low self-esteem, isolation, lack of support and education. Each of them deserves to be looked at separately, described and solutions sought. Because the better we understand them, the more effectively we will be able to support women in their return to life. Not only to health, but to wholeness – to feeling like themselves again.

The role of social



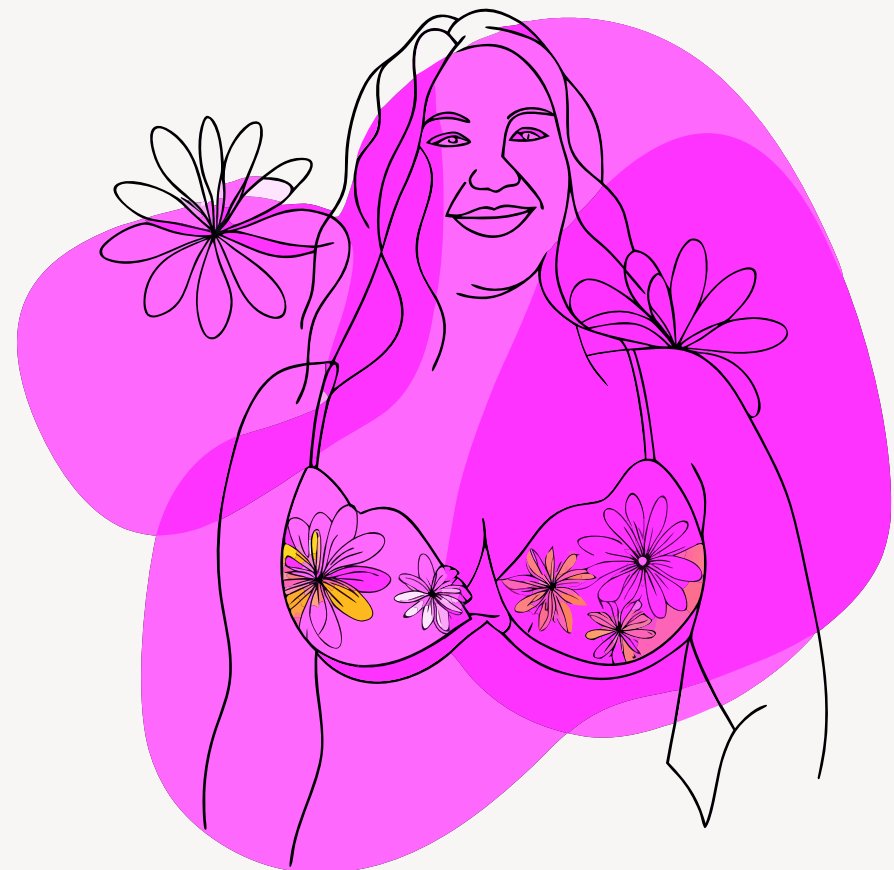
Barriers to returning to full life after remission from cancer

Low self-esteem and difficulty accepting one's own body

When cancer strikes a woman's life, it shatters all her certainties. Treatment is necessary to save her life, but the price is irreversible changes. The body becomes a battlefield – scarred, hairless, burdened with side effects. From the doctors' perspective, this is a natural consequence of therapy. From the woman's perspective, it is a painful transformation that affects the deepest layers of her identity.

Remission, which should be a time of relief, often becomes a moment of crisis. The woman returns to everyday life with a body

that is both familiar and foreign. The mirror ceases to be an ally – instead of reflecting her former self, it shows someone who is difficult to accept. In the conversations I had during the workshops, I heard the following phrases repeatedly: 'I don't recognise the woman in the mirror,' 'I feel like I've been given a new life, but in a body that isn't mine.'



- Body change as a source of suffering

The physical changes after treatment are multidimensional. The loss of a breast after a mastectomy, scars from surgery, changes in body shape, weight gain caused by hormone therapy or, conversely, drastic weight loss – each of these things leaves a lasting mark. Hair, eyebrows and eyelashes that fell out during chemotherapy grow back differently – sparser, finer, sometimes in a different colour. These are seemingly minor details, but for a woman whose sense of femininity has been linked to her appearance for years, they become a signal: ‘I will never be the same again.’

In a 2023 study by the American Cancer Society, as many as 68% of women who had had breast cancer described their bodies as ‘alien’ or ‘unattractive.’ A Cancer Research UK

report indicates that over 70% of women in remission struggle with a sense of loss of femininity. In Poland, according to research by the Rak'n'Roll Foundation, 61% of women admit that their appearance after the disease is a greater source of suffering for them than the fear of recurrence itself.

Behind these numbers lie personal tragedies. ‘My partner says that nothing has changed for him. But I can't touch myself without feeling disgust,’ said one workshop participant. Another admitted: ‘I avoid the swimming pool, changing rooms, even my close friend. I'm afraid of her gaze. I don't know if it's just me, or if people really see the disease in me.’

- The gap between the expectations of those around you and reality

Those around her often do not understand this pain. For friends and family, remission is a cause for celebration. They say things like, 'You look great, you've finally got it behind you, everything will be fine now.' But for the woman, this is only the beginning of facing a new reality. This contradiction leads to isolation – the woman withdraws into herself because her experience is not reflected in the reactions of others.

Research published in the Journal of Cancer Survivorship shows that as many as 45% of women in remission avoid social contact because of shame related to their appearance. This is not only a distancing from friends – it is also giving up professional

activity, avoiding family events, and sometimes even withdrawing from intimate life.

'The disease took my breasts, my hair and my sense of security. But the greatest loss is that no one understands my grief. Everyone wants me to be grateful, but I still can't look in the mirror,' said one of the women during a support group meeting as part of the project.

Low self-esteem does not only affect the individual sphere – it also carries over into relationships. A woman who does not accept her body often stops believing that someone else can accept it. In many relationships, a distance arises that is not due to a lack of love on the part of the partner, but to a barrier within the woman herself.

In a study conducted in Sweden in 2022, 54% of women who had had breast cancer admitted that they avoided intimate contact with their partners because they were ashamed of their bodies. The problem is even more pronounced among younger women – as many as 70% of respondents aged 20–40 felt that the disease had ‘taken away their attractiveness and sense of being a woman’.

‘My husband keeps telling me that I'm beautiful. But when he wants to hug me, I stiffen up. Because I know there's a scar under his hand. I feel like a fraud,’ said one workshop participant.

It is worth noting that the experience of low self-esteem is not the same for all women. In younger patients, it often involves a loss of attractiveness, plans for motherhood, and the ability to function in romantic relationships.

Older women more often talk about loss of fitness, changes in social roles, and being ‘invisible’ in the eyes of others.

The cultural context is also important. In countries where femininity is strongly associated with appearance, the problem is more acute. Studies in Japan have shown that women who have undergone mastectomy often avoid talking about their illness even within their family, because it is associated with shame and a sense of ‘lost femininity’. In contrast, in communities where acceptance of physicality has a broader spectrum, it is easier to find new meaning in the body after illness.

- Hope in the reconstruction process

Despite the immense pain caused by low self-esteem, there is also room for hope. Research on support programmes shows that appropriate interventions can radically improve women's quality of life.

Support groups, art therapy, motivational photography classes, dance, yoga and meditation are tools that help build a new relationship with one's own body. It is not about forgetting the scars. It is about giving them new meaning.

One of the participants in the photography workshop said: 'When I stood in front of the camera, I felt beautiful for the first time in a long time. Not because I hid my scars. But because I was able to look at them differently – as a sign of courage.'

In psychology, there is a concept of 'post-traumatic growth' – the idea that experiencing trauma can lead not only to suffering, but also to deeper development. For women in remission, low self-esteem can be the beginning of a new path. It is a moment when one can begin to redefine femininity – not as conformity to the canon of beauty, but as the strength that comes from survival.

Self- confidence



'I used to think that femininity was about hair, breasts, and smiles. Now I know that it's about the courage to get up in the morning and keep going. And that scars are part of that courage,' said a participant in an art therapy workshop.

The key to the recovery process is that women are not left alone with it.

Psychological support, but also community support, helps to overcome feelings of isolation. When one woman says, 'I can't look at my body,' and another responds, 'I feel the same way,' a space is created where shame turns into solidarity.

It is this solidarity that can be the most powerful remedy. Research shows that women who participate in support groups regain their self-esteem more quickly and return to social activity more easily.

Summary

Low self-esteem is a barrier that permeates every aspect of a woman's life in remission. It is not just a matter of appearance – it is a problem that affects identity, relationships and social roles. But it is not an insurmountable barrier. With the right support, therapeutic tools and a community of women, shame can be transformed into strength and scars into symbols of courage.

The road to self-acceptance after illness is neither easy nor quick. But every woman who travels it carries proof that beauty can be found even where only loss was once seen.

Social isolation and relationship difficulties

When treatment is coming to an end and doctors announce remission, loved ones often feel relieved. In their eyes, this is the moment when a difficult chapter ends and life returns to normal. However, for many women, this return turns out to be an illusion. The disease does not disappear overnight, and with it, the physical and psychological consequences do not go away. The woman, although formally healthy, begins to experience what can be called the 'quiet loneliness of remission'.

- External expectations versus internal experience

Close friends, family and colleagues often treat the end of treatment as a sign that everything is back to normal. They say things like, 'It's over now,' 'You have a new life,' 'Enjoy every day.' These intentions are good, but they carry invisible pressure. The woman feels that she has no space to talk about her fears, fatigue, or difficult emotions related to her appearance or health. As a result, she begins to remain silent.



This silence is the beginning of isolation. A 2022 study by the National Cancer Institute shows that as many as 52% of women in remission avoid talking about their experiences because they fear that their loved ones 'no longer want to hear about the disease.' In Poland, according to data from the Rak'n'Roll Foundation, 48% of women admit that after treatment they feel 'alone in a crowd' – surrounded by people but misunderstood. Social isolation takes many forms. Some women withdraw completely – they stop participating in social life, avoid meetings, explaining that they are tired. Others continue to function among people, but with a feeling of being 'separated by an invisible glass'. Many women also emphasise that a taboo subject arises in relationships. Loved ones do not ask about the illness because they are afraid of bringing up

difficult memories. The woman does not talk about it because she does not want to be a burden. A silence arises which, over time, becomes unbearable. The disease also changes the dynamics of relationships. Sometimes friends disappear – not because they are heartless, but because they feel helpless in the face of the situation. Long months of treatment, hospitals and restrictions cause relationships to become strained. After remission, women discover that their circle of friends has shrunk significantly. Research published in Psycho-Oncology shows that 37% of women who have had breast cancer experience the breakdown of at least one important friendship as a result of the disease. Some friendships cannot withstand the confrontation with suffering.

It is not only friends who become a source of loneliness. Paradoxically, isolation can be most acute within the family. Partners, children, parents – they also feel relief after the end of treatment. They want to close this chapter and move on. Women, on the other hand, continue to live in the shadow of an illness that reminds them of itself every day.

In a study conducted in Germany in 2021, as many as 44% of women in remission admitted that they 'do not tell their partner about their fears so as not to burden them.' As a result, a distance develops in the relationship. On the one hand, there is physical closeness – living together, everyday life. On the other hand, there is a lack of real communication. Isolation does not only affect private life. At work, women often feel that they have been marginalised. Colleagues avoid questions,

superiors treat them cautiously, sometimes even condescendingly. There is often a feeling that their professional identity has been overshadowed by the label of 'cancer patient'.

Research by the European Cancer Organisation shows that 41% of women who have had breast cancer experience difficulties returning to work due to stigmatisation or a lack of understanding. In Poland, this topic is only just beginning to be addressed, but many accounts confirm a similar pattern: 'Everyone at work is nice. But when a difficult project comes up, no one asks me for my opinion. It's as if my illness has made me lose my competence.'

Professional isolation is linked to a feeling of social invisibility. A woman who was active and felt part of the community suddenly discovers that her voice is not being heard. This experience can lead to feelings of exclusion and further withdrawal from social life.

Social isolation is not just a lack of meetings or conversations – it is a mental state that has serious consequences. Loneliness increases the risk of depression, intensifies the fear of relapse and exacerbates self-esteem issues. A woman who has no one to share her feelings with begins to doubt them – a sense of guilt arises ('Maybe I'm overreacting, maybe I should be stronger').

World Health Organisation research shows that people in remission who experience social isolation have a 60% higher risk of

depression relapse than those who participate in support groups. This shows that isolation is not neutral – it is a real risk factor for mental and physical health.

Searching for bridges – how to break through isolation?

Although isolation seems like a wall, there are ways to find a passage. The key is to create a space where women can talk about their experiences without fear of being judged. Support groups, art therapy workshops, women's circles and exercise classes become places where dialogue replaces silence.

How to break through isolation?

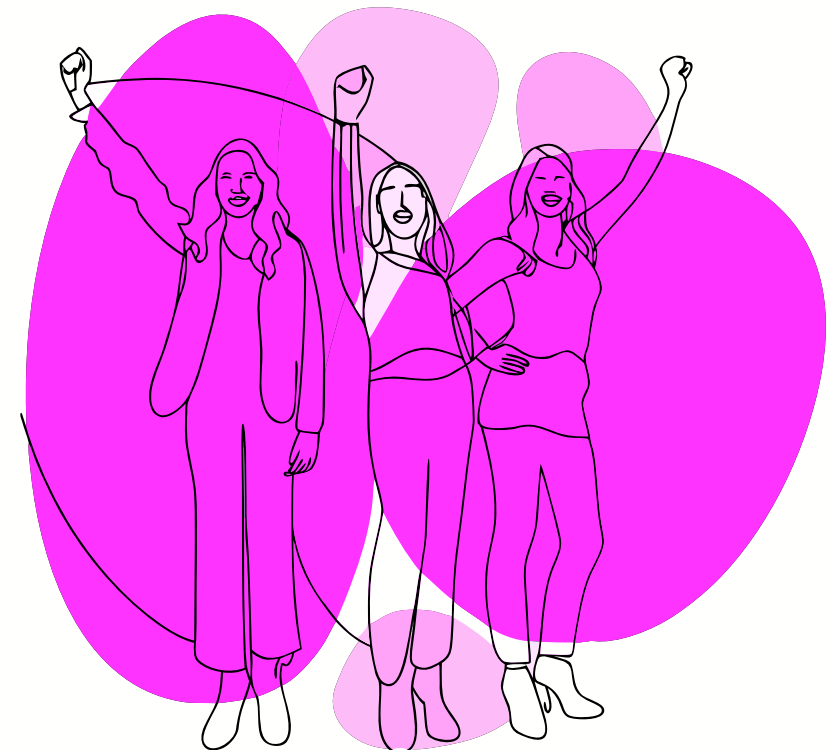


'When I first came to the workshop, I was sure I wouldn't say a word. And then I heard another woman say exactly what I had been feeling for months. I felt relieved - I'm not alone,' said one of the participants.

Creative forms of work – writing, painting, photography – allow us to express what cannot be said directly. Thanks to them, women find a language for experiences that they previously kept to themselves. Importantly, breaking out of isolation does not mean returning to old relationships in their former form. Often, illness becomes a filter that sifts out superficial bonds and allows deeper, more authentic ones to be built. It is a painful but necessary process. Social isolation is one of the most hidden and at the same time most painful barriers in the lives of women in remission. Misunderstanding from those around them,

the loss of old bonds, taboos in the family and professional stigmatisation create a feeling of loneliness that can be more difficult to bear than the physical effects of the disease.

But this barrier is not insurmountable. Creating a space where you can talk, listen and be heard opens the way to rebuilding bonds. Isolation then turns into community, and loneliness into strength that comes from shared experience.



Fear of recurrence – a shadow that won't go away

Although doctors say 'remission' and test results confirm the absence of disease, a deep-rooted fear remains in the hearts of many women. This fear is difficult to grasp because it has no single shape or face. Sometimes it manifests itself as a quiet anxiety that accompanies every day – in the morning glance in the mirror, in the evening falling asleep. Other times, it takes the form of a sudden panic attack, triggered by chest pain or unexpected fatigue. It is a fear that does not go away, even when the world around you repeats: 'you are healthy'.

- Anxiety rooted in experience

Cancer is not a disease that can be easily separated with a thick line. It is an experience

that leaves a mark on the body and soul. Every check-up, every test, every unexpected ailment is a reminder of the past. A woman who has undergone treatment often lives in a double reality: the external one, where she is expected to be normal, and the internal one, where the disease is still present. According to a 2023 American Cancer Society study, as many as 70% of women who have had breast cancer admit that they regularly experience fears of recurrence. In a study conducted in Poland by the Onkocafe Foundation in 2022, over 60% of participants described this fear as a 'daily companion in life.' This shows that remission does not mean the end of the disease – it is often the beginning of a new stage in which fear becomes a shadow cast by the past onto the future.

- ‘Is it coming back?’ – daily hypervigilance
Every twinge, every headache, every cough becomes a potential sign of a relapse. The woman begins to obsessively monitor her body. Ordinary fatigue after work is interpreted as a symptom. A harmless infection becomes a source of paralysing fear.

‘When my back hurts, I don't think it's from sitting at the computer. I think the cancer has returned and that this time it will be worse,’ said a participant in one of the support groups.

This phenomenon is called health hypervigilance and is well described in oncological psychology. Research published in the Journal of Cancer Survivorship indicates that excessive monitoring of the body leads to a deterioration in quality of life,

increases stress and, paradoxically, can contribute to psychosomatic complaints.

For many women, remission is associated with a calendar of tests. It is not months, but the dates of subsequent visits that become the measure of time. An upcoming check-up triggers an avalanche of thoughts: ‘What if they find something?’, ‘Will it be worse this time?’.

Research published in Psycho-Oncology (2021) shows that the level of anxiety in patients around the time of their check-up increases by up to 80% compared to other days. This is a kind of ‘check-up syndrome’ – even if the result is normal, the very process of waiting can be a source of enormous stress.

The fear of relapse is not just the fear of pain or death. It is also the fear of losing a newly rebuilt identity. A woman who is starting to return to work, to family life, to her passions, is afraid that everything will suddenly collapse. That the illness will take away what she has just managed to regain.

'Every time I start planning a holiday or buying something for the house, I think: what if it comes back? Maybe there's no point? Maybe I'll have to give everything up again?' said one of the participants in the Breast Cancer Now study.

This fear acts as a brake – it limits dreams, blocks joy, and causes women to live in the shadows, as if they had no right to complete happiness.

Anxiety also has consequences in relationships. A woman may avoid talking

about her fears with her loved ones so as not to worry them. Sometimes partners and family do not understand why, despite good results, she is still afraid. This leads to frustration on both sides and a feeling of misunderstanding.

Research from Supportive Care in Cancer (2022) indicates that in 43% of women in remission, fear of recurrence negatively affects their relationships. Women feel misunderstood, and their partners feel powerless in the face of their fear.

Anxiety is not just an emotion. Chronic fear causes an increase in cortisol levels and puts strain on the nervous and immune systems. Women experience sleep problems, chronic fatigue and low mood. Some resort to excessive testing and medical consultations, while others avoid visits because they are afraid of bad news.

The World Health Organisation emphasises that fear of recurrence is one of the main factors reducing the quality of life of cancer survivors and should be treated as seriously as physical symptoms.

- Ways of coping

Although fear of relapse is common, it is not insurmountable. It is crucial to make women aware that they are not alone in this – that it is an experience shared by most people in remission. Normalising fear does not mean downplaying it, but recognising it as a natural part of the healing process.

Art therapy, meditation, breath yoga, and emotional journaling are tools that allow you to give voice to your fear and thus tame it. Creative forms of work do not eliminate fears, but they change their weight – from

paralysing fear to a signal that can be processed.

Education also plays an important role – knowledge about the real risk of relapse, conversations with your doctor, participation in psychoeducational groups. Understanding that anxiety is not proof that the disease is returning, but a psychological reaction, gives you a sense of control.



For many women, the fear of recurrence becomes an impetus for change. To give new meaning to life, to redefine priorities.

'Yes, I am afraid. But that is precisely why I want to live more fully. I want to travel, paint, be with people. I am not putting my life on hold,' said one of the participants in the art therapy workshop.

Existential psychology suggests that confronting fear can lead to what is known as post-traumatic growth – finding new values and strength in the experience of illness. This does not happen automatically, but it is possible with support, openness to experience and creative tools for expression. The fear of recurrence is a barrier that affects most women in remission. It is like a shadow – it accompanies them in everyday situations, affects their relationships, decisions and even

their physical health. It is a fear that is not visible in test results, but which has a real impact on their lives.

However, fear does not have to be a prison. It can become a teacher – showing us what is really important. With support, openness and tools such as art therapy, women can learn to live alongside fear instead of under its weight. They can transform it into a force that leads to a more conscious, fuller life.

Lack of specialised emotional support and insufficient education in the area of mental health support

When a woman completes cancer treatment, she often hears: 'Everything will be fine now.' Doctors close her hospital records, nurses smile reassuringly, and her family tries to instil hope in her. But in reality, this is when the stage begins in which psychological support is most urgently needed. This is the moment when the patient, seemingly 'cured', is left alone with all her baggage of experiences, trauma, fear of the future and a sense of loss of control. The lack of appropriate tools, space and specialist help makes the road to mental recovery and social integration incomparably more difficult.

International reports, such as publications by the American Cancer Society and studies by the European Society for Medical Oncology, clearly indicate that up to 50% of cancer patients experience depressive or anxiety disorders after completing treatment. In Poland, the figures are similar – a 2021 study by the Żyjmy Zdrowo (Let's Live Healthily) Foundation shows that as many as 46% of women who have had breast cancer say they had no contact with a psychologist or therapist after leaving hospital. This means that almost half of women go through the most difficult stage of emotional transformation completely alone.

The problem is not only about access to specialists – the lack of education about support options is equally important. Many women are unaware that support groups, psychoeducational programmes, and even free helplines exist. Others, even if they are aware of these resources, do not receive information on how to use them in practice. The lack of information campaigns, an opaque system and scattered sources of support leave patients in remission feeling lost in a maze of medical and administrative procedures.

From a health psychology perspective, the lack of emotional support has multidimensional consequences. Women left without the tools to cope with trauma are more likely to experience chronic stress, which negatively affects their immune system.

Research on so-called 'oncological distress' (Holland, 2018) shows that the lack of psychological intervention in the first years of remission significantly increases the risk of long-term mood disorders and even leads to poorer health outcomes. In other words, the mind and body are so deeply connected that neglecting one sphere leads to disorders in the other.

Women in remission often say that in the healthcare system they are treated as 'cured cases' whose future does not require special care. However, for them, the words 'you are healthy' do not bring relief – on the contrary, they create a feeling that they now have to cope on their own.

The expectation of independence imposed by the system exacerbates their loneliness. In qualitative studies conducted by psycho-oncologists (including Król, 2020), women repeatedly said that the most difficult thing was that no one told them what to do next – how to live with the fear of recurrence, how to return to work, how to look at themselves in the mirror.

An equally important aspect is the lack of social education. The environment in which a woman functions – family, friends, employers – rarely has the tools to support her. Loved ones often expect a quick 'return to normal,' not understanding that the psychological process takes longer than the healing of physical wounds. This lack of awareness leads to awkwardness, misunderstanding, and sometimes even

avoidance of the subject of illness. The woman then feels doubly isolated – first by her experience, and then by the ignorance of those around her.

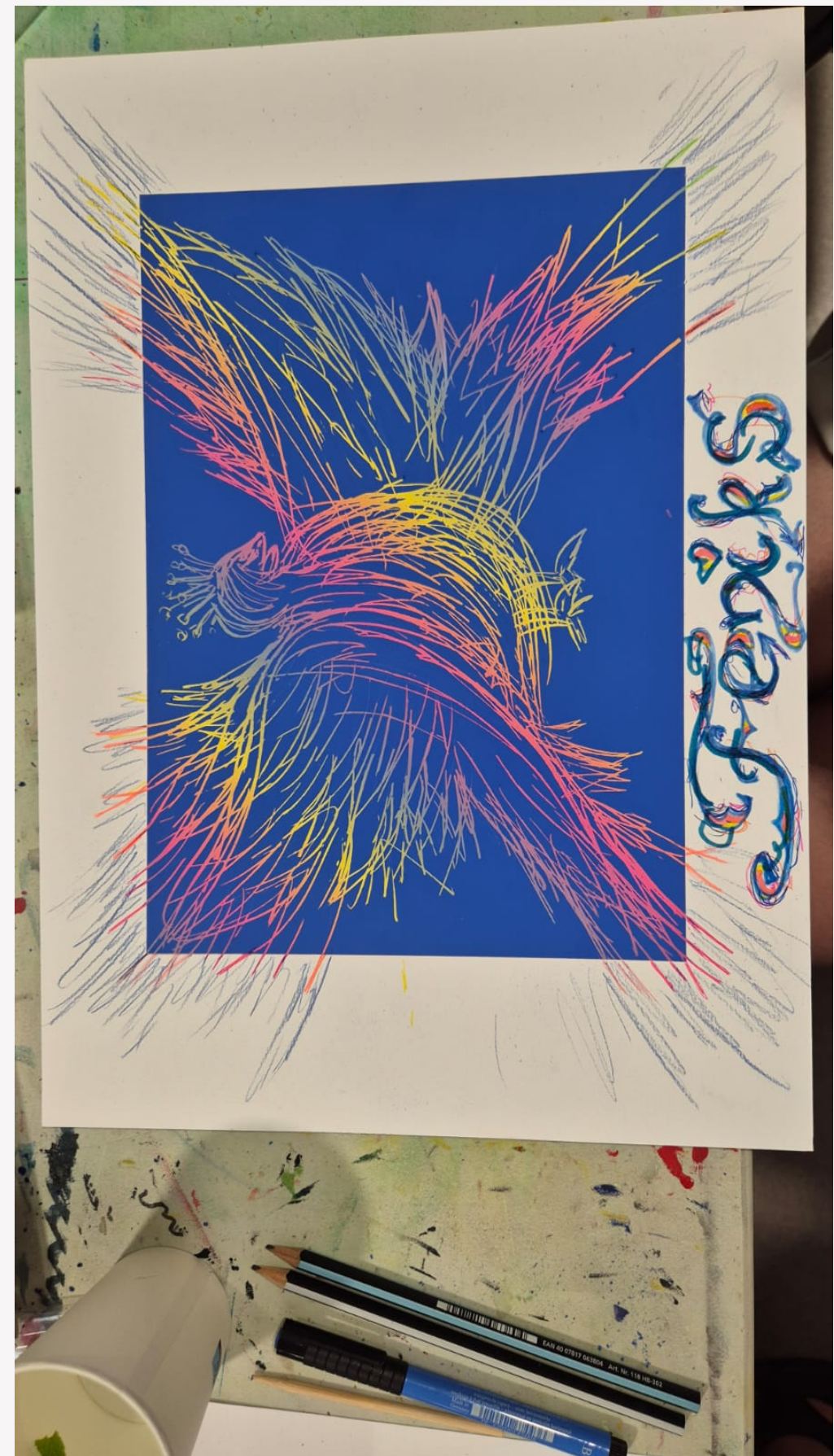
It should not be forgotten that education in the area of mental health also includes the education of the patient herself. Many women learn over the years to put the needs of others above their own. In a culture that promotes the image of the 'brave warrior,' a woman who has had cancer often feels that she has no right to weakness, fear or tears. The lack of specialist support causes them to suppress their emotions, which in the long term leads to their escalation – in the form of somatisation, sleep disorders or depression.

Meanwhile, there are examples of countries that show that things can be done differently. In Denmark and the Netherlands, patients who have undergone cancer treatment are automatically referred to psychological and educational support programmes. These include individual therapy sessions, group workshops and practical training on returning to work and social life. Thanks to this, women do not feel that they have been 'left alone' – on the contrary, the system guides them step by step through the process of recovering themselves.

In Poland, there is still a lack of such systemic solutions, but grassroots initiatives, such as support groups created by oncology foundations or local art therapy projects, show how important a sense of community is. Women who participate in such activities

emphasise that only talking to someone who has gone through a similar experience can provide real comfort and understanding. The barrier of a lack of specialised emotional support and insufficient education is therefore not just an individual problem – it is a problem of a system that does not recognise the psyche as an integral part of the treatment process. But it is also an area where new solutions can be developed – combining medicine with psychology, knowledge with empathy, education with the practice of everyday support.

However, until women who have survived cancer receive clear guidance on where and how to seek help, they will continue to struggle with feelings of loneliness and confusion. Until the system treats the psyche as an 'add-on' to the body, a full return to life will not be possible. Only when emotional support becomes the norm and public education a priority will it be possible to talk about real reintegration and a true quality of life after illness.

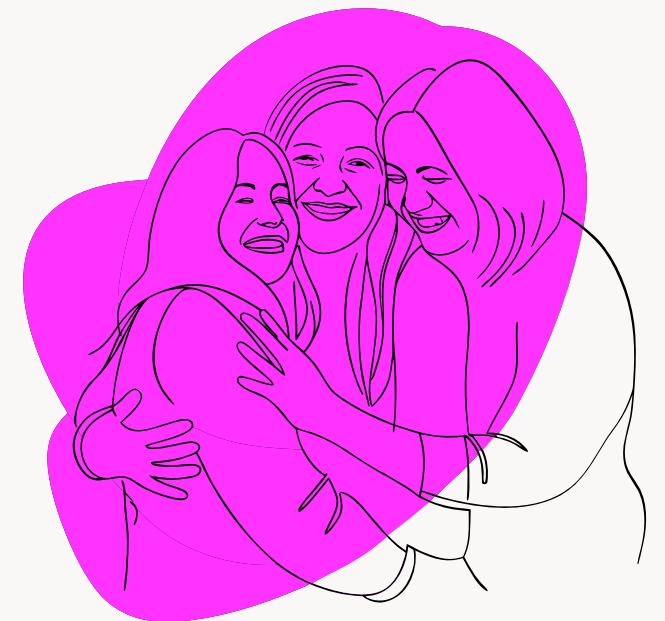


Financial and logistical barriers

Cancer treatment itself can be a source of financial instability. Many women have to give up work or reduce their professional activity during treatment, which leads to a drop in income. Meanwhile, expenses increase – for medicines, supplements, specialised diets, travel to hospital, and rehabilitation. As a result, women who are already struggling with enormous psychological stress must also worry about whether they will be able to pay their rent, afford another visit to the physiotherapist, or buy a suitable bra after a mastectomy.

The other side of this problem is logistical barriers. Poland, like many European countries, struggles with unequal access to

healthcare depending on where you live. Women from large cities often have easier access to specialists, psychotherapists and support groups. Meanwhile, a resident of a smaller town or village has to travel several dozen kilometres to get to a check-up or therapy workshop. The cost of transport, travel time, the need to organise care for children or elderly people at home – all this creates another layer of obstacles.



Research conducted in the USA (National Cancer Institute, 2020) indicated that women from rural areas were twice as likely to give up psychotherapy after cancer treatment precisely because of logistical difficulties – lack of transport, long waiting times for appointments or a lack of specialists in the area.

The situation is similar in Poland: according to a 2022 report by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK), the average waiting time for a psycho-oncological consultation in the public health care system was between three and six months, and in some regions such services were not available at all.

It should also be noted that financial and logistical barriers often intertwine. A woman who cannot afford a car or regular travel experiences even greater isolation. A lack of

funds for private appointments means that she has to rely on the public system, where appointments are long in coming and discouraging. This is a vicious circle that leads to the patient – although formally in remission – being deprived of real support in practice.

These barriers also have a social dimension. Women often say that they feel ‘inferior’ or ‘inadequate’ because they cannot afford the activities that others attend. They hear about development workshops, they see photos of their friends from support groups, but they do not go themselves because they lack the funds. This economic and logistical difference creates an additional sense of exclusion – not only because of their illness, but also because of their financial situation.

It is also worth mentioning the institutional dimension. Although there are foundations and programmes offering free workshops, access to them can be limited. They often take place in large cities, require prior registration, and have a limited number of places. Information about them does not always reach all women, especially those who need support the most. As a result, the help that does exist becomes inaccessible to many due to financial and logistical barriers.

The above-mentioned obstacles have psychological consequences. A woman who gives up therapy or meetings, not because she does not want to, but because she cannot, begins to blame herself. Her narrative includes words such as 'maybe I don't deserve it' or 'maybe I'm not trying hard enough'. This inner guilt further

undermines her confidence and hinders the recovery process.

However, solutions do exist. The development of telemedicine and online therapy, which accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, has shown that some logistical barriers can be overcome. Online therapy sessions, virtual workshops and support groups conducted via instant messaging have opened up new opportunities for women who previously had no access to help. However, this requires systemic support – the provision of digital infrastructure, education in the use of new technologies and, above all, a change in mentality within the healthcare system.

Financial and logistical barriers are therefore not just an organisational issue – they are real, profound challenges that affect mental health, self-esteem and the ability to return to a full life. If we want to talk about the true reintegration of women in remission from cancer, we need to think about support in a holistic way – not only emotional and spiritual, but also practical. Help is not only conversation and therapy, but also financial support, reimbursement, transport and proximity to home.

Only then will a return to life not be an illusion, but a reality in which every woman - regardless of where she lives and her financial situation - has an equal chance to regain herself.



Barriers to returning to the labour market and fulfilling social roles

Returning to everyday life after cancer is not only a process of regenerating the body, restoring health and regaining physical fitness. It also involves the need to find one's place in society again – in professional, family and social roles that have been interrupted or completely redefined by the disease.

Women in remission often face a double challenge: on the one hand, they have to deal with the realities of the job market, which can be ruthless, inflexible and often stigmatising towards people who have had a serious illness. On the other hand, there are social and family expectations - to return to their former responsibilities, roles and

tasks with the same energy as before their illness.

Data collected in international and national reports indicate that this problem is systemic. According to research by the European Organisation for Cancer Research, as many as 40–50% of people who have undergone cancer treatment report difficulties in returning to work, and one in four women say that they are unable to return to the labour market to the same extent as before their illness.

In Poland, the situation is further complicated by the limited number of programmes supporting the professional reintegration of chronically ill people. Although there are formal regulations protecting employees from discrimination on the grounds of health, practice shows that women in remission face employers' fears, stereotypes about their productivity, and sometimes even reluctance to hire them.

Another barrier is the women's own mental and physical condition. Although remission means victory over the disease, the body and psyche still bear its consequences. Chronic fatigue, concentration disorders, mobility limitations, mood swings and fear of relapse all affect the ability to perform professional duties. Combined with the pressure to return to their former professional role, women often experience severe tension: they want to

regain normality, but at the same time they do not have the resources to meet all the demands.

Social and family roles are also an important aspect. The illness not only interrupts the existing rhythm of life, but also changes the dynamics of relationships. A woman who often took on the role of a supported person during treatment is confronted with the expectation that 'she should now return to her former self' after the end of therapy. Those around her – partners, children, family – often expect that recovery automatically means a return to her former fitness and responsibilities. Meanwhile, recovery, both physical and emotional, takes time and patience. The clash with these expectations causes feelings of guilt that the woman is unable to 'give' as much to her family and work as she would like.

Professional and social fulfilment



Returning to the labour market is further complicated by financial considerations. Some women have to take up employment sooner than they are ready because their illness has undermined their economic stability. The costs of treatment, breaks from work, and additional expenses related to rehabilitation or psychological care mean that the decision to return to work is often not based on readiness, but on necessity. This, in turn, creates a sense of compulsion rather than agency and increases stress.

In social terms, women in remission face a subtle but painful form of exclusion. On the one hand, they are admired for their 'strength and struggle'; on the other, they are treated as less available, less efficient, and potentially at risk of relapse. This creates a vicious circle: women want to return to full

professional life, but they do not receive trust from those around them, and at the same time they struggle with low self-esteem and fear of being judged by others.

A particularly acute area is the clash with the realities of the labour market. Employers often do not offer flexible conditions – remote working, reduced hours or a gradual return to duties. In practice, this means that a woman who is just regaining her strength must immediately meet the full requirements of the job. The lack of such solutions leads to rapid burnout, a renewed deterioration in health and a sense of failure.

Reports by the Polish Oncology Society emphasise that women returning to work after cancer often resign within the first year of completing treatment, precisely because working conditions are not adapted to their needs.

The issue of self-identification is no less important. Cancer redefines the way a woman perceives herself. Her hierarchy of values, priorities and life goals change. What was previously natural – career development, promotions, climbing the career ladder – may seem less important or even burdensome after experiencing illness. Women seek new meanings, more related to quality of life than to achievements. Unfortunately, the labour market does not always provide space for such a search.

The role of the social environment cannot be overlooked either. Stereotypes associated with femininity and health have a huge impact on the self-esteem of women in remission. Social expectations of the 'ideal woman' - mother, partner, employee - become an additional burden. Women who have been ill often hear that they should 'enjoy life' and 'not complain, since they have managed to win'. This attitude invalidates their real difficulties and deprives them of the right to their own emotions. Instead of receiving support, women face pressure to prove that they are just as 'productive' and 'strong' as before.

It is worth noting that returning to social roles also has positive implications. It provides a sense of stability and normality, restoring structure to the day and meaning to activities. However, for this to happen, it is necessary to ensure appropriate conditions – flexible working arrangements, psychological support, education for employers and families, as well as social activities that dispel stereotypes associated with cancer.

Art therapy and other forms of psychosocial support can play an important role here. Creative work allows women to redefine themselves and their capabilities, as well as regain a sense of agency. The creative process helps them see themselves beyond the categories of 'sick' or 'post-treatment', and instead build a narrative around their own resources, talents and passions. This

change in perspective becomes the foundation for re-entering social and professional roles – no longer from a position of fear and deprivation, but with a sense of self-worth and the right to participate fully in life.



In summary, the barriers associated with returning to the labour market and fulfilling social roles are multidimensional. They are both systemic issues – lack of flexibility, employer stereotypes, insufficient institutional support – and personal issues – reduced self-esteem, fatigue, anxiety, change of priorities.

Overcoming these barriers requires comprehensive measures: from labour market policies and social education to individual forms of psychological and art therapy support. Only then will a return to professional and social activity become not a source of additional suffering, but a real opportunity to regain agency, self-esteem and a full life.



Art therapy and social therapy as a path

A voice in the silence – women in remission from cancer and their journey to recovery

When a woman enters remission from cancer, she often feels like an artist standing in front of a canvas on which someone has spilled paint, leaving chaotic, smudged shapes. Her body is changed, her soul is wounded, and her self-image is shattered like a mirror – into thousands of pieces. Remission is not only a medical state of recovery, but a process of deep, intimate self-recreation. It is a time when you have to slowly gather all the pieces and arrange them into a mosaic that will never be the same as before – but can be beautiful in its own unique way.

This stage often brings silence, during which a woman begins to face questions that are more difficult than those she faced during treatment. As the body regains its strength, the soul begins to speak. Remission, called victory, can be a moment when fear arises: 'Who am I now?', 'How am I supposed to live with this body that has changed so much?', 'Will others see anything more in me than scars?'

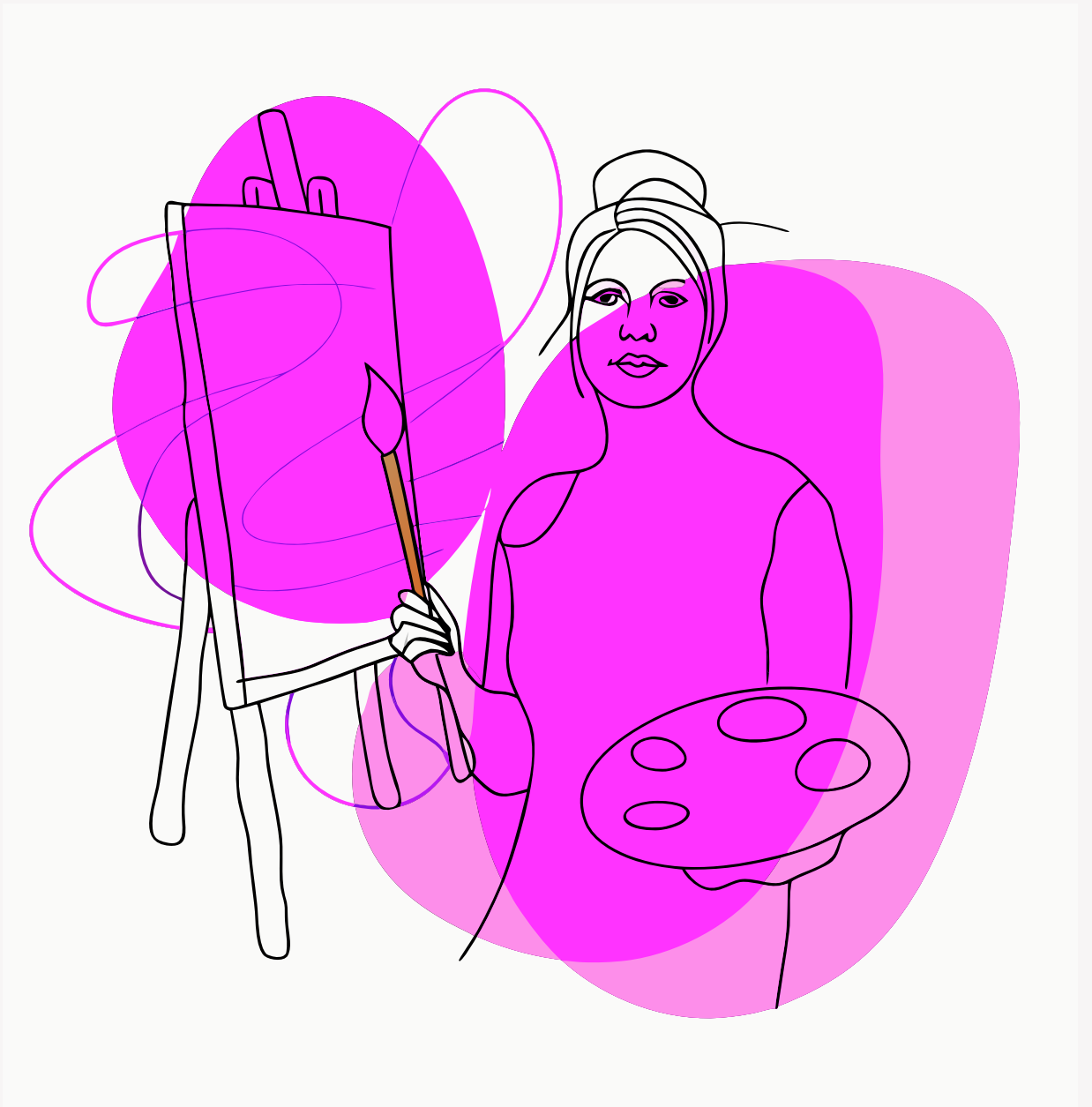
Scars, loss of breasts, hair loss, changes in body shape – these are not just traces of illness, but signs that still hurt when she looks in the mirror and in the eyes of others. The body that saved her life paradoxically becomes a source of alienation. The woman feels that she has distanced herself from her own physicality and, as a result, from the surrounding world.

Research and experience show that it is during remission that low self-esteem and feelings of exclusion most often appear. Treatment focuses on check-ups and tests, while the psyche is left in the shadows. There is no space to talk about shame, loss or loneliness. Women who have 'beaten cancer' often feel left to their own devices – without psychological support, without a guide to help them transition from a body that has

been fighting to a body that is living again. It is increasingly emphasised that the period of remission is a 'second battle' – no longer with the disease, but with self-esteem, relationships, and the attempt to rebuild everyday life and identity.

In this space of uncertainty, however, something emerges that has the power to change things – the art of creation. Art therapy gives women a tool to start telling their story differently: through images, colours and symbols. It is a way to touch the inexpressible. And to find a form for it. A woman who sits down in front of a blank sheet of paper does not have to start with words – she starts with colour, shape, an intuitive gesture. Each such gesture is a return to oneself, a delicate stitching together of torn pieces.

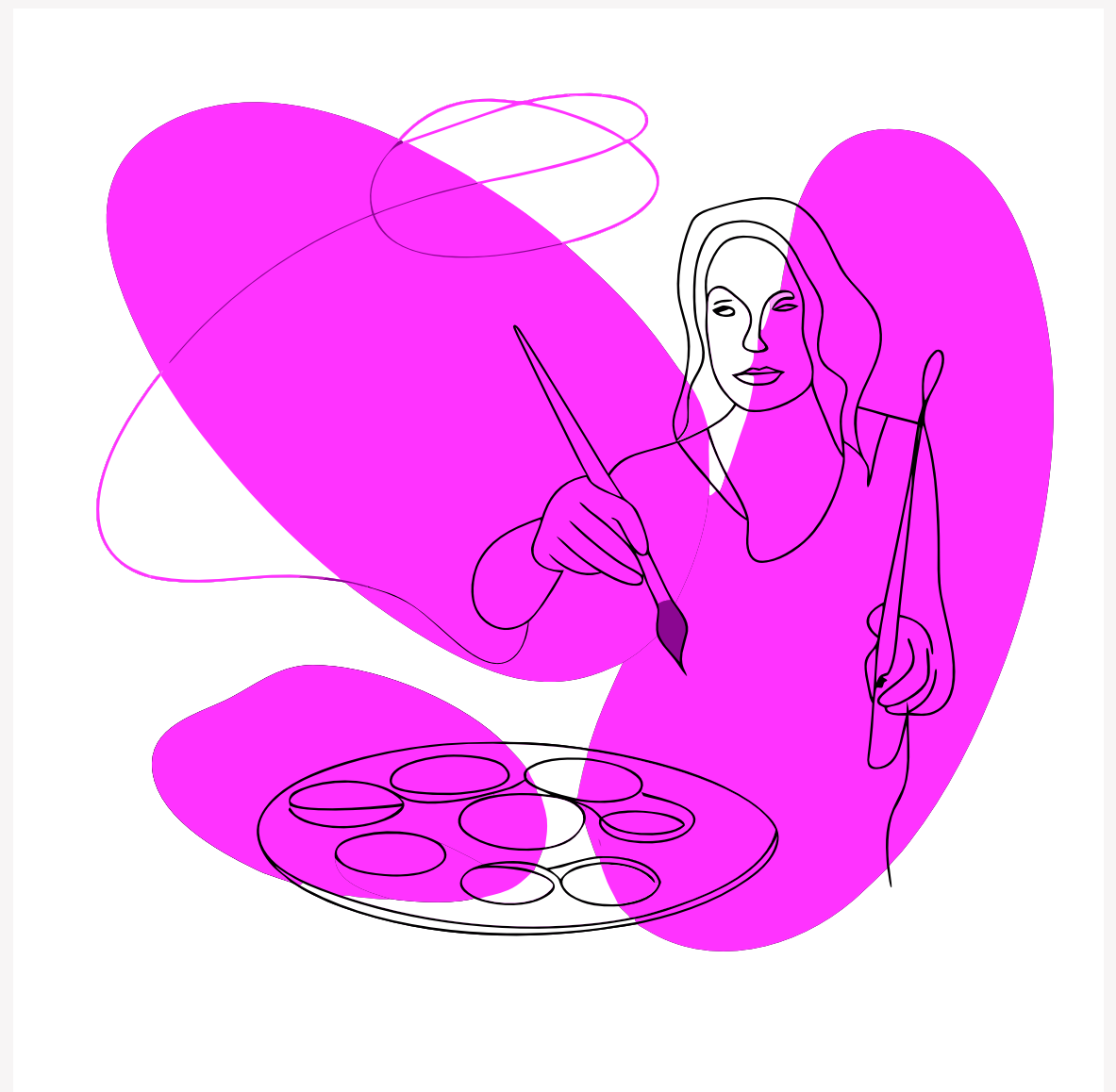
Recent studies confirm what we see in our workshops: art therapy reduces anxiety and depression, improves quality of life, and allows people to feel empowered where before they felt helpless. It is not an addition to treatment, but the foundation of recovery. However, creativity does not work in a vacuum. A community is needed – another person who will look, listen, name things or simply be present. This is why social therapy is so important – weaving the scattered threads of women's experiences into a network that carries and provides support. A meeting in a group where everyone carries their own story and at the same time sees that they are not alone in it has enormous power. Women learn that there is also strength in their scars, that their different bodies do not have to be a source of shame, but can become a testimony of courage.



Remission does not mean a return to the 'old self' – it is a process of giving birth to a new identity. It is a moment when a woman, though still wounded, reaches for a brush, a word, the touch of another hand, and slowly begins to paint a picture. A picture that is not a copy of the past, but a new, living form of herself. This process does not happen overnight. It is a journey that requires patience, support and tenderness. However, every moment in which a woman allows herself a creative gesture, a conscious breath, to be present in a group, is a step towards feeling once again: 'I am whole'.

And that is precisely what this handbook is for. It will not be a dry analysis of barriers and difficulties. It will be a guide in the process of creative self-reconstruction. It will be a place where the voice of silence

becomes audible. It will be an invitation to look at yourself not through the prism of illness, but through the prism of creation - because every woman who goes through remission is also an artist who paints her life anew.



Art therapy – the art of rediscovering oneself



Art therapy – the art of rediscovering oneself

Art therapy is an encounter with art, but even more so, it is an encounter with oneself. In the context of cancer remission, it becomes not only a therapeutic method, but also a way to re-inhabit one's own body, to tame pain and regain the feeling that life has not stopped, but can blossom anew. For many women who feel alienated from their bodies after treatment, art becomes a language they did not know before, but which suddenly turns out to be the most natural and safe.

It is in the creative process that one can touch upon the unspeakable. Words can be too harsh, too definitive. In conversation, it is easy to come up against a wall - 'How can I say that I am afraid of my reflection?', 'How

can I express that my scar screams louder than I do?'. Then a piece of paper, canvas, crayon or paint becomes a bridge. A drawn line, even if chaotic, is the beginning of a story. A cut-out fragment of a newspaper, pasted into a collage, becomes a sign - there is no need to explain what it means, because its very placement already says: 'This is inside me.'

Women in remission often describe their first art therapy experiences as a moment of relief. They feel: 'Finally, I don't have to pretend that everything is fine.' In art therapy, there are no aesthetic expectations, no judgement. All that matters is that I can create something and that what I create is a reflection of my inner self.

Art therapy in the context of oncology also has a special symbolic dimension. When a woman who has undergone a mastectomy paints her body, even just the outline, and allows herself to add flowers, colours and light to it, she is performing an act of creative rewriting of her trauma. The body, which was associated exclusively with pain, suddenly becomes a canvas capable of receiving beauty.

Such an experience does not remove the pain, but creates a new narrative: 'My body is still mine, and its scars can be part of the art of living, not just a testimony to suffering.' Research conducted in recent years in Europe and the United States emphasises that art therapy reduces anxiety, improves self-esteem and helps build a positive body image in women after cancer. In 2022,

a report was published in which women participating in an art therapy cycle indicated that creativity allowed them to express feelings they were unable to name, and the group process made them realise that their experience was shared and understood by others. In turn, American research from 2023 emphasised the role of creativity as a 'safe space for expression' – a place where one can be authentic without fear of judgement. But beyond the scientific data, there is something else – something that can only be felt during the workshops. It is the moment when a woman dares to use intense red for the first time, even though she previously avoided bold colours because they were 'too loud'. It is the moment when the participants of the group pause over a collage and suddenly see in it not sadness, but strength, which the author herself has not yet noticed.

Art therapy also allows you to regain agency. A woman who has undergone medical procedures for many months, whose body has been in the hands of doctors, nurses and technicians, suddenly finds herself holding a paintbrush. She decides what colour to choose, where to put a line, what to stick on, what to discard. This simple gesture is of great significance – it symbolises a return to being a subject, not just a patient. It is an act of freedom, even if it takes place on a small piece of paper.

Creative rituals also play a special role in working with women who have had cancer. Sometimes, during workshops, women paint a collective picture, on which each leaves her mark. On the surface, it is just an artistic exercise, but in practice, it is a profound symbol of community. Scars, experiences,

joys and fears intertwine into a single composition that shows that none of them are alone. This experience of being part of a larger whole acts as an antidote to isolation and feelings of exclusion.

It is worth remembering that art therapy is not a drawing lesson or an attempt to create 'pretty' pictures.

It is a journey through chaos, ugliness, imperfection - everything that is real. Beauty appears not in the aesthetics of the work, but in the act of courage to reach for a pencil or paint despite fear. In this sense, each work becomes priceless because it is a testimony to an inner journey.

Art therapy during remission from cancer is therefore not an add-on or a 'nice activity'. It is a real and profound form of healing for the soul whose body has experienced illness. It gives women the opportunity to look at themselves from a new perspective, find a language for unspoken emotions and regain the feeling that they are still the creators of their own lives. Every line, every colour, every piece of collage becomes a building block in the reconstruction of their own identity.

It can be said that art therapy is the art of regaining oneself - step by step, image by image, word by word, until a woman feels that she is no longer just a survivor of illness, but a complete, beautiful, creative being who has the right to a new life.

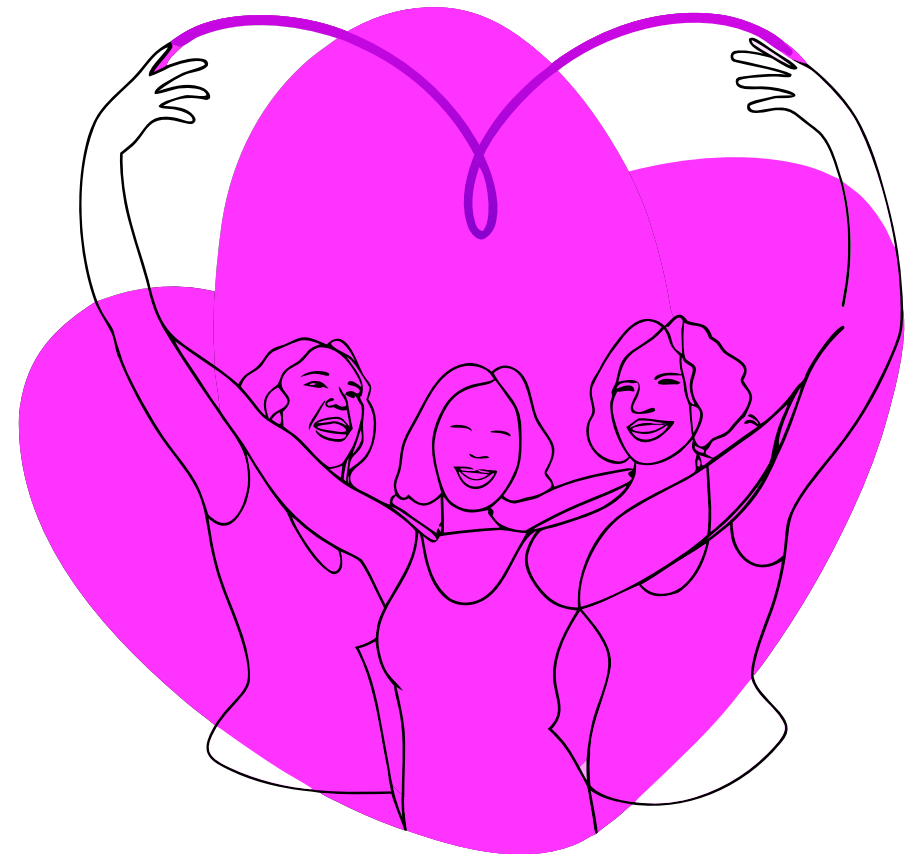


Social therapy – a community that heals

If art therapy opens the door to encountering oneself, then sociotherapy is the path to encountering others. Both approaches are inseparable – just as breathing requires inhalation and exhalation, so a woman in the process of healing needs both intimate work with her inner self and the experience of being part of a community. After cancer, loneliness can be one of the most painful experiences. Sociotherapy responds to this pain by offering a space where trust, a sense of belonging and strength from the group can grow.

When a woman finishes treatment, she is often left with a feeling of emptiness. Before, every day had its own rhythm – doctor's

appointments, tests, treatments. There was an intense presence of others: family, medical staff, friends who kept their fingers crossed and repeated 'you can do it'. And then suddenly there is silence. The world returns to its normal course, and she is left alone with her new body, new thoughts, new fears. And that is when social therapy becomes the answer to the need for community, which does not need to be explained or proven.



Social therapy meetings create a space where women do not have to pretend to be strong. They do not have to play the role of 'the one who won', they do not have to answer awkward questions from friends who want to comfort them but do not understand. Here, she can be who she is – with her fatigue, her silence, her sense of loss and her hope. The group becomes a mirror that reflects not only her own struggles, but also the similar experiences of others. In this mirror, she can see for the first time that 'it's not just me', that other women feel the same way.

Psychological and sociotherapeutic research shows that feelings of isolation are one of the main factors reducing the well-being of women in remission. A report published in 2023 in the United States emphasised that participation in support groups and

sociotherapeutic processes significantly reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as improving social and relational functioning. This confirms what practitioners have known for a long time – that people heal through relationships, and that the experience of community can restore hope where individual therapy only goes so far.

Social therapy has another dimension that is particularly important for women after illness – it is a space for relearning how to be in a relationship. Cancer often disrupts bonds – some loved ones withdraw out of fear, others do not know how to talk, and partnerships are put to the test.

A woman who returns to life after treatment may feel misunderstood or even rejected. In a sociotherapy group, she has the opportunity to try out new ways of communicating, to open up step by step, without fear of being judged. It is a kind of relationship laboratory – a safe place where she can experiment with closeness, distance and boundaries.

Workshop practice shows that extraordinary moments happen when one woman shares something very intimate – for example, her fear that her partner no longer looks at her as he used to – and the rest of the group responds with understanding silence or with the words, 'I feel the same way.' This "me too" acts like a plaster that does not remove the wound, but makes it less lonely. Over time, this experience of community translates

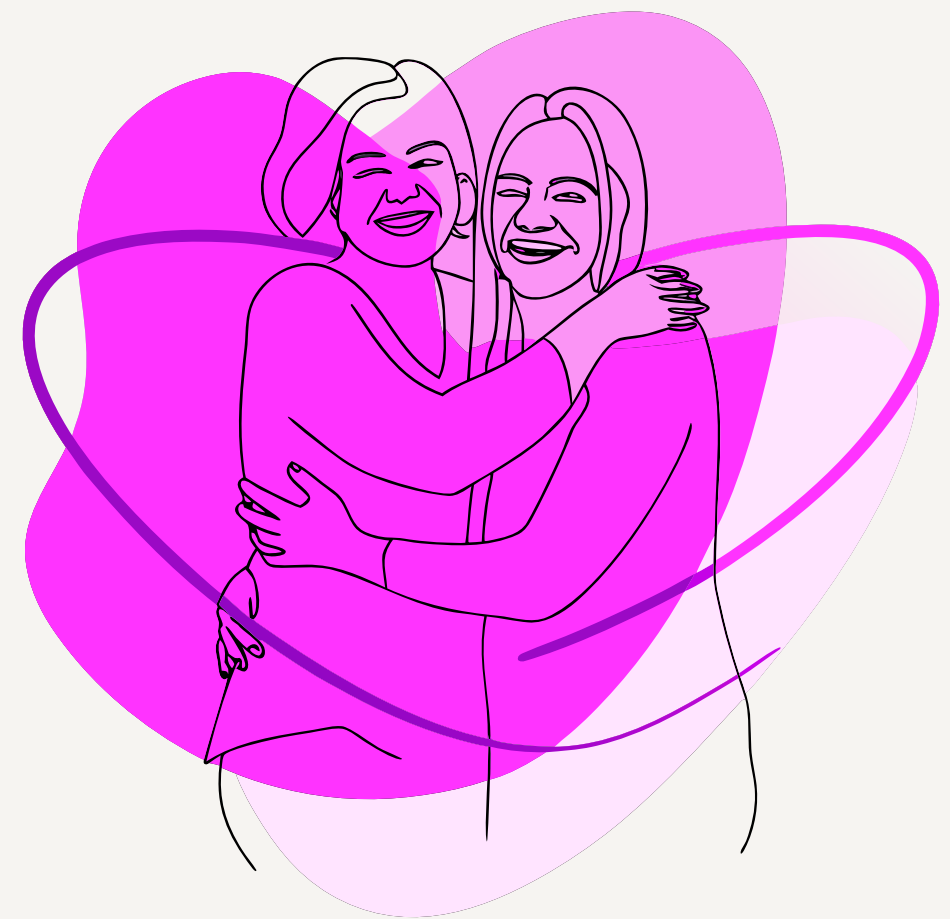
into greater courage in relationships outside the group – in the family, among friends, at work.

However, social therapy is not just about sharing pain. It is also a space for discovering joy and celebrating small steps together. Women often say that it was only in the group that they dared to say out loud for the first time: 'I am proud of myself', 'I feel beautiful', 'I have dreams again'. And they were accepted for these words, not ridiculed or dismissed. A new experience of femininity is born in the group - not understood as appearance or a perfect body, but as strength, sensitivity, and the ability to support others.

It is worth noting that sociotherapy, like art therapy, also works symbolically. The group becomes a shared image in which each woman is part of a larger whole. Together, they form a fabric in which holes and gaps can be stitched together with the thread of presence. One of the participants once said: 'Here, I feel that my scars are part of the pattern, not a defect.' This sentence captures the essence of sociotherapy well – the point is that scars are not the end of the story, but part of a new, richer picture of life.

In the long term, sociotherapy offers something else – a sense of belonging. Women who participate in such processes often form relationships that last longer than the workshops themselves. They meet privately, support each other in everyday life, and become a new family for each other. It is

a support network that also works when fear or crisis strikes again. And it is precisely this feeling that I am not alone, that I have someone to call, that someone understands my silence – that becomes one of the most important elements of returning to life.



Social therapy is not a theory. It is a living experience that arises between people.

In the context of cancer remission, it is like a shared song – sometimes quiet and full of sadness, sometimes loud and joyful – but always sung together. A woman who enters the group with her head down gradually begins to speak louder, laugh more often, and her eyes light up. This is proof that community has a power that no individual path can replace.

So you could say that social therapy is the art of regaining bonds – those with others, but also the most important bond: with oneself. Because when I see that others accept me as I am, it is easier for me to accept myself. And this is the foundation on which you can build

your life after illness – not the same as before, but full, true and rooted in relationships.

A deeper dimension of healing - how art therapy and sociotherapy shape a new identity after illness

When we talk about returning to life after cancer, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that 'time' is all that is needed – that the body will regenerate, hair will grow back, and the psyche will heal itself. However, women who go through this process know very well that it is not that simple. Time does not always heal. Sometimes it only deepens loneliness if it is not filled with meaningful activity. And this is where two extraordinary tools come into play – art therapy and sociotherapy.

Social therapy - a community that heals



You could say it's a perfect match. Art therapy – intimate, quiet, full of colour and symbols – opens up a space for women to encounter themselves. Sociotherapy – communal, pulsating with the energy of the group – teaches us anew how to be with others. One without the other is incomplete. Because if we stop at art alone, we can get stuck in the loneliness of our own images. And if we go exclusively towards the group, without contact with our own inner selves, it is easy to lose authenticity. Only the combination of these two currents creates a complete, healing path.

Art therapy is a language of symbols. A woman who looks in the mirror after chemotherapy and does not recognise her own face may not have the words to describe this experience. But she can reach for crayons

and paint herself as a tree with broken branches, or as a bird without wings. She can cut out fragments from colourful magazines that resonate with her emotions and arrange them into a collage – a visual story of what she feels. It is art that does not judge, does not require 'talent', does not set the bar.

In art therapy, every brushstroke is important because it is authentic. It is a tool that helps you look deep inside yourself without the need for verbalisation, which can be difficult or impossible.

Social therapy, on the other hand, gives that voice an echo. Because what's the point of drawing my tree if I hide it in a drawer? What's the point of making a collage if no one sees it? Of course, the act of creating has value in itself. But real healing often begins when I can safely share my image with others. That's when the magic happens. A woman shows her work and says, 'This is how I feel.' And someone next to her replies, 'Your tree resembles mine. I also have broken branches.' And suddenly, loneliness is no longer absolute. This synergy works both ways. Sometimes a woman in the group listens to another participant's story and feels a stirring that cannot be put into words. She then returns to her piece of paper and begins to draw. This is how a dialogue between individual and communal experience is born. Art therapy feeds sociotherapy, and

sociotherapy opens up new paths in art therapy. It's like a dance, where sometimes the body leads the steps and sometimes the partner does, but together they create the rhythm. An important element of this path is also overcoming shame. Women who have had cancer are often ashamed of their bodies – scars, asymmetry, missing breasts, or visible effects of therapy. In art therapy, they can translate this shame into an image – create a mask that hides and at the same time tells the truth, or a sculpture that reflects the burden. But it is only in social therapy, in contact with the group, that they learn that this shame does not have to be a lonely island. They hear: 'I see you. You are no less beautiful. Your scars are a testament to your courage.' What was a source of suffering in solitude becomes a sign of shared experience in the group.

The spiritual dimension of this process cannot be overlooked either. Cancer often undermines faith – in oneself, in one's body, in the meaning of life. Art therapy allows us to touch this dimension through symbols – a woman paints light that breaks through the darkness, or creates her own protective amulet. But it is only through shared group rituals – lighting candles, creating mandalas together, singing together – that this dimension of spiritual community is achieved. Then something more than the sum of the individuals emerges – an energy that lifts the whole group. I know from experience that extraordinary things happen at the intersection of these two spaces. In one of the workshops, the women created personal collages called 'maps of strength'. Each woman cut out images and words that she associated with power. When the collages

were laid out side by side on a large table, it turned out that they formed a common landscape – full of mountains, suns, hearts and roads. One of the participants said: 'My strength only makes sense when I see it next to yours.' This sentence sums up the essence of combining art therapy and social therapy – an individual experience takes on a new quality in a group, and the group strengthens the individual's path. This dual path also has practical significance. Art therapy teaches self-regulation – a woman can turn to art at home when she feels anxiety or tension. She can take paints, crayons, clay and give vent to her emotions. Social therapy, on the other hand, builds a support network to which she can return – a group of women who understand without explanation, who will answer the phone at night, who will write a message when she is having a difficult day.

The path to regaining oneself



Importantly, art therapy and sociotherapy also teach a new perspective on the body and relationships. Creating a self-portrait or collage about femininity opens up space for group discussion about what it means to 'be a woman' after illness. Is femininity about hair? Breasts? Or perhaps the ability to give birth? Can you be a complete woman with scars, asymmetry, a body that looks different? The answers vary within the group, but the shared experience leads to one thing - a redefinition of femininity as something deeper, rooted in courage, tenderness and strength.

There is no denying that combining these two paths requires attentiveness and sensitivity on the part of the guides. These are not 'technical' methods. They are processes that touch the most sensitive chords. But when they are conducted with heart, they can bring

something extraordinary – not just temporary relief, but real transformation. A woman who yesterday was afraid to look at her body, today paints it as a river full of life. A woman who yesterday was silent in the group, today says, 'Thank you for seeing me.'

Art therapy and sociotherapy together create a path of return that is not a straight line, but rather a spiral. We return to similar themes – the body, loss, fear – but each time from a different level. Through art, we delve deeper into ourselves, and through the group, we bring this experience out into the open and confront it with others. Together, they create a rhythm of inhalation and exhalation – of intimacy and community – which leads to balance.

You could say that it is a path to fully regaining oneself. Because a woman after illness is not just a body that has undergone surgery and therapy. It is also emotions that need to be expressed. It is relationships that need to be rebuilt. It is spirituality that demands meaning. Art therapy and sociotherapy together touch on all these dimensions – the body, the psyche, relationships and the spirit. And that is why they are so effective.

At the end of this road, there is no ideal image – it is not about a woman looking like she did ‘before the illness’ again. It is about her being able to look in the mirror and say: ‘This is me – with my scars, with my strength, with my history. And I accept myself.’ And next to her are other women who repeat: ‘Us too.’

This is the healing power of art therapy and sociotherapy – two wings that lift you up together.



A new story – art as a path to self-discovery

The handbook you hold in your hands is not just a collection of exercises or theories. It is a guide to the path that many women in remission from cancer can take to rediscover themselves. Here you will find not only an analysis of the main barriers and challenges, but also specific therapeutic tools to help you work through difficult emotions and rebuild your self-esteem.

The aim of this book is not only to describe the problems, but above all to find means of expression that will allow women in remission from cancer to move from a state of internal freeze to a process of creative transformation. Art and interpersonal relationships are two keys that can open the door to a new story –

a story not about illness, but about strength, hope and beauty.

Because every woman - regardless of how her body has changed - deserves to feel complete, strong and beautiful.

Part 1 –
worksheets for
women in
remission from
cancer

Part developed by the
Portuguese partner



A dress that doesn't fit like it used to

A woman stands in front of her wardrobe. The doors open slowly, as if they were carrying the weight of all the past months, years and experiences. Inside hangs a dress – her favourite one. The one she wore to important meetings, family celebrations, evenings full of laughter and dancing. The fabric feels soft in her hands, its familiar scent reminding her of times gone by. This is no ordinary fabric – it is a fragment of the past, a piece of her former self, enchanted in the seams and colours. She puts it on. The fabric falls over her shoulders, slides down her body, stops at her waist. And then the mirror appears – a reflection that brings hesitation instead of joy. The dress no longer fits as it used to. The folds are different, her shoulders seem

heavier, her silhouette unfamiliar. The mirror does not lie – it shows a body that has been through a battle.

This is the moment when a buzz creeps into the heart – a mixture of sadness, surprise, sometimes anger. Because it was supposed to be different. Remission – the word sounded like salvation, like a gateway to “normality”. And yet what she sees reminds her that nothing is the same anymore. But it's not just the body. It's also the soul. The scars on the skin are visible, but the scars inside are even deeper. They make putting on a dress an act of courage. Because right now, it's not just about clothes – it's about meeting yourself. A new self that has both the strength to survive and the fragility of a child who is just learning to walk on new ground.

This scene could take place in a thousand homes. In Warsaw, in a small village in Podlasie, in a flat in a housing estate, in a house smelling of dinner and silence. Every woman who has had cancer knows moments like this – when everyday life suddenly reveals what she would rather forget. When a simple activity, such as choosing a dress, turns into an encounter with her own fragility.

Remission does not mean a return to what was. It is the beginning of a new stage in which the body and soul learn about each other anew. It is a stage of uncertainty – because no one gives you a map. No one tells you how to deal with your reflection in the mirror, with questions from loved ones, with your own sense of loss. On the one hand, there is gratitude for being alive. On

the other, there is the feeling that you will never be the same person again.

And this is where the story about the need for support begins. About the fact that a woman in remission needs more than just doctor's appointments and check-ups. She needs a space where she can be seen not through the prism of her illness, but as a whole – with her pain, fear, hope, and dream of wearing a dress again and feeling beautiful.

This is a story about the art of recreating oneself. Just as an artist picks up a brush and begins to paint on a blank canvas, a woman in remission faces a new life. Not by choice, but rather out of necessity. And yet, it is precisely this necessity that can become a source of extraordinary strength and creativity.

Art therapy and social therapy, which this book leads to, are like tools in your hand. Not to cover up what is difficult, but to give it form. So that the chaos of blurred colours turns into a picture that you can love. So that a broken mirror does not hurt, but shows a new face – perhaps less perfect, but more real.

That is why this dress, which no longer fits as it used to, is not just a symbol of loss. It is also a symbol of a beginning. The beginning of a journey in which a woman discovers that beauty is not hidden in symmetry, proportions or former form. Beauty is born of authenticity. From the courage to look in the mirror and say, 'Yes, I have changed. But I am still here. I can still live, feel, love, create.'

This introduction is an invitation. An invitation to a shared journey through stories, experiences, worksheets and exercises that will help women in remission find their own language to tell their stories. It is an invitation to create – not alone, but in community. Because when women meet, share their stories and learn from each other, then the dress – even if it hangs differently – becomes a sign of life.

Because life after illness is not a return to 'what was'. It is a discovery that you can move on - in a new dress, in a new body, with a new soul. And that this image, although different from the original, is still beautiful.

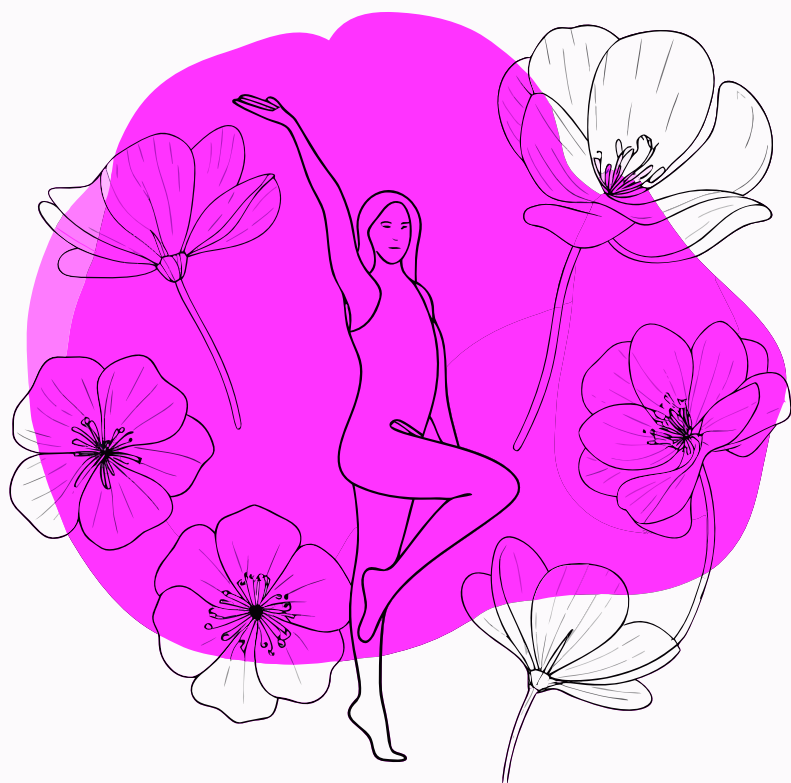
Breath yoga – the art of conscious breathing

Breathing is the simplest and at the same time the most profound tool we always have with us. It can soothe, energise, clear emotions and even help us regain our sense of strength.

When we are ill or going through difficult experiences, our breathing often becomes short, shallow and restless. Our body and emotions hold tension.

That is why today we will pause and give space only to our breath.

We will learn to listen to it, observe it and guide it so that it supports us in returning to balance.



Preparing for practice

- Find a comfortable place – it can be a mat, chair or armchair
- Make sure you have soft lighting, silence or calm music
- Place a blanket next to you – if you feel cold, you can wrap yourself in it
- Have a piece of paper and a pen with you – you can write down your reflections later

Part I – Encounter with the breath

1. Observing the breath

Sit or lie down comfortably

- Close your eyes and simply notice: how are you breathing?
- Do not correct or judge – just observe the rhythm

- Question: What did I notice? Is my breathing calm or rather shallow and nervous?

2. Wavy breathing

- Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
- Breathe in so that the hand on your stomach moves.
- Imagine a wave – inhaling is the tide coming in, exhaling is the tide going out.

Practise for 2–3 minutes, allowing your body to relax with each exhalation.

Part II – Transformative Breathing

1. Purifying Breath

- Take a deep breath through your nose.
- Hold your breath for a moment.
- Exhale through your mouth as if you were sighing with relief.
- Imagine that the exhalation takes away your fatigue and tension.
- Repeat 5 times.

2. Affirmation breathing

- With each inhale, think: 'I accept strength, light, life'
- With each exhale: 'I give up what does not serve me'
- These short sentences can be your daily mantra.

4-4-4 breathing

- inhale through your nose: counting to 4
 - hold your breath: counting to 4
 - exhale through your mouth: counting to 4
- This rhythm brings balance to your body and mind.

Part III – Heartbeat

- Place both hands on your heart. Breathe calmly, feeling your life beneath your hands.
- You can repeat in your mind:
- 'My heart is beating. It is a sign that I am alive.'
- 'I have the right to feel, breathe, and be myself.'
- 'My breath leads me to peace.'

Questions for reflection

 How did my body change after 15 minutes of conscious breathing?

 What did I notice in my heart and thoughts?

 Which way of breathing was most natural for me, and which was more difficult?

 How can I use my breath in moments of anxiety or fatigue?

Final exercise

- Write down one word on a piece of paper that emerged from your breathing today.
- It can be something simple: 'calm', 'life', "strength", 'courage'.
- Put the piece of paper in your notebook or wallet so that you can return to it at any time.

Important

- Breathing is not a competition – it is not about being 'the longest' or 'the deepest'.
- Every breath is good. Even if you sometimes find it difficult, observation alone is healing.
- You can repeat this exercise at any time of the day: in the morning to wake up, or in the evening to fall asleep more peacefully.

Music to support the practice

Music should not distract you, but rather be a soft, calm background that supports your focus on your breath.

Tips for leaders:

- Tempo: preferably slow, 50–70 beats per minute (at a calm heart rate).
- Character: instrumental music, without sudden changes in tempo. Avoid sharp sounds and strong beats.

- Tone: piano, harp, flute, and gently played violin sounds work well, as does ambient music.

Inspiration:

 'relaxation' recordings (e.g., nature sounds: waves, forest, wind)

 meditative or instrumental music in major keys, giving a sense of clarity

 instrumental mantras (without words, so as not to distract)

 recordings specially created for yoga or mindfulness practice

Sample suggestions:

- ocean sounds + soft ambient music
- 'calm piano' – slow piano pieces
- 'healing sounds' – Tibetan bowls or gongs (short, in the background)
- playlists such as 'Deep Breath' and 'Meditative Yoga' available on streaming platforms

Tip:

If the group is sensitive to music, it is better to choose nature recordings rather than melodies – waves, birds and wind often bring more calm and are less associated with 'exercise' and more with being in a space of tranquillity.

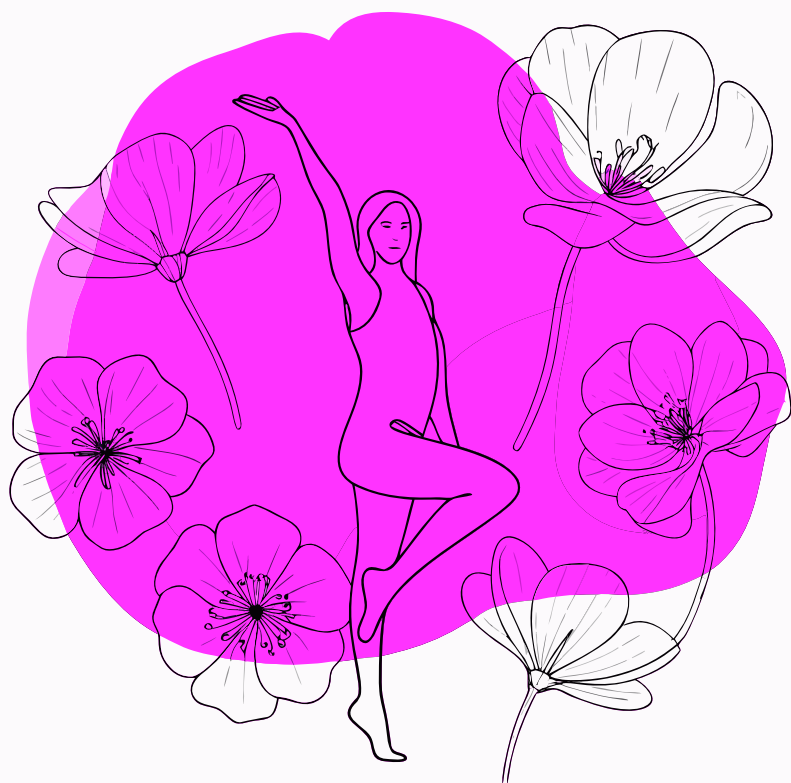


Personal collage – creating a visual story

Each of us carries our own story – with difficult and beautiful moments, with experiences that have shaped our view of the world and ourselves.

Sometimes it is difficult to put this into words. That is why today we will use images, colours and symbols to create a personal collage – a visual story about you.

It does not have to be a work of art. It is your map that will allow you to pause for a moment and see yourself in a new light.



Part 1. Preparing the space and materials

Prepare:

- a large sheet of paper, Bristol board or a sheet from a drawing pad,
- old magazines, newspapers, brochures, printouts, coloured paper,
- scissors, glue, optionally crayons, markers, pieces of fabric, ribbons, buttons, elements of nature (leaves, flowers, pieces of bark),
- a quiet place where you can concentrate and breathe freely.

Before you begin, place your hands on the paper and think:

'This is my story. No one can tell it better than me.'

Part 2. Choosing images – intuitive selection

Browse through the visual materials slowly. Don't look for perfect photos. Let the images 'speak' to you.

Pay attention to what moves you – colours, faces, fragments of nature, words.

Do not wonder why you are choosing a particular element. Intuition knows more than reason.

 Write down a few associations that came to mind while browsing through the images:

Part 3. Careful composition of the collage

Spread all the cut-out pieces out in front of you. Look at them before you stick them down.

Notice how they form a certain rhythm – perhaps a path, perhaps a circle, perhaps a centre and rays around it.

Do not strive for symmetry – let the form reflect your inner state.

Each element can have symbolic meaning:

- **Colours** – warm colours can signify hope, cool colours – calm or melancholy.
- **Characters** – they can represent you at different stages of your life.
- **Words** – they can become your manifesto or prayer.

 Stop for a moment and write down: what do I want my collage to “say” to the world or to myself?

Part 4. Creation – a visual story

Now stick on the selected elements – gently, carefully, with your breath.

Take your time.

Feel that each layer, each fragment is part of your story, even the difficult ones.

If you want, you can add something by hand: a word, a sentence, a date, a symbol.

You can also leave empty spaces – they also have meaning. Sometimes silence speaks louder than words.

 What emotions arose during the creation process?

Part 5. Reflecting on the story

When the work is complete, take a step back and look at it from a distance.

Do not analyse – just look.

Notice:

- which parts catch your eye,
- which colours dominate,
- what is in the centre and what is on the edges,
- whether you see yourself 'before' the illness or rather the one who is 'here and now'.

Each image in your collage is a metaphor – sometimes of hope, sometimes of change, sometimes of a strength that cannot be seen but can be felt in the heart.

 Describe in a few sentences how you understand your collage:

Part 6. The present and the future

On the right-hand side of your work, you can add elements that symbolise the future – dreams, desires, little things that bring you joy.

Let them be images of lightness: a flower, the sky, a smile, a ray of sunshine, hands holding each other.

Consider:

- What do I want to appear in my everyday life?
- How can I take care of myself when I feel fear again?
- What colours would I like to invite into my life?

 Write down one sentence that will become your message from this work:

Part 7. A gesture of gratitude

When you feel that your work is complete, place your hands on it.

Close your eyes and say in your mind:

'Thank you for all my colours - the light ones and the dark ones. Each of them makes me who I am.'

You can hang the collage in a visible place, put it in a folder, or give it away symbolically – for example, by burning a copy and keeping only the memory.

Let its meaning remain with you as a reminder that every story has a sequel.

Part 8. Emotional reflection

Ask yourself the following questions:

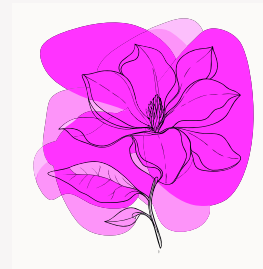
- What have I discovered about myself through this work?
- Did I feel relief, gratitude, sadness, peace?
- Is the story I saw different from the one I told earlier in words?



Space for reflection:

Guidelines for independent practice

- You can create collages regularly – for example, once a month – to observe how your emotional map changes.
- Do not compare your work with others – each one is unique.
- You can create miniature themed collages: 'my strength', 'my body', 'my dreams', 'my gratitude'.
- Play music that soothes you – this will help deepen your state of mindfulness.
- Pause in moments of silence – this is where the most meaning is often found.



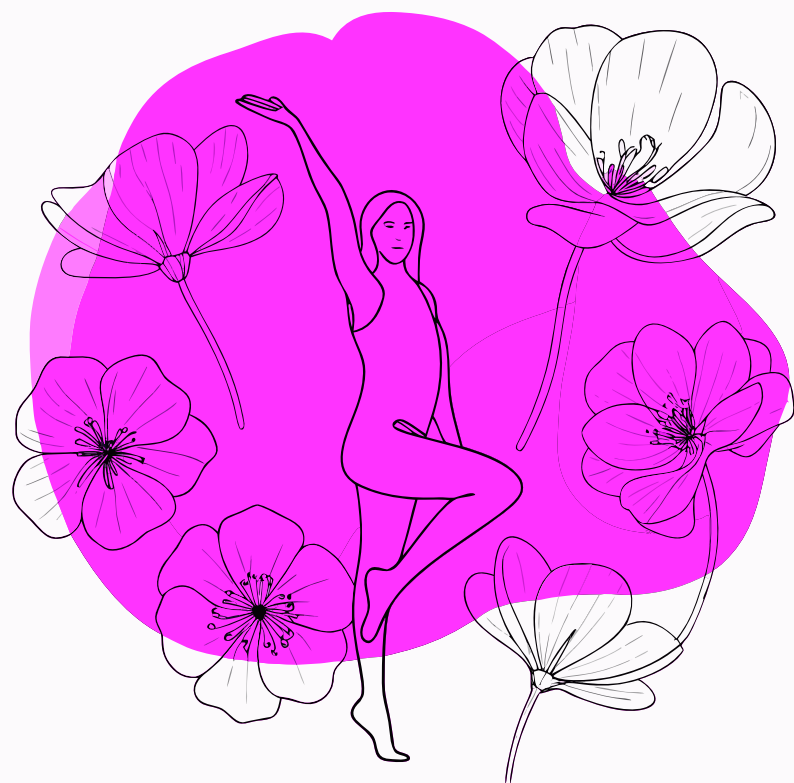
A final word

'Every image you create is an encounter with a part of yourself that is still waiting to be noticed.'

Personal notes

Mindfulness yoga

– the practice of mindfulness in motion



During illness, the body and mind often function in a state of tension. Many women experience anxiety, insomnia, loss of energy or difficulty accepting their own bodies after treatment.

Mindfulness yoga is not a sport or a competition. It is a way of being with your body – as it is today. Perform each movement slowly, without rushing and without forcing yourself. If you need to, rest, sit or lie down.

Remember: it is not the body that has to adjust to the position – the position has to adjust to the body.

Part 1. Grounding

Objective: to restore contact with the present moment.

- Sit or lie down comfortably.
- Focus your attention on your breathing – do not change it. Just observe how the air flows in and out of your body.
- Feel the points of contact: your feet on the floor, your hands on your knees or the surface below you.
- Notice how your body moves with each breath – your chest rises and falls.

 Write down in one sentence what you feel in your body after a few moments of mindful breathing:

Part 2. Mindful movement

Objective: to release tension and strengthen gentle body awareness.

Choose a few simple poses (asanas) that are safe for you:

- Cat-Cow (Marjaryasana–Bitilasana) — warm up your spine, synchronise your movement with your breath.
- Seated Twist — inhale: lengthen your spine, exhale: twist gently, only as far as you feel comfortable.
- Child's pose (Balasana) – a symbol of rest and trust.
- Mountain pose (Tadasana) – stand with your eyes closed, feel the stability and breath throughout your body.

 *Pay attention to the thoughts and emotions that arise during the movement. Do not judge them.*

Part 3. Mindful breathing

Objective: to release emotional tension.

Place your hands on your abdomen. Observe the movement of your hands with each inhale and exhale.

- Do not try to control your breathing – just be with it.
- With each inhale, think: 'I breathe in calmness', with each exhale: 'I release tension'.

 *What word best describes your state after this exercise?*

Part 4. Final reflection

After completing the practice, ask yourself the following questions:

- What needed my attention the most today – my body, my emotions, or my breath?
- When did I notice calmness or relief?
- How can I incorporate at least a few minutes of this practice into my day?

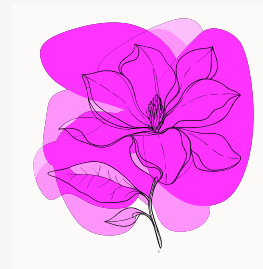
 *My intention for today:*

Guidelines for daily practice

- You don't have to practise for long — regularity is more important.
- You can practise sitting, standing or even lying down.
- Pay attention to your breathing in everyday activities too — washing dishes, walking, getting dressed.
- Instead of 'I must practise', say to yourself: ,I want to be closer to myself'.

Personal notes

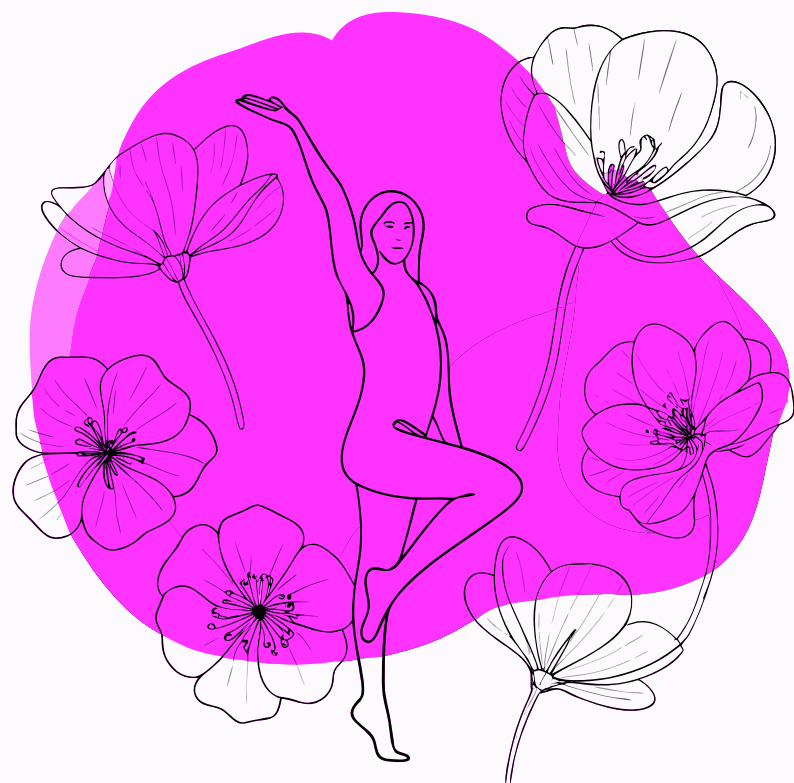
A place for your notes, emotions, and impressions after the practice:



A final word

'The body remembers every moment when you allowed it to simply be.'

Sensory art therapy – fine motor skills for the hands



Hands remember more than we think. We use them to touch the world, hold our loved ones in our arms, drive a car, stroke a child, mix dough, write letters. Hands are our tools for action, but also carriers of emotions. When cancer and treatment take away their dexterity, sensation or strength, a woman loses more than just physical ability – she loses contact with everyday life, with gestures, with a sense of agency.

The worksheet was created to restore the hands to their former – or new – significance. Through sensory and motor activities, we learn to feel, strengthen and love our hands again. It is an art therapy process in which movement, touch and creativity come together in a safe, gentle space.

Part 1. Preparing the space

Find a quiet place where you feel safe.

Prepare:

- a piece of soft fabric or a towel to rest your hands on,
- a container with warm water or a bowl with rice, beans or groats to dip your fingers in,
- natural materials for art work: clay, plasticine, salt dough, wax, pastel crayons, pieces of fabric, sponges or strings.

Before you begin, place your hands on your heart. Breathe calmly and say to yourself in your mind:

'Thank you for allowing me to create.

I don't have to be perfect. It's enough that I am.'

Part 2. Mindful touch

Close your eyes and slowly run your fingers over the prepared materials.

Feel the difference between warm and cool, soft and rough, smooth and coarse.

Notice which textures bring you pleasure and which cause tension. Do not judge – just observe.

Every texture has its own story. Sometimes it is a memory of home, sometimes a feeling of security, sometimes an unknown impulse.

 Write down a few words or sentences describing your tactile impressions:

Part 3. Creating with mindfulness

Choose the material that speaks to you the most today. It could be clay, paper, soft fabric or salt dough that feels warm in your hands.

Let your hands guide you – without a plan. Allow your fingers to knead, roll, press and squeeze.

Do not strive for a specific shape – focus on the rhythm of the movement.

This is your moment of conversation with your body.

If you want, you can give the form a symbolic shape – a heart, a spiral, a hand, a leaf. Let it be a gesture of care for yourself.

 *How would you describe the emotions that arose during the creation process?*

Part 4. Painting with touch

Once your hands are warmed up, you can move on to working with colour.

Use pastels, paints or coloured masses. Let the movement of your hands guide you across the paper or canvas.

Do not use a brush – only your fingers.

Notice how the colour reacts to pressure.

How does the mark change when you add water or when you let the colour flow freely?

Don't try to create an image – you are creating a trace of emotion.

 *What colours dominated your work today?
What do they mean to you?*

Part 5. Rest for your hands

After finishing your work, immerse your hands in warm water or wrap them in a soft cloth.

Feel grateful that you were able to create. Gently massage your fingers, wrists and the back of your hands. Pause for a moment in silence.

Say the following words in your mind:

'My hands are strong. My hands can give and receive. They are a part of me that heals.'

 *Write down a short sentence that could become your affirmation:*

Part 6. Emotional reflection

After the class, try to answer a few questions:

- What emotions did I experience while touching, creating, painting?
- Did I feel calm, relieved, surprised, joyful?
- What would my hands like to say today?

 Reflection note:

Part 7. A symbolic gesture of completion

If you feel like it, keep one element of your work – a small piece of clay, a piece of fabric, a piece of paper with a colourful mark on it.

Place it in a visible place as a reminder of a moment of mindfulness and creative power.

Every time you look at it, remind yourself:

'I am present. I create. I feel.'

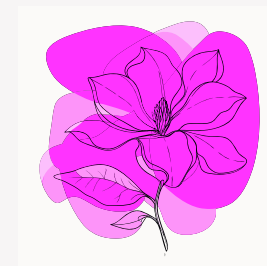
Tips for independent practice

- Do not plan – let your hands decide what to engage in.
- Do not compare your results with others – there are no mistakes in art therapy.
- Try to work with different textures – wood, stone, paper, wax, fabric, clay.
- Regular, short sessions are more valuable than occasional long exercises.

- Pay attention to your breathing – if you feel tension, stop and breathe deeply.

Personal notes

A place to write down your thoughts, impressions and emotions after practice:



A final word

'When hands begin to create, the heart begins to heal.'

Appendix – Hand massage and gestures of affection

Hand massage – 'dialogue with your own body'

 To nie musi być profesjonalny masaż – chodzi o świadomy dotyk, który łączy nas z ciałem i emocjami.

1. Preparation

- Sit comfortably, place your hands on your knees.
- You can use a little natural oil (e.g. almond, coconut, olive oil). If you don't have any, a dry touch will suffice.

2. Massage steps

- Fingertips: gently press each finger in turn – from the thumb to the little finger.
- Palm: massage the centre of your palm with circular movements, pausing in places that feel tense.

- Spaces between fingers: stretch them slightly, feel your palms become more open.
- Whole hand: place one hand on top of the other, press down firmly, then slowly release – feel the difference between the pressure and the fleeting breath.

3. End of massage

Place both hands on your cheeks, close your eyes, and take a deep breath.

Gestures of affection – 'the language of hands'

 Every gesture can be like a little letter written to yourself – in invisible ink, written on your skin. It is not about repeating familiar hand positions, but about finding your own. This is an invitation to create your own personal hand choreography – simple, but meaningful.

1. The 'opening' gesture

- Slowly open your hands in front of you, as if you were opening an invisible book.
- Imagine that this book contains all your experiences – both painful and joyful.
- You don't have to read them – just let them be.

2. The 'letting go' gesture

- Clench your hands into fists, tightly, until you feel the tension.

- Then open them suddenly, shaking the air as if you were letting go of a burden you no longer want to carry.
- Repeat the movement several times until you feel lightness.

3. The 'acceptance' gesture

- Open your palms upwards and hold them in silence.
- Imagine that light or warmth is flowing onto them – whatever you need most right now.
- It could be peace, strength, hope or love.

4. The 'sowing' gesture

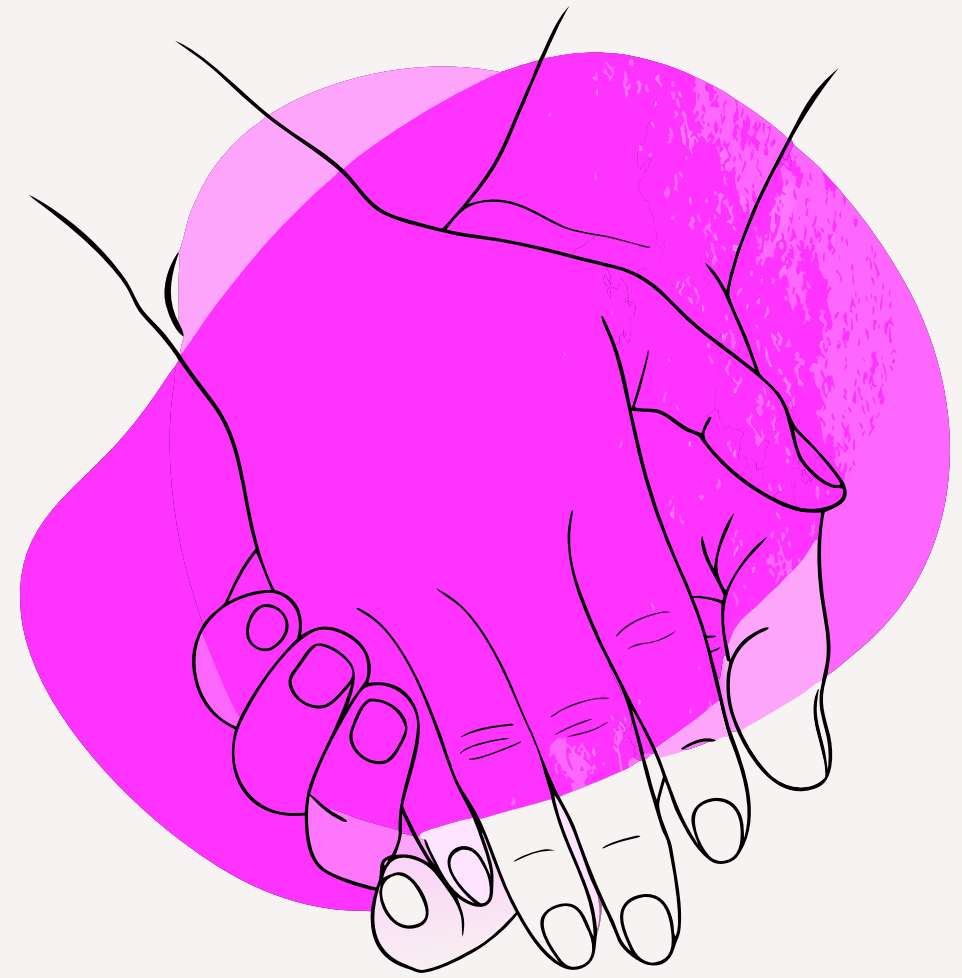
- Imagine that your hands are holding a tiny seed.
- Slowly 'plant' it by touching the floor or your heart with your fingertips.
- This symbolises a new beginning that is sprouting within you.

5. The 'circle' gesture – a group exercise

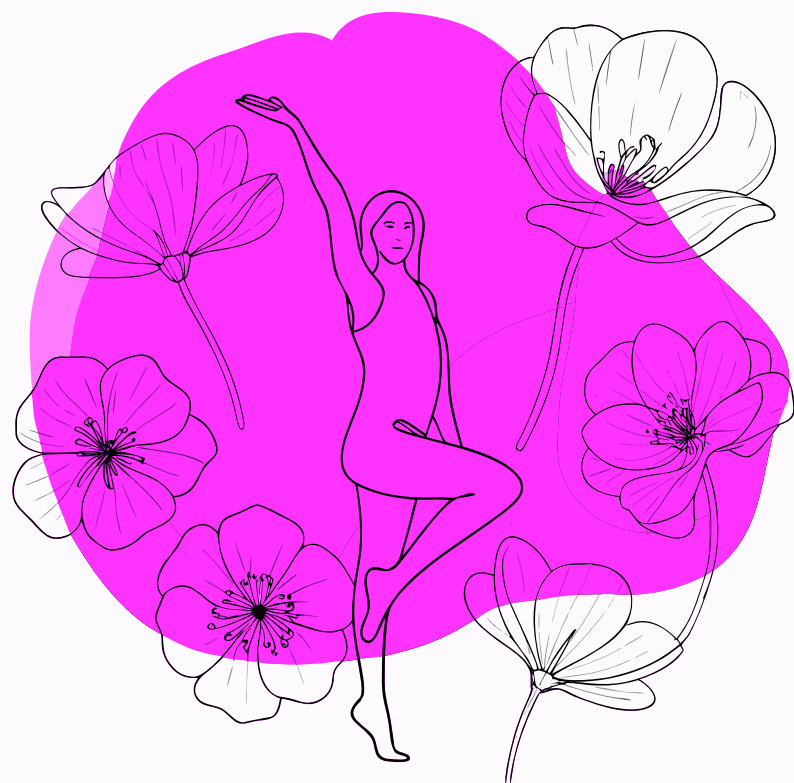
- The participants sit in a circle. Each person creates a gesture that spontaneously associates with strength, tenderness or hope.
- They pass their gesture on to the next person, who repeats it before adding their own.
- A 'chain of gestures' is created – a shared choreography of the group, unique and original.
- At the end, all the gestures come together in one synchronised movement.

Closing – 'touch as memory'

At the end, participants can place their hands on their hearts or interlace their fingers – as if they were embracing themselves. It is a simple gesture, but in combination with the previous journey, it becomes the seal of the entire experience.



Working with emotions – a journal of gratitude and reflection



When the body is ill, emotions can be overwhelming. Fear, anger, sadness and a sense of injustice arise. All these feelings are natural – they deserve acceptance, not judgement.

A gratitude and reflection journal is not intended to force 'positive thinking'. Its purpose is to teach us to notice things that bring even a little light into a difficult day: a gesture, a word, a scent, a moment of silence.

Gratitude does not deny pain. However, it helps to find a space between suffering and peace – a place where you can breathe for a moment.

Part 1. Pause and mindfulness

Find a quiet place. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and focus on your breathing.

Just allow yourself to be – with what is happening right now.

Do not push your emotions away. Notice them.

Try to name the feeling that dominates you today.

🌸 What emotions am I feeling right now?

Ask yourself: 'Is this feeling trying to tell me something?'

Sometimes anger hides fear, sadness hides longing, and tension hides the need for rest.

Do not judge, just notice.

Part 2. Gratitude journal

Take a piece of paper or a notebook in which you will regularly write down your reflections.

The entries don't have to be long – what's important is sincerity and everyday life.

Sample entry structure:

🌸 Today I am grateful for:

🌸 What made me smile?

🌸 What small good things happened around me today?

🌸 What can I be grateful to my body for, despite the difficulties?

Gratitude does not have to be about big things. Sometimes the smell of tea, the softness of a blanket, a conversation with a friend, or pain-free breathing is enough.

Part 3. Gratitude as a path to balance

Gratitude is not always joyful – sometimes it is quiet, full of tears, but it always reminds us that there is still something to be thankful for.

Each entry is like a small pebble with which you build a bridge over difficult emotions.

 What can I be grateful for today?

 Who or what has brought me peace or warmth in recent days?

 What small moments have given me a sense of living in the here and now?

Part 4. Working with the body through words

The body also has a voice – it speaks through tension, pain, fatigue or tenderness.

Try to listen to its message and respond to it in the form of a short letter.

 Letter to my body:

'Today I feel...

Thank you for...'

When writing, do not judge. You may feel moved or resistant – this is natural. Give yourself space for every feeling.

Part 5. Reflection – small steps towards yourself

Ask yourself the following questions:

What new things have I noticed about myself thanks to today's writing?

Which emotions still need my attention?

How can I take care of myself tomorrow – even with just one small gesture?

🌸 My reflections:

Part 6. Evening ritual of solace

At the end of the day, try closing your notebook with the words:

'Thank you for what this day has brought. Not everything was easy, but everything was part of me.'

You can also add a symbolic gesture – draw a heart, sun, flower, or write a single word that reflects how you feel.

🌸 Word of the day:



Part 7. Weekly summary

At the end of the week, read your notes. Do not analyse them too much – just notice how you are changing.

Pay attention to which emotions appeared most often, what brought you peace, what was challenging.

 What I discovered about myself this week:

 What words would I like to write down for next week?

Part 8. Gratitude for life

Gratitude can be like a prayer, like a sigh, like a smile. It doesn't have to be loud.

End each week by writing down three things you would like to remember:

 You can also add one sentence that will become your personal motto:

Tips for independent practice

🌸 Do not force yourself to write. If you do not have the energy, write just one word – that is enough.

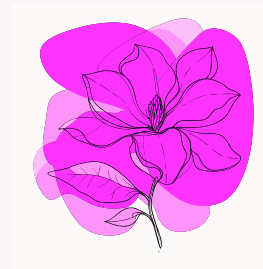
🌸 Give yourself the right to be honest. No one but you will read it.

🌸 If you find it difficult to feel grateful, think of something small: the smell of coffee, the gaze of a loved one, the singing of a bird.

🌸 Treat your journal like a conversation with a friend who never judges you.

🌸 Let each page be a place to breathe, not a chore.

Personal notes



A final word

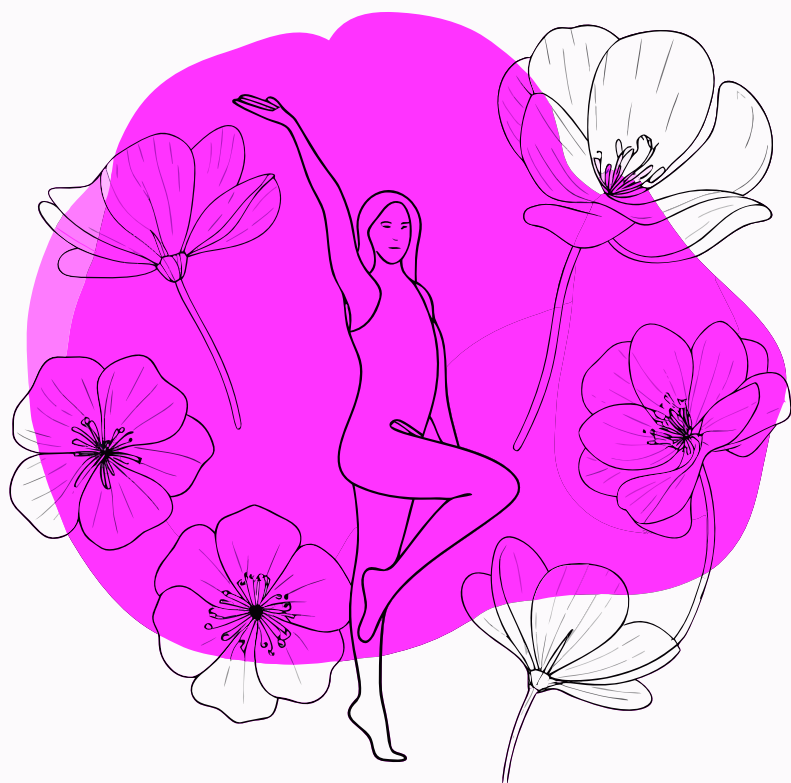
'Gratitude does not remove pain, but it reminds us that there are still reasons to get up and breathe.'

Daily meditation – mindfulness rituals

Silence is not always the absence of sound – it is often a space where we begin to hear ourselves.

During treatment, the body can become tired and the mind overloaded with information, emotions and anxiety. Mindfulness meditation can become your safe place where you can rest and gain some distance.

You do not need any experience or special positions. All you need to do is sit, breathe and be.



Part 1. My ritual for starting the day

Morning is a good time to greet the day with mindfulness.

Sit comfortably, place your hands on your knees or on your heart, and take a calm breath.

Notice:

- How does my body feel today?
- What emotions do I bring with me from my sleep?
- What do I need today?

Do not try to change anything. Just listen.

 My morning intention for today:

 The word I want to take with me today:

Part 2. Mindful breathing

Breathing is the simplest form of meditation. It is always with you – at every moment.

Close your eyes or focus your gaze on a single point. Notice how the air flows through your nose, fills your chest, and then flows out.

Do not try to control it – just observe.

If your thoughts begin to wander, simply return to your breath, as if returning home.

 How do I feel my breath in my body?
(warmth, tension, calm...)

 What word comes to mind when I breathe mindfully?

Part 3. Rituals of silence during the day

You don't need hours to meditate. A few moments of silence between tasks are enough.

Try to pause at least once a day:

- while drinking tea,
- during a walk,
- while washing your hands or looking out of the window.

Pay attention to your senses: what you see, hear, feel, how the air smells.

This is mindfulness in motion – small moments of presence that relieve the mind.

 My favourite moment of the day for mindfulness:

 What do I feel in my body at this moment?

Part 4. Gratitude meditation

In the evening, before you go to bed, take a moment to pause and reflect on the good things.

Close your eyes and think of three things you can be thankful for today – even very small things: a smile, a conversation, the taste of tea, a ray of sunshine.

Gratitude does not mean denying difficulties. It is a way of saying to yourself, 'I can still see the light.'

 Today, I am grateful for:

 How do I feel after this short gratitude exercise?

Part 5. Body meditation

Your body is your home – it deserves attention and care.

Sit or lie down comfortably. Focus your attention on different parts of your body: feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, face.

Do not judge them – just notice that they are there.

You can repeat in your mind:

‘I thank my body for breathing, for trying, for being.’

 Which part of my body needs the most warmth and care today?

 What can I do today to show my body gratitude?

Part 6. Evening soothing ritual

The evening is a time to return to yourself. You can turn on some calm music, light a candle or sit in silence.

Write down in your notebook:

- What was good today?
- What moved me?
- What would I like more of tomorrow?

This is a simple ritual that ends the day with a sense of calm and presence.

 My reflections at the end of the day:

 My word of calm for the night:

Part 7. Short meditations for difficult days

Not every day is easy. When you feel tension, anger or fatigue, try these simple, short practices:

- Take three deep breaths in and out, consciously.
- Place your hands on your heart and say, 'This too shall pass.'
- If you have the strength, write down three things that keep you going despite everything.
- If you don't have the strength to write, just be with your breath.

🌸 My anchor of calm for difficult moments:

Tips for daily practice

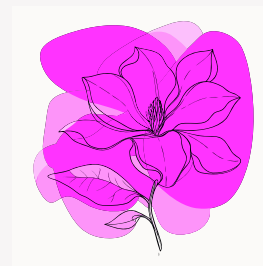
🌸 It's not about meditating 'well' – it's enough to just be present.

🌸 If your mind wanders, it's a sign that you're alive. Each time, return to your breath.

🌸 Choose one ritual a day – morning breathing, mindful tea drinking or evening journaling.

🌸 Over time, meditation will become a natural part of your day, like washing your hands or closing the door.

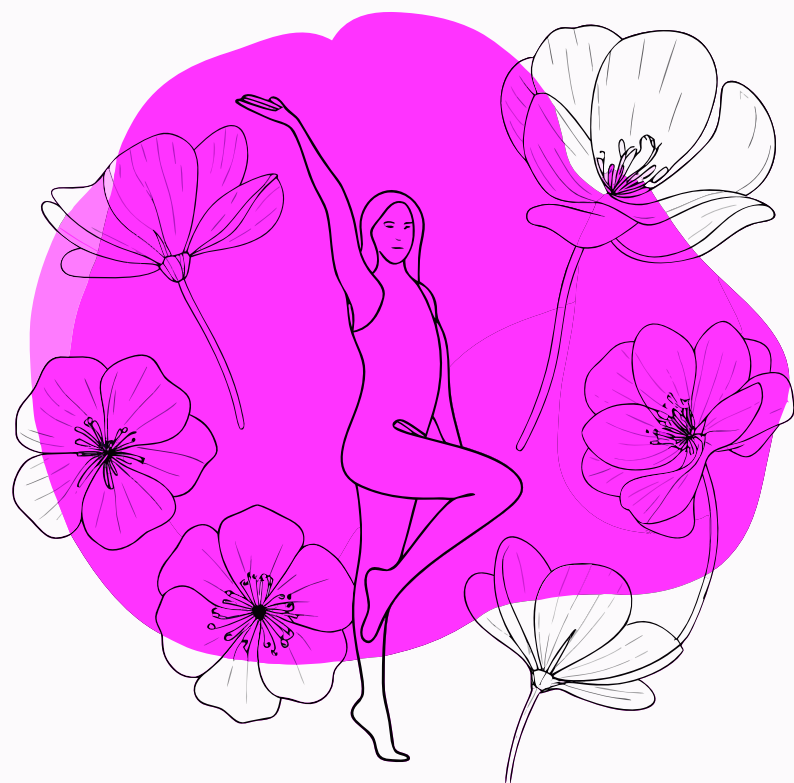
🌸 Most importantly, don't demand peace of mind from yourself. Peace of mind is not the goal – it is the result of being in the here and now.



A final word

'Meditation is not an escape from life, but a return to its simplest truth - that everything you need is already within you.'

Creating a narrative of strength – a story about overcoming difficulties



There are moments when everything familiar suddenly fades away. Silence remains. Ashes of what once was life – hot, chaotic, full of sounds. Then nothing is obvious anymore.

And yet... it is there, in the midst of this silence, that things are born which are not visible at first glance. The process of rebirth does not begin with fireworks, but with a quiet smouldering beneath the surface.

The phoenix does not fall from the sky. The phoenix rises from what remains.

Today's exercise is an invitation to look at your own story through the prism of the symbol of rebirth. Not a fairy-tale one, but a real one – with warmth, heat, scars and breath that slowly returns.

Preparing the space

Find a quiet place. You can light a candle or lamp, turn on soft music or nature sounds. Prepare a notebook, paper, crayons, pastels, markers – whatever helps you express yourself naturally.

This is your time. There are no judgements or rush here.

STEP 1 — ASHES

Ashes are what remain after a fire. Sometimes still warm, sometimes already scattered. A symbol of the end.

Think of such a moment in your life – a fragment in which something ended, fell apart, stopped working as it used to.

You don't have to go back to everything. Choose one image, memory or symbol that best reflects that time after everything was over.

Don't judge. Don't analyse. Just let it come.

Write down a few words, sentences or draw a shape that symbolises ashes for you.

You can use dark colours, heavier lines, cool tones.

🌸 My image of ashes:

🌸 How did I feel when everything was fading away?



STAGE 2 — THE HEAT BELOW THE SURFACE

Even if something has ended, life always smoulders somewhere deep inside.

The embers are that part of you that refused to die out completely — even if it was tiny and invisible. Maybe it was a gesture from a loved one, a word, a thought, an intuition. Maybe it was something completely insignificant that saved you from giving up at that time.

Think about what that embers were in your story.

Write it down or draw it. Let it be a symbol of the quiet strength that remained under the ashes.

 My embers – the first spark of life after everything:

 What did it look like? What did I feel when it first appeared?

STEP 3 — TRANSFORMATION

Transformation does not come suddenly. It begins quietly – with small decisions, with a gaze that begins to see differently.

This is the stage where the embers begin to take shape. The wings are not yet visible, but something is already awakening.

Think about what in your life was the beginning of this transformation.

What made you start to rise? What began to change in you?

Maybe it was a new daily routine, a conversation, a walk, or perhaps the moment when you felt the taste of life again.

 What was the beginning of my transformation:

 What emotions accompanied this stage?

STAGE 4 — PHOENIX

The phoenix is a symbol of rebirth. It does not return the same — it is reborn with the memory of fire in its feathers.

It is you — in a new form, with experience, courage, and tenderness for yourself.

Think about what your Phoenix looks like. What was born in you, matured, returned in a different form?

What strength do you see in yourself today?
What carries you?

Let it be an image, a symbol, a colour or a few words. It doesn't have to look like a bird — just let it express your 'now'.

 My Phoenix — a symbol of my rebirth:

 What strength do I see in myself today?

NEW CHAPTER — THE PRACTICE OF CREATING A NARRATIVE OF STRENGTH

This exercise does not end with the last sentence. It is only the beginning of your story.

A narrative of strength is the way you talk about yourself — not from the perspective of pain, but from a place that has survived.

1. Write a letter to your past self

Imagine yourself from the time of 'ashes'. Write a letter to that self — warm, supportive, gentle.

Tell her what she needed to hear back then: that she can do it, that she doesn't have to be perfect, that she has more strength than she thought.

Let it be a letter full of kindness, not lectures.

 My words to my past self:

2. Create your symbol of strength

Think about what sign, shape or colour could symbolise your new strength.

You can draw it, cut it out of paper, create a collage, a necklace or a small amulet from everyday objects.

Let this symbol be a reminder: "I survived. I am still growing."

🌸 Description of my symbol of strength:

3. A story in three sentences

Try to summarise your story in three sentences. Keep them simple and true.

The first – about what happened.

The second – about what kept you going.

The third – about who you are now.

🌸 My story:

4. A small daily ritual

Every day, you can return to this narrative for a moment. Stop, place your hand on your heart and say: 'Today, I choose life again.'

This sentence can become your inner mantra – a simple but extremely powerful reminder.

CONCLUSION – A MOMENT OF SILENCE

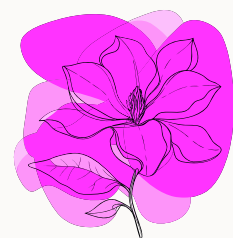
Look at your work – at the ashes, the embers, the transformation, the Phoenix and your own narrative of strength.

This is your story. Not about a miracle, but about perseverance. About how you were able to survive what seemed unbearable.

Place your hand on your heart. Breathe calmly.

You can say to yourself: 'This is all me. And that makes me strong.'

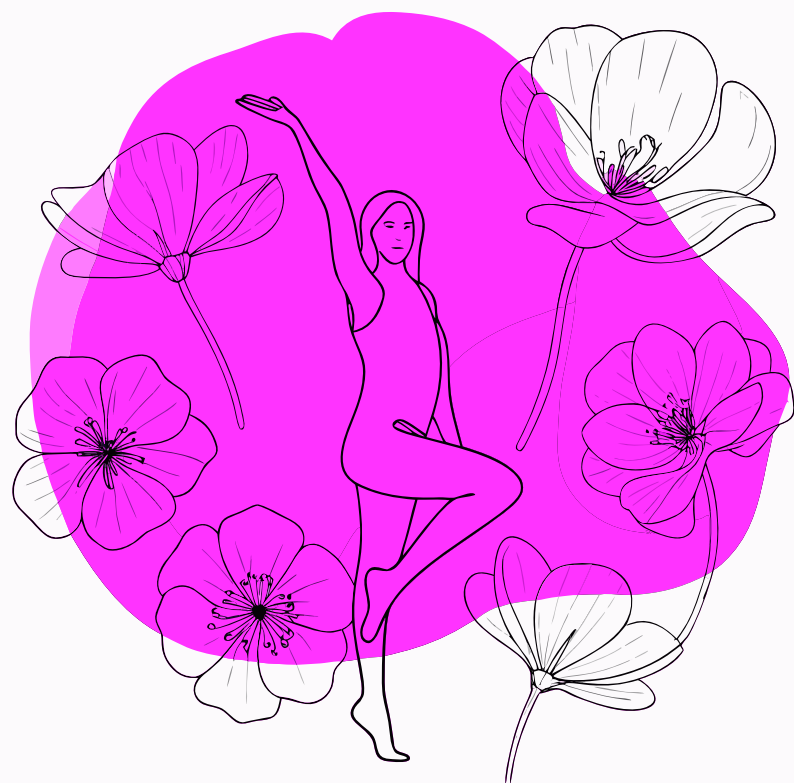
A final word



***'I no longer have to be who I was.
I can be who I am becoming.'***

Regeneration rituals

– relaxation to the sounds of nature



In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, it is very easy to forget that rest is not a luxury – it is a necessity. Our mind and body need a moment of respite to regain rhythm, balance and energy to continue living.

Nature has always been man's ally in the process of regeneration. Its sounds act as a balm for the nervous system: they organise thoughts, calm the heart and help us to 're-inhabit' our bodies. The rustling of trees, the singing of birds, the sound of waves or rain are not just music – they are a language that reminds us that we are part of a larger whole.

Today's exercise is an invitation to pause. In a short journey through the sounds of nature, you will create your own regeneration ritual – one that you can always return to when you feel tense.

1. Warm up your senses

Before you begin relaxing, pause for a moment.

Sit or stand comfortably, close your eyes, and let your body relax.

Slowly take three deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Notice:

- the temperature of the air around you,
- the weight of your body and the places where it touches the ground,
- sounds – the quietest one you can hear right now,
- the smell in the air, the texture of your clothes on your skin.

This short pause is your entry into the world of mindfulness. It helps you 'shift gears' and prepare your nervous system for rest.

🌸 What sounds do I hear around me?

🌸 How does my body feel after this moment of pause?

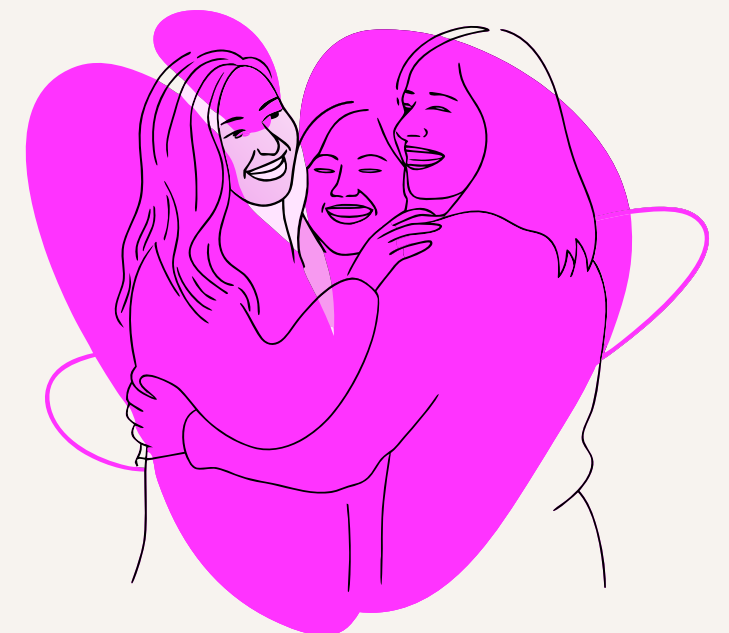
2. Listen to nature

Preparing the space

Find a place where you can feel calm – a balcony, a garden, a room with a view of greenery, or perhaps your favourite armchair by the window.

Turn off the bright lights, light a candle or a small lamp.

Put your phone away. Turn off notifications. Give yourself a signal: 'this is my time'.



Choosing nature sounds

Decide which sounds calm you the most:

- the sound of the sea,
- rain on the window,
- birds singing in the morning,
- the wind in the treetops,
- a fire crackling at night.

Play them through headphones or a speaker.

Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes and just listen.

Do not analyse. Do not try to achieve anything.

Notice how the sounds fill the space. How your body responds – does your breathing deepen, do your shoulders drop, does your face soften?

Imagine that you are really there – see the colours, the light, the smell.

Let nature envelop you.

 What sounds soothe me the most?

 What do I feel in my body when I listen to nature?

3. Create your own regeneration ritual

Every ritual is a personal space where you can recharge your inner batteries.

It doesn't have to be long or complicated – the important thing is that it's yours.

Think about the four elements of your ritual:

- Place

Where do you feel safe and at ease?

It could be a forest, a garden, a balcony, a room, or a bathroom with a lit candle.

- Sounds

What sounds of nature help you relax?

Choose one or two of your favourite recordings and save them as 'sounds of returning to yourself'.

- Time

When is it easiest to find a moment of silence – in the morning, after work, before bed?

Plan your ritual at a time that does not interfere with your responsibilities.

- Gesture

A small gesture that will become your signal to start the ritual: lighting a candle, wrapping yourself in a blanket, placing your hand on your heart, turning on your favourite sounds.

 My idea for a regeneration ritual:

Entering the ritual

Sit quietly. Take one deep breath.

Say to yourself:

'This is my time.'

'I allow myself to rest.'

'I am regenerating.'

Close your eyes. Listen to nature.

With each breath, let your thoughts drift away.

This is a moment when you don't have to do anything – just be.

Main part – sensory bath

Let the sounds flow through you.

Notice how your breathing deepens, how your body relaxes step by step.

If you feel like it, combine this with gentle movement: light stretching, calm arm circles, placing your hands on your heart or stomach.

You can try walking in the forest (shinrin-yoku practice)

or recreate the sounds of nature at home – turning an ordinary evening into a private ritual of silence.

Let your body listen with you.

Conclusion – return to everyday life

Do not come out of this state abruptly.

Stay in silence for a moment, feeling the calmness in your body.

Take three deep breaths.

Open your eyes slowly.

You can drink some water, make herbal tea (chamomile, lemon balm, linden),

or write down a few words: what has changed, how you feel now.



My impressions after the ritual:

Repeat the ritual regularly – even a few minutes a day is enough for your nervous system to learn calmness.

Over time, you will notice that relaxation becomes not a moment of escape, but a return to yourself.

4. My relaxation map – personal notes

🌸 Which sounds of nature relax me the most?

🌸 Where and when would I like to play them?

🌸 What small gestures help me relax?

🌸 What can I do to make this ritual available even on more difficult days?

Leave some space here for a small sketch, symbol or word that you associate with peace.

Let this be your personal map to restore balance.

5. A moment of reflection

Close your eyes and recall today's moment of relaxation.

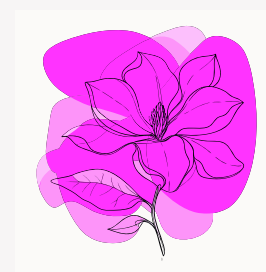
How did you feel? How did your breathing, mood and thought process change?

Don't judge – just observe.

The sounds of nature are like a silent anchor.

They don't help you escape, but rather take root in the present moment.

And that is where true regeneration lies.



A final word

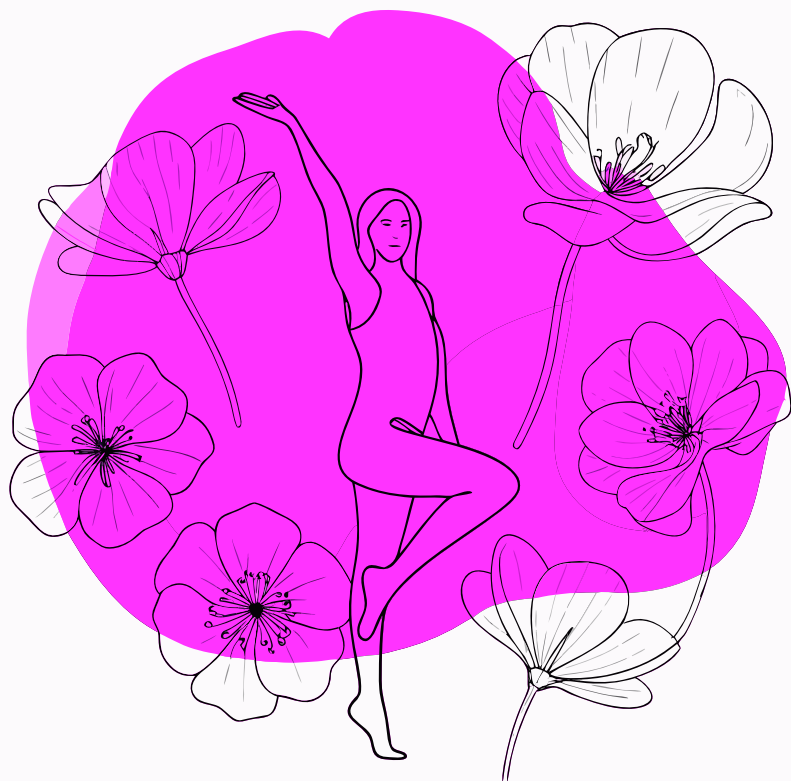
'Nature takes its time, yet everything gets done.'

The art of affirmation – creative affirmations and visualisation of strength

Each of us carries within ourselves a map of resources – consisting of experiences, memories, symbols and small moments that remind us of our strength.

This worksheet invites you to create your own visual affirmation – an image that will serve as a reminder of who you are and how much you can already bear.

This is not just an art exercise, but a process of finding your centre, processing traces of difficulties and giving them a new, creative shape.



Your workspace

Find a place where you feel comfortable – it could be a table by the window, a quiet corner of the room or a piece of floor where you can spread out your materials. It is important that you feel safe and calm.

Put on music that envelops you rather than distracts you. It could be the gentle sound of a piano, the breath of the sea, or something that reminds you of home. Let it accompany you like your breath – quiet but present.

Prepare a sheet of thick paper in a colour that speaks to you today. Don't choose it with your mind – let your heart choose. Prepare the materials you have at hand: crayons, pastels, markers, paints, newspapers, glue, or perhaps pieces of fabric.

Most importantly, you don't need artistic talent. This is not about beauty for the eye, but about honesty with yourself. Your lines

may be irregular, the colours too intense, the proportions off – that's all right. What matters is what you feel when you create.

Stages of work

Step 1. The centre – your symbol of strength

Start in the middle of the sheet of paper.

Place a symbol there that you associate with your strength. It could be a plant that always grows back despite storms. It could be an animal that symbolises courage or instinct. It could be a shape – spiral, open, irregular – that expresses your path.

Close your eyes for a moment and ask yourself:

‘What is my pillar, even when I no longer have the strength to stand?’

Don't look for a logical answer – let the image appear on its own. When you feel that it is ‘it’, place it in the centre.

Step 2. Circles of memories and resources

Start building a map of strength around your symbol. These can be words, names, memories that give you strength. Maybe the name of a person who was with you during a difficult time. Maybe a place, a smell, a piece of music, a hand gesture.

Add layers. Draw, write, stick, scratch, apply paint, mix colours. Let your story grow like circles on water – from the centre outwards. Each circle is a different part of you: the past that taught you perseverance, the present that teaches you gratitude, the future that calls for courage.

Let the colours speak for you. Light and dark. Warm and cool. This dance of contrasts hides the truth about life – that light cannot exist without shadow.

Step 3. Traces and layers

When your work begins to take shape, add texture to it. Scratch, rub, stick something new, paint over a fragment, and then uncover it. Allow traces to form – let them remind you that strength does not come from perfection, but from experience.

***Think: which moments in my life were like scratches that turned into scars over time?
How do these scars teach me to love myself?
Every scratch can become a decoration - if you look at it with kindness.***

Step 4. Affirmation

Now stop. Sit comfortably. Look at your map. Breathe calmly. Let a sentence appear that sums up how you feel. Let it be short but true – one that touches something inside you.

It could be:

🌸 'My footprints are proof of my journey.'

🌸 'I am full of light, even if I don't always see it.'

🌸 'I come out stronger from every storm.'

🌸 'I am whole – made of light and shadow.'

Write it down next to your symbol. This is your affirmation of power – a sentence that will accompany you when weaker days come.

Reflection

When you have finished creating, sit quietly for a moment. Look at your work as if it were a mirror reflecting your inner self. Ask yourself:

- What did I feel when I created the centre of my work?
- Which symbols spoke to me the most?
- How have my marks and scars become part of my strength?
- What do I want to take from this experience with me on my journey?

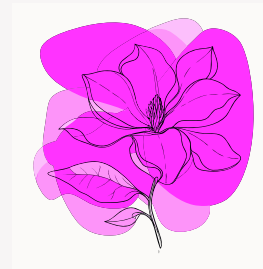
If you feel like it, write down your answers in a notebook. Let this be your intimate dialogue with yourself.

How to use this work further?

Your affirmation map is more than just a picture. It is a guide. You can hang it in a place where your gaze stops every day – by the mirror, on your desk, by your bed. You can hide it in a notebook or put it in a box with your keepsakes.

Reach for it whenever you feel doubt. Look at the colours, shapes and sentences – and remind yourself: this power is still within you. It may sometimes be dormant, it may waver, but it does not disappear.

Let this card remind you that creating is a way to be closer to yourself. You don't have to be perfect to be whole. All you have to do is be – real, present, on your way.



A final word

Stop for a moment. Look at your work again. It is not just a piece of paper – it is you. Your light, your traces, your path. Everything you see in it already exists within you.

You do not need to add anything, correct anything, prove anything. You are complete – just as you are now.

Breathe deeply. Feel gratitude – for yourself, for your body, for the path you have travelled. And then place your hands on your work, as if you were embracing yourself.

Your strength is within you.

Your light does not fade.

It simply rests sometimes – just like you.

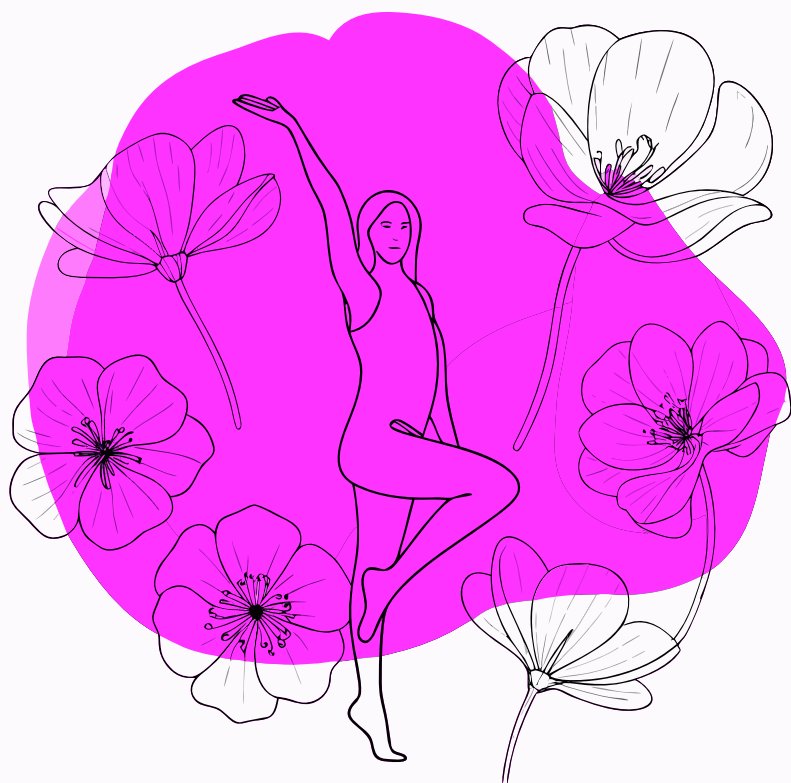
Drawing emotions – emotional self- portrait techniques

Each of us carries within ourselves a world of stories – moments of joy, quiet sadness, tension, gratitude and longing that cannot always be put into words.

Drawing emotions is an invitation to look deep inside ourselves and allow what lives within us to find expression in colour, line, texture and gesture.

It is not about a portrait in the mirror. It is about a true image of the interior – about emotions that have their own shapes and colours, about movement that flows from the heart.

This exercise is a journey into ourselves, but also a bridge to others – because when we express ourselves authentically, we become part of a shared emotional space.



Your space and materials

Find a safe, quiet place for yourself – this is your little workshop of emotions.

Make yourself comfortable. You can sit at a table, spread your materials out on the floor or by a window with a view of nature.

Prepare:

- thick paper or a drawing pad,
- crayons, pastels, felt-tip pens, paints, markers – whatever you have at hand,
- scissors, newspapers for cutting out if you like collages,
- calm background music: sounds of nature, ambient, soft piano or silence.

Make sure the space is your sanctuary – a place where emotions can come and go freely.

 How do I feel today before starting work?

 What emotions would I like to understand or see better today?

1. Opening circle – get to know yourself and others

Start with a moment of mindfulness. Sit comfortably.

Take three deep breaths and let your body relax.

Ask yourself:

‘Who am I today – at this moment, with what I am feeling?’

If you are working in a group, you can exchange a few words with others:

your favourite colour, a symbol of peace, one sentence about how you feel today.

This opening requires nothing more than your presence.

If you are creating alone, you can write down three words that describe your current emotional state.

 Three words that describe my mood today:

2. Creating an emotional self-portrait

This is the moment when you start drawing yourself – not how you look, but how you feel.

Let your hand move freely, without a plan, without control.

Start with a central figure of yourself – it can be a face, a silhouette, the outline of your hand, or simply a shape that you intuitively recognise as ‚me‘. Then add colours, lines, symbols, words – anything that reflects your emotions.

Don't worry about whether they ‚match‘ – emotions can also be disordered.

Try to notice how your body reacts while drawing – whether your breathing deepens, whether the line is tense, fast, soft, fluid.

This is your language of emotions. Every line is a testimony to life.

 What colours did I choose and why?

 What emotions do I see in my drawing?

3. Reflecting on fear and resistance

While creating, thoughts may arise:

‘Does it look good?’, ‘Will anyone understand what I wanted to express?’, ‘Is it too much?’.

Pause and consider these feelings.

Draw or write down your resistance – it can have a colour, shape, texture.

Look at it with tenderness:

‘What is it trying to tell me?’ ‘Is it protecting me from something?’ ,How can I thank it and move on?’

Do not fight your resistance – allow it to be part of your work.

Sometimes it is what leads to true understanding.

 What was difficult for me in this process?

 How can I turn this resistance into strength?

4. Sharing reflections (or your own notes)

If you are working in a group, share whatever you want.

You do not have to show the entire drawing. You can talk about one colour, one fragment, one emotion.

Listen to others as well, without comparing or judging.

Notice how different emotions can create a common space.

If you are working individually, write a few sentences about your experience.

It can be a short sentence, a casual reflection, or a dialogue with yourself.

 What did I discover about myself when looking at this self-portrait?

 What emotions demand care or attention today?

5. Summary – the image as a map of emotions

Look at your drawing again – calmly, without analysing it.

Notice the colours, textures, and movements of the lines. This is a map of your inner self at this moment.

Do not try to interpret it. It is enough to see and accept it.

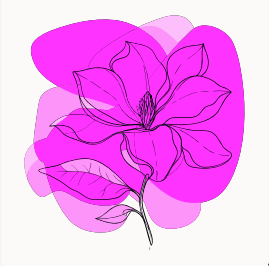
What you have drawn is not 'finished' – just like you, it is alive.

You can come back to it, add something, paint over it, erase it, start again.

Put it away in a place where you can return to it later.

You will then see how your emotional language changes – just as your life changes.

 What word could sum up my drawing today?



A final word

'A drawing of emotions is not a portrait, but a mirror of the soul - a reflection of everything that is true, fragile and strong within us.'

Every line, colour and gesture is a trace of your presence - proof that you see, feel and live.

That is enough.

Part 2 –

Scenários for group
sócio-therapeutic
classes for women in
remission from
cancer

Part developed by the Polish
partner



There are moments when life shatters into pieces – like glass falling to the floor and breaking into hundreds of shards. Each piece reflects light differently, each one pricks us when we try to pick it up. Illness can be just such a moment: a sudden, brutal interruption of everyday life, a break with the familiar, the certain and the comfortable. And yet there is more to these pieces than meets the eye. They reflect not only the past, but also the chance for a new image. Different from before, perhaps incomplete, but full of light.

Female strength has many shades. It does not always manifest itself as a heroic struggle or loud slogans. It is often born in silence, on a lonely evening, when you have to face your own reflection in the mirror. It can be like a barely noticeable breath, which

nevertheless constantly reminds us that we are alive. Sometimes it is unsteady, like a step taken for the first time after a long period of immobility, and sometimes calm and firm, like a look that says, 'I'm still here.'

We often talk about resilience as something obvious, but in reality it is a subtle art. It is not only the ability to survive, but also the ability to be reborn. Like trees that open their buds after winter, even though yesterday their branches seemed dead. Like a woman who, after an illness, learns to listen to her body again – not as an enemy, but as a companion. Every path is different. For one, the strength lies in returning to work, for another – in allowing oneself to rest.

One finds herself in daily rituals, another in creativity, yet another in relationships. There is no single model of resilience, just as no two fingerprints are identical. What they have in common is a quiet decision: 'I want to continue living, but in a new way, differently, more fully.'

This part of the book does not provide ready-made recipes or advice that can be ticked off like items on a list. Instead, it invites you into an open space where you can experience, try, search and discover. Every step is important here: a small gesture, a symbol, a moment of mindfulness, a shared experience. Anything that allows you to touch what is sometimes hidden and shy inside – and which is, in fact, your greatest strength.

Resilience is an art. The art of living after the storm, the art of finding meaning in everyday life, the art of recreating yourself.

It is a process in which every woman is both an artist and a work of art. Because it is in these most delicate places that true power is born – not the flashy kind, but the kind that lasts and sustains.

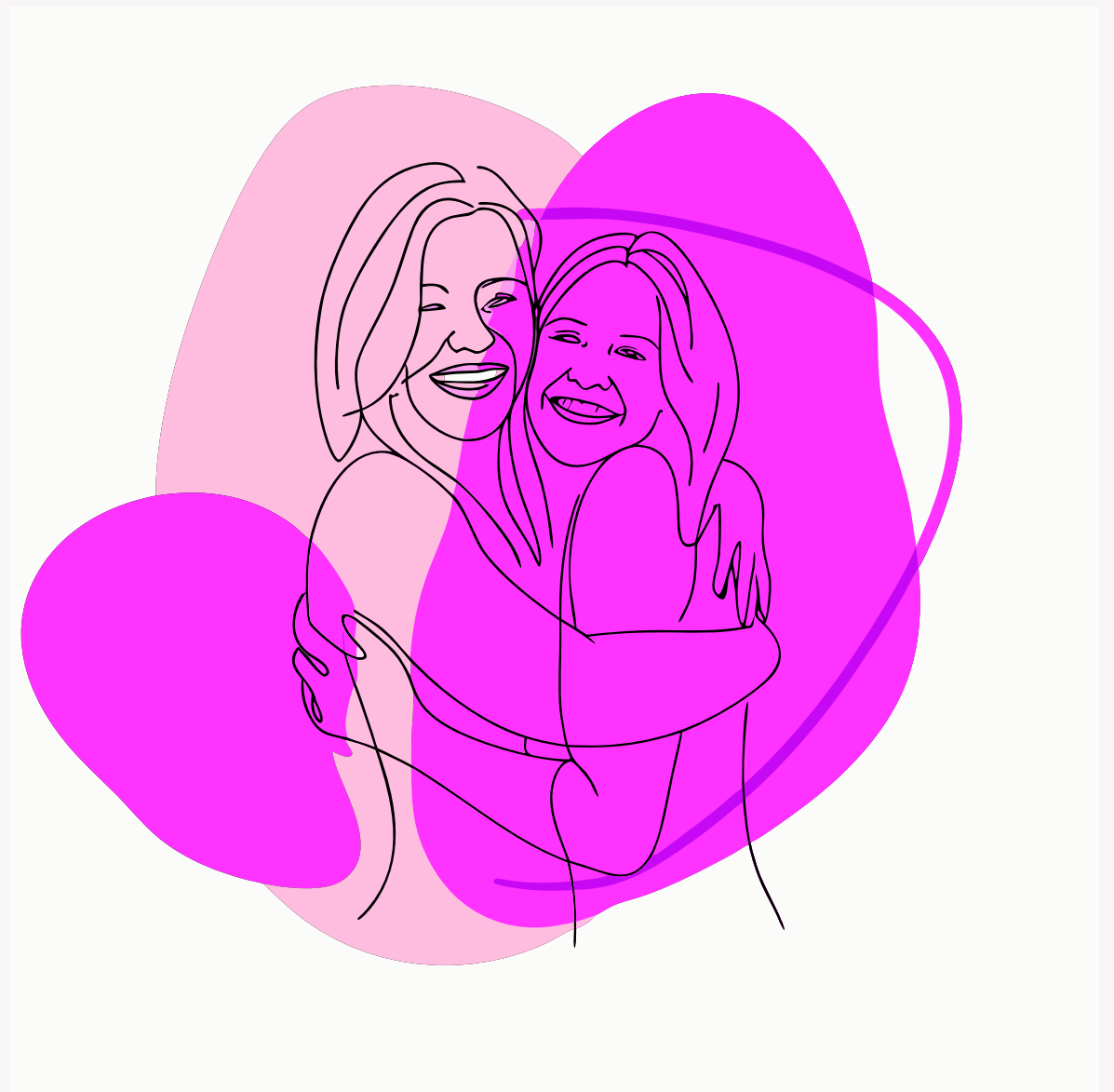
That is why what lies ahead of you is like an invitation to a journey together. We do not yet know exactly where it will take us. However, we do know that every moment on this journey is important. That every experience can become a milestone. That in silence and shared laughter, in gestures and images, in words and symbols, there is something that helps us rediscover ourselves.

You may feel that certain parts of this journey are particularly close to your heart. You may discover something that at first glance seemed trivial, but suddenly comes alive within you. You may meet other women and see something in their eyes that reflects your own story.

This is the art of resilience: not a linear march towards a goal, but a dance – sometimes calm, sometimes jerky, sometimes surprising. But always full of meanings that each of us gives it ourselves.

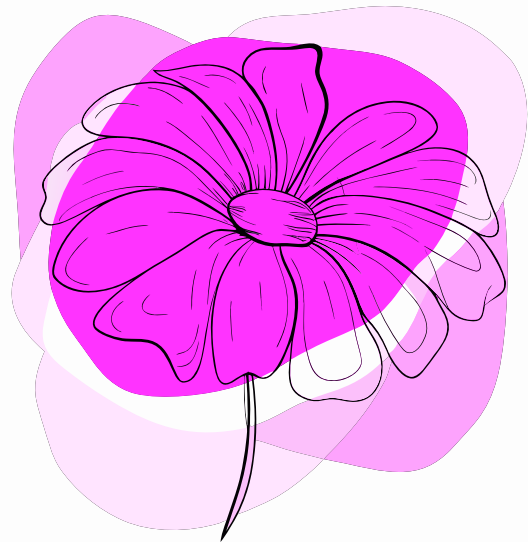
So stop for a moment. Take a deep breath. Feel your body – just as it is now. Feel your heart, which carries so many stories within it. And let what lies ahead of you be like a canvas: filled in step by step, layer by layer,

until it begins to form a picture that tells a story of strength. Your strength.



Workshop 1

Dream Boxes



Group workshop: 'Dream Boxes'

Duration: 120 minutes

(can be extended to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

To create a personal box that will become a safe place for dreams, memories, plans and symbols of strength.

It is not just about making a decorative object, but about a creative and emotional experience – finding your inner sanctuary and a space to return to in moments of doubt. The box will be a metaphor for a personal garden of hope – a place where we nurture what is most precious to us.

Workshop schedule:

Introduction – metaphor and atmosphere of the meeting (15 minutes)

We all need a place to return to when the world becomes too noisy.

Today, we will create our own box – not for external valuables, but for what is most precious within us: desires, strength, gratitude, warmth and self-confidence.

The finished work will be our personal ritual of returning to ourselves.

Let it be a reminder that even after a storm, you can find light, and that what is delicate can be extremely durable.

Short opening conversation (10 minutes)

The facilitator invites everyone to join in a conversation in a circle:

- What does a dream mean to you?
- What gives you strength when things get tough?
- Where do you keep important things so you don't lose them?
- What memory or symbol always brings you peace?

 The aim of the conversation is to open up emotionally, create an atmosphere of trust and community, and realise that each of us carries our own 'treasures' that deserve a safe place.

Artistic part – creating a box (decoupage technique) (60 minutes)

Materials needed:

- Wooden boxes (one for each participant),

- Napkins, decorative paper, newspaper clippings, fabric,
- Acrylic paints, brushes, decoupage glue, scissors,
- Sticky notes, fine-tip pens, ribbons, dried flowers, lace, glitter (optional).

Instructions:

Each participant chooses elements that 'speak' to them – colours, patterns, words, symbols.

There are no random choices here – trust your intuition.

First treasure – symbolic start (15 minutes)

When the boxes are dry and have taken on character, the leader invites the participants to the first filling ritual.

Each of them puts their first treasure inside – something that is meaningful to them.

It can be:

🌸 a piece of paper with an affirmation:

‘I am stronger than I think.’

‘I deserve peace.’

‘I have the right to dream.’

🌸 a symbolic object: a pebble, a dried flower, a bead, a photo, a shell,

🌸 or a handwritten dream, even the smallest one.

This gesture is the beginning of a new story – the first seed that can be nurtured at home.

Instructions for the future – the home box ritual (10 minutes)

Your box is like a garden that you can tend to at your own pace.

Put in it what is important to you: memories, tickets, cards, photographs, affirmations, letters to yourself from the future.

When you feel lost, open it.

When you achieve something, add a new item.

Let it grow with you.

🌸 It is your inner compass – a box that reminds you who you are and where you want to return to.

Final reflection – discussion circle (15 minutes)

The participants sit down in a circle again.

The facilitator invites them to a short reflective conversation:

- What did I discover about myself during the creative process?
- What emotions arose during the work?
- How does my box make me feel?
- What else would I like to put in it someday?

Optional: those who wish to do so can read one sentence from the note they placed inside.

This is a symbolic moment of shared closure and gratitude.

Conclusion – a gesture of gratitude (10 minutes)

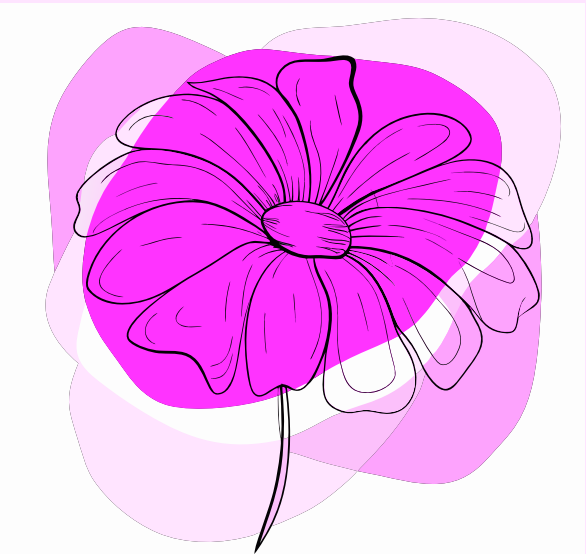
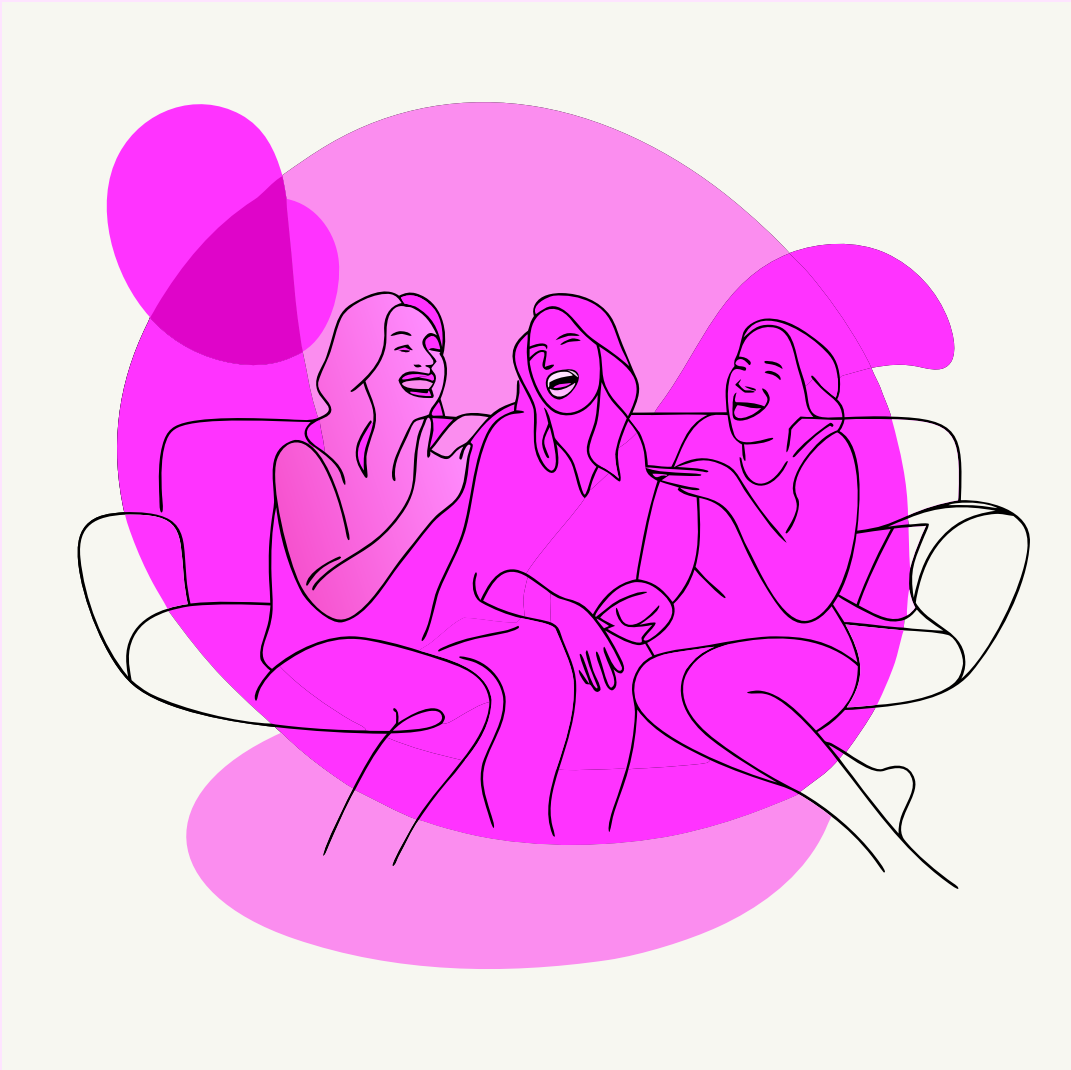
The facilitator thanks everyone for creating together, and the participants can place their hands on their boxes for a moment and repeat silently:

‘May what is hidden within it give me peace when the world is noisy.’

The workshop ends with a short moment of mindfulness or quiet music.

After the workshop, participants can continue the ritual:

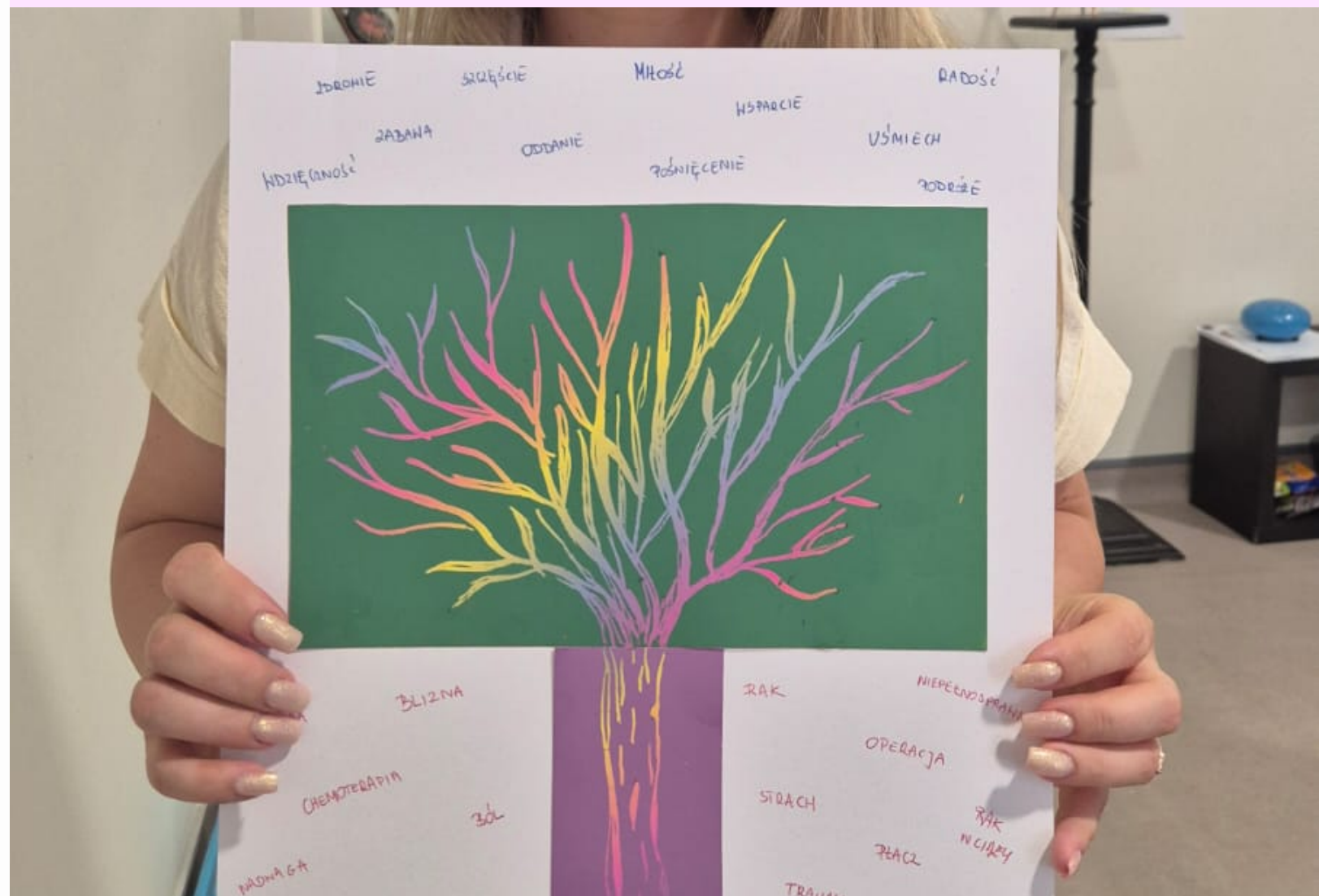
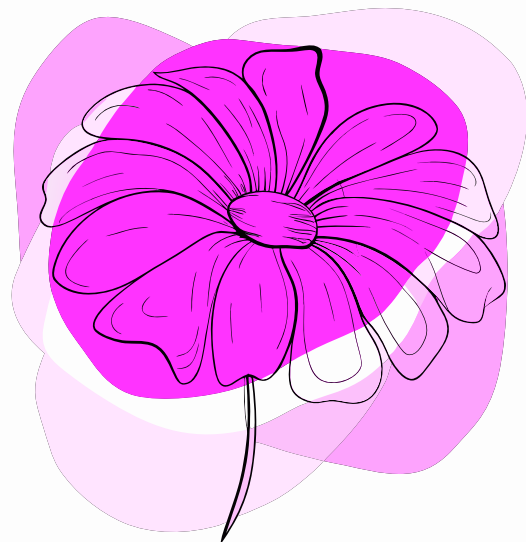
- once a week, add a new sentence of gratitude or a dream,
- every month, open the box and read its contents,
- after a year, create a new one and see how their story has changed.



Workshop 2

Trees of the

Future



Group workshop: 'Trees of the Future'

Duration: 120 minutes

(with the possibility of extending to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Workshop objective:

To create a symbolic 'tree of the future' – a personal image that helps to name dreams, take root in what gives strength, and open up to what is new.

This is not just an art class, but a process of self-discovery and affirmation: an encounter with one's own potential, values and hope. Each tree will become a metaphor: the roots from which we grow, the trunk – our strength, and the branches – the desires we want to nurture.

Workshop schedule:

Introduction – the metaphor of growth (10 minutes)

The future often seems hazy, as if shrouded in a light mist that makes it difficult to see clear shapes.

But each of us carries within us the seeds of possibility – something that can sprout if we give it space.

Imagine that you are the gardener of your life. You have the time and space to plant your own tree of the future – with roots based on what is important, a trunk full of power and a crown that lifts your dreams high into the sky.

Today, we will create this tree together – not to plan for tomorrow, but to feel that the future can be co-created.

 At the beginning, you can write down one word that you associate with the future today:

1. Opening circle – conversation 'What next?' (20 minutes)

We start with a short, calm conversation in a circle.

The facilitator invites participants to reflect:

- What small things would you like to nurture in your life?
- What do you want to take with you from the past, and what do you want to leave behind?
- What gives you strength when you think about tomorrow?
- What emotions accompany you when you think about change?

It's not about grand declarations – one word, image or feeling is enough.

It's a moment of mindful pause to name what lives in us here and now.

2. Artistic part – creating a tree of the future (60 minutes)

Each participant receives:

- A3 or Bristol board,
- paints, crayons, pastels, felt-tip pens,
- newspaper clippings, fabrics, stickers, natural elements (dried leaves, string, thread, eco-friendly paper).

There is no single way to do this – the tree can be painted, drawn, glued or a combination of different techniques.

The most important thing is that it comes from intuition and the heart, rather than a need for aesthetics.

The symbolism of the tree:

🌱 Roots – everything you want to build your future on.

Your values, family, passions, friendships, experiences that have shaped you.

What keeps you grounded and gives you strength.

🌳 Trunk – your strengths and inner resources. The qualities that allow you to move forward: perseverance, self-confidence, sensitivity, courage, openness.

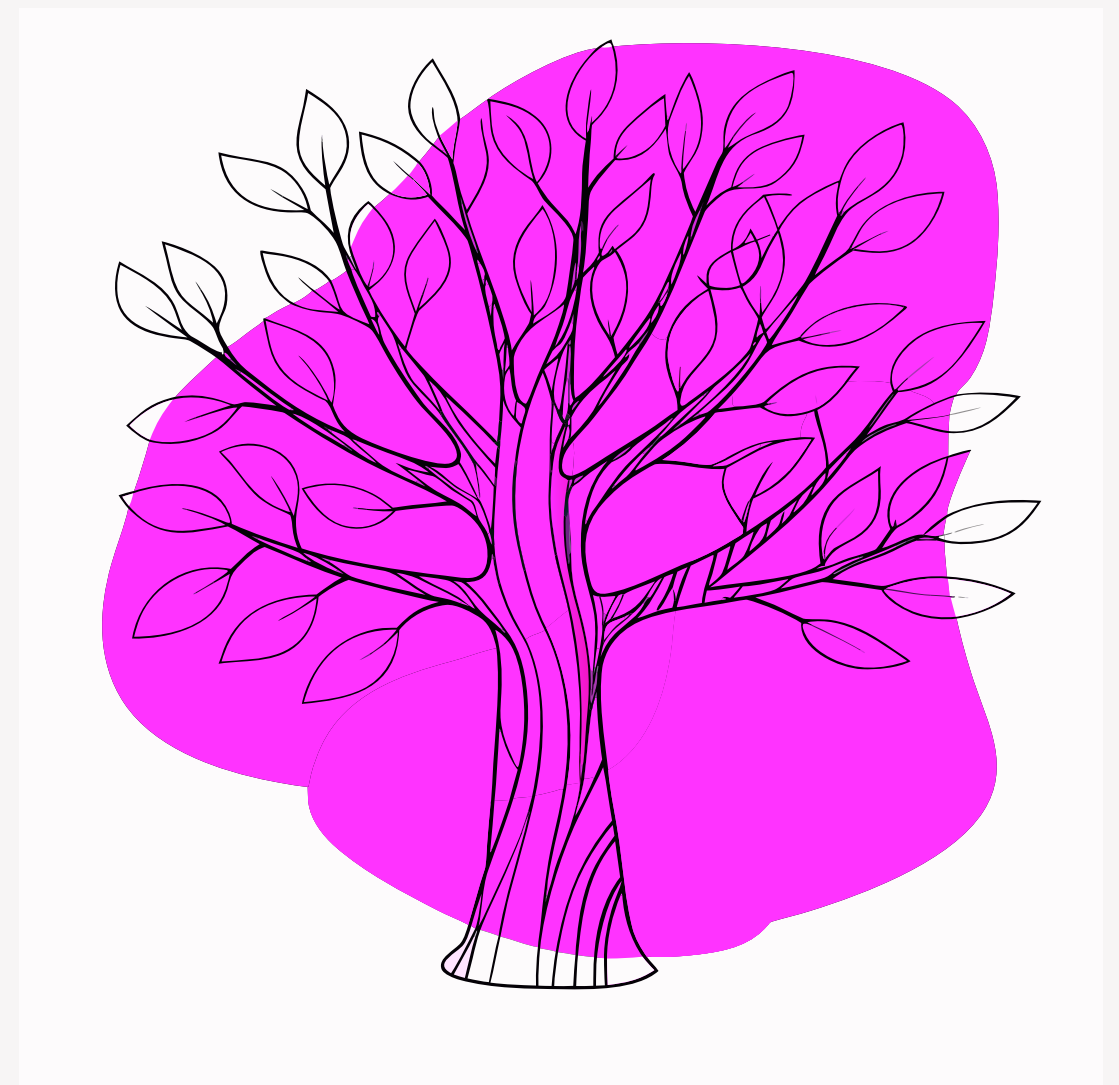
🌿 Branches and leaves – your dreams and goals.

The big ones, floating high, and the small ones, close and possible today: a new skill, a journey, a relationship, peace, the courage to rest.

☀️ The sky around the tree – the space of what is still undefined.

You can draw stars, clouds, the sun, the moon – symbols of what will accompany you on your journey.

🌸 The tree does not have to be realistic. It can be colourful, fanciful, abstract. It should speak the language of emotions.



3. Words of the future – affirmation of direction (10 minutes)

Once the tree has taken shape, the participants write one sentence on it that will accompany them on their further journey.

It can be an affirmation, a thought, or a sentence of power.

Examples:

'My tomorrow is rooted in strength and love.'

'I can grow at my own pace.'

'My future is full of light.'

'I am changing gently.'

This word or sentence can be written on the trunk, between the branches or in the sky – wherever it intuitively finds its place.

4. Reflection and shared viewing (10 minutes)

Each participant looks at her tree.

In silence or in conversation, she answers the following questions:

 What is most important to me in my tree?

 What makes me feel calmer when I look to the future?

 How can I use this image in my everyday life?

 What emotions arose when I created this image?

Those who wish to do so can show their work or say one sentence that best describes their experience.

At the end, all the works can be placed side by side, creating a symbolic 'forest of the future'.

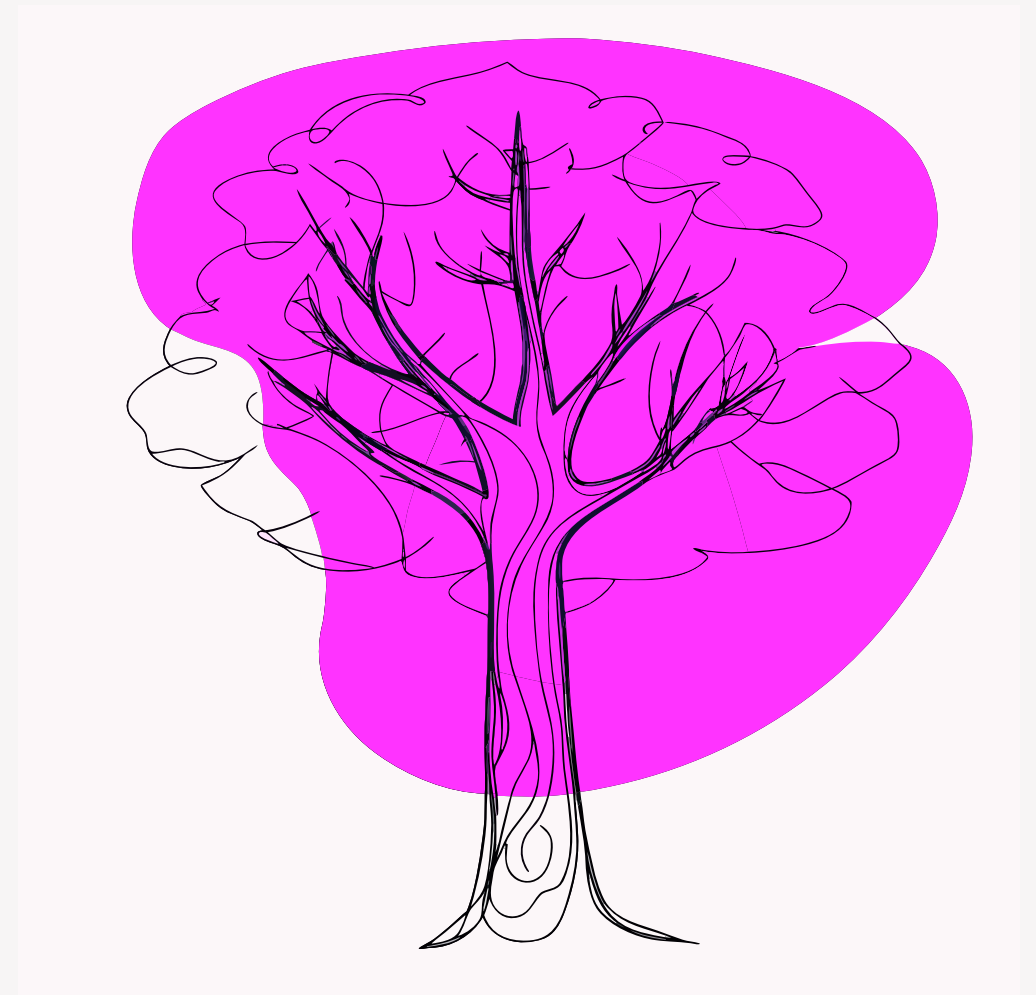
It is a beautiful moment: different trees, different paths, yet a shared space for growth.

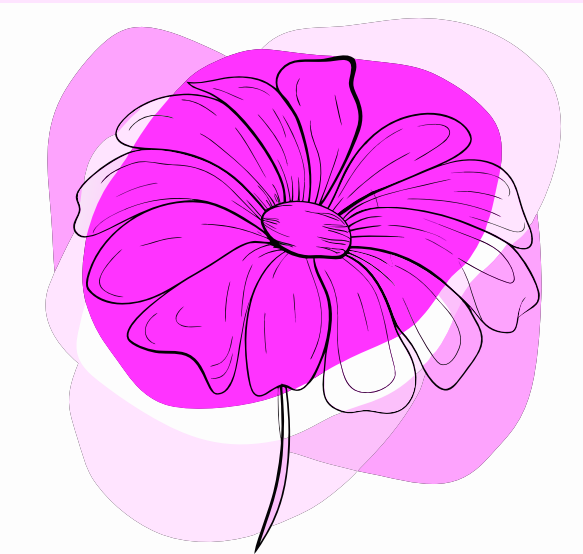
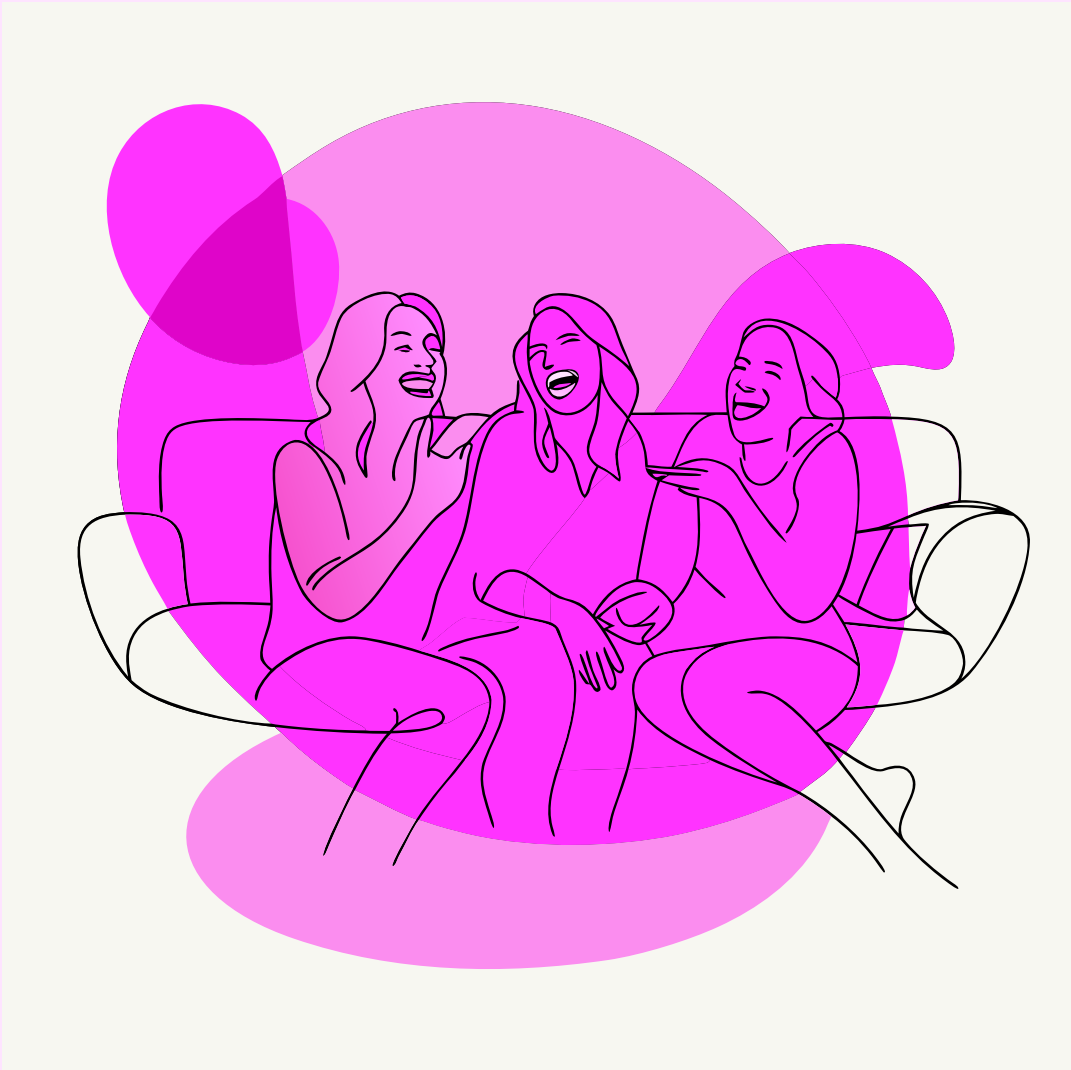
5. Conclusion – word of power (10 minutes)

The facilitator invites everyone to observe a moment of silence and perform a symbolic gesture – participants close their eyes, place their hands on their hearts and repeat in their minds:

'My roots are strong. My branches reach for the light.'

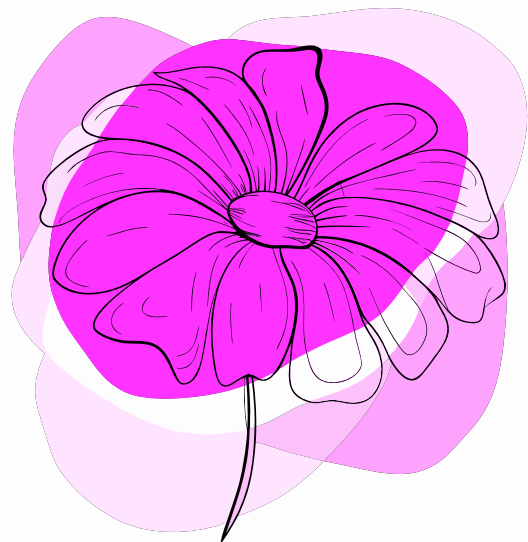
You can also suggest that each person write down one sentence they would like to remember from today's meeting on a small piece of paper and hide it in a notebook or dream box.





Workshop 3

Smile Yoga



Group workshop: 'Smile Yoga'

Duration: 60 minutes

(can be shortened or extended depending on the dynamics of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

The 'Smile Yoga' workshop is a meeting during which laughter becomes a tool for regeneration, lightness and closeness.

It is not about fun for entertainment's sake, but about a conscious experience of joy that revives the body and mind after difficult experiences.

Laughter relieves tension, oxygenates the body, alleviates stress and restores contact with the inner energy of life.

It is a form of therapy through joy, in which you do not have to pretend anything — you

just have to allow yourself to be here and now.

Space:

A quiet, warm room with space for free movement and soft lighting.

Chairs arranged in a circle or semicircle.

In the background – gentle instrumental music, perhaps with sounds of nature or subtle rhythms of positive energy.

 ***The most important thing: an atmosphere of safety, intimacy and trust. Here, every woman can relax, without pressure or expectations.***

Materials (optional):

Not required, but you can use:

- balloons,
- scarves,
- light props (hats, glasses, masks, ribbons) that stimulate spontaneity, childlike joy and freedom of movement.

Workshop schedule:

1. Introduction – why do we need laughter? (10 minutes)

The instructor welcomes the participants and introduces them to the idea of laughter yoga: "Laughter is not just a reaction to something funny – it is a conscious choice to live lightly. It is a breath that says: I am, I feel, I allow myself to be joyful."

Short conversation in a circle:

 What do you associate laughter with?

 When was the last time you laughed so hard you couldn't stop?

 What emotions did you bring with you today?

Let everyone say one word or make one gesture that symbolises their mood.

This opens up the group and creates a shared, safe space.

2. Warm-up – we wake up the body and smile (10 minutes)

Before laughter can appear, the body needs to be awakened.

Suggested exercises:

 **Breathing with a smile** – slow inhalation through the nose, long exhalation through the mouth, with a gentle smile on the face.

 **Wave of smiles** – one participant smiles at another, passing the smile on around the circle.

 **Movement and lightness** – gently shake your shoulders, rotate your wrists, lightly dance your hips, as if your body were saying 'I feel good'.

The purpose of the warm-up is to relax, open up your breathing and introduce joyful energy.

3. Laughter exercises (15 minutes)

Laughter comes naturally when we stop controlling it.

We start with simple games that trigger spontaneity:

- Laughter mirror – in pairs, participants imitate each other's facial expressions and grimaces until laughter comes naturally.
- Balloon in motion – we keep the balloon in the air using everything except our hands.

From 'ha-ha' to real laughter – we start with artificial laughter, which after a while becomes natural and contagious.

The instructor encourages but does not force. Each participant decides on the intensity of their participation.

Laughter comes in waves – and each one is good.

4. Group games and improvisations (10 minutes)

Time for fun and exercise together.

Participants divide into small groups or pairs and perform simple tasks:

🌸 'Reunion after many years' – we greet each other as if we were seeing each other after many years, with great joy and affection.

🌸 'Laughter without words' – we communicate only through laughter and gestures, without speaking.

🌸 'Clowning around' – exaggerated facial expressions and movements that help us escape from the seriousness of everyday life.

It is a moment full of movement, absurdity and carefreeness - for many participants, it is their first such light-hearted experience in a long time.

5. Circle of calm and reflection (10 minutes)

After intense laughter, there is a moment of calm.

The participants sit down again in a circle, take a few deep breaths and focus on what they are feeling.

Reflection questions:

- What did I feel in my body while laughing?
- What relaxed in me?
- What thoughts or memories came up when we laughed together?
- How do I feel now – after this shared wave of joy?

This is the moment to see that laughter not only relaxes, but also heals, connects and restores the breath of life.

6. Conclusion – smile ritual (5 minutes)

At the end, the facilitator invites the participants to make a symbolic gesture:

they place their hands on their hearts, close their eyes and, with a smile on their lips, repeat in their minds:

'My laughter is my strength. I allow joy to grow within me once again.'

There is a moment of silence – light, warm, filled with presence and calm.

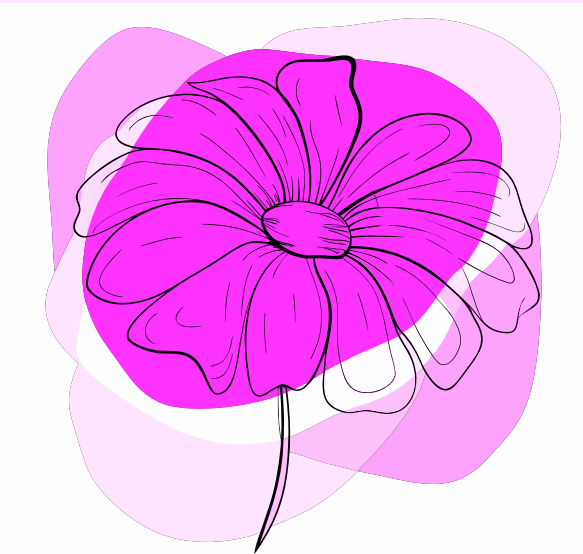
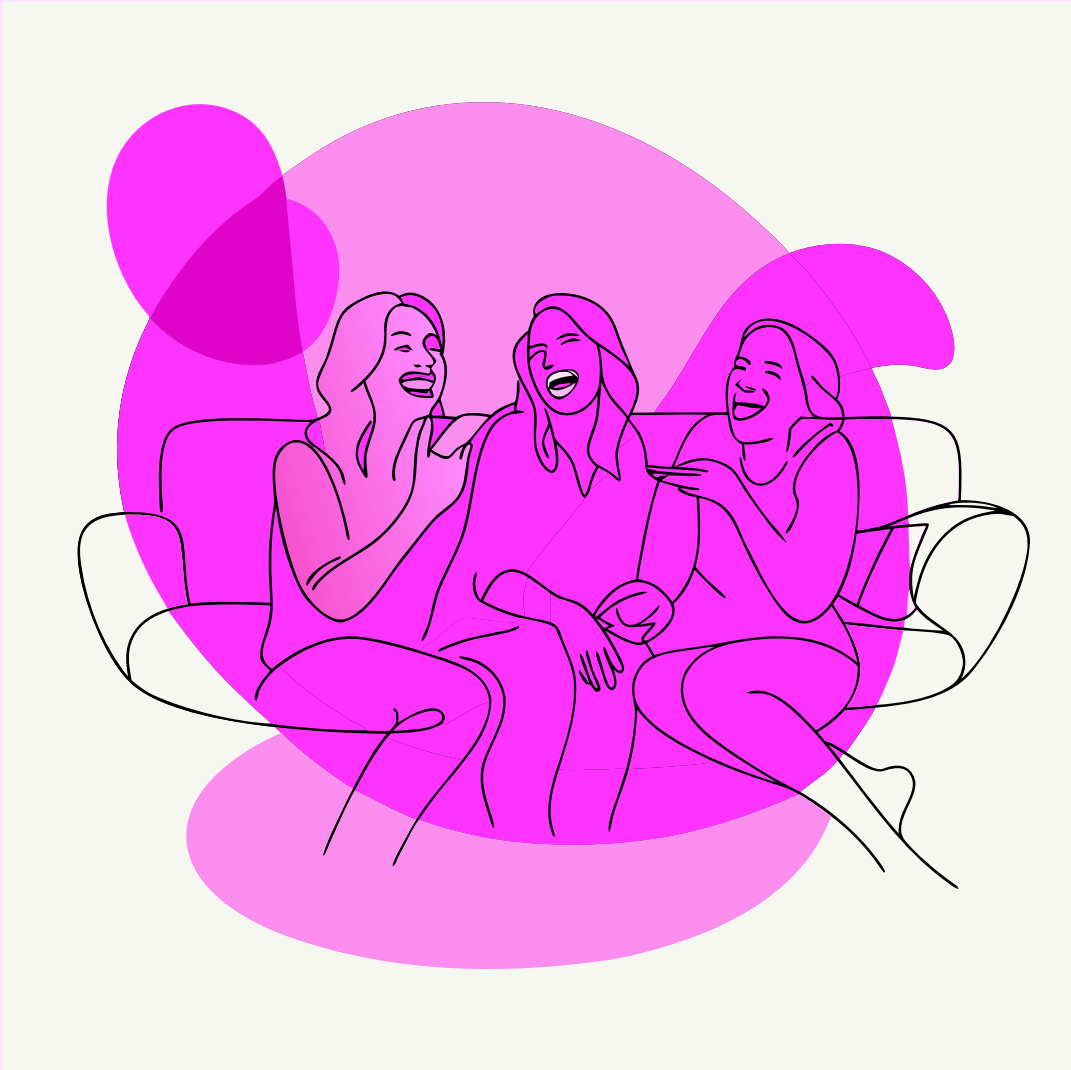
Therapeutic elements

 Release of tension and stress – laughter relaxes muscles and soothes emotions.

 Increased optimism – activates happiness hormones, improves mood and concentration.

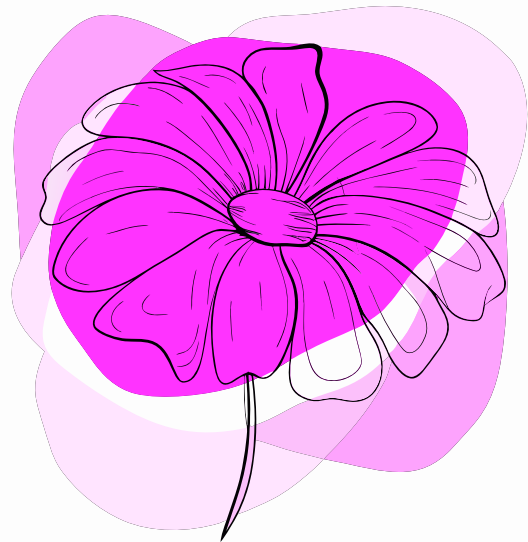
 Closeness and community – shared laughter brings people together, restores trust and tenderness towards others.

 Regaining energy – laughter is the breath of life, reminding us of the power that flows from the body.



Workshop 4

Mindfulness and Dream Catchers – The Art of Stopping



Group workshop: 'Mindfulness and dream catchers – the art of stopping'

Duration: 120 minutes

(with the possibility of extending to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

The aim of the meeting is to regain contact with the here and now through the art and symbolism of dream catchers – to create a space where women in remission from cancer can regain trust in their bodies, senses and intuition.

This is a workshop about mindfulness, gratitude and the gentle power that comes from small gestures.

Through creative activities, participants learn how to slow down, how to listen to

themselves and how to find peace in everyday life.

Mindfulness is treated here not as a technique, but as an act of kindness towards oneself - an invitation to breathe, be silent and be conscious.

Workshop schedule:

1. Introduction – 'The time I breathe' (20 minutes)

Silence, warm light, a circle of women.

The facilitator invites everyone to a short greeting ritual – calm breathing, hands placed on the heart.

'Today we will not prove anything or achieve anything.

Today we just want to be – with ourselves, with our breath, with colour, with sound.'

A brief opening conversation:

- What have I brought with me today?
- What does my body need?
- What does peace mean to me?

Next, the facilitator introduces the participants to the idea of mindfulness as the art of presence:

that mindfulness does not require silent meditation, it can also arise while painting, stringing beads, touching yarn, smelling paint.

It is the art of being with oneself – through the senses.

2. Main part – Creating a 'mindfulness dream catcher' (70 minutes)

Each participant receives metal or wooden hoops, coloured strings, beads, feathers, pieces of fabric, ribbons, dried flowers, twigs,

leaves – anything that can become part of her personal amulet of peace.

Stage 1 – Breath and intention (10 minutes)

Before they begin their work, the participants close their eyes and focus on their breathing. The facilitator asks each of them to say one sentence in their mind, which will become the intention of their work:

'I want my dreamcatcher to remind me of...
peace / trust / strength / gratitude.'

This sentence can be written on a small piece of paper and woven into the dreamcatcher as a hidden message to oneself.

Stage 2 – Creation (50 minutes)

Calm instrumental music plays in the background.

The women work in silence or quiet conversation. The instructor encourages them to engage with the materials mindfully:

‘Feel the texture of the string. Notice how the light reflects off the beads.

Listen to your breathing as you create. This is mindfulness.’

Each part of the dreamcatcher takes on symbolic meaning:

- **The circle** – the cycle of life, rebirth, continuity and acceptance of transience.
- **The weaving of the thread** – the web of experiences that shape us but do not define us.
- **The beads** – moments of gratitude.

Feathers and ribbons – that which is light, which allows dreams to flow on.

Important: it is not about perfection. Each weave is a story, each knot is a memory.

Stage 3 – A short mindfulness break (10 minutes)

After finishing the dream catchers, the participants place them in front of them and sit in silence.

The facilitator reads a short passage:

‘You don't have to change anything. All you have to do is notice what is already there.

Mindfulness is not about fighting your thoughts, but about not losing yourself in their noise.’

A moment of shared breathing and silence.

3. Reflection – ‘What do I want to keep?’ (20 minutes)

Discussion circle – each participant shares their experience if they wish to do so.

The facilitator asks questions:

 What did I feel when I was making my dream catcher?

What thoughts came to my mind?

 What do I want my dream catcher to remind me of on difficult days?

This is a moment for kind words, tears, laughter and emotion.

There are no ‘good’ or “bad” statements here – each one is important.

The facilitator can end the circle with a short affirmation:

‘I deserve peace.

I deserve rest.

I deserve time that is only mine.’

4. Conclusion – Gratitude ritual (10 minutes)

Each participant takes their dream catcher in their hand and looks at it in silence for a moment.

The facilitator invites everyone to make a symbolic gesture: breathing together, with their eyes closed and a smile directed inwards.

‘May what has been woven today from thread and breath remind you that life is delicate – and beautiful – when we look at it with tenderness.’

Silence. A few minutes of peaceful stillness.

Then the dreamcatchers can be hung in the room – they form a collective installation of feminine strength and peace.

Materials:

- Hoops (wooden or metal) – one for each participant.
- Strings, threads, ribbons, yarn.
- Beads, feathers, dried flowers, fabric scraps.
- Small pieces of paper and pens (to write down intentions).
- Scissors, glue, possibly hot glue.
- Soft music in the background.

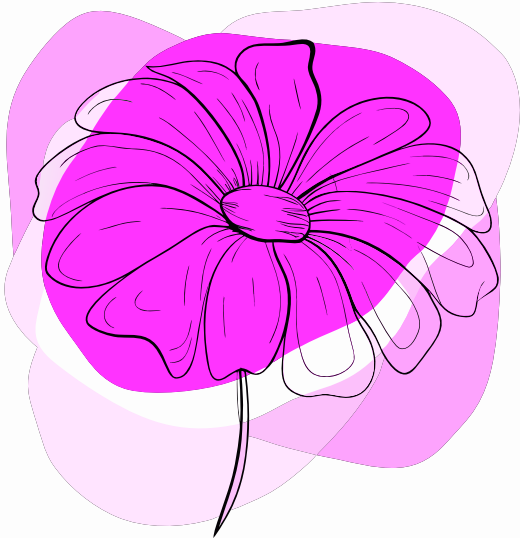
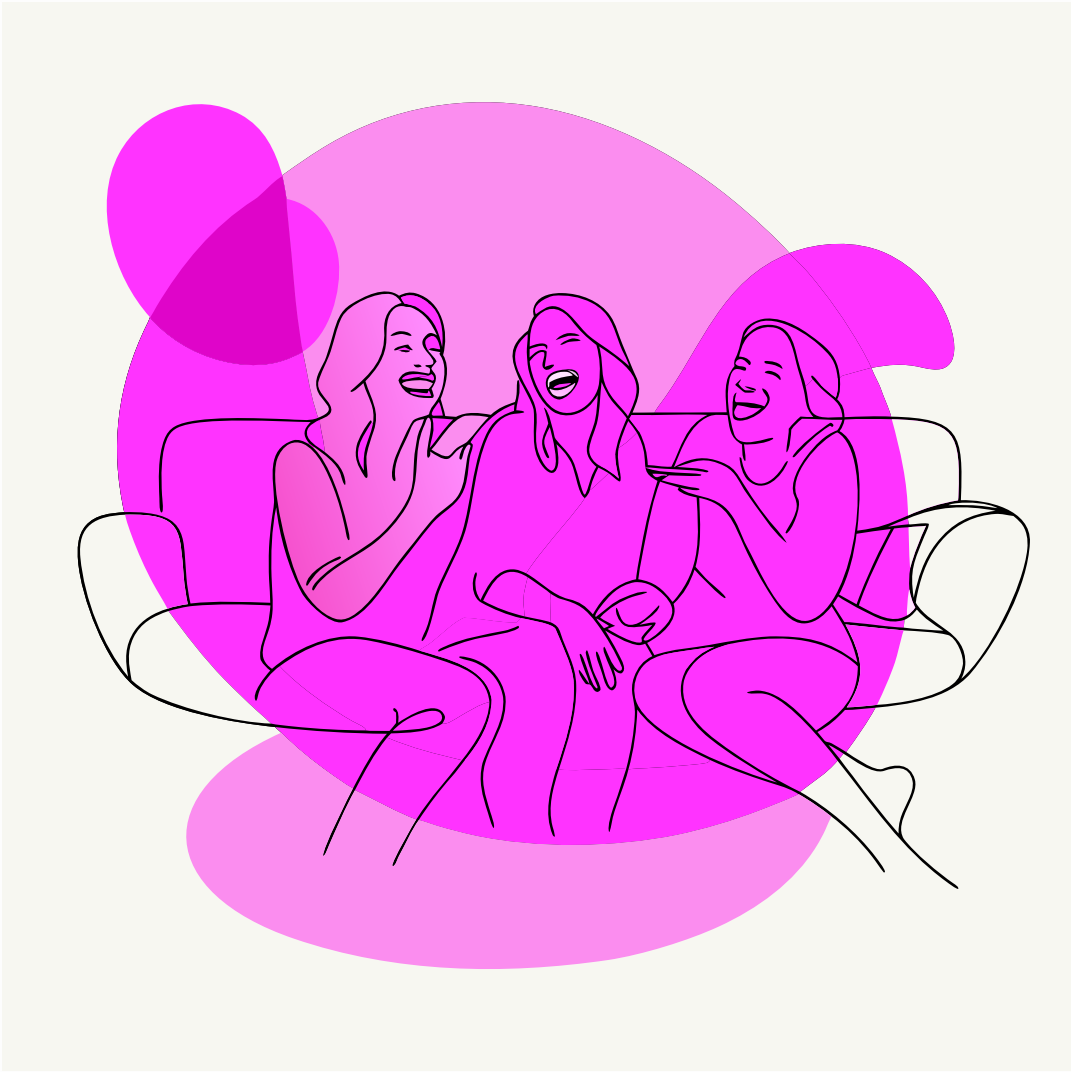
Workshop outcome:

Women leave with a sense of inner peace, focus and gratitude.

Each takes with her not only a dream catcher she has made herself, but also a symbolic compass – a reminder that even after difficult experiences, it is possible to build a life with lightness and awareness.

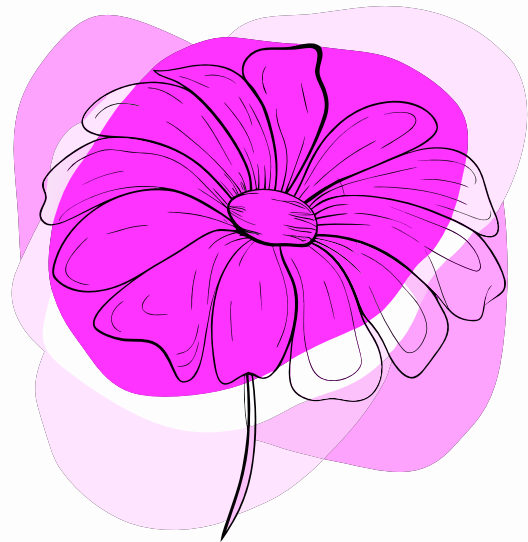
'Mindfulness is not about stopping the world, but noticing that the world does not have to carry me away.'





Workshop 5

Motivational Photography



Group workshop: 'Motivational photography'

Duration: 120 minutes

(with the possibility of extending to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

The aim of the meeting is to discover one's own beauty, peace and feminine strength through the experience of photography as a form of mindfulness and self-therapy. This is a workshop in which the camera becomes a symbolic mirror – not to judge, but to see oneself anew, with tenderness and acceptance.

For women who have experienced cancer, photography can become a ritual of self-recovery – a space where the body ceases to

be 'after the battle' and becomes a home for life, breath and gratitude.

Workshop schedule:

1. Introduction – 'The light I have within me' (20 minutes)

Warm light, the scent of candles, calm music. The facilitator welcomes the participants in a circle, inviting them to a short mindfulness exercise:

close your eyes, place your hands on your heart,

take a deep breath and think: 'I am here, I am enough just as I am.'

Each woman introduces herself by name and with one word that describes her mood.

The facilitator introduces the idea of the workshop:

'Today is not about posing, but about seeing yourself - the one who has survived, matured, and radiates from within.'

2. Conversation about beauty and the body after trauma (20 minutes)

A short, opening conversation in a safe atmosphere:

- What does beauty mean to me today?
- How do I view my body after everything it has been through?
- What would I like to see in my reflection today?

The facilitator talks about beauty that does not disappear – it only changes shape.

Each woman can write down one sentence-intention: 'Today I want to see in myself...'

This sentence will stay with her for the rest of the meeting.

3. Preparation – 'Touch, colour, tenderness' (20 minutes)

This is a moment of caring for the body – a gesture of gratitude for its existence.

Participants have time to gently prepare themselves: fix their hair, apply lotion, choose a scarf, jewellery, something that makes them feel good.

It is not about make-up, but about the ritual of presence.

The facilitator encourages them to work with their breath and senses:

'Feel the texture of the fabric, the scent of the cream, the weight of the earring. This is also photography - internal, sensory.'

4. Photo session – 'Seeing yourself truly' (40 minutes)

Each participant has a few minutes of individual work with the photographer.

The photos are taken in silence or with quiet music, with full respect for emotions and boundaries.

The photographer does not direct – she accompanies.

Sometimes she asks: 'Look out the window,' 'Close your eyes and think of someone who supports you,' 'Smile at yourself from years ago.'

Photography becomes an act of courage – a moment when a woman says to herself: 'This is me. And I'm okay.'

5. Reflection – 'The image that empowers me' (15 minutes)

After the session, the participants return to the circle.

Each of them can share their impressions, emotions and thoughts.

We do not talk about the technique of photography, but about feelings:

- What did I feel when I looked into the lens?

- What emotions did that moment awaken in me?

- Did something relax, lighten or calm me?

This is a time for gentleness and listening – without comments or judgements.

6. Conclusion – Affirmations and gratitude (5 minutes)

A short calming ritual. The facilitator reads the affirmations, and the women can quietly say the ones that resonate with them the most.

 ***'I am beautiful here and now.'***

 ***'My body is my story and my strength.'***

 ***'I don't need to fix anything - just breathing is enough.'***

At the end, each participant writes down one sentence of gratitude to herself:

'I thank myself for...'

Materials and space:

- A circle of chairs, calm music, soft lighting (lamps, candles).
- Mirror, scarves, jewellery, make-up accessories (optional).
- Notebooks, affirmation cards, pens.
- Camera, curtain or separate corner for privacy.

Affirmations to use:

- 🌸 I am beautiful at every stage of my life.
- 🌸 I see myself with tenderness, not criticism.
- 🌸 My body is a road map, not a boundary.
- 🌸 Every smile brings out the light from within.
- 🌸 I allow myself to shine – in my own way.

Reflection card:

- When was the last time I looked at myself with kindness?

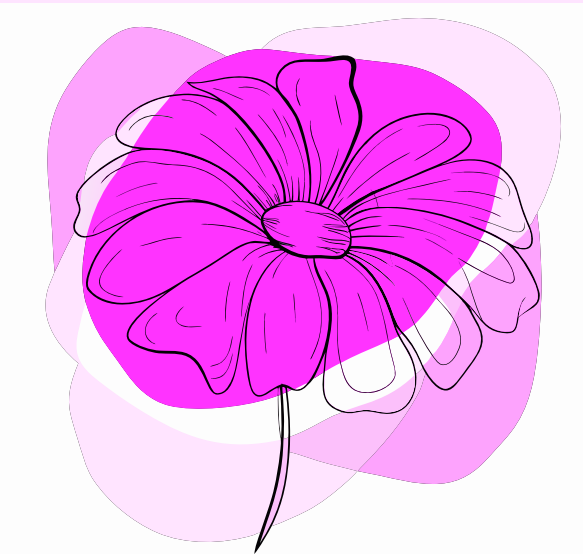
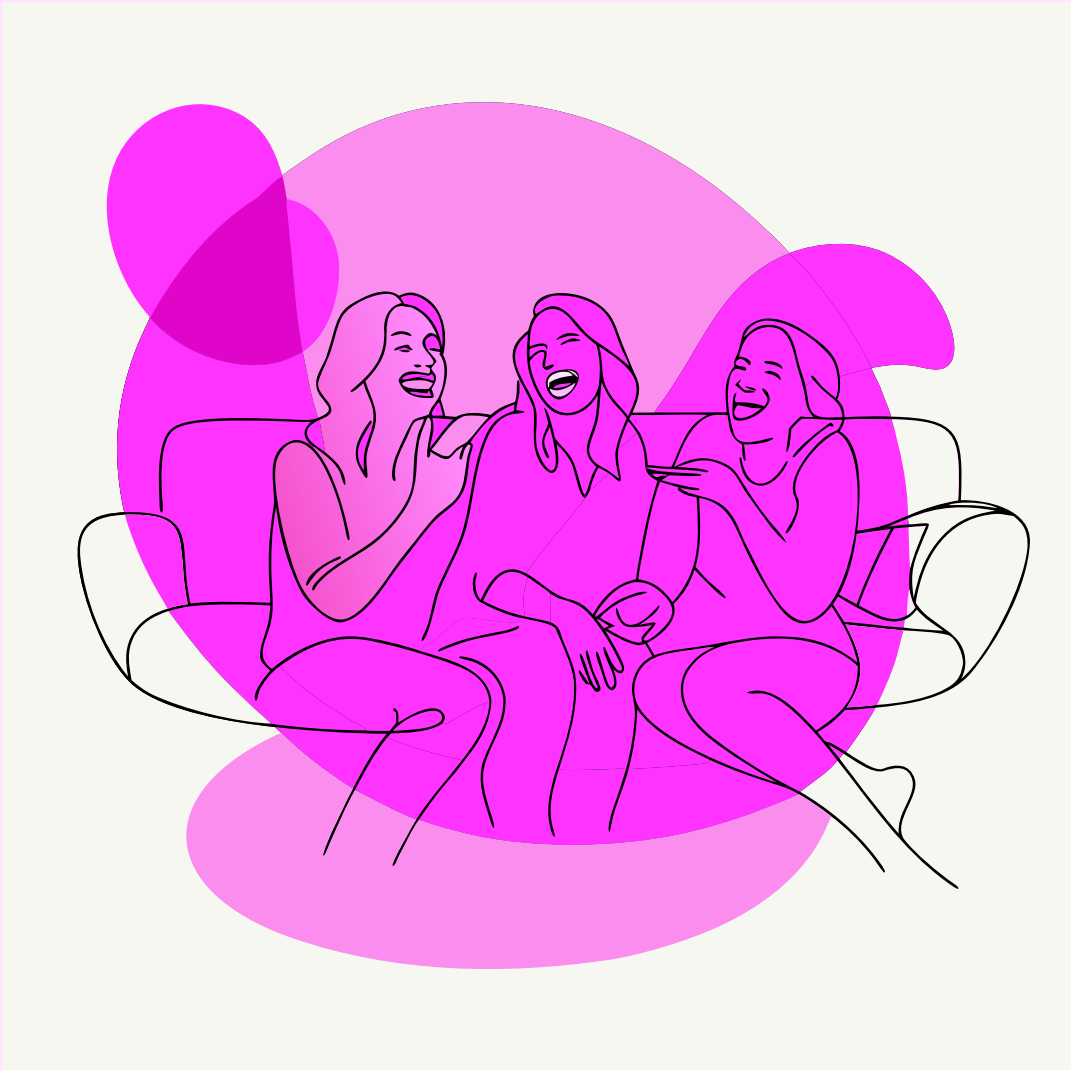
- What in my body would I like to accept more?
- What feeling comes up when I see my photo?
- What do I want to remember from this meeting?

A workshop is not a portrait, but a testimony of presence.

It is a moment when a woman regains her inner vision and says:

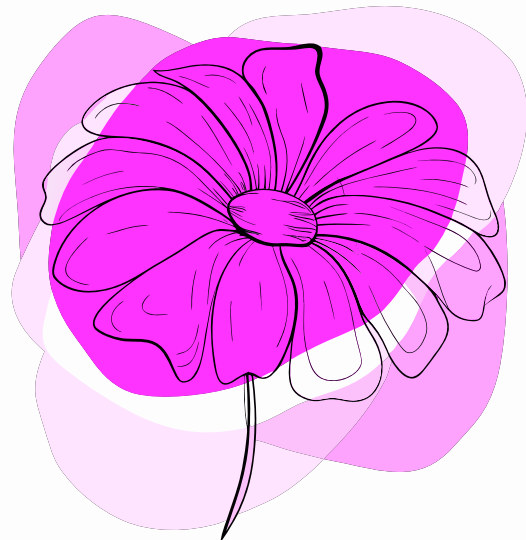
'This is me - with scars, with light, with life.

And that's enough.'



Workshop 6

Make-up with Soul -
The Art of Self-Care
and Discovering



Group workshop: 'Make-up with soul – the art of self-care and discovering beauty'

Duration: 120 minutes

(with the possibility of extending to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

The aim of the meeting is to rediscover the joy of connecting with your body and face through a gentle ritual of care and make-up that does not hide but emphasises your authentic beauty.

Make-up is treated here as a form of mindfulness and tenderness towards yourself, not as a mask, but as a gesture of care, gratitude and affirmation of life.

This is a workshop for women in remission from cancer who want to see themselves in

the mirror with gentleness again, experience the support of other women and remind themselves that beauty is not so much in the face as in the way you look at yourself.

Workshop schedule:

1. Introduction – 'The beauty I already have' (20 minutes)

The facilitator welcomes the group in a circle with calm music and the scent of candles.

Each participant introduces herself by name and with one word that describes how she feels today.

The facilitator introduces the topic:

'Make-up is not meant to hide. It is meant to remind us that there is light within us.

Sometimes a drop of colour is enough to see something in ourselves that has long been dormant.'

Next, participants receive a small piece of paper and a pen.

They write down:

‘What makes me feel beautiful?’

It is not about appearance – it can be a gesture, a scent, a memory, a character trait.

2. Care – ‘A touch that says: I am important’ (25 minutes)

The aim of this part is to feel cared for and present in contact with the body.

The facilitator demonstrates a simple care routine – cleansing, toning, moisturising.

Each movement is performed slowly, mindfully, with quiet music playing.

Participants can perform a facial massage – alone or in pairs (if they feel comfortable).

This is not a cosmetic technique, but a gesture of gratitude to one's own face.

A short reflection after the exercise:

🌸 How did I feel when I touched my face with tenderness?

🌸 What changed in my breathing when I did it mindfully?

‘Care is a conversation with the body. It understands tenderness better than words.’

3. Make-up – ‘Colour that breathes’ (45 minutes)

Objective: to show that make-up can be a form of self-expression and affirmation, rather than an attempt to hide imperfections.

The instructor presents three subtle directions:

- Freshness – a light, natural look;
- Warmth – emphasising the eyes or lips;
- Strength – a more pronounced accent, a symbol of courage.

Each participant chooses what best reflects her mood and needs.

Under the guidance of the instructor, she applies simple make-up or allows a friend from the group to do it for her.

During the session, the instructor talks about the emotions evoked by colours and gestures:

'Make-up is not meant to change us – it is meant to remind us that we can choose how we want to feel today.'

4. Mirror and photography – 'See yourself anew' (20 minutes)

After finishing their make-up, the participants take mirrors and look at themselves in silence. They do not analyse or correct anything. They just look and breathe.

The instructor encourages them:

"Look at yourself as you would a friend. Don't ask if you look good – ask how you are today.'

Women who wish to do so can take symbolic photos of each other – with a phone, in natural light.

Not to evaluate the effect, but to capture the moment of presence and gratitude.

5. Reflection circle – 'I see in myself...' (10 minutes)

A group conversation accompanied by calm music.

The facilitator asks:

- How did I feel when I touched my face while applying make-up?
- What would I like to remember from this experience?
- How can I weave small rituals of self-care into my everyday life?

Each participant writes down one sentence that she would like to say to herself in the mirror:

Materials:

- Mirrors, brushes, sponges, creams, toners, wipes, hair bands, foundations, eyeshadows, lipsticks, blushers, disposable applicators.
- Additionally: cards, pens, a candle, background music, warm lighting.

Affirmations to use during the workshop:

 My beauty is calm and real.

 Every touch of care is a gesture of gratitude towards life.

 I see myself with gentleness.

 My body is enough.

 I don't have to be perfect to be beautiful.

Reflection card:

- When was the last time I took care of myself without rushing?
- What emotions do I feel when I look in the mirror?

- What makes me feel feminine?
- How can I take care of myself every day – with my soul, without pressure?

Organisational checklists

For the facilitator:

- prepare a warm, calm space (circle of chairs, mirrors, table with cosmetics);
- ensure intimacy and emotional safety;
- plan for soft music and a scent element (candle, oil);
- take care of the rhythm: silence – action – reflection;
- prepare affirmation cards and questions for reflection.

For the make-up artist (if present):

- use hypoallergenic, gentle cosmetics;
- support women, do not correct – emphasise naturalness;
- allow participants to act independently;
- remember that make-up is an emotional process, not a technical one.

Conclusion

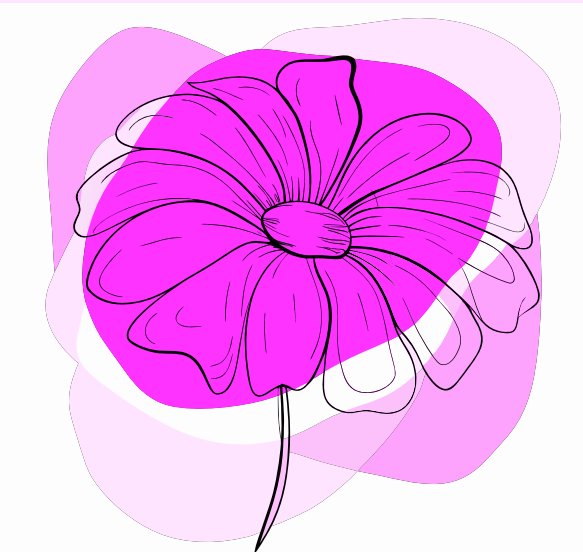
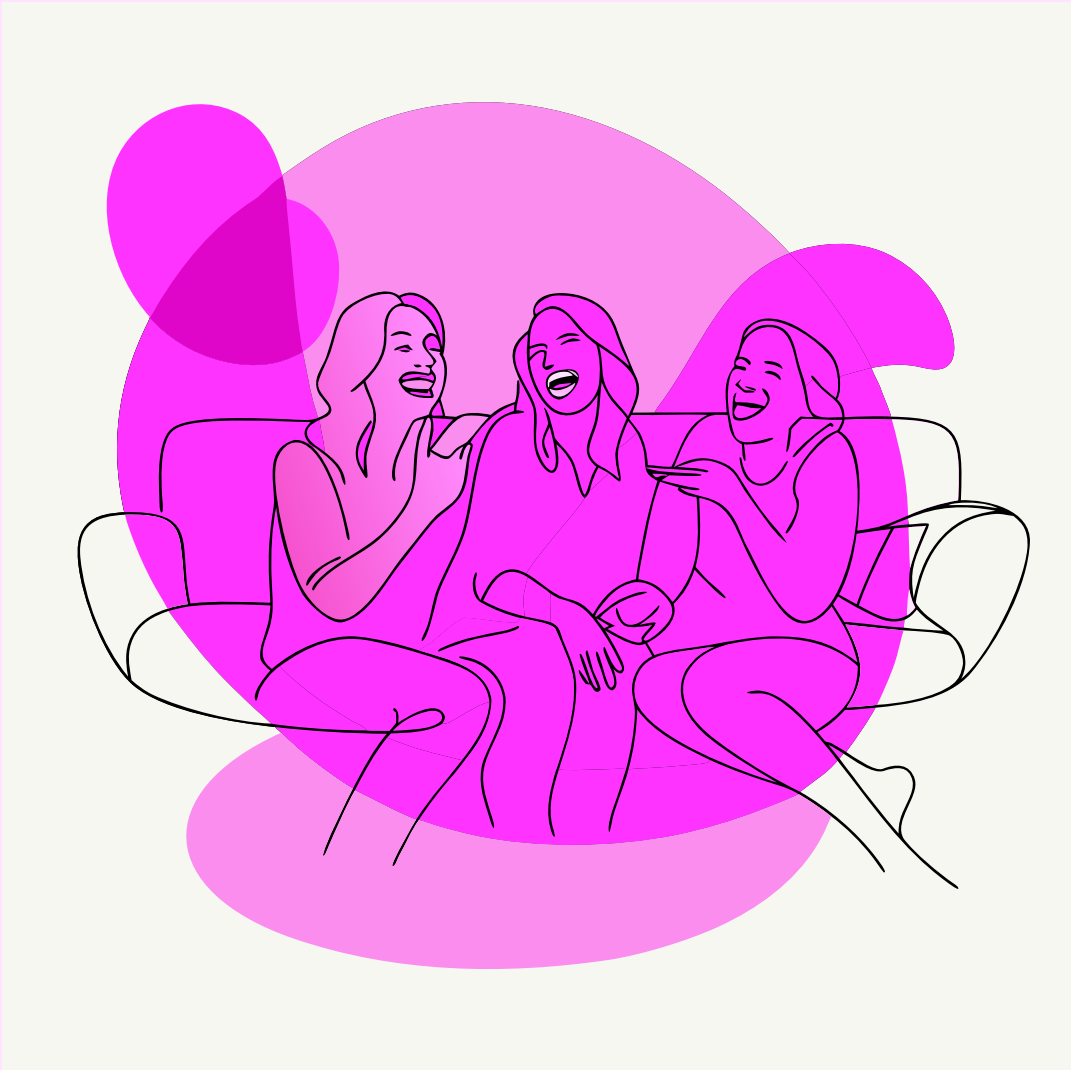
The workshop 'Make-up with soul – the art of self-care and discovering beauty' is an encounter with your own reflection without criticism or pressure.

It is a moment to feel that your face is a map of your life, not a list of corrections.

Every gesture of care, every colour, every smile in the mirror is proof that a woman can still be good to herself – with soul and light.

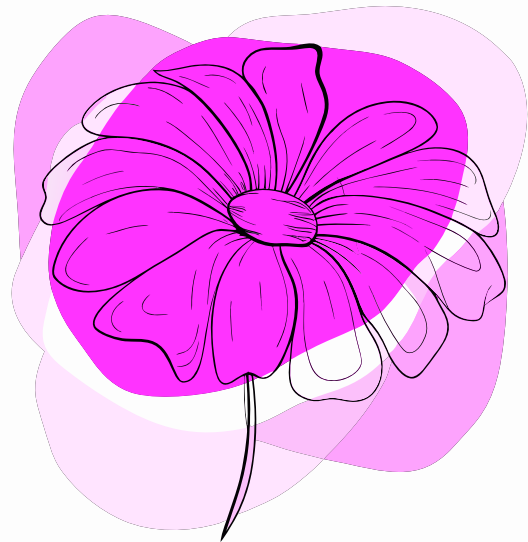
'I don't wear make-up to hide. I wear make-up to remind myself that I am alive.'





Workshop 7

Art Therapy
Workshops –
Línocut



Group workshop: 'Art Therapy Workshops – Linocut'

Duration: 120 minutes

(with the possibility of extending to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

The aim of the meeting is to creatively express emotions and stories through the art of linocut, understood not as an artistic technique, but as a symbolic process of regaining agency and voice.

During the classes, women talk, create, share and find strength in the process of joint action in a safe space.

Linocut becomes a metaphor for life after illness – leaving marks that remain, but also creating something new and beautiful.

It is not about the aesthetic effect, but about the process: cutting, reflection, light and shadow – everything that tells the story of the journey and rebirth.

Workshop schedule:

1. Introduction – 'The mark that remains' (20 minutes)

The facilitator invites the participants to form a circle.

Quiet music plays in the background, and on the table there is a candle and several ready-made linocut prints – symbols of different emotions.

Opening conversation:

- What does leaving a mark mean to me?
- Can I look at my scars – both visible and internal – as part of my history, not a source of shame, but a sign of strength?

The instructor introduces the metaphor of linocut:

'Linocut is the art of light and shadow. Just like in life - one cannot exist without the other. What we cut out disappears from the surface, but that is where the light appears.'

2. A short art therapy warm-up – 'Hands that remember' (10 minutes)

Before we begin our creative work, a few simple hand awareness exercises:

 gently rubbing our fingers and wrists,

 closing our eyes and feeling the texture of our hands,

 writing a few words on a piece of paper:

'What would I like to leave behind today – in an image, in a gesture, in a trace?'

This is a symbolic preparation for creation – from the body to the emotions, from the emotions to the image.

3. Creating a matrix – 'I cut out what I want to release' (45 minutes)

Each participant receives a piece of linoleum, a pencil, a graver and a paint roller.

The instructor demonstrates the basics of linocut technique (without emphasising perfection).

Task:

- Draw a symbol that speaks to you today – it can be a shape, a word, a line, a ray, a heart, a leaf, a hand, a wave.
- Begin to gently cut out what you want to release – anger, pain, sadness, fear.
- Keep what you want to preserve in the linoleum – hope, strength, gratitude.

Calm instrumental music plays in the background.

The instructor reminds them:

'This is not a competition. It is a conversation between the hand and the heart. There are no mistakes - every cut says something.'

During the work, participants can talk or remain silent - as they wish.

This is a time of silence, concentration and inner order.

4. Reflecting and discovering meaning – 'What remains in the light' (25 minutes)

When the matrices are ready, the participants cover them with paint and make prints on paper.

The effect is often surprising – the reflection is reversed, imperfect, but therefore real.

The facilitator invites a short discussion:

 What do I feel when I look at my linocut?

 What do I see in it – beyond the image?

 What emotions did I leave in this print, and what do I want to take away from it?

Emotions often arise – the print becomes tangible evidence of a transition: from pain to creativity, from experience to meaning.

5. Circle of support and reflection – 'My story in reflection' (20 minutes)

The group sits back down in a circle.

The prints lie in the middle – they can be placed next to each other to create a shared composition.

Conversation:

- What did I discover about myself during the work?
- What would I like to take from this meeting into my everyday life?
- How can I use art as a way of caring for myself?

At the end, the facilitator suggests an affirmation:

'What I cut out of pain, I now reflect in light.'

Each participant writes down one word or phrase that they want to keep - e.g.

'strength,' 'calm,' 'gratitude,' 'I am alive.'

Materials:

- Linoleum (soft),
- Scribes,
- Rollers,
- Printing or acrylic paints,
- A4/A3 paper (optionally cotton bags, T-shirts),
- Pencils,
- Tissues, protective aprons, cloths,
- Candles, relaxing music.

Affirmations to use during the workshop:

 What I have been through has made me deeper, not weaker.

 My scars are part of my map.

 I cut out what hurts to make room for light.

 Every mark I leave behind matters.

 Art is my language of strength.

Reflection card:

- What did I want to 'cut out' of my life today, and what did I want to 'leave'?
- What emotions arose during the creation process?
- What does my linocut say to me?
- How can I find space for creativity and peace in my everyday life?

Organisational checklist:

- prepare the room (circle of chairs, work tables, art supplies, candles);
- ensure safety when working with tools (chisels);
- prepare warm, calm background music;
- have gloves, cloths and aprons in stock;
- accompany during work, do not judge – listen, support, encourage conversation.

Conclusion

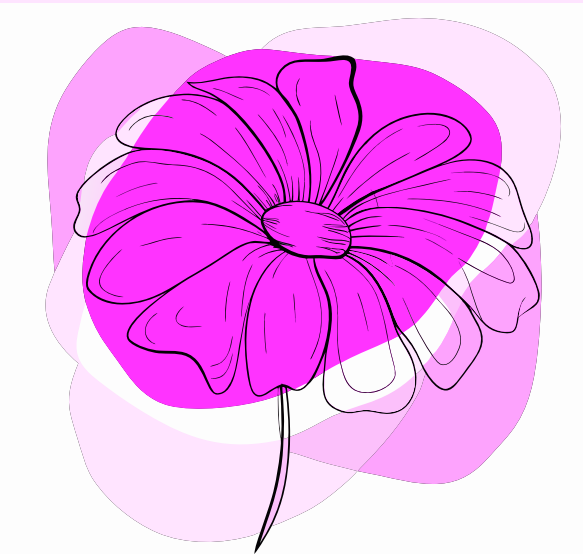
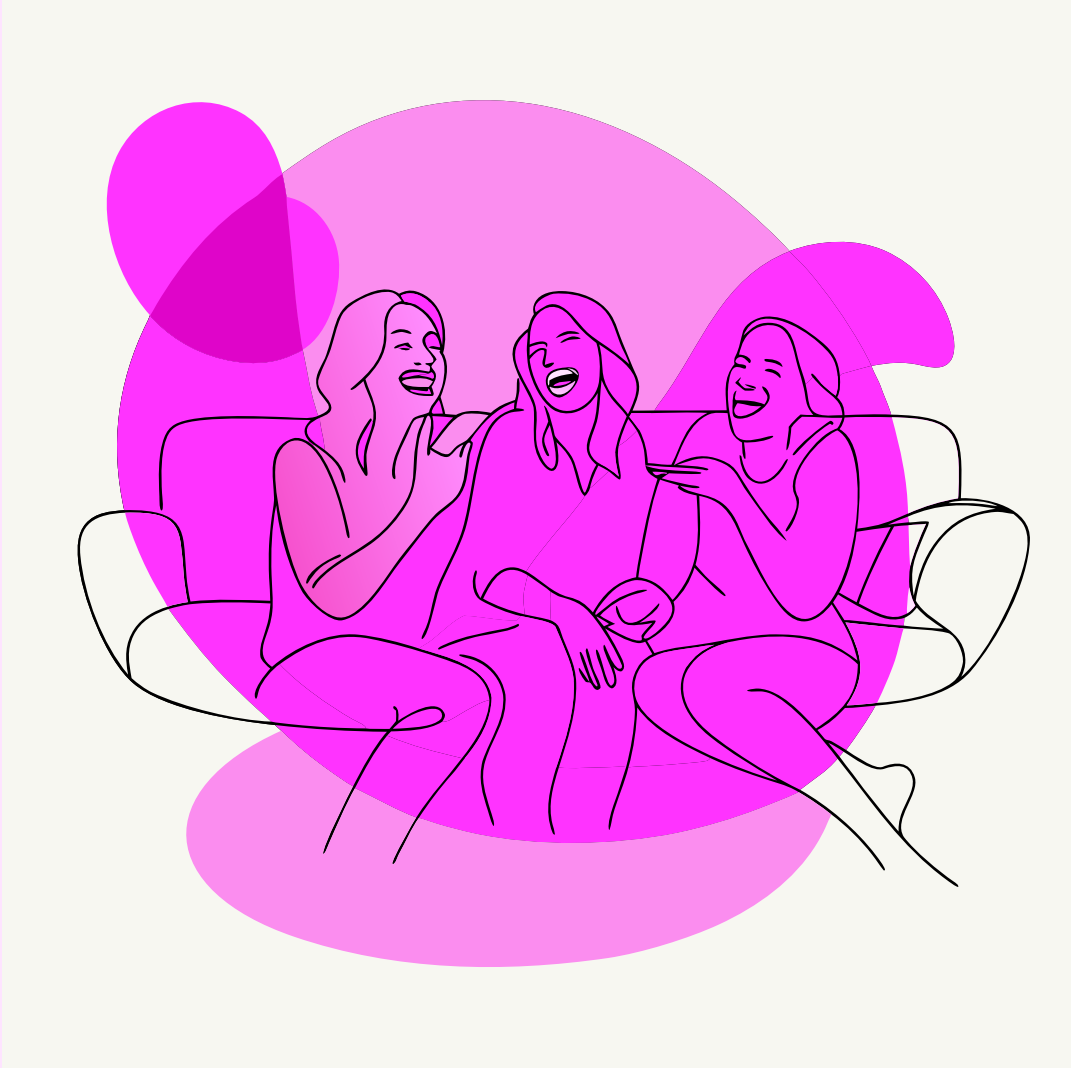
The 'Art Therapy – Linocut' workshop is an encounter with your own shadow and light.

It is a time to create form from pain, to extract meaning from silence, and to create an image of strength from your hands.

Each imprint is proof that you can start over, that you can transform hardship into beauty.

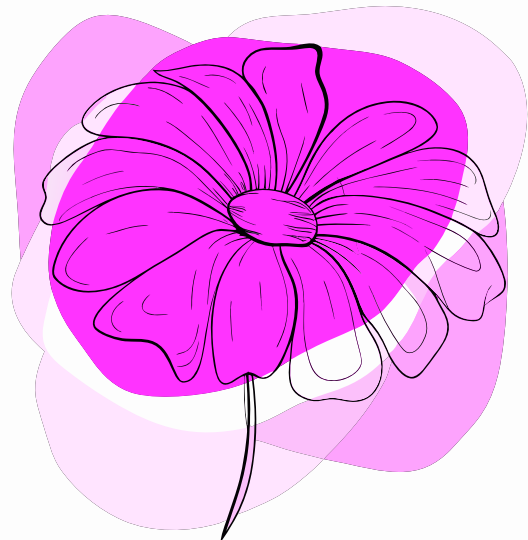
'I cut to make room to breathe. I bounced back to remind myself that I am alive.'





Workshop 8

Art Therapy
Workshops –
Cyanotype



Group workshop: 'Art Therapy Workshop – Cyanotype'

Duration: 120 minutes

(with the possibility of extending to 150 minutes depending on the pace of the group)

Aim of the workshop:

The aim of the meeting is to creatively experience cyanotype as a form of mindfulness, gratitude and symbolic preservation of light.

Cyanotype – a technique of old photographic prints with a characteristic blue tint – becomes a metaphor for memory and presence.

For women in remission from cancer, it is a unique way to express their emotions: combining tenderness with the process of creation, observing how light leaves a mark

on paper – just as experience leaves a mark on us, but without the pain.

Workshop schedule:

1. Introduction – 'Stop the Light' (20 minutes)

The facilitator welcomes the group into a circle, bathed in soft light. On the table are several examples of cyanotype prints: plants, hands, symbols, everyday objects.

- What shines within me, even when it is dark?
- What would I like to remember today, to preserve, to capture in an image?
- What memory would I like to transform into something beautiful?

The instructor explains the idea behind the workshop:

'Cyanotype is the art of capturing light. It is light that draws the image - slowly, delicately. Just as life draws our faces, hands, memories.'

2. Art therapy warm-up – ‘Traces of Memory’ (10 minutes)

Mindfulness exercise:

The participants close their eyes and imagine their hands – everything they have ever held in their lives: someone's handshake, a cup of tea, a lock of hair, a letter, a handkerchief, hope.

The facilitator asks:

‘Think about what you would like to leave on paper today. What could be your symbol – a piece of a leaf, a feather, a fragment of lace, a key, a photograph, a hand?’ This is emotional preparation for working with images – from the level of memory and gratitude.

3. Creative process – ‘Reflection in light’ (45 minutes)

The instructor demonstrates the basics of cyanotype printing (on prepared photosensitive material – paper or fabric). Participants arrange selected elements on the surface: leaves, plants, fabrics, their own hands or symbols.

The work is accompanied by ambient music, calmness and concentration.

The instructor encourages them:

‘Arrange what is important to you. Don't think about aesthetics – let the light tell your story.’

After exposure to light (approx. 10–15 minutes) and rinsing the paper in water, a blue image slowly appears – the effect of the work becomes visible. This moment is full of emotion – the women watch as a clear, lasting trace emerges from delicate forms. It is a symbol of transformation: something fleeting is captured in light, like a memory that no longer hurts.

4. Discussion and interpretation – ‘What does my light say?’ (25 minutes)

When the works are dry, the participants return to the circle.

Each of them can show their print and describe what they see in it – not in a technical sense, but emotionally.

Supporting questions:

- What did my light show today?
- Is there peace, strength, tenderness, longing in my image?
- What do I want to remember from this process?

This conversation is often filled with emotion and the warmth of community – because each work is different, but they all share a tone of gratitude and life.

5. Conclusion – ‘The Light That Remains in Me’ (20 minutes)

The facilitator invites everyone to take part in a short closing ritual.

Each participant writes the following sentence on a piece of paper:

‘The light that I want to keep within me is...’

The pieces of paper can be stored together with the printout in envelopes symbolising a ‘memory box’.

At the end, a joint affirmation:

‘The light has remembered me. And I have remembered myself in the light.’

Silence, gratitude, a peaceful farewell.

Materials:

- Paper or fabric coated with cyanotype emulsion (prepared in advance),
- Items for imprinting: leaves, lace, keys, feathers, photographs, hands, fabric fragments,
- Water trays, brushes, pegs, protective gloves, aprons,
- Envelopes, sheets of paper, pens, candles, soft background music.

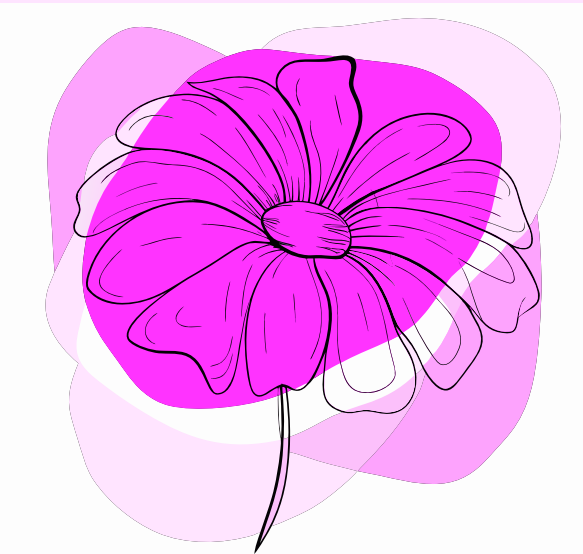
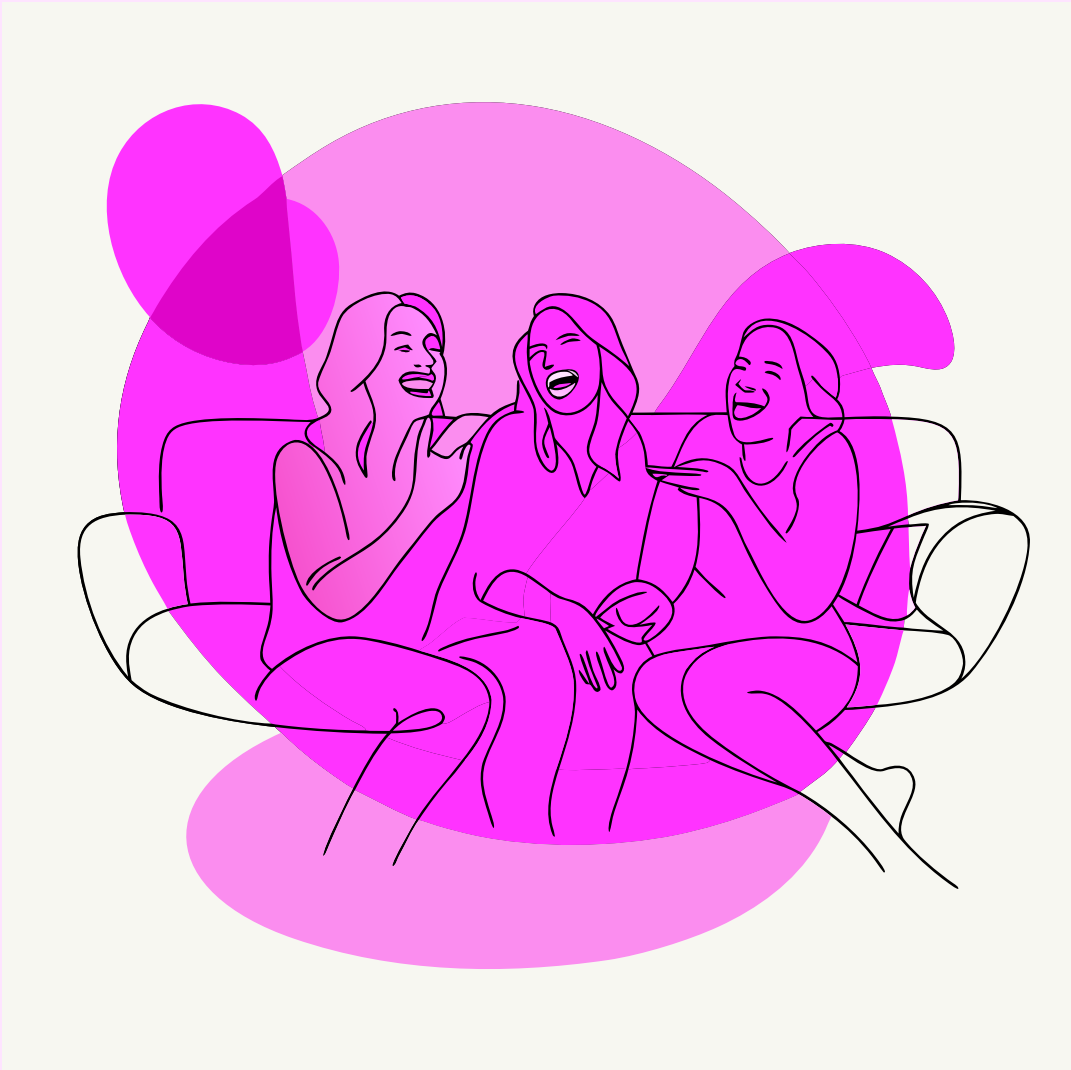
Affirmations to use during the workshop:

- 🌸 My light is within me, not outside.
- 🌸 I can hold on to what is beautiful without fear of loss.
- 🌸 I am in the process of finding clarity.
- 🌸 Every shadow reminds me that the sun is shining somewhere nearby.
- 🌸 I allow the light to remember me.

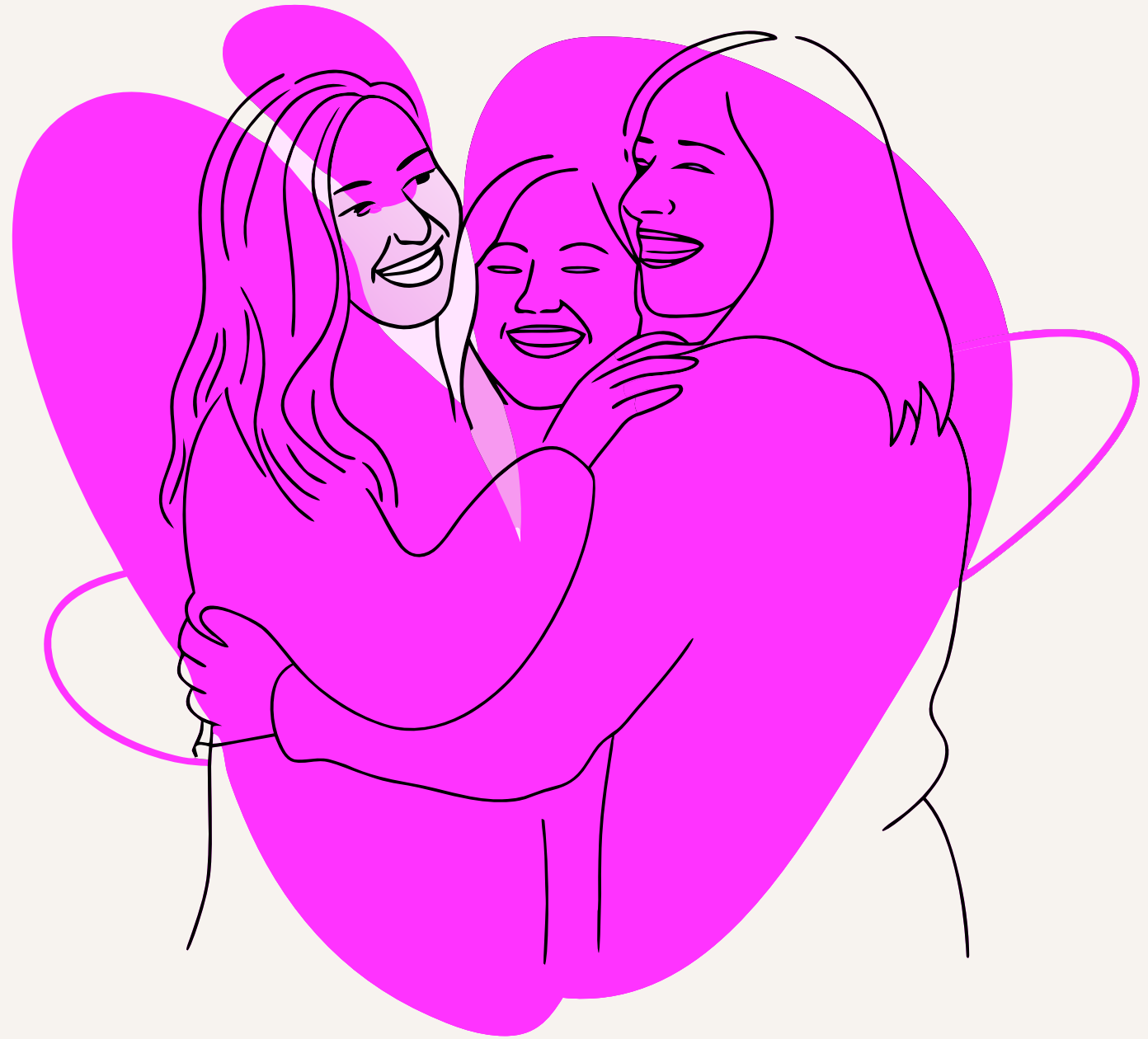
Reflection card:

- What did I want to capture in the light today?
- What did I discover as I watched my painting come to life?
- What feelings accompanied me during the creative process?
- How can I transfer this peace and mindfulness into my everyday life?





Conclusion –
The light that
remains
within us



As the project drew to a close, there was more than just a sense of fulfilment in the air. In the eyes of the women who had gone through illness, convalescence and long months of uncertainty, there was a new sparkle – calm, warm, conscious. It was no longer the flame of struggle, but the light of endurance. Over a long period of time, each of them had learned that the fight for life is more than just chemotherapy, hospitals and a calendar of check-ups. It is also quiet, everyday courage – opening your eyes after a night's sleep, getting dressed, drinking coffee, looking in the mirror and seeing not only a patient, but a woman who has survived.

During the project, they realised that each of them is a warrior – unique, one of a kind, but also tired. Because even the bravest of

warriors needs to lay down their arms at some point, take a breath and allow themselves a moment of silence. This is precisely why this space was created: to stop fighting and start living. To exchange weapons for brushes, chisels, cameras, pieces of pottery or frames for memories. Because femininity does not have to be solely about heroic survival – it can also be about softness, calmness and creative breath. From the very beginning, the project had this idea at its core – to create a safe space where you can give yourself permission to take a break. The partners understood that actions were needed that went beyond the usual occupational therapy. Instead of a rigid framework, a process was proposed – a path leading from fear to expression, from silence to storytelling, from loneliness to community. It was not just a series of workshops; it was a way to understand oneself anew.

Each meeting became a small ritual of regaining meaning. Women who, until recently, were afraid to look to the future, began to make plans again – not big things, but the little things that make life full. Drinking tea together, sharing laughter, talking about what hurts and what heals – all this became part of a process that cannot be described in numbers.

Over time, an unbreakable bond developed between the participants. Shared experiences, creativity and mutual presence built something more lasting than the workshop schedule - a community of women who no longer need to fight to feel strong. It is enough that they simply are.

In the following weeks of the project, as the workshops gained momentum and the women's hands became accustomed to working with clay, paint, paper and camera light, something invisible began to happen within them. Each of them carried the weight of experiences that cannot be expressed in a single sentence. Sometimes it was the fear of a relapse, sometimes regret over lost femininity, sometimes simple fatigue that was not visible from the outside. But there was also something else in all this – a hunger for life, a desire to create, a need to express oneself on one's own terms.

Creative work allowed them to get closer to emotions that they had previously hidden deep inside. When someone holds a brush in their hands, when colour begins to flow across the paper and form takes shape, words fall silent and a conversation with oneself begins. One of the participants said during the class: 'I didn't know I could create something beautiful. I always thought that beauty no longer concerned me.' It was then that the entire team realised that what they were doing had a deeper meaning than they could have imagined. Because the project was not meant to heal the body – it was meant to help heal the inside.

As part of the planned activities, eight workshops were conducted, as described earlier in the project proposal. Each of them was different, yet they all formed a coherent

story about returning to oneself. There were art therapy sessions, classes on expressing emotions through colour and texture, workshops on focus and mindfulness, and sessions working with the body and the senses. But what happened next went far beyond the project documentation. The women themselves began to propose new ideas – they wanted more, deeper, bolder. And so, new activities were born: mosaic workshops, during which each participant created her own symbolic image of the world; photography classes, where the camera became a tool for looking with tenderness; meetings for creating frames, which were used to frame not only photographs, but also memories.

The project partners recognised the enormous potential in this spontaneous development. The company, in cooperation with its partner organisation, decided not to stop this process at the end of the formal activities. A joint decision was made to continue the meetings – without the obligation to report, but out of a genuine desire. This is how a network of informal relationships was created, which today lives at its own pace: women meet, talk and create.

The project ended in documents, but it did not end in the lives of the participants.

