

SWEET SURPRISE: HOW SUGAR HELPS YOU DIET

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IN 2001, KIM STROUSE lost her sister to suicide. The next year her grieving took a positive turn; she began Rita Project, an organization that offers art therapy work-

shops in New York and L.A. to people who've attempted suicide or lost someone to it. "Art therapy is helpful to those who have trouble putting words to feelings," Strouse says. "A traumatic event often sends one into a state of shock. The process of creating helps people understand themselves."

"The Wedding Couple" was created in Strouse's New York art therapy workshop.

Art therapy can work in any medium. A clinician usually guides you—instructing you, for instance, to make a collage expressing how you feel that day—and encourages you to discuss what your creation means. The

method has been shown to help children, cancer patients, those with neurodegenerative disorders, and the mentally ill, though proponents believe anyone can benefit. It's no wishy-washy feel-good tactic, says Cathy Malchiodi of the American Art Therapy Association. "Most of us are cross-trained in both psychotherapy and art therapy."

Researchers have offered hypotheses as to how art therapy works. Putting a problem on paper can make it seem more external, rendering it easier to deal with. Producing something also gives people a sense of control and enhances self-esteem. Perhaps most important, creative expression gets emotions flowing and out in the open. "I have been surprised by my artwork," Strouse says, "and am often taught by my artwork." —Matthew Hutson

THE WEDDING COUPLE BY KIM STROUSE. RITA PROJECT, RITA STUDIO NYC, 2006



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