

Symbols

Symbols evoke profound memories and emotions—often without our making rational or conscious connections. They fuel our imagination. In a therapeutic relationship, the use of symbols can assist a client to get in touch with otherwise inaccessible personal realities.

The *Symbols* card set contains 100 visual images from a potentially unlimited range of symbols. While this set has its origins in grief and loss counselling, the possible applications for this resource are endless. Teachers, counsellors, workshop facilitators, social workers and team-builders will be among those to find their own creative uses for this set of cards. Here are some suggestions to try!

Grief and loss counselling

The experience of grief and loss may feel utterly overwhelming or shattering for some people, while others may experience a sense of relief or ultimate peace, depending on the circumstances. Here are some questions that can be used to explore this often life-changing experience using *Symbols*:

- Can you use a *Symbols* card to help you describe your initial experience of grief?
- Can you use a card to help you describe how grief has challenged you?
- What card might represent your grief here and now?
- What has helped you most (or least) in your experience of grief?
- Can you locate your grief in your body?

Mind-mapping

Mind-mapping activities build upon our powers of association. As visual or physical activities, they can provide valuable new insights into the meanings we give to our experiences. Try selecting a card that speaks to you in some significant way. Then choose other cards that seem connected.

- Can you say how the cards connect?
- Can you arrange them to reflect this connection?
- Is there a sequence of connections? Is this like a story?
- Does the map have a centre or a pivotal point? Is one card the central figure?
- Does the map say anything about what is important to you at present?
- Does the pivotal point sometimes change? What happens if you select another card as the pivotal point?



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Exploring meaning and spirituality

Symbols can be used to explore spirituality and meaning in one's life—past, present and future. The questions below may provide a starting point to broaden spiritual reflection and connection, either alone or in conversation with others.

- Which *Symbols* card(s) help you define or describe your understanding of spirituality?
- Can you find a card or group of cards which represent meaning in your life?
- Is there a card which represents mystery?
- Which *Symbols* cards seem contrary to your beliefs or understandings of spirituality?
- Do any of the cards hold a religious resonance for you?
- Are there any cards that might offer you a greater sense of purpose or direction in your life?

Exploring identity

Sometimes a symbol has the capacity to help us integrate (or at least hold) seemingly opposite feelings within our identity. Questions such as those below can be used in counselling and groupwork, but are also available for us to use in our personal reflection and self-exploration:

- Which symbols would I use to describe myself to someone who doesn't know me?
- Which symbols are fundamental to who I am right now as a person?
- Which symbols reflect parts of myself I could readily give up?
- Which symbols would my partner, parents, children or colleagues say were me?
- Do any of the symbols reflect my shadow side—parts of me I would rather not have?
- Do any of the symbols scare me, challenge me or repulse me?

The blank card

A blank space can be anything and everything you want it to be. For this reason we have included a blank card which can signify anything you wish, such as a symbol, dream, memory, thought or hope. Start exploring!

- What message might this blank space have for you?
- What story might this blank card hold?
- If you had one wish, what would it be symbolised by?
- Do you have enough space in the world for yourself?
- Can you be with uncertainty?