

WHAT IS ART THERAPY?

Art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. A goal in art therapy is to improve or restore a client's functioning and his or her sense of personal well-being. Art therapy practice requires knowledge of visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms) and the creative process, as well as of human development, psychological, and counseling theories and techniques.

Today art therapy is widely practiced in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, wellness centers, forensic institutions, schools, crisis centers, senior communities, private practice, and other clinical and community settings. During individual and/or group sessions art therapists elicit their clients' inherent capacity for art making to enhance their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Research supports the use of art therapy within a professional relationship for the therapeutic benefits gained through artistic self-expression and reflection for individuals who experience illness, trauma, and mental health problems and those seeking personal growth.

Art making is an ancient form of healing: It is the process of making art that is transformative and healing, although art therapy can also help people understand their art expressions.

Art + Therapy = Process + Product = the interplay of biochemistry, mental status, and creativity.

Integrative approaches involve two or more expressive therapies to foster awareness, encourage emotional growth and enhance relationships with others. This approach distinguishes itself by combining modalities within a therapy session. Integrative approaches are based on a variety of orientations including arts as therapy, art psychotherapy, and the use of arts for traditional healing. Creative arts and expressive arts therapies are not merely subsets of play therapy and have a long history in mental health with distinct approaches. Arts therapies are different from play therapy because they integrate knowledge of art with principles of psychotherapy and counseling.

Many therapists also integrate activities that enhance relaxation as part of trauma intervention.

Art Therapy does not require artistic ability, just the ability to manipulate the art instruments.

Art is a tool that stimulates imaginative expression and communication, and can provide a safe way to externalize painful, even traumatic emotions. Drawings are used to provide an indirect, non-intrusive platform for discussion rather than addressing emotional problems in a straightforward fashion.

Because drawings add flexibility and creativity to the therapeutic encounter, they enhance the understanding of interpersonal dynamics, and build cohesion and trust. The use of drawings also establishes rapport building which is so important in the early stages of family and group therapy.

The use of graphic images offers a fresh view of problems and conflicts that enhance the development of treatment goals and impact the direction of treatment.

[More about Art Therapy and my practice.](http://www.dweinapplemft.com/art-therapy)

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