

The Benefit of Art Therapy

Introduction to How Art Therapy is Works



Art Therapy is Proven:



Studies have shown that art therapy helps reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress by 73% and decreases self-harm tendencies in adolescents by 54%.

In addition, art therapy can yield a 50% improvement in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in military veterans. Group art therapy can lead to a 45% decrease in negative emotions and feelings of isolation in individuals with serious mental illnesses and help reduce 40% of anxiety and stress for hospital patients. ⁽¹⁾



Art therapists are the fundamental link in helping patients learn how their minds and body react to trauma so they can learn healthier, more manageable ways of coping with their mental health. Art therapists that work with children can directly help them untangle their complex, often unknown, thoughts and emotions that inhibit their intellectual processing skills.

How the Brain Normally Processes Experiences

A person hears, sees, or feels something.

Brain sends signal to the Amygdala, which senses danger.

Amygdala sends signal to the hippocampus which activates the fight, flight, or freeze.

At the same time, the mid-prefrontal cortex quickly evaluates the situation as safe.

Once a situation is deemed safe, the body returns to its normal relaxed state.



How the Brain Experiences Trauma

A person experiences a traumatic event.

Brain sends signal to the Amygdala, which senses danger and activates the fight, flight, or freeze.

The Amygdala goes into overdrive, causing the child to relive the trauma as if for the first time over and over.

The mind loses the ability to control their fears, causing the person to be in a constant reactive state.

The mind's hippocampus shrinks, causing uncontrollable negative thoughts and emotions.



Aayushi. "Here's What Happens to Your Brain When You Experience Trauma." *Healthshots*, 26 June 2021. <https://www.healthshots.com/mind/mental-health/here-s-what-happens-to-your-brain-when-you-experience-trauma/#~:text=The%20intensity%20emotional%20impact%20of%20a%20traumatic%20event,...%203%20%20Distinguish%20past%20from%20the%20present.>

“Art therapy helps to unlock blocks to verbal expression and relational connection which in turn helps to better understand interpersonal experiences and better integrate and manage triggers related to trauma”

- Dr. Girija Kaimal; American Art Therapy Association President

Art Therapy Alleviates Trauma by:

- Offering a nonthreatening method for discovering and processing of an embedded traumatic experience
- Offering engagement and enjoyment by reawakening positive emotions
- Providing an outlet to express experiences and emotions without using words
- Helping to increase self-awareness, group work, and awareness of continual environmental changes
- Offering healthier coping mechanisms of processing negative thoughts and emotions
- Allowing patient to sidestep mental defenses and decode what they are actually feeling
- Allowing patient to safely explore and investigate their sense of self which aids to the mental healing process





The Umbrella Project: In one small group art therapy session at an orphanage in Lviv, children were asked to draw something under an umbrella that they would like to keep safe and protected. Some children drew technology or people they know. One child put a clay border, blue and yellow, around his umbrella to better protect it from bombs and one child created a monster- saying that if he protects the monster, the monster will protect him.

Children's Art Therapy

Individual and Group

Art Therapy specifically impacts children by encouraging the release of their negative and damaging thoughts and feelings to regulate their emotional state while strengthening their self-esteem, self-knowledge, and self-expression.

Group art therapy establishes a safe environment for children to be themselves which helps them to regain a sense of internal safety and restores inner resolutions. In addition, it creates communications between the therapists and the group. Each individual gains perspective from individual experiences in context of how others are coping with similar situations. Group members serve as peer to peer support and points of connection to combat patient isolation.

Art Therapy for Teens and Adults

It is not just children that benefit from Art Therapy. Art Therapy practices specifically targeted at teens and adults help them reconnect with their younger selves, providing a soothing method for them to feel safe and obtain a playful mindset. Art therapy helps to restore balance in the body and mind while also helping to explain what is going on mentally after experiencing trauma.

As a person gets older, oftentimes, verbal expression of one's feelings, thoughts, or emotions becomes harder and more painful. Art therapy practices offer a nonverbal method for exploring and expressing these aspects while in a safe and supported environment to do so.



Art Therapy offers patients skills that include reflective abilities, empowerment, and an increase in their sense of self-efficacy. In one particular Open Studio, some attendees shared that though they only attended so their children could come, they were found to be enjoying themselves and admitted to learning some methods of destressing to help process their own trauma.

Art VS Art Therapy

According to the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy combines different mental health therapies with creative activities to aid people's experiences through art, imagination, applied psychological therapy, and human experience.

One of the biggest reasons why art therapy conducted in clinic settings is different than just creating art is that **art therapy is clinically and psychologically proven** to positively change the way trauma is processed and improve the way the patients think and views their life. While creating art can be therapeutic, actual art therapy is a licensed practice that is administered to directly help a patient's mental health.

Art Therapy is facilitated by a professionally trained art therapist that cultivates a safe environment where the patient can feel comfortable to fully express themselves. Where creating art is largely focused on the end result, the **main focus in art therapy is the creative process and the feelings that the action brings about.** The finished artwork is then viewed as a reflection to the patient and is used to understand their mental perspective of their experiences.



Art Therapy Practices For Home

Scribbling with Eyes Closed

Begin by relaxing for a few minutes prior to picking up any material. Then, tape a piece of paper to a flat surface, pick up a writing material, and start scribbling. Do this for 60 seconds and then examine the drawing to see what particular image is there. This practice focuses on the movement of creating art and relaxes the mind.

Create a Visual Music Piece

Begin by selecting a song to listen to and gathering a piece of paper, paint and/or colorful writing materials. As the song plays, imagine what the music would look like, what shapes, colors, and design it would have. Move the writing material over the page in sync with the music and analyze what feelings and thoughts arise during this activity.

Draw in the Dark

After selecting a color and medium, create a dark setting where there is no visibility. Take a moment of mindfulness to pay attention to breath and the body. Start drawing with an image that comes to mind and do not think about perfecting the outcome. Remember to not add judgement once the piece is finished and the lights are turned on.

Double-handed Scribble

Make sure to tape a piece of paper to a flat surface and then pick up two writing materials, one in each hand, and start scribbling. Do this for as long as desired and then examine the drawing. This practice helps to wake up more neurotransmission which help to keep the mind integrated and in control.

What DTCare Art Therapy Offers:

Small Group

DTCare’s small group art therapy sessions are customized to give art therapist overseeing the sessions to work with a small, intimate group of individuals with shared experiences. These groups are initiated particularly for children and youth residing at IDP centers, family-style orphanages, hospitals, and hostels. Dedicated sessions help contextualize one’s traumatic experiences within a social context of how others are coping with similar situations and provides reassurance that they are not alone.

Open Studio

DTCare’s use of an open studio greatly focuses on cultivating a safe and playful environment to help patients build confidence, encourage creativity, and develop a sense of community during extreme tragedy. This method has been proven to be helpful in processing grief, encourage emotional expression, and better cope with crisis, especially when working with children.⁽¹⁾ These sessions are easily accessible to fit the needs of participants. Similar projects and materials, for example using colored paper, scissors, and glue, are good for both children in orphanages as well as injured soldiers.

1: Frontiers | The Open Studio Approach to Art Therapy: A Systematic Scoping Review (frontiersin.org)

One on One

DTCare’s one on one therapy sessions work to encourage direct growth between therapist and patient by building an individualized path of healing for patient’s trauma while also cultivating trust and respecting their privacy. These sessions allow the patient’s experiences and perspective to be the primary focal point while also giving room for the therapist to introduce new methods and practices of restorative healing.



A young patient at a children’s hospital in Odesa enjoys himself during a small group art therapy session. Under the supervision of our esteemed therapist Polina Berezyuk, the group discussed the change of seasons and what they are looking forward to in 2023.



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