

Using art for healing is what we do in art therapy. Art therapy is the therapeutic use of our innate creativity and our personal understanding of the world. It combines the creative process of visual art and psychotherapy as a means of improving mental health, well-being and relationships.

Sometimes thoughts, feelings and memories are better expressed in images or pictures than in words because the words seem inadequate. Or sometimes we cannot find the right words because what we are trying to say is very complicated. And sometimes, we are not even sure of what we want to say, but we really need to express ourselves because we have a problem that needs to be sorted out. Visual art offers a different way of communicating. It can be considered an alternative form of language that uses symbols and metaphors which have their origins in the unconscious. Because art uses symbols, it can be an effective way of reaching what is lost or hidden.



The visual dimension of art therapy enables a subtler, sometimes more detailed and definitely very personal statement to be made. Feelings, emotions, sensations and fleeting or dissociated memories can be shown through form, design, movement and colour instead of only words and gestures. Art itself has a way of speaking to us if allowed to do so.

Some of the things that art therapy can explore and help

resolve are: issues of loss and grief, life transitions, emotional and behavioral difficulties. It can increase awareness of yourself, reduce stress, heighten creativity and promote personal growth. Depression, anxiety, traumatic experiences and dementia all respond to art. The art therapist is trained in both art and psychology and might work privately as well as in conjunction with other health care professionals and teachers.

So, who best can benefit from art therapy?

Art therapy is helpful for people of all ages: children, teenagers, young people, adults and seniors. It is important to remember that art therapy is “user-friendly,” so no artistic talent or previous experience is needed. (If you are artistic, all the better!) Art therapy is not the same as taking art lessons, but the therapist will show you how to use the art material and offer other help when it is needed. There is a surprise element to making art as well as the value of finding a new way of communicating that is very satisfying and helpful, regardless of your age or background. We all have a creative brain and spirit!

ASK THE EXPERT:

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