

Introduction to Art Therapy for People Living with Mental Health Challenges

What is art therapy?

Art therapy combines non-verbal creativity with personal and interpersonal exploration. It is intended to help people to develop their strengths, cultivate greater well-being in their lives, and express their unique selves.

No art experience is required.

Why would someone go to art therapy?

People come to art therapy for a variety of reasons, including:

- a desire for greater self-awareness
- unresolved feelings of grief & loss
- stress and anxiety
- difficulties maintaining focus
- depression
- social challenges
- complications from side-effects of medication
- eating disorders
- difficulties discerning the boundaries of reality
- trauma, past or present
- creative blocks
- intense feelings of anger or fear
- relationship challenges
- self-esteem issues
- changes in or crisis of identity
- the intention to actively engage in one's own personal growth

What are some of the benefits of art therapy?

Art therapy has many benefits. Most of these benefits result from having a safe space to intentionally immerse oneself into a creative process while being supported by a trained art therapist. This can be in either a one-on-one or a group setting. Either way, safety and confidentiality is emphasized. The following list is intended to give you a sense of these benefits.

Develop self-esteem and self-awareness

Build self-respect and confidence through taking risks in creating art and mastering new creative skills.

Take your well-being into your own hands with an active role in your own therapeutic process. Develop a strong sense of trust in yourself and your decisions through active choice-making in the creative process.

This trust helps to increase autonomy and independence as your interpretive ability and self-awareness grows.

Safely express difficult emotions

Make use of non-verbal communication and a safe and supportive environment to express challenging emotions.

Expressing yourself through art, rather than language, can help you to make sense of your emotional, mental, and physical realities and support you in reducing self-censorship.

The art therapy process facilitates both the containment as well as the acknowledgment of mixed feelings.

Acknowledging mixed feelings can help to break us out of black-and-white thinking.

Focus on one's own concrete experience

Discussing concrete, tangible art work, the permanence of which is not subject to distortions of memory, is often easier than speaking directly to one's feelings.

Art-making can help to clear up confusion and make order out of chaos.

Connect with other people

Creative expression can form a bridge from an individual's inner world to the external world of relationships and people.

The art therapy process can help you to understand others as well as to be better understood.

Relax and enjoy

Have fun and play within a world of unlimited imaginative potential.

Relax into an atmosphere without expectations of performance.

Take risks by creating new possibilities for yourself.