

# Benefits and Uses of Art Therapy for People Living with Developmental Disabilities

People living with developmental disabilities can benefit from art therapy by having a safe space to intentionally immerse oneself into a creative process while being supported by a trained art therapist. In working with this population, the goal of art therapy is to increase the possibility of the client building a meaningful life; a life of dignity, self-reliance, connection, and purpose. Benefits of art therapy for people living with developmental disabilities tend to include:

## **Expression of feeling**

Provide a safe and supported environment for emotional expression.

Facilitate containment and release of ambivalent feelings. This can aid the client in coming to terms with conflicting emotions and counteract a negative view of self.

Express grief and move through the emotional stages of grieving in a supportive atmosphere using the universal language of pictures.

## **Improve self-esteem and support a sense of achievement and self-mastery**

Focus on strengths and functional abilities of the participants rather than their disabilities to enable them to experience success.

Enable an individual to give expression to and make sense of his or her emotional, mental, and physical realities.

Provide an opportunity for individuals to accomplish and complete art works by having choices and making their own decisions.

Provide an opportunity to explore and create meaning through creative activities.

Reduce feelings of isolation through social interaction and help the client gain a sense of shared meaning and connection to others, particularly within group work.

## **Address patterns of learned helplessness**

Encourage participants to make choices for themselves and to take initiative in a supported environment. Making successful choices while art-making helps to build confidence and promotes independence in all areas of life.

## **Sensory, cognitive and perceptual stimulation**

Improve reality orientation through concrete art-making.

Engage the individual in making choices, problem solving, and sensory, physical and cognitive stimulation.

## **Pleasure and relaxation**

Art therapy can provide an opportunity for fun and relaxation, serving to reduce anxiety and decrease restlessness. Art therapy can be a place to have fun, take risks, engage in a world of unlimited imaginative potential, and relax.