

Art Therapy

"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance".

Aristotle (384-322 BC)

Art Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art making and creative activities as its primary method of communication. It is particularly useful for children who have experienced early trauma and who may not have the words or cognitive understanding to express or make sense of their experiences.

The therapeutic element that already exists from being creative is further enhanced through the role of the therapist and the relationship that they develop with the child.

The therapist seeks to provide a safe, accepting and containing space in order for the child to feel able to express thoughts feelings and memories from their inner world. The therapist acts as witness to the child's emotional material when it emerges in the paper, clay, painting or other chosen medium. They accept, acknowledge and value the emotional material the child shares.

The artwork then becomes a 'space' in which to safely explore ways to facilitate inner healing, personal growth and change. The 'image' becomes a physical record of the therapeutic process, something the child and therapist can return to throughout the therapy. This is useful when the child is experiencing significant internal chaos and needs time to develop their sense of themselves within the therapy. Having something tangible also gives the child something concrete and personal to them which can be hugely significant for their sense of self.

There has been a wealth of research in recent years to explore and further harness the use of art therapy in relation to early developmental trauma. This includes the formulation of a Dyadic approach, developed in order to promote attachment and emotional understanding between children and their families. In this context the art making serves as a bridge to foster connections between the families, where play and metaphor enable joint exploration. Where repairs can be made, and new beginnings can be sought.

Art Therapy initially began as an adult centred therapy, since then it has been applied to many areas of psychological wellbeing. Art therapist's work in hospitals, schools, prisons and day centres with a wealth of client groups including older adults, Forensic patients, adults and young people with eating disorders and perinatal mothers and their infants.

Research

Slayton, SC, et al. (2010) Outcome studies on the efficacy of art therapy: a review of findings. *Art Therapy*, 27(3), pp.108-118

Van Westrhenen, N., Fritz, E., Vermeer, A., Boelen, P. and Kleber, R. Creative arts in psychotherapy for traumatized children in South Africa: An evaluation study
Published: February 13, 2019. PLOS ONE

Van Westrhenen, N and Fritz, E (2014) Creative arts therapy as treatment for child trauma: an overview. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 41(5), pp.527-534

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Janusz Korczak 1925



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