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<http://www.childdevelopmentclub.org/apps/blog/show/7438672-art-therapy-what-it-is-and-how-it-can-help>

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Art Therapy: What it is and How it Can Help

The American Art Therapy Association defines Art Therapy as a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight.

Art therapists are master's level clinicians who, in addition to coursework and practicum experience, have completed a large number of post-graduate clinical hours under the supervision of an experienced clinician. The Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) is the credentialing body whose mission is "to protect the public by promoting the competent and ethical practice of art therapy." The ATCB provides the following credentials to art therapists: Registration (ATR) and Board Certified (ATR-BC). In the state of New York, an art therapist is required to become licensed by the state (LCAT) in order to call themselves an art therapist.

During a typical session clients are asked to engage in the creative process, within the context of a therapeutic alliance, to address mental, emotional, developmental, and behavioral challenges. Art Therapists are trained in psychotherapy and how to incorporate the arts to provide appropriate services for each individual client.

Art Therapy and ASD

Many children gravitate towards the graphic arts. This is for a variety of reasons that may include any of the following: to record their experiences, to understand or make sense of their world, communicate their ideas when words "just won't do", get the sensory input that they may be craving, or simply because it is fun and intrinsically rewarding. When working with children on the spectrum, the art therapist should focus on bringing a child's passion for art-making into a shared experience. The art media can be used to encourage reciprocal interactions and to support the development of abstract thinking. It is critical that the art therapist be knowledgeable about the sensory integration challenges that are commonly associated with ASD. If the therapist is aware of the child's sensory, visual, and motor-planning systems, she can adapt materials to promote optimal exploration and expression.

Art is a powerful vehicle for self-expression and supports the development of creativity and communication. The non-verbal aspect of the medium can be especially important for individuals diagnosed on the autism spectrum as they often struggle with auditory processing and expressive language. Art therapy aims to offer these individuals another avenue for communication and expression. For example, an individual may have a strong visual system that helps them to explore and understand the world around them, but a weaker auditory/language system that makes it difficult to express one's ideas. The idea is to use an individual's strengths to support areas of challenge.

Depending on the individual and the medium, art therapy can promote sensory integration, support language development, and/or provide an opportunity for expressing emotional ideas. When made in the context of a relationship, the creative process can lead to a deepened understanding of his/her images, helping to expand beyond what he/she has seen before, and to engage meaningfully with another about these ideas.

An individual doesn't have to possess savant-like skills to benefit from art therapy. Rather, assessment is based on the following criteria:

- a) Does the child demonstrate an interest in using the materials?
- b) Would the sensory input provided by the materials be helpful for increasing shared attention, regulation, and engagement?
- c) Does the visual support provided by the drawing, sculpture, etc. promote sustained interactions and/or symbolic play?

For more information, please visit: <http://danawhiddonlcat.com>