



- a) **A Colorful Initiation: Therapist's Guide to Art Therapy**
- b) **Beyond That Mandala: Using Art Therapy**
- c) **Art Therapy for Anxiety and Stress: A Therapist's Guide**

What is the hullabaloo around Art Therapy?



Art Therapy, a field that came into existence because of the hard work of several individuals around the 1930s, has received a renewed importance in the present where several events are being endorsed in its name.

A culture for **spending time “creatively”** is coming up more than before in ways that are **therapeutic** but not necessarily Art Therapy.

When we meet at a cafe with a group of individuals & are handed over a canvas to paint and sip a beverage alongside, definitely those experiences are **meaningful** as they allow us to connect with people, bring us back to our childhood days when we had easier access to art supplies. Since we get to engage with material & might be guided to explore our ways around it, it is a **therapeutic experience** for sure as it is different from our usual routine experiences.

What is Art Therapy?

Art Therapy is different. It is an approach that **stands apart from traditional talk therapy** in a manner that uses art to **aid the individual to express, emote, explore & understand** themselves or the concerns they may be experiencing. While art therapy **uses verbal processing** alongside, it is **not the only medium** we rely on.

Why Art Therapy?

When we are trying to verbalize our concerns or our feelings, we often get **caught up** in the correctness, logic, political rightness of our content, however when using art as a medium, our **inhibitions may reduce significantly** as our focus would shift to other aspects.



Additionally, since it involves colour, our **visual faculty** or sense is in use, so are our fingers & hands (**touch** is involved), **smell** can get activated since different materials may have distinct smells & **sound** when different material is used on different surfaces like paper, sandpaper, water, tissue etc. Hence art proves to be a powerful approach as it involves multiple acuities for an individual.

Another relationship it brings about is the **connection to childhood**. This is not to assume that childhood experiences are always pleasurable or pleasant but, almost stepping into a similar place when **inhibitions were relatively lowered**, and exploration was in the fore. Since, our fears get conditioned over time, childhood is that period where we are freer than we let ourselves be in the future as adolescents or adults.

Art Therapy was founded almost around the same time in Europe and the United States. The term was coined by **Adrian Hill** in 1942 who was a British artist, author, and art therapist. While in treatment for tuberculosis he understood the potential of and began working with other patients. He recorded his

findings in a book called Art Versus Illness. While in the United States (early 1900s) **Margaret Naumburg** is referred to as the “mother of art therapy”. She was an American psychologist, educator, artist, author.

Who can we use art therapy with?

Well, this was a trick question. Art Therapy can be used **with all kinds of clients**- children, adolescents, young adults, adults, geriatric population & with all kinds of experiences, goals or concerns.

When clients who are not from the field of psychology or mental health hear and see art material in a therapy space, they often get wary of the modality because of **their assumptions about its use** in the space.

It is usually a good idea to **psychoeducate** the client to the modality rather than simply expecting them to be open to it or being discouraged in case a client doesn't want to go ahead. Just remember, in either case it is a win-win situation for you as you're getting a **step closer to the client's worldview**.

When clients simply put their hands up and say they can't draw, they aren't creative or don't have the skill for it, it is extremely important to let them know that it is brilliant, because our **focus is not on that**.

Since this is therapy and **not an art class**, it works well that we may not have certain honed art skills. Our focus is on the process of trying out a different experience & if at any time a client wants to pause, stop, halt or withdraw, the **therapist will be there for them**.

Pause for Thought

- Take a minute and think about **your first experience with art** (or the first encounter that you can recall)
- **When** was it? Can you trace yourself back to that experience?
- **Where** was it? What was the setup like?
- **How** did that experience go?
- Does that experience play into your **present relationship** with art?
- Can you recall any other experiences that may have played a role in the way you have developed your relationship with art **over the years**?

**The purpose of this activity is to explore our relationship with art, which is technically almost our initial forms of expression that we are introduced to.*

When you bring this conversation up with your clients, it would be good weaving point into sharing that-

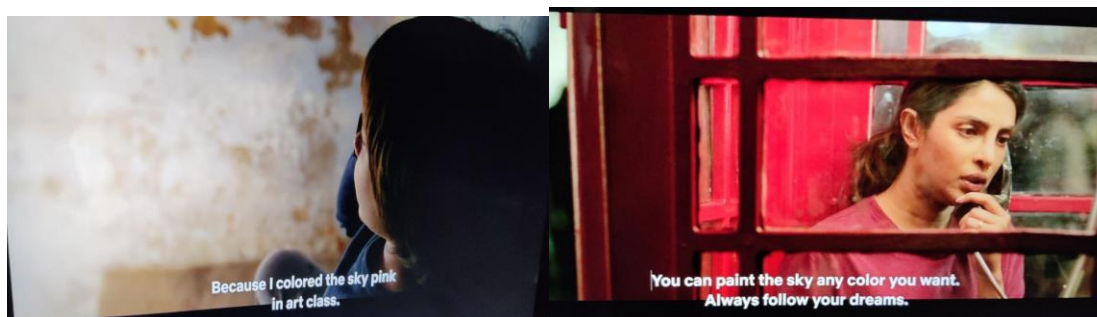
- Art in the therapy space is **not synonymous to an art class.**
- What the client makes is **unique to them.**
- There is **no evaluation and judgment** attached to the client's art piece.

(Remember to reiterate on this time and again).

In case an artist or an individual who is traditionally skilled at art reaches out for a session, we may want to **spend more time** to encourage them to let their **guards down** with regard to their ideas around **perfectionism** or how the output must have a **desired look**, aesthetic presentation or being considered an **extremely creative** piece of work.

Our aim is to also aid the client to step out from the approach to colour within the lines or shapes & rather to go about the way they want.

The Bollywood film "*Sky is Pink*" addresses one such important aspect. A young child is reprimanded by his teacher for colouring the sky pink rather than blue.



We want to bring forth the idea to our clients that the way they choose to draw, depict, colour something that they create is **absolutely up to them & is their choice**. They can create an apple that is the size of a hippo and in purple colour as long as they feel it aligns with them.

Pause to experience

Take some time to gather, see & notice the art material that you may have or in case you can visit an art store that could be a different experience too.

Supplies could include essentials like pencil, eraser, glue to sketch pens, colours, crayons, paint, brushes & a lot more.



Spend some time with them and try to see which material **catches your sight first**, which one feels compelling enough for you to **pick up and play with**. Notice the **textures, colours, size, peculiarities** that these materials come with.

How to introduce the idea of art in sessions?

While there is no right or wrong way for this, it could be a good idea to **begin gradually**, rather than having a completely art-oriented therapy session.

We can use art as ice breakers or for grounding purposes to get the client started and step into the water just by dipping in their toes.

Let's give a try to some ice breakers, shall we?

When we meet a client for the first time, we often ask them to introduce themselves. How about if the introduction happens in a **different manner**.

What if we ask them to create a **logo** that *captures their essence, purpose or way of being*, the way it exists for brands.

Of course, this is not something where our mind would immediately pop up with an answer, at this point that's what we need to encourage- **time for the client to think, recollect and express** on paper. We must

remember at all times to follow up an activity to **summarize** it for both the client & therapist so that we can seamlessly weave it into our conversation ahead.

Remember to not hurry the client up when they are thinking, you can definitely give them a heads up about how much time we would ideally want to spend on this activity.

Moreover, let's try & **refrain from interpreting or analyzing** the client's work. Our focus has to be on the client's narrative. If at any point we feel they are having a hard time, we can encourage them to **pick up elements from their work** & ask them what it means in their understanding. Since it is their work, they will be the guide for us. We as therapists, must be open from a curious standpoint to understand, take note of & **weave into future sessions** & of course gently probe wherever we feel is needed.

How can I support my client who is currently feeling overwhelmed?

We often engage in grounding exercises that involve the body or the space we are in.

Let's try & experiment with art now.

Cautionary Warning

Please ensure whenever you wish to carry out an activity with your client, you **first implement it on yourself**. That experience is very powerful as it allows you to understand the intricacies of an activity- what all it could bring up, how it can be followed up with a discussion & how the client can use it in their day-to-day life in case they wish to.

Pattern work- We may often assume that making a certain pattern won't be any good. But when we are drawing a tight/thin spiral (very thin jalebi), we are forced in a subtle way to **pay attention** to our sketch pen or colour or pattern. This paying of attention is an aspect of mindfulness. It allows us to concentrate

our thoughts & hand movement in a directed path. Since, this activity is a short one, it also leaves us with a feeling of accomplishment as well.

A final product is a big part of using art in sessions, as you have a tangible reminder in front of you, that you can carry back with you. However, this is not to say that the nature of the product matters. Rather, it is the process that is more essential, having a tangible product to carry home is simply a cherry on top.



Here is another example of line work that can help to create a sense of calmness, slowing down & helping in regulation of the body as a whole. We can even **intersperse this with deep**

breathing while creating each line. In case we wish to mix it up & be more creative, we can even ask our clients to pick up certain colours that call out to them & engage the client with guided art work. Where the therapist walks them through a script of relaxation & the client rather than imaging this, is creating a pattern that comes naturally to them. At the end of the activity, we are likely to notice a change in the sharpness, pressure or even colours that

are used by the client. Each activity can be molded & combined with other elements to create something new. *It's almost like old wine in a new bottle.*



Drawing circles & filling them in completely is a helpful exercise. Circles are than squares or rectangles. Circles allow the movement of the wrist in a more natural way than any other closed shape. We can encourage the client here to experiment with application of different pressures/intensities as well. Or we can ask them to start with more pressured colouring & slowly reduce the pressure & check with them if they feel a difference in this gradual movement.

Here is another modification around a similar activity, can you guess the instructions of the same?



Pause to experience

The next time you're on call, in a session or anywhere else, let yourself free with your doodles, you'll realize that you may have a go to pattern of your own. It could be an object, kind of lines, patterns or shadings.

We'll be back soon!

The aim of this e-pdf was to re-introduce you to the world of art & how it can be a powerful tool to use in the therapy space for our clients as well as for ourselves as therapists.

The next two parts will dive more into stepping in as a therapist, material interaction & a lot more.

Please note- *This is not exhaustive training material for art therapy or the use of art in a therapy setup, rather it is created from the point of view of being supportive so that it can help us to more readily use this modality to the extent that we are comfortable.*

Pause to experience



Until we are back with the next addition of this e-pdf series, try to take some time out for yourself where you let yourself free when it comes to you & your art material.

Don't direct yourself, don't be too harsh, you don't need to produce an artwork for social media or to sell it, it's solely for you. Remember that the process > the product.

Pick up all the colours that caught your eye first, the ones that were compelling enough for you to select & put aside.

Now, you need to cover the entire sheet of paper (any size) with all the shapes you can possibly imagine (don't just restrict yourself to geometrical shapes). However, you can colour these shapes, you can fill them up only with

patterns. P.S. No sample has been attached for the same, we are rooting for each of your unique masterpieces.