

Expressive Therapies

Empowering individuals—those living with social, cognitive, emotional, physical, and/or spiritual needs—through music, art, and mental health therapies to improve health and well-being.

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“Struggles” by Kim Roltgen

Art Therapy

As defined by the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), “art therapy is a regulated, integrative mental health and human services profession.” The field is unique in that, through the art therapist’s use of “art-making, the creative process, psychological theory, and knowledge of human experience,” art therapy “promotes the ability to unlock

emotional expression by facilitating non-verbal as well as verbal communication.” In addition, anyone can benefit from art therapy! The variety of creative options and individualistic nature of art-making, combined with a strong knowledge regarding human experiences and responses to challenges, allow art therapists to address various needs and goals areas, large or small. Art therapists require a Master’s degree in art therapy or art psychotherapy, which includes training in psychology, counseling, and creative processes. The art therapists at ETLLC are all Board-Certified Art Therapists (ATR-BC) who also hold the Licensed Professional Counselor title (LPC), or are completing the certification requirements for both of these at this time (“in training”).

Art Therapy Overview

COVID-19 Response

Moving Forward

Art Therapy Overview

Who?

Art therapists work in a variety of settings with many different populations and individuals, including (according to the American Art Therapy Association): mood disorders such as anxiety and depression; communication and/or learning disorders such as Autism or ADHD; neurological disorders such as Parkinson's or cerebral palsy; dementia and Alzheimer's Disease; Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; Traumatic Brain Injury; difficulties related to medical treatment or diagnoses; domestic abuse; natural disasters or other collective trauma; navigating identity or sexual orientation; displacement from home or country; and major life transitions. We may encounter any number of a vast array of challenges over the course of our lives, and art therapy provides opportunities to process them in a safe and creative way.



What?

The American Art Therapy Association defines art therapy as: “a regulated, integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-

making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship.” However, if you ask an art therapist, they might give you a different definition, one which speaks more to their work specifically, or talks in more particular terms about how the creative process relates to human challenges and struggles. Check out the box to the right for definitions and descriptions provided by art therapists at ETLIC!

When?

Art therapy promotes emotional expression, processing, and growth through the combination of psychological theory and human experiences with an assortment of creative processes. When we feel stressed or anxious, are struggling with a difficult change in our life, or are working through challenges that affect our day to day activities, we often utilize creative outlets to help ourselves feel better (like listening to music, playing games, watching movies, or making art!). Art therapists provide structure and purpose to creative processes like these—informed by training in psychology and human experiences—in order to best support growth during life's challenges.

“What is art therapy?”

Heather: “When clients have trauma or cognitive delays or are children, they often lack words to tell me their story. Creating, building, making, playing, imagining is what allows us to use shapes, colors, lines, objectives, and pictures as words. These creations are our form of expression. We are telling each other our stories through the creative process. The art actually becomes our language. And how beautiful, how powerful that is!”

Kim: I would say it's a way for people to express themselves through various forms of art!

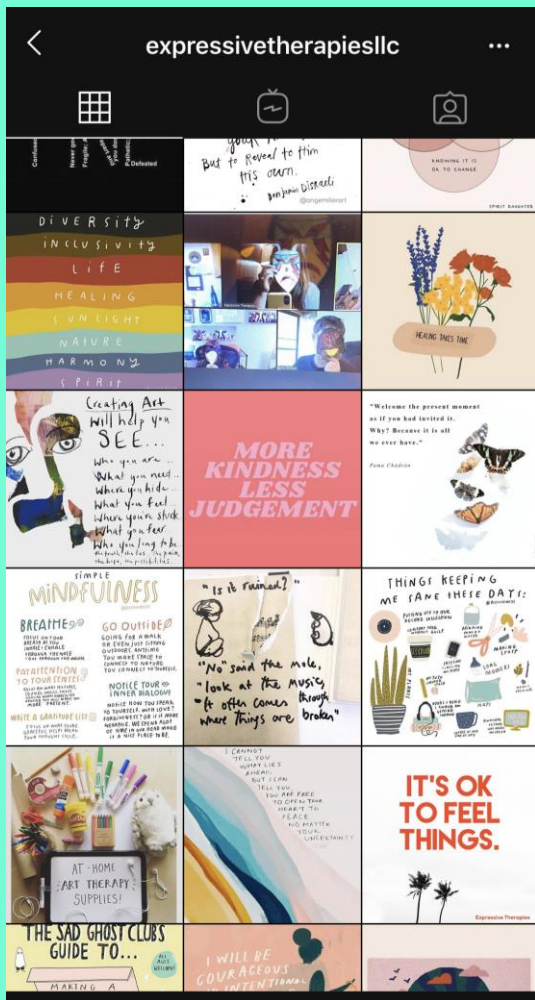
Victoria: I strongly believe in the capacity of art to create positive change within. The power of art therapy has the potential to be the stimulant for positive transformations, insights, and internal/external changes that occur through meta-verbal communication.

Alyssa: “There are times in our lives when we don't have the words to express what we are thinking or feeling. Through engagement in the creative process we are able to learn about ourselves and the world around us. Art therapists work with clients to provide opportunities of hope and healing through art making. Art teaches us reflective, expressive, and regulation skills so we can be more present and compassionate in our lives and relationships. Overall, art heals. Making art is like taking medicine for our soul.”

@expressivetherapiesllc



Check out the Expressive Therapies Instagram page, where we share daily thoughts, inspirations, interactive opportunities, and updates! In May, we completed a 30-Day Song Challenge with our followers on Instagram and Facebook, and mid-July we started sharing our virtual CRESCENDO concert series!



Where?

Some places you might find an art therapist include: hospitals, schools, veterans’ clinics, community clinics, crisis centers, forensic institutions, senior communities, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, and private practices. In each of these areas, art therapists may be working with individuals, families, groups, or extended communities to enhance clients’ mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Why?

Art therapy is an incredibly diverse field, working to improve an array of need areas through extensive creative opportunities. Some of the goal areas that art therapy is equipped to address and improve include: cognitive and sensorimotor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress, and advance societal and ecological change. Art therapists, with their training across creative processes and psychological theory, provide a highly motivating means for approaching challenging human experiences.

How?

The American Art Therapy Association reports the following regarding how art therapy actually works: “Through integrative methods, art therapy engages the mind, body, and spirit in ways that are distinct from verbal articulation alone. Kinesthetic, sensory, perceptual, and symbolic opportunities invite alternative modes of receptive and expressive communication, which can circumvent the limitations of language. Visual and symbolic expression gives voice to

Mandalas



experience and empowers individual, communal, and societal transformation.” It can be very difficult to put words to strong emotional experiences, or to work through situations which are complex and challenging. Art therapy provides an outlet for those feelings and experiences which can’t be put to words, in order to support healthy insight, growth, and self-expression.



The above quotes and general overview information was accessed and assimilated from the American Art Therapy Association's public resources. For additional information and specifics regarding art therapy overall, check out the following resources:

www.arttherapy.org

<https://arttherapy.org/upload/AATA-Fact-Sheet-Art-Therapy.pdf>

<https://arttherapy.org/upload/AATA-Fact-Sheet-Research.pdf>

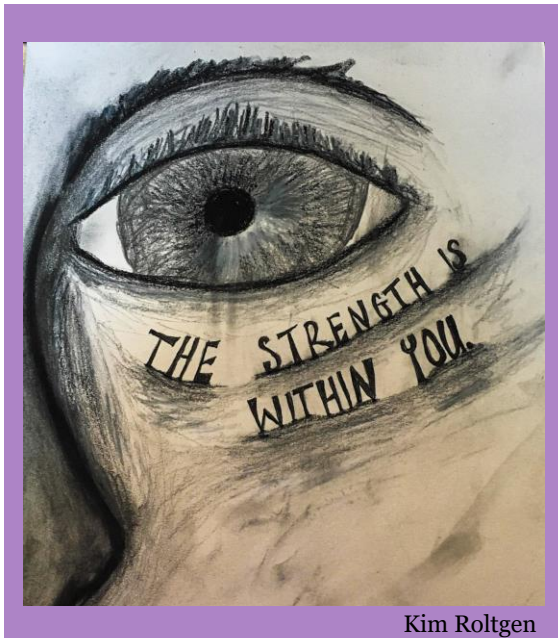
Responding to COVID-19

In response to the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), healthcare providers across different fields have transitioned to new protocols and methods for providing services as safely and effectively as possible. Health professionals qualified to address emotional health, brain health, and mental health needs, in particular, have had to adapt to the ever-changing situation in order to address the very unique and complex demands of a pandemic. Recommended psychosocial guidelines have been shared, which can then be addressed by healthcare providers in their practice. The art therapists at Expressive Therapies are uniquely qualified to address the psychosocial needs of individuals and groups during the pandemic, and continue to adapt and evolve services in order to provide the most beneficial care. Below are some of the recommended psychosocial guidelines, as shared by the CDC and WHO, and ways in which art therapy can address and meet these needs during this difficult time.

COVID-19 Art Studio



Heather McDonald



Kim Roltgen

Disseminating Information

Art therapists are equipped with both the creativity and the health information needed to share information with clients and the community during a time of uncertainty. Art is an excellent way to raise awareness of risk factors and pass along preventative measures because it can share the information in an appealing but understandable way. Art can also disseminate emotional health and brain health information—not just how individuals can support their physical health. Art therapists—with their training and experience in meeting psychosocial needs—are an excellent resource for spreading the word about how we can take care of ourselves at home during an uncertain time.

Promoting Expression and Inspiration

Art therapy, as a creative arts health field, is naturally equipped with the tools for healthy emotional expression. Art, as well, can appeal to any and all as inspiration because of the wide variety of artistic options and endeavors. During a global situation like COVID-19, art therapists around the world are available to

provide 1-on-1 support to individuals struggling with emotional and brain health needs, like anxiety, stress, and coping skills. Art therapists are also available to provide group support, either in a community setting or in smaller, particular needs-based settings. Promoting expression and inspiration can be done indirectly as well, through shared tools and information on virtual or social media platforms.

Challenging Stigma

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a general social climate of uncertainty and fear, which can lead to stigmatization against people, places, or situations associated with the virus. Art therapists are uniquely equipped, with a background and training in both the arts and psychosocial information, to help address stigma, fight discrimination, and challenge misperceptions that fuel unhealthy, fear-motivated behaviors.

Modulating Media Input

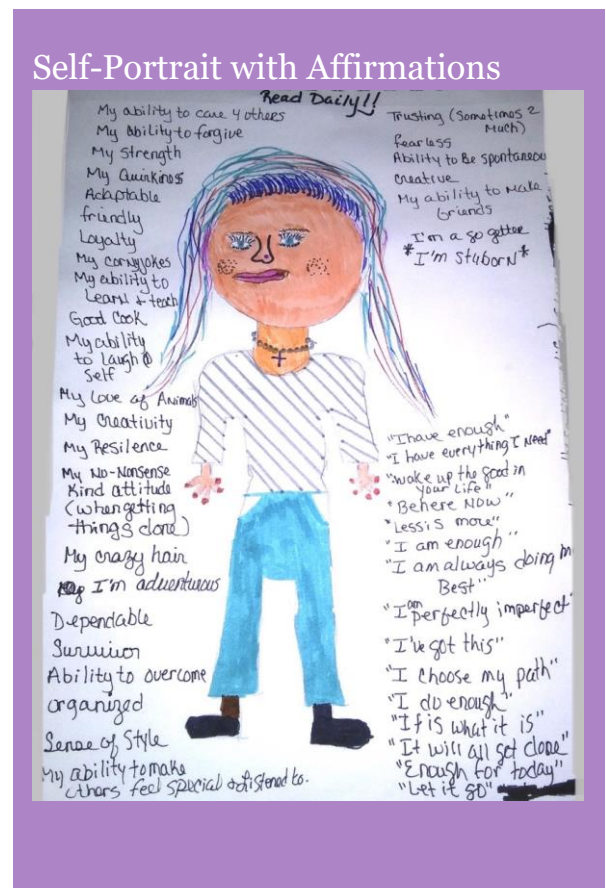
The simple overwhelming presence of COVID-19 in our personal lives, in addition to the potential spread of misinformation regarding the situation, can create a great deal of anxiety, stress, and fear. These strong emotions can be very taxing on our emotional, brain, and physical health, and how we respond to these feelings can either help us to cope in a productive way or can spread further anxiety and fear. Two aspects of art therapy that go hand-in-hand are the creative expression of difficult emotions, especially anxiety, and the building of healthy coping strategies to help with anxiety management. When we can manage our own stress responses and anxiety, we are better equipped to support and protect others. Art therapists and the use of art are an excellent resource for healthy anxiety management, which protects our own health in addition to the health of others.

Securing Family Connections

Quarantines, safer-at-home orders, and a general inability to travel anywhere or engage in activities we might otherwise love to do have created an atmosphere of isolation and loneliness, even if we are among family. When will I have the opportunity to see my friends and other family members I'm distanced from? When can kids go and play, outside the confines of the backyard? Isolation can create feelings of loneliness and sadness, which can be difficult to manage when constantly surrounded by the pandemic social environment. We may also find ourselves, while in isolation with those we live with, that navigating those relationships can be difficult when you have limited means of creating individual space. Art has the ability to create and reinforce connections, no matter the distance between friends and family. Art therapists, then, can help families to connect and engage with one another, either within the same home or while isolating in different places.

Monitoring Secondary Traumatic Stress

In response to quarantine, many may find themselves struggling with confusion, anxiety, anger, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Work-life has been upended for many, and we may feel we have too much distance from some people in our lives and not enough distance from others. Navigating the constant changes, the fear-ridden environment, feelings of loneliness even if we're not alone, and judgment of ourselves can make it difficult to find time for relaxation or meaning in our work and activities. Art therapy creates a space for relaxation, addresses those negative feelings and responses we may be having, and helps us to find meaning and gratitude in our day to day life, especially as we experience great upheaval of the typical day to day.



Developing Coping and Resilience

Art therapy doesn't only create space for healthy expression of feelings that are emotionally difficult or negative, but also those that are feelings of strength, health, and positivity. Through artistic exploration, art therapists can support others in identifying what their natural strengths are and how they can use these strengths to support healthy coping skills and creative routines in their lives. During a time of incredible uncertainty and upheaval, identifying that which grounds us in the here-and-now and builds us up as individuals is very important to healthy coping when faced with challenges.

Maintaining Relationships

Transitioning to telehealth has been one of the biggest changes during the pandemic, as both providers and individuals seeking support have had to adapt to what is, to most, an entirely new and different format for healthcare. Though certainly different, and often difficult at times due to the distance implemented and limitation of materials, telehealth has been an incredible means of maintaining relationships despite enforced distance and continuing art making with digital materials, at-home items, and other unexpected creative solutions.

Amplifying Hope

Art therapists also have the ability, as artists, to create, find, and share images through social media outlets which provide motivation, inspiration, and empowerment. By spreading even just small messages, ideas, and artwork to others, art therapists can involve members of the community in creative pursuits, or even just give little reminders of what everyone can do to help take care of themselves that day.

CDC and WHO psychosocial guidelines with art therapy responses accessed here:

Jordan S. Potash, Debra Kalmanowitz, Ivy Fung, Susan A. Anand & Gretchen M. Miller (2020) Art Therapy in Pandemics: Lessons for COVID-19, *Art Therapy*, 37:2, 105-107, DOI: [10.1080/07421656.2020.1754047](https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2020.1754047).

Moving Forward

One of the biggest questions from all areas of personal and professional life is this: What's going to happen next? How do we move forward and transition into post-pandemic life? Healthcare professionals are recognizing and sharing some of the challenges we may be facing, especially those which are mental health related. Health professionals qualified to address emotional health, brain health, and mental health needs—including art therapists—are poised to assist with the psychosocial needs that will emerge.

Post-Pandemic Challenges

In an article discussing the mental health challenges that individuals may be facing after COVID-19, Perpetua Neo, a Doctor of Clinical Psychology, identified the following 5 as the main challenges: PTSD from quarantine, invisible burnout, financial stress, domestic violence, and survivor/thriver guilt. Not everyone will experience all, or even any, of these to a full-blown extent, but many will feel the impact of the pandemic in ways they perhaps didn't anticipate.



“Support System” by Kim Roltgen

PTSD won't just be about having to stay in and work from home—it may involve individuals' discovery that perhaps they don't quite like the people in their lives, or their lifestyles, or themselves. We judge ourselves for not having enough energy, or not finishing tasks quickly enough, or for feeling envious of others who seem to have it better than we do. Invisible burnout might not be so invisible after a certain point: some aspect of staying at home or quarantining is causing a great many people significant stress or anxiety, whether that's related to working from home, who's at home with us, or trying to manage and live our "normal" lives when very little about the situation is "normal" or even familiar. We've already seen a large spike in financial stress, both on a smaller, personal or family level, and on a larger, more national scale. We need to learn how to best master financial stress, because chronic stress—regardless of cause—can be debilitating both mentally and physically. Domestic violence, according to many reports referenced, is spiking due to COVID-19, because individuals and abusers are stuck together in prolonged close proximity. This may be physical or emotional, and many may not even realize that abuse is happening. Survivor/Thrivers' guilt may arise as a natural response to how we see others coping with the pandemic. Perhaps we see others who seem to have better resources, or maybe have had their lives minimally affected because of where they live or their work. Perhaps we're the ones who are coping well, because we're used to working from home, or have maintained control over day-to-day life, or our job allows us to thrive. And then we see others who are struggling and feel anything from slight twinges to full-blown guilt.

Art Therapy Response

It's easy to rationalize, ignore, or even bypass our feelings as they emerge in response to our experiences throughout the pandemic. One of the most important questions we can ask ourselves is: "What can I do to take care of myself, right now?" If people have needed to work from home during this time, the line between "work" and "home" may have become blurred. It's important for our emotional and mental well-being to provide decompression time or distinctions between these activities. It's also important to recognize that it's OK to not be OK, and it's OK to be coping just fine. There is no single, specific way to respond to the pandemic's effect on our lives, because everyone's individual situation will have been impacted in a different way. Art therapy, and other psychosocial healthcare fields, are pre-equipped to address unique situations, like the varied responses people may have to the pandemic. Through realistic and healthy expression of emotions, art therapy provides an outlet for difficult emotions that have emerged during our individual COVID-19 experiences, and therefore presents opportunities for growth.

Article regarding mental health challenges and responses post-pandemic:

Neo, P. (2020, May 17). 5 Mental Health Challenges We'll Be Facing After COVID-19. Retrieved July 13, 2020, from <https://mindbodygreen.com/articles/mental-health-challenges-from-covid-19>.

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR NEWSLETTER!

We appreciate connecting with the community by sharing the specifics of music therapy and art therapy. If you have further inquiries, we highly recommend you visit our website at www.expressivetherapies.net, our Facebook page (Expressive Therapies), our Instagram page (@expressivetherapiesllc) the American Music Therapy Association at www.musictherapy.org and the American Art Therapy Association at <https://arttherapy.org/>, or email us at info@expressivetherapies.net.

