

The Role of Art Therapy

Introduction

From time to time your students may receive related services to help them deal with their present special education situation. There are time when parents may not fully understand what exactly a related service does. This Parent Teacher Conference Handout explains to parent what the role of art therapy will be if their child has it on his/her IEP.

According to the American Art Therapy Association (2015), art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. A goal in art therapy is to improve or restore a client's functioning and his or her sense of personal well-being. Art therapy practice requires knowledge of visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms) and the creative process, as well as of human development, psychological, and counseling theories and techniques.

Today art therapy is widely practiced in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, wellness centers, forensic institutions, schools, crisis centers, senior communities, private practice, and other clinical and community settings. During individual and/or group sessions art therapists elicit their clients' inherent capacity for art making to enhance their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Who benefits from art therapy?

Art therapy is practiced in mental health, rehabilitation, medical, educational, forensic, wellness, private practice and community settings with diverse client populations in individual, couples, family, and group therapy formats. Art therapy is an effective treatment for people experiencing developmental, medical, educational, and social or psychological impairment. Individuals who benefit from art therapy include those who have survived trauma resulting from combat, abuse, and natural disaster; persons with adverse physical health conditions such as cancer, traumatic brain injury, and other health disability; and persons with autism, dementia, depression, and other disorders.

Art therapy helps people resolve conflicts, improve interpersonal skills, manage problematic behaviors, reduce negative stress, and achieve personal insight. Art therapy also provides an opportunity to enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of art making.