The Art of Finding the Words for What You Are Feeling

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Which picture says something about you today?

What is art therapy?

Art therapy is an interactive therapeutic intervention where professional art therapists engage “the mind, body, and spirit in ways that are distinct from verbal articulation alone . . . [and in ways] which can circumvent the limitations of language.”

(American Art Therapy Association, 2017)
By the way, 

Art therapy has been identified as an effective strategy for addressing work-related stress: Art-making can facilitate . . .

• the expression of true emotions associated with work stress and
• the action to alleviate the impact of work stress

(Huet & Holttum, 2016)

. . . so you can use it for yourself too!

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Let’s get started!

Here’s what you need to do:

• Draw a circle
• Take a few deep breaths
• Fill the circle

Worry is imagination used self-destructively.
Creativity is imagination used self-constructively.

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But I can’t draw!

Here’s what you need to do:
• Draw a circle
• Take a few deep breaths
• Fill the circle

While you are working, I’ll share some information about why and how artmaking can be therapeutic.

Art making is associated with
• Decreased cortisol levels (Kaimal, Ray, & Muniz, 2016),
• Reduced feelings of sluggishness and improved concentration (Lawson et al., 2012),
• Decreased depression (Rosen, 2002), and
• Increased positive emotions/reduced negative mood (Mercer, Warson, & Zhao, 2010; Smolarski, Leone, & Robbins, 2015).

What does art add to traditional therapy?

Evidence-based benefits of art therapy

- Symbolic expression (Blomdahl et al., 2013)
- Relational aesthetics (Czamanski-Cohen & Weihs, 2016; Franklin, 2012; Moon, 2007)
- Embodiment (Czamanski-Cohen & Weihs, 2016)
- Ritual (Moon, 2000; Turner, 1966)
- Pleasure/play (Blomdahl et al., 2013; Hain-Cohen & Carr, 2006; Hinz, 2006)
- Ritual (Moon, 2010; Turner, 1968)


Adolescent development and art making

- Ability to apply logic to abstractions (developing formal operational thought)
- Unformed, but developing identity
- Desire to be seen
- Powerful emotions (amygdala-driven brain)
- Bonus: Family


Here’s what you need to do:

- Draw a circle
- Take a few deep breaths
- Fill the circle

Are you done or close to being done?
Let’s process the artwork

1. Write about your drawing.
   - Were you able to fully engage? Why or why not?
   - Why did you choose the colors you used?
   - What image is prominent?
   - What is at the center of your circle?
   - Are the edges permeable?
   - What would be a succinct, descriptive title for your artwork?
   - Other thoughts?

2. And then share with a partner.

If time permits...

Choose one of the following prompts and create a second drawing.

Prompt 1
Draw a picture of tension. Identify those areas of the body where you carry tension. Try to represent how your insides would look if you could peer in at them.

Prompt 2
Draw a wide chasm separating two areas of land: one where you are and one where you’d like to be. Next, depict a real or imagined strategy for crossing the chasm.

In short:

Making art ➔ Finding words
Questions?

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References


