Art Has A Unique Ability To Heal

Many consumers struggle with issues from past traumas, self-esteem, and interpersonal relations. The focus of this methodology is to use art in a unique way to access and address ways to heal stress-producing thoughts and feelings that impede recovery. Art has a SPECIAL place in expression of feelings, hopes and desires. This workshop will discuss and demonstrate how art aided by guided meditation can facilitate the need to “get out” and deal with negative feelings in order to transform the person and thus accommodate the process of improving functionality. Additionally, the artwork can be exhibited to build self-esteem in consumers, as is done in our agency, Lakeview Mental Health Services, Inc in our annual art show. This model requires no artistic experience or abilities other than a willingness to heal stress-producing issues/emotions so that transformation can become reality. It will show the incredible power of art for Healing Through Expression.

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Carol Clarke and Barbara Crumb
Lakeview Mental Health Services, Inc.

What is Art Therapy

From the International Art Therapy Organization: Art has the potential to change lives in profound ways. When words are not enough, we turn to images and symbols to tell our stories. And in telling our stories through art, we can find a path to health and wellness, emotional reparation, recovery, and ultimately, transformation.

From Art Therapy Sourcebook [2006] and International Art Therapy Organization: Although art therapists have generated many specific definitions of art therapy, most of them fall into one of two general categories. The first involves a belief in the inherent healing power of the creative process of art making. This view embraces the idea that the process of making art is therapeutic; this process is sometimes referred to as art therapy. Art making is seen as an opportunity to express oneself imaginatively, authentically, and spontaneously, an experience that, over time, can lead to personal fulfillment, emotional reparation, and transformation.

Using Barbara Ganim’s book “Art and Healing: Using Expressive Art to Heal Your Body, Mind, and Spirit”, you can use art to heal yourself and others. Art has a unique ability for healing, whether you are a good artist or not. Many consumers struggle with issues from past traumas, poor self-esteem, and difficulty with interpersonal relations. The focus of this methodology is to use art in a unique way to access and address ways to heal stress-producing thoughts and feelings that impede recovery. Art has a very special place in expression of feelings, hopes, and desires. Guided meditation can facilitate the need to “get out” and deal with negative feelings in order to transform the person and thus accommodate the process of improving functionality. Additionally, the artwork can be exhibited to build self-esteem in consumers, as is done in our agency, Lakeview Mental Health Services, Inc in our annual art show. This model requires no artistic experience or abilities other than a willingness to heal stress-producing issues/emotions so that transformation can become reality.

“Although the key to healing lies in our ability to express and release our painful, stress-producing emotions, accessing these emotions isn’t always easy when we continue to do it in the only way we know how—using words. We try to talk about it, yell it out, get it off our chest, but in the end, the feelings remain. That’s because our left brain’s verbal language in only capable of expressing what we think we...
feel, while the real feelings often go unnoticed and unexpressed. To access our real feelings, we must use the right brain’s language of imagery.

As split-brain research has revealed, each side of the brain has separate and distinct functions. The body’s senses take in all of our experiences and the emotions generated by those experiences and create imagistic impressions in the right side if the brain. As the right brain then processes these imagistic impressions, they are then transferred to the left side of the brain, where they are translated into verbal thoughts and memories. Unfortunately, however, something is often lost in the translation.

The left side of the brain is not an objective reporter of our feelings. It analyzes, categorizes, and judges every experience we have and the emotions we feel. The left brain uses our learned beliefs as a yardstick to evaluate our experiences, and as it does it weaves a different kind of story that frequently reinterprets, alters, or denies the truth of what has really happened. That’s why several witnesses to an accident can have so many different versions of what they think took place. When we use words to talk about our feelings, what we often get is the left brain’s judgmental interpretation. But when we use the right brain’s language of imagery, we get the truth of our experiences and feelings, because judgment is not a right-brain function.”

Class Summary: The class involves a process of using guided meditations, journaling, and artwork to get in touch with emotions that cause stress, in order to heal them. We will be taking those feelings and transforming them through guided meditation, journaling, and artwork. First the class members will write about anything bothering them, that they are ready to heal. Then they are guided through a meditation. The guided visualization facilitates “mind’s eye” pictures/images. When everyone is back from the visualization, class members take pencil/pastels/markers to paper, to express the feelings they saw in their mind’s eye. The process is repeated for the transformative exercise except that the emphasis is on visualizing how it would feel to heal that negative emotion. The class would then discuss their experiences with the group. No previous art experience is necessary.

Supplies:
List of emotions
Journals or lined paper
Pens
Pencils
11” x 14” (or larger) art paper
Oil pastels
Colored markers and/or pencils
DVD player
Meditative CDs
Paint, brushes, and canvas (where possible)

Step I: Instruct class members to write about anything that has been troubling them lately. After thinking and writing about something negative or that causes stress, come up with an emotion that describes that feeling.

Step II: Guide class members by guided visualization to a relaxed state leads class members to a place where they can put images, colors, forms, etc. to their negative emotions.

Step III: As class members come out of the meditative state, they will take pencil, pen, colored pencils, or oil pastels to paper to express the emotion they identified.

Step IV: Class members consider questions to help them to understand their images.

The book goes on through more exercises to heal body, mind, and spirit to “get out” emotions and transform them into healing works of art.

Books:
Healing Through Expression

Presenters
- Carol Clarke
- Cornell University
- Ithaca, New York
- Bachelor of Science in Design
- 1974
- Barbara Crumb
- Alfred University
- Alfred, New York
- Bachelor of Arts in Music
- 1965

Lakeview Mental Health Services, Inc.
Geneva, New York

“Club 620” Art Room

Lakeview Art Show

Resource:
- “Art and Healing: Using Expressive Art to Heal Your Body, Mind, and Spirit”
- Barbara Ganim, M.A.E., C.H.H.C.
- Faculty - Salve Regina University, Newport, Rhode Island
- Expressive Arts Institute

Drawing from the Heart
Visual Journaling
Art is Special

Why art therapy versus talk therapy?

Chapter headings
- The Power of Art to Heal
- How to begin using Art for Healing
- Expressing Emotions through Imagery
- The Difference between Expressing an Emotion with Words vs. Images
- Setting your Intentions to Activate your Healing Process
...more Chapter headings
- Healing the Mind
- Exploring your Emotional Nature
- Healing the Body
- Using your Body's Wisdom to Heal an Illness

...more Chapter Headings
- Transformation of the Spirit
- Opening the Divine Connection to Express the Images of your Heart
- Healing Others
- How Art Can Heal Others

The Value of Imagery
1) Expression of emotions.
2) Access the right brain.
3) Facilitate healing.

Facilitation of Healing
1) Get out negative feelings.
2) Transform feelings.
3) Improve functionality.
4) Build self-esteem.

How Words Betray our Feelings
“Although the key to healing lies in our ability to express and release our painful, stress-producing emotions, accessing these emotions isn't always easy when we continue to do it in the only way we know how--using words.”

Examples of art
Imagery created by art students Bound and gagged Art as expression of selfBlocked Freedom Emotion
Let your light shine Alienation Intention to healFrustration Feeling Loved Expression of angerConnect with spirit and love in Disconnection Grief my heart Connection

Sample Exercise

How to Begin:
1) Two pieces of lined paper.
2) Two pieces of blank paper.
3) Package of colored markers.
Expressing Your Emotions Through Imagery

(Chapter Three)

“Imagery is the body-mind’s inner language”

- “Art is the voice or expression of that language. Using art to express what your body-mind is saying will enable you to connect, perhaps for the first time, with your deepest feelings and emotions. Negative and fearful emotions can torment the mind, damage the body, and suppress the spirit, thus blocking the path to physical and emotional healing.” - Barbara Ganim

Expressing Your Emotions Through Imagery

- “Expressing these emotions through color, form, shape, and image releases their hold on the body, mind, and spirit, clearing the way for healing to begin.” - Barbara Ganim

Defining an emotion

- Think of something that has been causing stress or has in the past, created stress for you.
- Write the word on your paper.
- Then write a sentence or two describing how it affects your life.

Stress-producing emotions:

- Anger
- Sadness/Grief
- Fear
- Frustration
- Hurt
- Alienation
- Rejection
- Abandonment
- Anxiety
- Despair
- Confusion

Guided Visualization

Accessing the right brain.

Create the Image

1) Draw anything that came into your mind during the guided visualization.
2) If no image is presented, look at the colors available and see what color(s) you are attracted to. Pick up that color.
3) Create whatever comes to you.

Remember:

- Art experience is not necessary to do the exercises.
- Do not judge your work.
- You are the only interpreter of what you create.

Questions to ponder:

1) In what part or parts of your body did you feel your painful, stress-producing emotion?
2) How do you feel now as you look at this drawing?
3) How do you sense that this drawing symbolizes your painful, stress-producing emotion?
4) What do the colors tell you about this emotion?
More questions to ponder…
5) Look at each of the shapes, forms, or images that you drew, and write a sentence or two describing what each one of them tells you about the emotion?
6) If this drawing could speak to you about how this emotion feels and the circumstances that evoke it, what would it say?
7) How did it feel to express this emotion in a drawing?
More questions to ponder…
8) How does this emotion feel now inside your body?
9) What have you learned about this emotion from your drawing?
10) What have you learned from these first two exercises about the difference between expressing this emotion with words and expressing it with images?

Creating the intention to heal
This exercise is designed to set your intentions to activate your healing process.

Aspects for Healing
- Physical
- Emotional
- Spiritual

Guided Visualization

Intention to heal

Questions to Ponder:
1) How does this artwork symbolize that part of you that is in need of healing?
2) What do the images and colors tell you about your affliction?
3) What does this piece of artwork tell you about what is needed to restore balance and harmony?
   …more questions to ponder?
4) How do you feel now about your ability to heal?
5) If each image, shape, or color within your artwork could speak, what would each one say to you about your affliction and the healing of it?
6) What have you learned about this part of yourself that is in need of healing?

Conclusion: We hope that this experience has shown you how effective this methodology can be.