



The Therapeutic Benefits of Art Therapy for Individuals with Dementia

WHAT IS ART THERAPY

Art therapy integrates the visual arts and the creative process with psychotherapeutic techniques to support, improve, and enhance an individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Artistic talent is not required to participate in art therapy. The focus is on the process of self-discovery, self-expression, and creative exploration and play.

ART THERAPY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEMENTIA

Engaging in the creation of art can be an enjoyable experience on its own. However, for the individual with dementia the art process can also be used therapeutically to improve their physical, emotional, and cognitive functioning. For those with limited speech the art process also provides a non-verbal mode of communicating.

THE ART THERAPY PROCESS

Art therapists are trained in the therapeutic use of a variety of art media and can assist, guide, and support participants throughout the art process. The art media, tools, and process can be adapted to accommodate a variety of physical challenges and a wide range of functional abilities. Art therapy can be provided individually or in a group format. Group art therapy provides the added benefit of peer support.

BENEFITS OF ART THERAPY

Art therapy has been shown to improve the quality of life for individuals with dementia. Research has identified the following benefits:

- Improved communication (Malchiodi, 2003).
- Increase in verbalization and memory recall (Stallings, 2010).
- Reduced anxiety (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006).
- Improved cognitive functioning (Cohen, 2006; Alders & Levine-Madori, 2010).
- Improved self-esteem (Rusted, Sheppard, and Waller, 2006).
- Improved mood & sense of well-being (Cohen, 2006; Rusted, Sheppard, and Waller, 2006).
- Increase in social connection (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006).



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Additional Resources

American Art Therapy Association: www.arttherapy.org

Indiana Art Therapy Association: www.indianaarttherapyassociation.org

National Center for Creative Aging: www.creativeaging.org