

7 Common Myths About Art Therapy

I have been an artist and a professional art therapist for over 30 years. Frequently I am asked what is art therapy? The best way to answer this question is to identify common misconceptions about art therapy.

Myth 1: Only artists or people who are good at art can benefit. The truth is you don't need to be good at art or talented. There is no pass or fail criteria. Your artwork is not going to be "critiqued." You just need to be open minded.

Myth 2: Art therapy is only for children, the elderly, the intellectually disabled, and/or people who are seriously mentally ill or cannot express themselves verbally. I have worked with individuals of all ages from diverse backgrounds, including ordinary folks who just want to feel better about their lives.

Myth 3: An art therapist can see things in my artwork that I don't want them to know and/or talk about. Your artwork may provide clues, but really, you are the only one who truly knows what your artwork means or represents.

Myth 4: Art therapists are not real therapists. I was actually told this by one of my psychology professors that told me art therapists are "quacks." The truth is art therapists are Master level clinicians with special skills and training in using visual media in counseling and psychotherapy. In the US, professional art therapists are credentialed by the Art Therapy Credentialing Board and in many states licensed. In New York State art therapists are licensed as creative arts therapists or LCATs.

Myth 5: It is recreational and just arts & crafts. Recreational & occupational therapists may offer arts and craft activities as therapeutic interventions for their patients. That may be where the idea that treatment for "mental patients" in the old days consisted of basket weaving and making ash trays.

Myth 6: My adult coloring book is art therapy. Many non-art therapists are marketing their coloring books as "art therapy."

Myth 7: Art therapy is too new age and touchy feely for me. An art therapist will learn about your needs and then with your collaboration develop a treatment plan that is suitable to you.

I hope by outlining some of the common misconceptions about art therapy I have helped to explain what art therapy is and is not. Art therapists typically provide services for people with medical and/or mental health issues, as well as for individuals interested in seeking an emotional outlet that is creative, productive and/or spiritually uplifting. Art therapists work from a fundamental belief that the creative process has the potential to be restorative and healing. In addition to adapting and integrating psychological theories and interventions to an art therapy (nonverbal) experience, art therapists are trained to conduct talk therapy. An art therapy session may involve art making and talking about your problems, goals and objectives, and/or may involve discussion only, and/or other therapeutic interventions, such as self-hypnosis, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), motivational Interviewing, and mindfulness stress reduction exercises. Many art therapists attain additional training in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), Progressive Counting (PC), trauma counseling and addictions counseling. I am particularly interested in adapting self-hypnosis techniques to help artists overcome barriers to their success, whether it be fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of success, shyness, procrastination, bad habits or something deeper. Presently, I am collaborating with Lisa Langer, owner of Pencil in the River and River Art Gallery, who is a certified consulting hypnotist, to help artists achieve their full potential. We look forward to updating you on our collaboration soon! To read a comprehensive definition about the art therapy profession, please refer to American Art Therapy Association website: www.americanarttherapyassociation.org.