

Art therapy encourages communication and healing

Art therapy is a vehicle for communication, healing and growth through non-verbal as well as verbal expression.

Dianne Tennyson, MAT, ATR, a registered art therapist, has seen through her practice how it can help people reconcile emotional conflicts and expand self awareness. The techniques can be applied to individuals, couples, families and small groups.

Tennyson works with clients to uncover unconscious or emotionally charged feelings that may be impossible to access by verbal means alone.

The visual medium of art provides an avenue for symbolic and metaphoric expression that can lead to a deeper understanding of personality, experiences, concerns, interest and other critically important facets of an individual's make-up.

Participants can be self-referred or referred by a psychiatric professional.

With degrees in nursing and art, and a master's degree in art education, Tennyson received her art therapy training from the University of Illinois and the University of Oklahoma. She offers years of clinical experience as an art therapist working with adolescents and adults at Fenwick Hall Hospital.

In her private practice, she has

worked with alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual abuse, depression and bipolar disorder.

Her medical background is combined with a focus on mental, physical, and spiritual concerns for a holistic approach to therapy.

Tennyson has taught art for 20 years. She also is a professional artist and exhibits locally.

Examples of Art Therapy Applications

For Children

- Phobias and social skills: Art gives both concrete and metaphoric form to fears and adverse social situations confronting children, allowing them to both understand and solve their problems.

- Victimization issues: Scary, embarrassing or taboo subjects can be given accessible form through art so the child feels safe while addressing threatening issues.

- Loss/Abandonment/Grieving: The visual medium of art provides transitional objects for children moving through loss issues. It helps children move forward to new attachments while concretely leaving adverse situations or people behind.

For Adolescents

- Substance abuse: Use of alcohol

and drugs often includes sub cultural imagery and symbols of issues that can be expressed and explored in art therapy. Substance abuse masks feelings of anger, pain and loneliness. Art provides a way to release these feelings.

- Oppositional Defiant: Even when faced with behaviors like refusal to speak or drawing inappropriate imagery, art therapy can establish a means of expression for the adolescent.

- Depression: Art therapy is an active, experiential therapy that challenges depressive symptoms and ideas. Imagery can also reveal suicidal thoughts and plans.

For Adults

- Marital and Family Disfunction: Art therapy identifies communication patterns and family issues by making them concrete, external, and accessible.

- Stress and Anxiety: Expressing losses, and the stresses of relationships and feelings in a visual form provide clarity and acceptance for the client. Communication is clearer and less distorted when expressed visually.

According to Tennyson, "Art connects us to ourselves and our world. Making art is a deeply human act. Whether you're creating in a studio, class or group therapeutic setting, art helps



IMAGE PROVIDED

This is an example of a client's work.

you connect with yourself and others. "How? We're born wanting to create. To create is human. We want to make objects and images, we want to sing and dance and we want to tell stories about everything and nothing at all," she says.

"Making art increases and maintains self-esteem, encourages communication and interpersonal relationships. And, as our understanding of life deepens with maturity, art provides metaphors for the issues we face in life."

For more information, e-mail her at jenniann@netzero.com or call her at 884.9479.