



What is Art Therapy?

Art therapy is a form of counselling which utilises the verbal, visual, and sensory aspects of your human experience. It is similar to verbal counselling, in that you work with your therapist to unpack and process what is happening in your experience now, which may involve reflections about the past and future. What is different is that we also invite other forms of communication and expression - the visual and sensory (felt experience). The purpose of doing this is that our experiences, the traumatic and challenging, as well as the easeful and enjoyable, are processed by different areas of our brain. Art therapy seeks to work with the 'whole brain' to facilitate self-exploration for meaning making, develop greater emotional regulation and enhanced cognitive processing.

In contrast to talk therapies alone, art therapy provides what can be considered a less threatening way to access difficult psychological content. It doesn't mean this therapy cannot go deep, it's that the speed of progress is more regulated and controlled by you.

Art therapists use approaches similar to frameworks you may have heard before like Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Positive Psychology, to name a few, specifically tailored for an arts-based approach. The therapeutic approaches we use are evidence-based, and art therapists are trained to deliver the most appropriate approach, or combination of, for individual and group needs.

Registered Art Therapists in Australia are post graduate trained with a Master in Art Therapy and are registered with the Australia New Zealand Asia Creative Arts Therapy Association (ANZACATA).

Common myths about art therapy

- *Art therapy is only for artists or the creatively talented.* Art therapy is not about creating a pretty, or skilled piece of artwork, it is about the process and the act of expression. Art therapists do not judge your skill level nor do they seek to improve your technical skills as that's not the point of art therapy.
- *Art therapists interpret their clients work.* Art therapists do not interpret client's artwork and we're not here to tell you about yourself. You are the expert of your experience and your work. We aim to offer reflective questions to assist you in making meaning out of your work if that is the aim of the therapy in that moment.
- *Art therapy is really 'out there' or 'woowoo', not evidence based.* Art therapy is just as broad as traditional talk therapy approaches. Some art therapists work on a transpersonal level, whereas others work on humanistic, or cognitive behavioural, or psychodynamic levels. Art therapy has a growing evidence base and has been around since the 1950s. We are young as a discipline, but we are seeing more research emerging particularly in areas such as complex trauma, PTSD, eating disorders, chronic pain and disability.

What to expect when working with an Art Therapist

- *Collaboration:* the art therapist is there to support you with a tailored approach on your journey. We work collaboratively using carefully selected materials to tap into different parts of the brain for self-expression, gaining new perspectives and problem solving in order to reach therapeutic goals.
- *Confidentiality:* As with most therapy, the relationship with your therapist is paramount. We therefore place high value on providing you with a safe, confidential and non-judgmental environment.
- *Process over product:* you do not need to be 'good at art' in order to partake in art therapy. The focus is on the process of the of the art making rather than producing a 'pretty' final product. There is no right or wrong way to express yourself through art.