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Enriching the Lives of Seniors Through the Art Therapy

ELISTAT MODULES

Art Therapy For Seniors In Practice

Module

03

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Elistat Modules

Module 03

Content of The Module

- A. Art Therapy Applications with elderly
- B. Art Therapy Methods
- C. How to implement an Art Therapy session



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Learning Outcomes

The knowledge, skills and attitude to be gained in the module

- Know and apply Art Therapy methods and processes (Drawing, visual arts, writing, poem, music, dance, drama)
- conduct Art Therapy sessions in accordance with the needs and requirements of senior participants

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Main Subject of The Module

- A. Art therapy benefits for elderly
- B. Art therapy methods: Drawing, Painting, Visual Art, Dance/Movement, Music, Drama
- C. Art therapy exercises with elderly
- D. How to implement a specific Art therapy session

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Materials and Documents of The Module

Coursebook – Tutor guide

Curriculum

Movie & visual tools

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A. Art Therapy Applications



How can art help people's mental health?

- A. Art Therapy for Seniors
- B. Benefits
- C. Approaches

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A. Art Therapy for Seniors

Current studies in the field of art therapy confirm that art can **positively affect individuals** by inducing both psychological and physiological healing.

- In general, the exercise of creativity **improves quality of life and promotes general well-being**.
- Several studies show that art can **reduce depression and anxiety**. The imagination and creativity of the elderly can flourish in old age, helping them **realize unique and unexperienced potential**, even when they have Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease.

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- Neurological research shows that making art can **improve cognitive function** by producing new neural pathways. Art helps the brain actively compensate for pathology by using more efficient brain networks or alternative brain strategies. Making art or even just viewing works of art causes the brain to continue to remodel, adapt and restructure. According to behavioral neurologist Bruce Miller, although the brain inevitably ages, creative abilities do not necessarily deteriorate. On the contrary, the aging brain responds well to art, allowing the brain's two hemispheres to work more in tandem.

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B. Benefits

Gene Cohen, director of the Center on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., found that the arts have a positive effect on health and disease as we age, offering a **wide range of benefits**, including:

- helping people relax;
- providing a sense of control;
- reducing depression and anxiety;
- aiding socialization;



- aiding socialization;
- encouraging play and a sense of humor;
- improve cognition;
- provide sensory stimulation;
- promote a stronger sense of identity;
- increase self-esteem;
- nurture spirituality;
- reduce boredom.

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In addition, expressive art exercises are innovative interventions to promote self-expression and improve communication with others.

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C. Approaches

Art can be used as therapy according to two approaches:

1. ART AS THERAPY

Artists, art educators and health professionals usually incorporate the first approach in their work. This method mainly emphasizes the value of the creative process itself and helps people harness and express their imagination and creativity.

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1. ART IN THERAPY

Art in therapy integrates art and clinical psychology. This method, employed by an experienced art therapist, uses therapeutic art activities to achieve specific therapeutic goals.

Expressive arts, including visual arts, music, dance/movement, writing and drama, are empowering tools that can help in the aging process by promoting active engagement in life. Similar, specifically designed arts activities can serve as therapeutic interventions for individuals diagnosed with chronic diseases.



B. Art Therapy Methods



Techniques used in art therapy

A. Drawing

B. Painting

C. Visual Art

D. Dance/Movement

E. Music

F. Drama

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A. DRAWING THERAPY

Drawing therapy allows the patient the opportunity to communicate thoughts, feelings, problems, wishes, hopes, dreams and desires in a relatively non-threatening manner. It is used as a way to express conscious and unconscious issues and beliefs. Drawing serves as a vehicle to facilitate communication, growth and insight.

Patients can use figures, lines, colors, shapes, abstractions or realism. Different drawing materials are available, as papers, crayons, pastels and colored pencils.

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Sometimes patients are asked to draw what they have in mind, other times directives are offered. These latter just provide a structure, that the participants are free to follow or modify.

Seniors usually prefer to have a basic structure to follow, as it helps them start and address creativity.

It also is important to give the patient **time** during the session **to discuss** the artwork, **observe and analyze** it and relate to representations and figures illustrated. This time allows also **group interaction**.

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BENEFITS OF DRAWING

As we age, more effort is needed to control the muscles in our arms and hands and to maintain coordination. An activity such as drawing can be very therapeutic both physically and mentally and is a great way to relieve stress and anxiety.

Drawing therapy is fun and relaxing and can be practiced in the comfort of one's home or in a social setting.

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With elderly:

Drawing allows them to **forget illnesses and problems** and is a **pleasant distraction**. The **rhythmic movements** of coloring are immediately **relaxing and calming**; Art **stimulates the mind** and also **develops motor skills**; Studies have shown that art, particularly drawing, can **reduce the risk of developing early signs of dementia** by 73%; It allows both **the left and right sides of the brain** to be used, which means it allows both logic and creativity to be used; Completing a drawing can also create a **sense of accomplishment** and **increase self-esteem**.

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B. PAINTING THERAPY

Painting therapy is particularly useful with patients who need to get more flexibility.

Painting allows for **spontaneity and freedom**.

Usually, **watercolors** are more easy to work with for some patients, because it is easier to control dark and light, or the thickness of things, just by adding more or less water to the mixture. This type of painting is also easier to clean up and can be painted over a pre-drawn line. *Acrylics, instead, are a little more difficult to use, but can be more easily blended and mixed to create new shades.*

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- Another interesting way of painting is finger painting, used for patients who feel more free to express themselves. This method is usually accompanied by music and allows the patient to express himself through movement and art and to change his mind whenever he wants.
- Other types of painting are: sponge painting; painting with a mini roller; painting by blowing through a straw; marble painting; using the brush to flick the paint.

It would be better not to use toxic and non-washable paints.

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BENEFITS OF PAINTING

Painting is a great way to **relax, pass the time, exercise creative muscles and keep the mind engaged**. The elderly especially can take advantage of the unique benefits that painting can offer.

- Regular, focused activity can have rewarding effects for seniors living with **memory loss**.

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- Art activities engage the mind on both sides of the brain, simultaneously using different centers and lobes of the brain. This kind of mental exercise can keep the mind sharp, helping to keep the **mental abilities** of the elderly strong and resilient. In the case of people with dementia or Alzheimer's disease, it can help create bonds and passions that can cut through the debilitating fog of memory loss.

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- For seniors with limited **mobility or movement problems**, painting can be a great way to keep active. The act of engaging with the canvas, moving the brush, and handling the paint can provide a slow, easy, low-impact activity that helps keep joints flexible and muscles firm, promoting fine motor skills and dexterity. For the elderly with arthritis, improvement in pain and swelling in the wrist, hand, and finger areas may be noted. For the elderly who can stand, keeping upright at the easel helps keep the legs and core muscles engaged, promoting balance and preventing falls.

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- Painting also has countless **emotional benefits**. Everyone experiences stress to some degree, but the challenges of aging can weigh heavily on the elderly, causing them to experience a high amount of unhealthy stress. Without an outlet or an outlet valve, the gathered weight of stress can have not only deleterious mental effects such as depression, agitation or irritability, but also cause physical illnesses such as inflammation or ulcers. Painting, being a fun, creative and relaxing activity, can be a great stress reliever for the elderly.

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- Moreover, since problems such as loneliness, **depression or isolation** are common among the elderly, painting can help alleviate these problems as well. With the pride and sense of accomplishment that comes from completing a work of art and the social activity of sharing one's work, or perhaps participating in a group painting class, one can see how cultivating an appreciation for art and creativity can help chase away sadness.

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- Even for the elderly, who find it difficult to adapt and live in a world that is changing from the one in which they grew up and thrived, painting can offer another benefit. By tapping into their subconscious and using art to put their feelings on canvas, the elderly can enhance their **communication skills**, as well as provide themselves with something to discuss, start a conversation about, or create a gift or keepsake for their family to cherish and keep.

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C. VISUAL ART THERAPY (VAT)

Visual art therapy (VAT) is a therapeutic process that is based on spontaneous or prompted creative expression. It involves the use of various art materials and techniques such as sculpture, modeling (clay or substitute materials), collage, etc.

Among the various types of VAT, very popular are **collage** and **clay**.

- **Collage** works make the patients feel free to express themselves through the use of a variety of resources and materials, such as paper, fabric, magazines photos, pictures, foam shapes, wood pieces, felt, construction paper, cotton, pipe cleaners, ecc.

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- **Clay** work promotes expression of mood and feeling and allows the client to experiment with texture and touch by molding, shaping and manipulating the clay. These movements allow the patient to lessen stress and anxiety and provide a way to turn an amorphous shape into something specific. The most common shapes given to clay are pots, trays, figures, animals, abstract designs, family sculptures and masks.

There are also different types of clay that can be used, such as: terracotta, sculpey, crayola, home-made clay, model magic clay. This latter is usually preferred because it is clean, non-toxic, air dries, and is easily used.

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BENEFITS OF VISUAL ART

Through nonverbal language, VAT allows patients to express their emotions and focuses on how they work and create.

Art products document the therapeutic process, allow the person who creates them to maintain a dialogue with himself or herself, and are lasting objects that can be referred to for a long time.

At the heart of art therapy is the healing power of the creative process and the special communication that takes place between the patient, the artwork and the therapist.

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Collages are non-threatening ways of representing thoughts, concerns, feelings and attitudes. Everything about the collage can express these matters: the symbols used, the organization of the various things, their distance, etc.

Clay works are important in therapy because they give the patient the opportunity to work three dimensionally, seeing things from more than one perspective. Additionally, the patient gives shape to the clay, as he can shape behaviors, attitudes and self-image. Thanks to clay works, patients develop new methods for coping and problem solving.

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D. DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY (DMT)

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is a form of psychotherapy and art therapy. It is defined as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote the emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual. Dance/movement therapy focuses on movement behavior as it emerges in the therapeutic relationship between clients and therapists.

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DMT is considered a useful intervention for individuals with developmental problems, medical, social, physical and psychological disabilities, particularly those who have difficulty expressing and exploring their needs and emotions with verbal language and those with cognitive deficits.

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Depending on clients' needs, DMT interventions can last from weeks to years and can be used in individual, couples, or group therapy sessions.

Pleasure is a basic need often overlooked and neglected among the elderly. Dancing constitutes what neuroscientist John Krakauer calls a “*pleasure double play*”: both music and movement stimulate the brain’s reward centers, increasing the number of activated pleasure centers. Krakauer also traces the pleasure of dancing to the neural processes of mirroring, attunement, and shared social experience.

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BENEFITS OF DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY

The elderly, particularly those diagnosed with dementia, often face major losses such as loss of speech, confusion, communication difficulties, memory loss, and the feeling of losing control of their lives little by little. These symptoms can in turn cause anxiety and depression.

Since our bodies and minds are strongly connected to each other, when one of them changes, it automatically affects the other.

This feature of DMT is ideal for the treatment of dementia.

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Through movement, in fact, our bodies release chemicals called endorphins that help us **relieve pain, stress and produce a feeling of euphoria.**

In addition to improving mood, DMT also **helps the patient communicate.**

On the physical side, for elders falls and unstable balance is always high on the rank of serious clinical problems and considerations. Research shows that dance-based exercise approaches can **improve strength, endurance, body mechanics** and can significantly **reduce the fall risk** for the elderly population.

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E. MUSIC THERAPY

Music therapy is a therapy in which music is used to **address the physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs of individuals**, from young children to older adults. In particular, it is defined as *"the use of musical or rhythmic interventions specifically selected by a music therapist to accomplish the restoration, maintenance, or improvement of social or emotional functioning, mental processing, or physical health of an older individual."*

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E. MUSIC THERAPY

Musical interventions can be of different kinds: listening to live or recorded music, participation in singing or playing instruments, writing songs, combining music and movement/dance, discussing music, etc.

During a music therapy session, patients can be left free to express themselves with music or be directed by the therapist.

Anyway, it has several beneficial effects on seniors, even those suffering dementia or Alzheimer's.

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BENEFITS OF MUSIC THERAPY

Music offers several benefits for the physical and mental health of older people. Listening to music and learning to play instruments has become a form of therapy for the elderly.

Among the benefits music therapy can provide to the elderly, some are:

- Improving **memory and concentration**. Music therapy for the elderly involves memorizing words, patterns, rhythms and instructions.

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- **Calming agitation in dementia patients.** Music therapists use songs with particular themes, lyrics, instruments and rhythms to help participants relax. This slows the heart rate and lowers the level of the stress hormone cortisol.
- **Help against depression and stress.** Music is a powerful healing tool that can affect a patient's emotions and bring him or her out of states of depression and fear.

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- **Increase movement and exercise.** Some music therapy activities include movement, which can range from clapping hands to moving arms and legs and shaking instruments of all shapes and sounds. It often even comes naturally to patients listening to music to start swaying, moving to the beat or dancing.

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- It **improves communication skills**. In fact, music therapy is a valuable tool for patients with memory problems and helps slow the decline of language skills. People who are no longer able to express themselves verbally can communicate their feelings by humming or moving their hands.
- **Help with socialization**. Many elderly people, especially those with dementia, Alzheimer's or other neurocognitive disorders, suffer from severe social anxiety, which in turn generates fear and agitation. Music therapy can help overcome this fear, allow them to relax and enjoy the company of others.

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F. DRAMA THERAPY

Drama therapy is one of the Creative Arts Therapies (CAT). It constitutes an active and experiential psychotherapy modality that involves the intentional and systematic use of drama/theater processes as a primary means of achieving psychological growth and change within a psychotherapeutic relationship.

In drama therapy sessions, individuals explore their life experiences in an in-depth manner through dramatic enactment, fantasy and imagination-based techniques to step into a character and tell a story from within this role.

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The literature indicates that drama therapy benefits a range of the aging population, from those who are high functioning to those who live with a physical, emotional, and cognitive challenges.

Drama therapy was also found to increase group involvement and positive relationships while aging, and promote improved communication and a sense of confidence among those suffering from dementia.

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BENEFITS OF DRAMA THERAPY

Among the drama therapy benefits for the elderly, we can find:

- Reduction of the feelings of isolation;
- Development of problem solving skills;
- Being able to express feelings and better relate to others;
- Better understand themselves and their experiences;
- Improving self-esteem and self-worth;
- Development of better coping skills.

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Through drama therapy, one has the opportunity to tell his story and change it, as well as to look at problems from a different perspective, express one's emotions or deal with emotions related to certain memories or ongoing situations.

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C. How to implement an AT session

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An art therapy session Guide

- A. Session plan
- B. Warm-up
- C. Drawing Therapy
- D. Painting Therapy
- E. Visual Art Therapy
- F. Dance/Movement Therapy



C. How to implement an AT session

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An art therapy session Guide

- G. Music Therapy
- H. Drama Therapy



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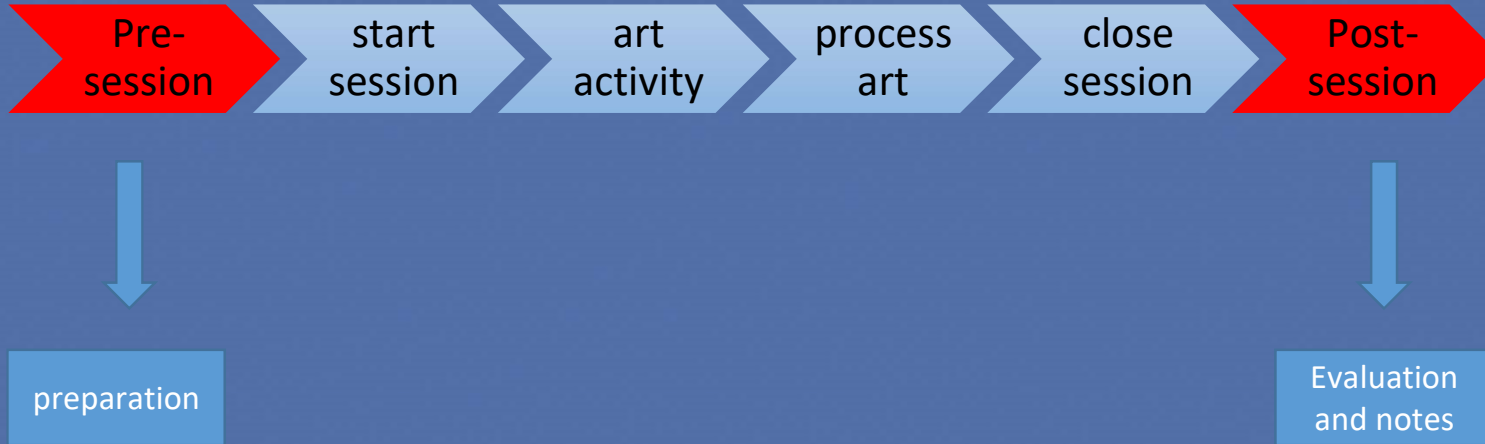


ART THERAPY SESSION GUIDE

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ART THERAPY PLAN

Each client and group requires different creative approaches. There is no one special way to lead an art therapy group. The most effective therapist is the one who bases his/her approach on the specific individual's diagnosis, needs and psychological state.

- The clinician needs to assess which projects are suitable for people he's working with, individually or in a group.

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- Many techniques allow for utilization of a variety of material: the therapist has to determine which materials are suitable for his/het target group.
- Using a wide range of techniques keeps participants motivated, energetic and involved.

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START SESSION

Present your role and your approach to art therapy providing participants with a basic guideline of the treatment process ahead.

To create a relaxed and motivating environment it is recommended start the session with WARM-UPS: they are usually 5 to 10 minutes and help participants become familiar with expressing themselves creatively.

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The warm-ups are relatively simple, increase self-esteem, and help convey the message that «it is not matter how one draws», it is important the expression of thoughts and feelings.

Another advantage is that people are given time to settle down, relax, catch their breath, socialize and greet each other.

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EXAMPLE OF WARM-UP

Activity name

Smile

Materials

Drawing paper, pastels, crayons, markers.

Procedure

Instruct patients to draw the first person, place or thing they saw in that day, that brought a smile on their faces.

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Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on emphasizing the positive in life and counting one's blessing. Encourage patients to express their feelings as they observe what they've drawn. The main goals include: to learn appreciating the beauty and goodness in nature and people; to use appreciation as a coping mechanism.

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ART ACTIVITY

Having a clear idea of problems and goals for the participants, the therapist can have an indication of an art activity that the client may benefit from.

When a client is making art, an important part of the therapist' role is to observe: answer any question, trying to be non-directive while the client is creating.

It is important to determine how comfortable participants are with art supplies and to discuss any possible resistance to use art supplies, as to place the focus on the process of creating instead of completing an art work.

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EXAMPLE OF DRAWING THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

A brief summary of the decades of my life

Materials

Paper, pastels, crayons, markers, booklet.

Procedure

Patients are given a stapled booklet (made from A4 papers) that has the decades between 1930 to 2020 printed on each individual page.

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The decades included depend on the average ages of the patients. Patients are directed to draw symbols, people, places and things that are representative of their lives.

Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on important events in one's life and the explorations of positive and negative experiences. Conversation may focus on how to use past strengths and experiences to deal better with present and future challenges.

The main goals are: reinforcement of one's identity, enhancement of self-esteem and realistic assessment of accomplishments.

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EXAMPLE OF PAINTING THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

Painting emotions

Materials

Brushes, paint, painting palette, painting paper.

Procedure

After getting the patient the necessary materials, ask him or her to paint what they feel at that moment.

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You can accompany this moment with a relaxing melody or one that can make the patient feel good.

After the patient has finished the paintings, ask him or her about the meaning and get him or her to talk about his or her emotions at that moment.

Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on the meaning of the artwork, the emotions expressed and the origin of these emotions. Conversation may focus on the connection among the colors chosen and the emotion they express.

The main goals are: to develop creativity and concentration and bring one's emotions to life.

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EXAMPLE OF VISUAL ART THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

Life stages

Materials

Magazines, scissors, glue, markers, paper.

Procedure

Suggest that clients find photos from various magazines that represent stages of their life and have them glue the pictures on a piece of paper in any manner they please.

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Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on examining how one's past affects present attitudes, beliefs and circumstances.

The main goals are to increase self-esteem and self-awareness by reminiscing about past experiences, achievements and strengths.

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EXAMPLE OF VISUAL ART THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

Clay animation: a comedy

Materials

Modeling clay and clay tools.

Procedure

Ask the patients to create a figure out of clay and to think of a humorous story they can tell by moving the parts of the figures in various ways.

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Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on what makes patients laugh. Encourage clients to explore how it feels to laugh and to make other laugh (if the activity is done with a group of patients). Explore the humor in the figure created, the way it was animated and the story told. The goal is to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of laughter, such as better mood, decreased of stress, lower blood pressure, increased socialization, ecc.

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EXAMPLE OF DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

How does it make you move

Materials

Background music.

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Procedure

Participants are spread in the room. The facilitator asks them to start moving and dancing freely. The facilitator then asks the patients to move the way they would if they were experiencing a certain feeling or situation (e.g. “imagine that you are now feeling very angry” or “you have just met a person that you have felt in love with”, etc.). While everyone is dancing, the facilitator can then instruct the participants to choose one of the movements they have been doing and start repeating this movement however they want with a certain rhythm. After sufficiently having explored one scenario, they can explore another one.

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Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on the choice of each move to express a certain feeling.
The main goal is to develop emotional awareness, empathy, imagination and creativity.

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EXAMPLE OF MUSIC THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

Soundtrack of your life

Materials

Paper and pen, music.

Procedure

Ask the patients to create a soundtrack, choosing one song that represents or is from their past, present, and future, plus 2 songs they really love.

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Then, ask them to title the soundtrack and draw a cover. During the session, you can put some music in the background.

Discussion/Goal

The discussion focuses on the choice of each song, the way it makes them feel and the memory it is connected to.

The main goals are to develop emotional awareness, develop memory and creativity and express feelings.

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EXAMPLE OF DRAMA THERAPY ACTIVITY

Activity name

What's in a name?

Materials

Paper and pencils.

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Procedure

Have patients sit in the room alone with writing materials. Ask them to make a list of all the names they remember and have been given throughout their lives, including maiden names, nicknames, role names, special names given by a particular person, etc. Therefore, ask them to add a (+) or (-) sign to names that have positive or negative connotations and to choose one in particular to focus on. Its meaning will be hidden and that they will not be asked to reveal anything about the actual history of that name. Then ask patients to write on the other side of the page the name they have chosen, but in reverse and to imagine that this name is a word in another language (not necessarily a known or existing language).

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Discussion/Goal

The main goal is to explore hidden emotions related to one's biography from a new point of view while developing imagination and creativity.

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PROCESSING ART

Processing art for new and returning participants it is important to explain that processing the art activity is not about interpreting the meaning of images or outcomes but about discussing the experience of the client during the activity:

- What thoughts came to their mind
- What emotions they felt
- If the art supplies created any concerns

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- If the art work they created represents a memory or if it is a storytelling about a life experience in the past

The processing art is similar to an «interview», posing questions, facilitating the discussion and understanding.

It is important to note that people are often critical and make negative comments about their art work, so it is important to remind the purpose of the activity, avoiding that self-criticism could impact their self-esteem.

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CLOSE SESSION

The final part of the art therapy session gives the opportunity:

- to summarize any key point from the session
- to invite participants to share their reflections or any insight they may have gained from the session
- to discuss the option of any homework activity (if pertinent)
- to ask for feedback for the experienced art activity
- to schedule the next session (if needed)

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