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Treating ADHD with Art Therapy

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Treating ADHD with Art Therapy

BINGHAMTON
UNIVERSITY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Source Project: Thinking Through Painting

Victoria Scarlett

Understanding ADHD

Attention Deficit hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological disorder characterized by the following:

- Inattention
- Lack of focus
- Time management problems
- Impulse control issues
- Sensory processing issues
- Hyperfocus
- Hyperactivity
- Executive dysfunction

Often ADHD is considered as a dopamine deficiency issue where the reward-processing center of the brain is constantly seeking stimuli to produce dopamine.¹

What is Art Therapy?

5 Modalities of Art Therapy:²

1. Art as Assessment- can they follow direction, recognize patterns
2. Art as Expression of Feelings- color choice, shapes, forms
3. Art as Insight and Understanding- motivations, subconscious desires
4. Art as Mood and Affect
5. Art as Therapeutic

Benefits of Art Therapy for ADHD

Behavioural and emotional improvements

- art as alternate form of communication
- bypasses internal censors
- means of release of frustration or anxiety
- can be reviewed again later
- connects people
- art making as practice of self-control, decision making, impulse control



“ ‘They are stimulation seekers because [stimulation] increases the uptake of the dopamine and helps them to stay focused,’ says Safran. ‘It’s often more helpful than cognitive therapy.’ ”³

Importance of Artistic Process

Sensory and Tactile value. Especially young boys with ADHD tend to prefer 3D forms, so clay and sculpture is especially effective as they can get hands on.⁴



Collage and mixed media art is often especially stimulating for ADHD children, and can be particularly engaging and effective in improving mood.



Analysis and Conclusion

Evidence suggests that art therapy is effective in promoting healthy emotional regulation and behaviours. It is also effective in reducing stress and promoting relaxation. The improvements in executive function, impulse control, self expression and social skills lead me to consider this to be a useful approach to treating ADHD. Art therapy also utilizes the excessive creative energy often present in ADHD individuals and channels this energy in a productive manner.⁵ It provides naturalistic learning and practice of these skills. It works on multiple levels: kinaesthetic/sensory; perceptual/affective; and cognitive/symbolic support behaviour modification and promotes a positive experience.⁶

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