

making sense



arts therapies

Making sense of arts therapies

This booklet explains what arts therapies are, what they are for, what happens during therapy and how to find a therapist.

Please note: this booklet covers regulated arts therapies. It do not cover unregulated therapeutic activities such as writing or reading groups, or doing arts recreationally by yourself or in a group, without the support of a therapist.

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What are arts therapies?

Arts (or creative) therapies involve using the arts in a therapeutic environment with a trained therapist. The different types of regulated of arts therapies include:

- dance movement therapy
- dramatherapy
- music therapy
- visual art therapy

You do not need to have any artistic skill or previous experience of dance, drama, music or visual art to find arts therapies helpful. The aim isn't to produce a great work of art, but to use what you create to understand yourself better.

What can I expect from arts therapies?

In arts therapy, your therapist helps you to create something — such as a piece of music, a drawing, a play or a dance routine — as a way of expressing your feelings, often without using words.

 *[It] helps me when I struggle to find the words when I'm too angry, despairing or confused to know what I think. It gives me a voice.* 

Your therapist will guide you in thinking about what you have created and how it relates to your feelings and experiences. This can help you come to terms with any difficult feelings, events or memories that may be causing you problems.

Like all therapies, arts therapies aren't for everyone. And you may find that one kind of art therapy is more helpful than others. It's about finding what works best for you.

How are arts therapies regulated?

Music therapy, dance movement therapy, dramatherapy and visual art therapy all have recognised professional bodies which provide regulation and codes of practice for their members (see 'Useful Contacts' on p.14). Arts therapists are expected to maintain professional standards and must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Where are arts therapies offered?

Arts therapies are offered in a wide range of settings including hospitals, private practice, therapy centres, residential care and day centres.

Arts therapy sessions can take place in a one-to-one setting or within a group. If you feel isolated, or find it difficult to get to know people, you may find group arts therapy helpful. If you feel more comfortable sharing your thoughts and feelings with just your therapist, you might prefer one-to-one sessions.

●● *I had art therapy as part of a combination of therapies for six months as part of a group... [I]t was really interesting to look back at the end of the six months at how our art work had changed as we got more used to the experience, and with different thoughts and feelings.* ●●

What can arts therapies help with?

Arts therapies can help you manage and cope better with:

- mental health problems
- physical health problems
- difficult emotions
- difficult experiences, such as historical abuse or bereavement

 *Arts therapies allowed me to let go of my anxiety and use my imagination for something positive, rather than for thinking up negative situations.* 

If you have a mental health problem, you may be offered an arts therapy as your main form of treatment, or in addition to other treatments, such as:

- medication
- talking treatment
- complementary and alternative therapy
- ecotherapy
- electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)

As with other types of therapy, your relationship with your arts therapist is important as you will be working together to explore difficult feelings and experiences and learn how to better cope with them.

Arts therapies can be particularly helpful if you:

- feel distanced from your feelings
- find it too upsetting to talk about painful experiences, and find talking treatments difficult

 *My hope is that I make people smile with my art work and through doing art therapies I can challenge my mind to get to a better place.* 

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines recommend that arts therapies should be considered for everyone with a diagnosis of schizophrenia and related problems, such as schizoaffective disorder and psychosis. For more information, you can read the full guidelines for schizophrenia and psychosis on the NICE website (see 'Useful contacts' on p.14).

What is dance movement therapy?

Dance movement therapy (or dance therapy) involves using a range of different dance and movement styles. During a session, your therapist may:

- watch the way you move, or copy the way you move to better understand how you are feeling
- encourage you to change your movements to help change the way you feel. For example, if you are feeling low, you may hunch your shoulders and appear smaller than you are. Your therapist may encourage you to reach up and out and stand more upright, to help to increase your self-esteem.

When doing dance therapy, it's a good idea to wear loose, comfortable clothes and light, flat shoes or bare feet, so you feel comfortable when you are moving around.

How might dance movement therapy help me?

Dancing and moving may help you become more aware of emotions that you find hard to talk about, and feel more comfortable with your body. Dance therapy can be particularly helpful if you:

- have negative feelings about your body — for example, if you have a mental health problem related to your appearance, such as an eating problem or body dysmorphic disorder
- find physical contact with other people difficult
- feel detached or disconnected from your surroundings, or out-of-touch with everyday life
- are taking medication that affects the way you move — for example, if you are taking antipsychotics and the side effects make you stiff or slow
- have been physically or sexually abused, which has affected how you

feel about your body or the way you move

What is drama therapy?

Dramatherapy uses a range of different drama and theatre techniques, such as:

- improvisation — making up short plays or sketches
- role play — acting the part of a particular person in a specific situation, such as a parent or child
- mime — acting without using words
- movement — using your body to express yourself
- speech — using your voice in ways that you otherwise find difficult
- acting out — replaying a behaviour or situation that has caused you problems in the past

You don't have to act in dramatherapy. You can also be involved in other parts of theatre, such as:

- being the director or producer
- doing the lighting
- creating scenery, costume or props
- being the audience — this can be particularly helpful if you are feeling overwhelmed or want some space without having to leave the group

👏👏 *The therapists were able to tell a lot from what you had created... and it helped open up topics for conversation or get a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions out of your head.* 👏👏

How might dramatherapy help me?

Dramatherapy can help you to:

- express yourself and help you to put difficult experiences behind you
- explore difficult or painful things that have happened to you from a

safe distance by using stories, imagery or symbols, without having to repeat the details of your own story

- explore and understand your relationships with other people, and may help you address any problems. For example, if you feel you're controlled by other people, you can practise being assertive.

What is music therapy?

Music therapy can involve playing an instrument, singing or listening to music. You might make up your own piece of music or play specific pieces that you can develop over time. The type of music you play will depend on your feelings, taste and musical experience.

Music therapy often uses instruments that don't require any previous experience of reading or playing music. For example:

- drums
- cymbals
- wood blocks
- bells
- simple harps

If you already play an instrument, you may also be able to use that in your sessions.

How might music therapy help me?

During a session, your therapist will listen to the music you create to try to understand how you are feeling. They will then respond to this by playing their own music to focus on making positive changes to how you feel.

 *When I feel sad, picking up my violin, feeling it nestling against me and playing a tune takes me on a journey and I come back much better.* 

You may also listen to different pieces of music before talking about them or respond by playing or singing music of your own. Music therapy may also help you to:

- explore challenging feelings and memories that you find too difficult to talk about
- bring back old feelings and memories you thought you had forgotten, helping you deal with difficult things in your past
- get used to expressing yourself, which can then help you write or talk about your feelings more easily
- think about how you relate to other people and help you to build positive relationships with others

●● *Producing music can untangle my thoughts and re-establish order.* ●●

What is visual art therapy?

Visual art therapy involves using different mediums such as paint, clay, chalk and photography to create something that expresses yourself. Working with your therapist, you will decide what you want to make. You might listen to music or stories to inspire you.

●● *[It] helps quiet my mind. Concentrating on the colours, lines and shapes takes me away from the noise in my head.* ●●

How might visual art therapy help me?

The art you make can help you and your therapist to:

- understand your feelings
- think about what may be causing these feelings
- explore ways you can learn to cope with these feelings

Art therapy allows you to express those feelings that you can either not find words to explain or are simply too difficult to even attempt to. Then you can talk through the image with your therapist and communicate through it, taking the pressure off yourself. The connection with your therapist becomes even stronger.

The different materials you use in your art can be helpful in different ways. For example:

- objects you find may remind you of experiences you have had and help you express and explore your feelings around them
- clay can be useful if you find using colour difficult — for example, if you are experiencing a manic episode, colours may be too stimulating and may make your mania worse
- clay could help you move on from difficult feelings and experiences, as the shape of clay is easily changed and transformed to show changes in your emotions or circumstances
- taking photos can help you to think about how the things you choose to photograph might be connected with memories and emotions in your past

You may wish to keep what you create private or share your art with your loved ones. Having your experiences presented in a way that others might find easier to understand can help you to feel more accepted. Your art can also be a useful reminder of your progress and recovery.

 *The art I produced acted as a starting point when I couldn't find the words to begin to describe how I was feeling. I've kept all of the artwork I've made and I'm proud of the visual record I have of my recovery. It allows me to see the progress I've made and acts as a reminder of what I've achieved.* 

How can I find an arts therapist?

What services are available often depends on where you live. You may be able to access an art therapy through:

- the NHS, either in the community or in hospital
- voluntary organisations
- the private sector

NHS

In some areas, you may be able to access an arts therapy through the NHS as part of a mental health service, either in the community or as part of the treatment provided if you have to spend time in hospital. However, this varies from area to area. Your GP or community mental health team (CMHT) should be able to tell you what's available in your area and may be able to refer you to a local service.

For more information about speaking to your GP, see our page on seeking help for a mental health problem.

Voluntary organisations

Voluntary organisations, such as a local Minds, may offer arts therapies. You may also be able to access an arts therapy through a charity, such as the Roundabout Dramatherapy charity (see 'Useful contacts' on p.14).

To find out what is available in your area, you could:

- contact the Mind Infoline
- ask at your local library
- search your council's website

Private sector

You can also access arts therapies privately, although this can be expensive. Private therapists may offer one-to-one or group sessions — group therapy may be more affordable as everyone shares the cost. You can find details of accredited therapists in your area by searching the register of the relevant professional organisation:

- Music therapy — British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT)
- Dance therapy — Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK (ADMP UK)
- Dramatherapy — British Association of Dramatherapists (BADth)
- Art therapy — British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)

You could also search the counselling directory website to find accredited arts therapists near you. See 'Useful contacts' on p.14.

Useful contacts

Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK (ADMP UK)

tel: 0180 340 2142
web: admp.org.uk

Information on dance movement therapy and directory of accredited dance movement therapists.

British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)

tel: 020 7686 4216
web: baat.org

Directory of accredited art therapists.

British Association of Dramatherapists (BADth)

tel: 0124 223 5515
web: badth.org.uk

Information about dramatherapy and list of accredited dramatherapists.

British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT)

tel: 020 7837 6100
web: bamt.org

Information on music therapy and

list of accredited music therapists.

Counselling directory

tel: 0333 3447 990
web: counselling-directory.org.uk

Directory of accredited therapists.

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

tel: 0300 500 6184
web: hpc-uk.org

Regulates arts therapists, including art psychotherapists, art therapists, drama and movement therapists and music therapists.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

tel: 0300 323 0140
web: nice.org.uk

Guidelines around the use of arts therapies in the treatment of different problems.

Roundabout

tel: 020 8665 0038
web: roundaboutdramatherapy.org.uk

Charity that conducts long-term and short-term dramatherapy projects.

Further information

Mind offers a range of mental health information on:

- diagnoses
- treatments
- practical help for wellbeing
- mental health legislation
- where to get help

To read or print Mind's information booklets for free, visit mind.org.uk or contact Mind Infoline on 0300 123 3393 or at info@mind.org.uk

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Mind

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