Art therapies

This factsheet explains what art therapies are and who can use them.

This information is relevant to England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

What are arts therapies?
Who do arts therapists work with?
Why use the arts as therapy?
Why are arts therapies useful for people with a learning disability?
How are arts therapists qualified?
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Art therapy contacts

What are arts therapies?
Arts therapies comprise of:

- Art therapy (i.e: painting)
- Music therapy
- Dramatherapy
- Dance and movement therapy

The aim of the art therapy depends on the needs of the individual or group involved but are largely around emotional or psychological healing and growth. They are similar to the goals of psychotherapy.

Who do arts therapists work with?
Arts therapists can work with groups or individuals. They work with a wide variety of people such as:

- people with a learning disability
- people with mental health issues
- elderly people
- schools
- prisons
- youth centres etc.

Why use the arts as therapy?
Each form of art therapy uses a different method but they all focus on how the client is thinking and feeling. The therapist and client then explore the feelings and thoughts together by either
talking and/or by developing further what has been created. It is hoped that through this process the person will come to understand and/or come to terms with and move on from the personal issues they are struggling with emotionally.

The relationship between the therapist and 'client' is always important. If social skills are a problem they can be worked on. These issues can then be worked through within the therapist/client relationship. Again with group work, personal relationships can be mirrored in the relationships between members of the group, then developed.

Arts therapies are not

- A leisure activity
- Lessons in improving the quality of the art form
- Community arts

Why are arts therapies useful for people with a learning disability?
The main reason would be that people of any ability can access main arts therapies. They all provide largely non-verbal activities for expressing and coming to terms with difficult feelings. This is useful for people who have limited or no verbal communication.

Everyone experiences negative emotions and events at certain points in their lives. These may be more distressing and cause more problems in the future if they are not in some way addressed. This may often be the case for someone who does not communicate their feelings verbally.

How are arts therapists qualified?
There are various registered post graduate training in the UK in each type of therapy. The courses and often the practitioners are registered with the individual professional body, (see below).

Art, drama and music therapy have been state-registered professions since 1997. They are members of the Allied Health Professions and by law, practitioners have to be registered with the Health Professions Council.

How can I find an arts therapist?
There may be arts therapists working for your local learning disability services. If not you can contact the relevant professional body for details; contact details are at the end of this factsheet.

Unfortunately, provision of the arts therapies is patchy across the UK despite its potential.

Art therapy contacts
British Association for Arts Therapists
Email: info@baat.org
Website: www.baat.org
Telephone: 020 7686 4216

British Association of Dramatherapy
Email: enquiries@badth.org.uk
Website: www.badth.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7731 0160

Association for Dance Movement Therapy UK
Email: queries@admt.org.uk
Website: www.admt.org.uk

British Society for Music Therapy
Email: info@bsmt.org
Website: www.bsmt.org
Telephone: 020 8441 6226

Health Professionals Council (to check your arts therapist is registered):
Telephone: 020 7582 0866

Key terms:
1. Psychological - state of mind.
2. Emotional - the way you feel for example, happy or sad.
3. Psychotherapy - different ways of communicating with people to help improve the way they feel.

This document was approved by Val Huet (British Association of Art Therapists) on 13/10/2009

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