

Self-Expression, Introspection and Embracing Change through Art Making and the Expressive Arts Therapy process.

A group of people sitting around a table making scribbles with crayons, painting, gluing torn paper and feathers onto a canvas board and shaking glitter onto it. Playing, sharing and laughing. It's called art making. WHY ART MAKING? What does it have to do with stress, loss, challenges, divorce, cancer, diagnosis, and all the tough decisions in life?



Expressive Art Therapy Playshop™ at Caring Community - Living with Cancer, Sharp Grossmont

Participants experiencing art making in a relaxed, non-judgmental environment benefit from a powerful process that promotes self-awareness, self-expression, communication, introspection and supports transformation. It's called Expressive Arts Therapy.

Art is more than crayons, scissors and glue. The chosen medium is a way to express feelings that are otherwise too difficult to verbally communicate or hidden in our subconscious.

Artistic Expression is one of our elemental tools for achieving psychological integration, a universal creative urge that helps us strive for emotional well-being.

How good it feels to work with clay, and better yet to pound it when we are feeling upset with the world!

Playing with art material is a way to activate fantasy and imagination, giving it shape and color, bringing out messages and guidance from our inner world - or subconscious.

Any non-verbal approach applies to the right side of the brain and therefore reaches into the psyche, where there is a natural tendency for the psyche to heal itself. 'Art making is the doorway to our souls' - Carl Jung

My playshops are more than 'art classes'. Participants get in touch with their creative, healing energy and wisdom. They create original, unique art and/or special cards to share with their loved ones - or frame and display them as reminders of the process. My sessions are an opportunity for self-discovery, and to share laughter, joy and hands-on playful time with others.

Through spontaneous creativity, children and adult alike experience a deep transformation, which results in increased awareness, behavior modification, reduction in conflicts and improved sense of wellbeing, inner strength, self-esteem...

ENCOURAGEMENT & VALIDATION VS. PRAISE CREATE MOTIVATION & DISCIPLINE

Encouragement is also a primary ingredient for successful Art experiences with children and adults. However, there is a difference between the encouragement and praise. According to play therapy, praise produces a false sense of self-esteem, and the child becomes accustomed to other people's judgment in what he or she does and therefore can make art to please an adult or a peer. So instead of judging your child's Art as beautiful, for example, you choose to provide encouragement by affirming and reinforcing: " I see a lot of blue here" " It looks like you have a very specific picture in mind' .



Expressive Art Playshop™ with Children at Deer Park Monastery

On the other hand, you will not be asking “what is this figure over here?” that puts anybody on the spot - he/she may not know or care to know what that is! - that stifles his/her creativity. Instead, you will choose to ask if there is anything that he/she wants to tell you about her/his artwork. Besides, what’s important is the process, the discovery and creation, not the product.

PROCESS VS. PRODUCT

Expressive Arts Therapy is an intuitive, spontaneous and playful tool to reawaken the healing power from within, connect with our psyche where wisdom and awareness reside. It does this by integrating these practices with the diverse therapeutic orientations of the contemporary psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, and humanistic approaches to psychotherapy.

By integrating art processes into counseling sessions, I’m there to help the client to articulate his or her life concerns. The art work can build understanding between us. It can also serve as a bridge between the inner life of images and sensations and the world of words. In addition to empowering clients and opening them to their own inner depths, expressive arts therapy enriches the practice of family therapy by providing a powerful tool for deepening communication in couples, families, and groups. Self-expression and

experiencing others through movement, music, or drawing helps people understand each other from the inside out. As partners, families, or groups enter the world of imagery together, they can explore the roots of (dysfunctional) patterns of belief and behavior, and experience new creative insights. Participants don't need to have or be aware of their artistic abilities to enjoy and be successful with Expressive Arts Therapy.

I use primarily visual art to assist the client to make contact with his/her authentic self. However, on a long term relationship with clients and groups, or to address specific issues and needs, we'll explore all the five art disciplines in the Expressive Arts Therapy: dance, drama, music, visual arts, and poetry. It's called the Intramodal Approach. Each discipline will assist with special strengths and abilities in exploring the subconscious, in bridging the gap between the literal reality of "here now" and the world of the imagination, where life stories are written in mythic form and life experiences are held in symbols.

We'll also use verbal reflection to help make sense of and more deeply understand the art making process and art produced. The term "expressive arts" is used to distinguish this way of working from entertainment or purely aesthetic uses of art making. Our purpose is to make art that is an expression as simple or as complex of challenges, issues and conflicts of life; and give voice to life's joy and rewards as well.

By engaging in the art making activity the client/group participates in his/her own healing, using the language of his/her own psyche. It is guided from within, rather than imposed from the outside. This approach is empowering for the individual, as it allows and supports self-determination, and healing.

The creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing. Through manipulating art materials, creating art and talking about what is emerging in the process of art making, my participants can increase self-awareness, cope with symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences, enhance cognitive abilities, explore change and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of artistic creativity.



Expressive Arts Therapy session with teens and monastics at Deer Park Monastery

I use Expressive Arts Therapy with children and teens when often we address reconciling emotional conflicts, developing social skills, managing behavior, solving problems, reducing anxiety, and increasing self-esteem.

Aspects that translate well in the creative process are stages of development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns, and conflicts. I use it also to enhance communication between individuals, within a family, groups or professional teams.



Mask Making Process at Caring Community - Living with Cancer, Sharp Grossmont

The therapeutic relationship is central to this process. This relationship involves ethics, values and protocols which are particular to those unique circumstances which arise in the expressive arts studio; we may find ourselves up to our elbows in clay or putting plaster tape on our faces to build a mask, or crawling on the floor. I always make sure the participants are at ease, comfortable and feel safe in the process.

As an Expressive Arts Therapist, I work in numerous kinds of settings. Some settings include support groups, medical hospitals, community centers, business settings, public and private schools, private homes, churches and wellness communities.

Alessandra's sessions are part of highly selected activities offered at Caring Community - Living with Cancer; Golden Door and Cal-A-Vie Spas; Four Seasons; Deer Park Monastery; Church of Today; San Dieguito Adult Education in Encinitas; Scripps Breast Cancer Support Group; The Children School of La Jolla; Cosmikids™; Red Door International; The Learning Annex.

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