

Art Therapy and its effectiveness with children who have experienced trauma

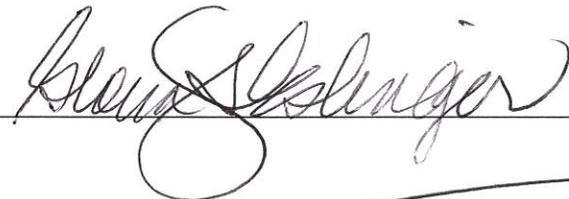
By

Weiwei Bian

University of Wisconsin – Superior

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree of M.A. in Art Therapy



Advisor



Second Reader



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ABSTRACT

Art therapy is a highly important part of child trauma treatment, Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses the creative process of making art to improve children's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The creative process involved in expressing artistically can help children to resolve issues as well as develop and manage their behaviors and feelings, improve self-esteem and awareness. "Art can provide a window to children's problem, traumatic memories, development, and worldviews" (Malchiodi, 2012). Its primary purpose is to give children another language with which to experience feelings, ideas, perceptions, and observations about themselves, others and the environment. Art therapy will help child work through the traumatic event, it is a regulated mental health profession, using the creative process to enhance child's experience in a safe environment, structured by the therapist, helps facilitate that process for the client.

Acknowledgement

I WISH I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very own world.

I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows.

Those who make believe to be dumb, and look as if they never could move, come creeping to his window with their stories and with trays crowded with bright toys.

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters.

—— Rabindranath Tagore

I love this poem from Tagore for many years since I was a teacher back then, I dedicate this poem to all the lovely children in this world. That is also why I picked this topic and I have combined the experiences and things I learned from my art therapy Master's degree.

I give very special thanks to my advisor, professor, and mentor Gloria Eslinger of the art therapy graduate program at the University of Wisconsin-Superior for supporting, advising on, and encouraging this project. The motivation, connection, and practice she brought helped me grow in the professional field through two years.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, for making all things possible and their support and encouragement throughout my education career.

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Introduction

The behaviors, perceptions, or mental illnesses and difficulties that adults are now experiencing are all closely related to childhood experiences, especially those with trauma. An important reason is a native family and other factors in childhood, which make children change unconsciously in their habits, and gradually form the character of adulthood and influence the choice of many things in the future. If you look at a person's present and want to find real reasons for their deepest challenges, one must go back to childhood and return to the starting point. For example, if a person is weak and timid or tends to violence, maybe the reason is childhood intimidation or domestic violence. Violence in adulthood may be a vent of childhood emotions, or it may be due to the persistence of symptoms of symptoms after childhood trauma. For another example, when a person sees something, he reacts strongly: vomiting, panic, or anxiety, and all the reactions out of control. This phenomenon may be caused by trauma in childhood. But people are often confused about the reason behind the behavior, they have suffered physical and psychological torture through childhood trauma. Therefore, discussing how to dissect and treat childhood traumatic experiences is an important issue for children's growth and development. It is important to expression and discovery of trauma. Stein explained that at the age of three to ten years of age, the brain develops rapidly and is an important stage of brain development. Trauma and other psychological diseases caused may affect the development of the brain. This will affect children's future study, work, and life (De Bellis, 2014).

More and more children are experiencing the harm that trauma brings to them. The trauma comes from many sides; it may be a death in the family, family violence abuse and traumatic loss, or the irritating accident occurs around the child and also may be a trivial matter. How to treat children's psychological trauma has become a topic discussed and studied by many scholars and psychologists. Many children's development experts believe that the key to treating childhood trauma is to find the cause of the trauma, discover what the child is experiencing and what has been experienced. In this way, a safe and trustworthy environment is very important for children. What's more, children's ability to understand and express limits their range of expression. They may not understand what is going on, or they cannot describe what happened in their life. Talk therapy may not be the most suitable and effective treatment for children. Conventional treatments may not achieve the most effective results (Cohen, 2017).

Art therapy is a very important part of child trauma treatment. Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses the creative process of making art to improve children's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The creative process involved in expressing artistically can help children to resolve issues as well as develop and manage their behaviors and feelings, and improve self-esteem and awareness. "Art can provide a window to children's problem, traumatic memories, development, and worldviews." Its primary purpose is to give children another language with which to experience feelings, ideas, perceptions, and observations about themselves, others and the environment. "Art therapy can serve as an important catalyst for increased interaction and exchange between therapist and child, thus expanding and deepening the effectiveness of the relationship and its impact on young clients." (Malchiodi, 2012). The therapist brings art to the session with children, from building a safe environment, trusting relationships, to the artistic creation process. Both have opened the door to imagery for traumatic treatment. Children are immersed in the world of artistic expression. This is a wonderful part of art therapy and also the beginning of the healing process.

What is the art therapy?

Art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship. Art therapy, facilitated by a professional art therapist, effectively supports personal and relational treatment goals as well as community concerns. Art therapy is used to improve cognitive and sensorimotor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress, and advance societal and ecological change.

-American Art Therapy Association

When we use a blank piece of paper, we need to conceive something on this piece of paper. What do we write on paper? What will we draw? This is a creative process, and it is also the process of treatment. People view the spiritual world in the artistic media. It is perspective psychotherapy, it is called Art therapy. Malchiodi said that "Art therapy is based on the idea that the creative process

of art making facilitates reparation and recovery and is a form of nonverbal communication of thoughts and feeling” (Malchiodi, 2006). Art therapy helps different age groups express themselves through art, create meaning, and resolve individual’s conflicts. It can also work with individual daily life to increase self-awareness, express emotions, and enhance sense of well-being.

Art therapy may help people express emotion and mood by art, guiding people to find the answers to their own lives. Different art media can be used to better communicate people’s emotions and thought process. Through visual images and creative process, people become more aware of themselves. “Art therapists working within a psychoanalytic framework focus on client’s unseen dynamics, unconscious motivations, inner conflicts, and past experiences, as revealed in artworks” (Moon, 2017). Art therapy may help clients focus on their own inner changes and gain a sense of security and trust from the process, help clients change their attitudes towards life, work from the physical, psychological and emotional aspects and establish a system of self-awareness (AATA).

Art therapy is a pluralistic language, not just a verbal description. It is a treatment method based on the communication between the therapist and the client; art therapy is the engine to verify the authenticity (Moon, 2017). If only through language expression, the therapist couldn't determine whether the client's expression is true or not, but through art, the client focuses on the creation of the art work that would help to mitigate client defensiveness in the process of artistic expression, what’s more, it relieves the pain and shame of the client and is helpful for the treatment of traumatic psychological problems; in the art therapy process, creative self-expression promotes client satisfaction and enhances self-esteem (Moon, 2017). Using imagination to stimulate self-exploration, take the issue that the client is experiencing as the source of inspiration for artistic creation. Art creation has become a process of self- exploration. This principle will be further discussed in the case presented; “art therapy allows clients to make objects that represent feelings and thoughts” (Moon, 2017). It is difficult to describe the feeling completely with verbalization. Art provides a medium to express feelings more specifically, such as communicating with client about what color it is, what shape it is, what material it is, and what size it is. On the other hand, the process of creating artworks provides both the client and art therapist something to dialogue with and about (Moon, 2017). Clients often find that talking about the characters or artistic elements in their artwork is less

threatening than directly discussing feelings and treatment issues. In this way, clients may express their true thoughts more (Moon, 2017).

How can art therapy help?

Art therapy can provide a safe space for dealing with trauma. For an example, art therapy helping military service members recover from traumatic brain injury and mental illness was facilitated. Art therapist Melissa Walker worked with a group of veterans who had suffered in the war. They were not willing to recall the tragic experience. The war not only hurt the body of the veterans personally, but also seemed to leave a huge shadow in their heart. Art therapists created masks with them together to let the veterans personally vent their feelings and courageously face the harm that was caused by the war. That experience may have restored the psychological shadow slowly and allowed them to face what they had experienced in the past bravely. It was a powerful mechanism for helping them express their invisible wounds (Walker, n.d.).

“Images and image formation, whether mental images or those drawn on paper, are important in all art therapy practice” (Malchiodi, 2012). Based on their own experiences, the client actively creates images and gives new meanings. The creative process and creative results become the process of treatment, thinking through images and reflecting on themselves from the images after creation. Because of its artistic creativity, clients are encouraged to rethink their patterns, react to events or experiences, and work to change their emotions and behaviors (Malchiodi, 2012). However, unlike psychological images, artistic creation allows individuals to experiment or actively exercise the changes required by drawing, painting or collage, it involves tangible objects that can be physically modified. Art therapy can be defined as a form of therapy in which creating images and objects plays a key role in the developing of the therapeutic relationship (David Edwards, 2014).

From the theoretical analysis of psychoanalysis, art therapists who work from a Freudian perspective generally view the impulse to make art as an expression of id energy (Moon, 2017). Art therapists help clients discover the root cause of problems through unconscious artistic activities and spontaneous associations. Then, through the transference relationship between the art therapist and the client, help the client understand the unconscious behavior with the art process, the art product, and the conversation content. From a psychological counseling perspective, talk about Person-

centered Therapy can illustrate how art therapy works. The person-centered approach aims toward the clients achieving a greater degree of independence and integration, assist clients to gain independence, increase awareness of emotions, help individuals access and process emotions (Corey, 2017). Therapists with an understanding attitude, enabling clients to understand the meaning and purpose of their lives and develop their creative potential (Corey, 2017). Person-centered therapy has profoundly demonstrated the treatment of expressive art. “Expressive arts therapy uses various artistic forms-movement, drawing, painting, sculpting, music, writing, and improvisation-toward the end of growth, healing, and self-discovery. This is a multimodal approach integrating mind, body, emotions, and inner spiritual resources” (Corey, 2017). Individuals have a tremendous capacity for self-healing through creativity if given the proper environment. When one feels appreciated, trusted, and given support to use individuality to develop a plan, create a project, write a paper, or to be authentic. Bring people to the unconscious, so that they can express their previously unknown aspects and bring new information and awareness (Corey, P189).

Art therapists also work with cognitive- behavioral techniques. “cognitive behavioral art therapists use art processes to help clients recognize false, destructive, and unhelpful beliefs and thoughts that negatively influence their behaviors and feelings.” (p.41) The combination of art and cognitive behavior therapy illustrates the importance of art therapy. In art creation, the client finds the answers to contradictions in life through art.

Understanding of brain hemispheres and their interactions has contributed to the understanding of mental images and artistic creation. Artistic expression is based on the simultaneous analysis of both sides of the brain. “The right brain was the center of intuition and creativity, while the left was thought to be engaged in logical thought and language” (Malchiodi, 2012) The right brain dominates a lot of artistic work and the left brain helps people express language in the process of artistic creation and turn creative thinking into language output.

For artists, art is the way to express themselves. For clients, it is also the way to express themselves. The artist's process of creating art is a process of expressing oneself and understanding oneself, and is closely related to the principles of art therapy. Discussing the art creation process help to understand how art therapy works. Art therapy helps different groups express themselves through

a variety of media—Whether it's an artist, an ordinary person, or a patient. They are all expressing and speaking through the medium of art. Whether discussing the work of a studio artist or the productions of a studio artist or the productions of a mentally ill individual, Kris (1952) explained, they both engage in the same psychic process, that is, “The placing of an inner experience, an inner image, into the outside world.” (Malchiodi, 2012). The creative process is spontaneous art expression provides access to the unconscious. The therapist encourages the individual to create spontaneous images and to discover personal meaning in the expressions, translate inner to outside meanings, which promotes the idea that all expression is acceptable and is intended to encourage more free communication of conflicts and emotions (Malchiodi, 2012).

What is the trauma?

In general, trauma can be defined as an emotional response to an extremely painful or disturbing event or experience; such trauma can be described as an accident, an illness or injury, the loss of a loved one or a divorce. Because of the wide range of traumatic reactions, psychologists have developed categories to distinguish types of trauma. These include complex trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and developmental trauma disorders. Children with trauma have specific causes, symptoms and time. It is different compared with adults with trauma (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2000, p. 265).

Trauma can impact every area of human functioning: physical, mental, behavioral, social and spiritual. The adverse childhood experiences study was one of the largest examinations of traumatic events in childhood and their impact on later life health and well-being. More than half of adults in the US reported experiencing at least one traumatic event before the age of 18. An individual's experience of trauma increases the risk of mental illness including depression, addiction heart, and liver disease. (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2000)

The trauma happened the way depend not on the logical brain but on the instinctive brain. Trauma occurs when a person is overwhelmed by something beyond their control. Responses are part of our natural fight or freeze instincts, when distress from a disturbing event remains the upsetting images thoughts and emotions, may create feelings of being overwhelmed of being back in

that moment or if being frozen in that time. Trauma occurs when a person is overwhelmed by something beyond their control. The survival brain takes over the rational brain. It can lead to PTSD, such as in domestic abuse or child sexual abuse. The alarm system in the brain becomes jammed, memories are stuck in the limbic system. So, a trigger can set off the alarm. The trigger could be a color, a smell, a sound, and the sensation. They may cause people depression, crying a lot, nightmares, flashbacks, and stress, or may feel shame or guilt, social isolation. People often feel overwhelmed by the symptoms of trauma (Trauma and the Brain, n, d.).

What constitutes childhood trauma? / What are the causes of trauma?

Jean Piaget has a theory about children's growth experience. Basically, every child has four stages when he or she is growing: Sensorimotor Stage, from birth to 2 years old; Preoperational Stage, from 2 years old to 7 years old; Concrete Operational Stage, from 7 years old to 11 years old; Formal Operational Stage, from 12 years old to 17 years old. Each stage plays a significant role in every person's childhood. From 2-7 years old, children start getting cognitive and perception at that age or stage. Thus, everything around children will affect most of the problems, in other words, most of childhood trauma are caused from this period of age. If the child did not cure the problem at that time, it will leave a heavy shadow in the life (Piaget, 2015).

“Many children experience stressful events as they are growing up. They are faced with painful situations, such as parental divorce or the death of a beloved elderly relative, which may be difficult and stressful to varying degrees. Yet, these experiences would not usually be considered traumatic, a qualitatively different experience” (Cohen, 2017). Features that distinguish traumatic events include the following: sudden or unexpected events; the shocking nature of such events; death or threat to life or bodily integrity; and/ or the subjective feeling of intense terror, horror, or helplessness (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2000, p. 265). Some examples include child physical or sexual abuse; witnessing or being the direct victim of domestic, community, or school violence; severe motor vehicle and other accident; potentially life-threatening illness, such as cancer, burns, or organ transplantation; natural and human-made disasters; sudden death of a parent, sibling, or peer; and exposure to war, terrorism, or organ transplantation. Many children are resilient and do not

develop enduring trauma symptoms. Several factors, including developmental level, may influence which children will develop difficulties. (Cohen, 2017)

Not only these above reasons can cause harm to children, there are many other reasons that may cause child trauma; such as those that often occur around the world. Here are some examples:

1. The trauma of growing up caused by loneliness: Some children grow up without the companionship of their parents, these children are not just referring to abandoned children, they live with grandparents, relatives, or caregivers. This group that appear is called leftover Children. Parents of left-behind children go to big cities to make money. They work far away from their children, living in a big city costs a lot of money, so they have to leave their children in the countryside or somewhere. As time goes by, the child's real thoughts cannot be expressed; such as what happened in school, children cannot communicate with their parents in time, they gradually become autistic, anxious, and depressed. Some dependents may punish children or children may be bullied by their classmates. For parents, they even don't know what their children are thinking and suffering. This will be a huge spiritual trauma for children.
2. The trauma of natural disasters and accidents: such as earthquake, tsunami, fire, or a car accident that happened around the children. Children's perception of everything is not mature. During childhood, witnessing some destructive disasters and accidents will have a double blow to their body and mind, which was very traumatic to the child.
3. Divorce, traumatic family relationships: Divorce rates have been on the rise in recent years. Parents decided the child's custody but did not seek the child's opinion. Many children cannot accept the divorce of their parents, nor can they accept living with others who get married with their mother or father.
4. Illness and surgical trauma: Children from one to six years of age are particularly poorly resistant and the body is at a developmental stage. The weak resistance makes children more susceptible to illness, and the sick child will receive a series of measures such as injections, medication, and hospitalization. If the child's fear and anxiety cannot be expressed in time, it will have a serious impact on the child's mental health in the future.

5. Stigma and Trauma from Stress: Some parents will belittle their children, compare their children with other children, and then say something unpleasant to children. Children will lose confidence for everything. When they are trying to face challenge, they probably will say 'no or I cannot' to themselves. Parental pressure casts a shadow over the child.
6. Violence, quarrels, and scaring trauma from family and society: Some parents use violence as a means of educating their children, children have no ability to resist and can only endure in silence. Or parents fight in front of their children, always frighten the child. Another example is school bullying. The violence and attacks on children in school can cause a huge shadow in childhood (Trauma Symptoms, n.d.).

These examples are all common examples that are happening now around the world. They are different from general death and abuse, but if the above examples last a long time and the severity is strong, this will also cause trauma to children and affect their healthy growth.

What are trauma symptoms?

If anybody goes through a traumatic event, or is associated with a traumatic event. It is normal to feel hopeless, helpless, and out of control. They initially feel like the world is an unsafe place. It does not subside over time and people get more or less stuck feeling hyper alert fearful, irritable, like something is always going to happen very negative. When trauma interferes with everyday life and becomes a problem for child, these may include post-traumatic stress disorder, acute stress disorder, and reactive attachment disorder. When child suffer with trauma, they may feel unsafe, they may have difficulty forming attachments, lack impulse control, have trust issues, cannot control their emotions, have low self-esteem, and even have thoughts of suicide (Osofsky, 2007).

The term traumatic symptoms refer to the behavioral, cognitive, physical and emotional difficulties directly related to the traumatic experience. These usually correspond to symptoms of PTSD, but also include other depressive, anxiety or behavioral symptoms, such as self-injury, substance abuse, impaired interpersonal trust and emotional instability. Children with traumatic symptoms may experience a profound change in their perception of themselves, the world and others because of their exposure to one or more traumatic events. It is becoming increasingly clear that many of these children are also undergoing psychobiological changes that may contribute to the

development and maintenance of these psychological symptoms. These symptoms are divided into several broad categories: emotional, behavioral, cognitive, complex PTSD, and psychobiological trauma. These divisions are somewhat arbitrary in that the areas of difficulty overlap and interact continuously. Such as depression and anger. “Children may experience depressive feelings after a trauma, which may arise in response to an abrupt loss of trust in other people and the world, such as loss of innocence, trust, faith, or hope in the future” (Cohen, 2017). “Anger may result from the child’s awareness that the traumatic event was unfair, that is, that he/she didn’t do anything bad enough to ‘deserve’ the trauma” (Cohen, 2017). Children with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have a range of symptoms as a result of trauma. they may not appear sad or afraid, but may be angry, reckless, moody, withdrawn, jumpy, forgetful, or hard to talk to and get along with. It is diagnosed when the person has had symptoms for longer than 1 month. Being exposed to threatened or real death, severe injury, or sexual assault. Having symptoms of intrusion for 1 month or more after the traumatic event. Frequent avoidance of any reminder of the event for 1 month or more. Showing negative changes in beliefs and feelings for 1 month or more, which began or became worse after the trauma. Showing two major changes in arousal (being keyed up) and response for 1 month or more, which began or became worse after the trauma These symptoms can cause major distress and impair social, study, or other key aspects of function. (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2000, p. 463)

Art therapy with children

Art therapy is a very important part of psychotherapy with children. Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses the creative process of making art to improve children’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The creative process involved in expressing artistically can help children to resolve issues as well as develop and manage their behaviors and feelings, and improve self-esteem and awareness (Rubin,1984).

Art therapy for children has a creative way that is helpful for children to express themselves. Creating helps children to develop well, because they can experience everything in art way which is the development from the inside to the outside, from mental activity to the brain growing and then to the body growing. “Framework for freedom and conditions for creative growth” (Rubin,1984).

Framework for freedom is one way of thinking about appropriate facilitating conditions for growth, something he assumes necessary in order to help human beings to actualize their inner creative potential (Rubin, 1984). The freedom depends on creativity that is important for children to build cognitive structure. Creativity also can enhance ability to learn knowledge as they grow up. When children create art, they will have more and more ideas, feelings and actions, thus it can stimulate and enhance creativity constantly. That is why art is a meaningful activity for children.

How can art therapy facilitate coping with trauma?

Fundamental to the art therapy process is the creation of images. Traumatic memories are often stored in images and other sensations, rather than in words, and allow therapy be more accessible through imagery than in verbalization (Herman, 1997). Artwork can stimulate the memory of forgotten trauma. The accompanying emotions may also be more readily expressed in images than in language. Recent psychophysiological studies have demonstrated that the development of a trauma-based disorder is qualitatively different from a simple exaggeration of implications of the normal stress response in ways that have important implications for art therapy treatment. Excessive stimulation of the central nervous system during trauma appears to cause permanent neuronal changes that adversely affect learning, habituation, and stimulus discrimination, thus diminishing the brain's natural ability to integrate experience (van der Kolk, 2003). Art therapy is a form of treatment that uses art to integrate the brain. For the recovery of the brain, using art helps the progress of thinking which has indirect influence on the brain. (Wadeson, 2010).

The psychological trauma of children has always been a concern, and it is expected to find effective treatments, art activities help with healthy behavior, leading to reduce and resolve the harm it has caused to children. In this way, children can analyze problems properly. In my opinion, there are a lot of differences between psychological trauma and common mental illnesses. Children are affected by the outside world, such as family abuse, insults, classmates' bullying, and teachers' insults, however, children do not tell anyone many times. On the one hand, they feel that these wounds cannot be explored because they are afraid to be ridiculed or punished, and sometimes they are afraid and shy. On the other hand, the cognitive abilities of children are blurred and incomplete. They can't make correct judgments on everything they have suffered, and they don't know what is

terrible in abuse and insult. However, language often fails to allow children to express true thoughts of children (van der Kolk, 2003). Because of their age, children are still in the stage of development, and they cannot get mature expression skills like adults. They also cannot fully state something that has happened and communicate their true reaction and feelings about this matter, so the language is limited. Children can experience difficulty expressing feelings by language. A therapist using verbal treatment cannot always understand the reason for distress, because the children are afraid to put their feeling into words, which would not clearly reveal the real reasons. As a part of intervention therapy, art has overcome the shortcomings of language therapy to a certain extent and gives the corresponding environment and gradually intervened in children's thoughts and actions with artistic activities (Chapman, 2001).

Art therapy will help children work through the traumatic events, it is a regulated mental health profession, using the creative process to enhance child's experience in a safe environment, structured by the therapist, helps facilitate that process for the client. In this way, the art making process taps into that nonverbal part of the brain and helps them to eventually uncover some of the more deeply seeded traumatic experience they have been through. Art therapy uses art media and the creative process to access both the verbal and nonverbal parts of the brain. This proves crucial in recovery, because trauma therapy requires the remembrance of damaging events and the reconstruction of them both consciously and unconsciously. Art making is similar to inviting a third party into the conversation because it takes direct attention off of the survivor and into the artwork. Art is a communication expressing what is impossible to do with words (Chapman,2001).

Using artistic therapy, the first step should guide children to understand the wounds clearly and find the root causes of the problems. The second step should help the children express and vent their emotions, establishing a positive environment for children, adjusting emotions and perceptions of children, and building a safe and healthy structure to make children become strong and brave. Sometimes children's intrusive thoughts are so fearsome that they couldn't begin to verbalize them. It is important to encourage children to go at their own pace and use materials that don't expose them too rapidly to an invasive thinking. Wet materials, especially clay could potentially be triggering, as well as colors used on the artwork.

Art activities of treating trauma

For example, Domestic Violence is one of the biggest issues that may lead children who live in a family to have social problems such as anti-social behaviors. Those children will feel bad and not safe when they just see their parents fight and arguing all day and night, or maybe even worse, their parents will hit them for no reasons. It can cause a huge stigma and shadows in a child's life (Trauma Symptoms, n.d.).

It is important to give these children unconditional positive regard as an art therapist. Thus, "Safe Box" could be a good way to lead these children from dark to a brighter place. "Safe Box", is an activity that children can put the things that will make them afraid or feeling not safe in a box. They can either write it down or paint it out. In other words, they can give their fear away to that dark and empty box. After that, a therapist can check what is in the box and find what are they feeling unsafe about. Then the therapist can write or draw something different with what they gave to that box but in a safe way, and put them in the box and give the box to children. So, after they are seeing the different but safe things about it, they will feel a measure of control from then (15 Art Therapy Activities, 2019).

In this way, children can analyze problems properly. Instead of looking at everything negatively (Cohen, 2017). There is another activity named "Fill Your Burrito". Create a burrito shell out of paper, then determine what ingredients to use that would appear in proportions representative of the level of disturbance each thought causes you. After the ingredients are determined, place them in the burrito shell as desired. Allow time for discussion regarding the ingredients and amount of each chosen, along with what each represents. Once the client has discussed what he/she feels comfortable, instruct to fold the burrito as a representation of closure. The Treatment Objectives that Key component to easing PTSD symptoms is engaging in activities such as this one that can increase safety and calmness. Creating an artwork can be helpful in the communication and understanding of the trauma (Intrusive Thoughts, 2017).

Art therapy practicum experience with children experiencing trauma

During my two years in the art therapy program, I worked with children at the Boys and Girls Club of the Northland in Superior, Wisconsin for my internship experience. This organization supports a safe environment for children to grow, develop, and promote their success with social and emotional behaviors through a variety of activities. We are working on building up self-awareness, social skills, teaching skills, and strategies for the children to practice more successful behaviors. At the start, it is important to build a safe environment for the child and develop the relationship between the child and the therapist. I learned a lot about the group treatment there. I recognized the importance of group work safety, the role that the therapist encourages to promote, and the way the team members communicate. I also have had the opportunity to work with children in the Child Development Project that began as a research-based clinic affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Superior. The project was a cooperative effort among faculty in Early Childhood, Counseling, Health and Human Performance, and Art Therapy. Services available include: Infant Mental Health, Early Childhood Mental Health, Preschool Behavior Problems, Child and Family Counseling, and Maternal Mental Health. As I worked there in child and family sessions, there were some children and families suffering from PTSD, depression, and anxiety. These issues have an impact on the child's daily behavior. It also affects the child's psychological growth and development. The case studies will show how feelings of trauma, depression, and anxiety are lessened; through art therapy and play therapy, children may show the causes and symptoms of trauma, as well as the effects of art therapy on symptoms and behavior. The name of clients have been changed to maintain their privacy.

Case studies 1

Jessica: For about one semester, I was able to work one-on-one with a ten-year-old girl who has signs of struggling with trauma and anxiety. Her mom also has problems struggling with trauma, depression, and anxiety. Jessica's brother came to her room during the night to scare her when she fell sleep. She was intimidated by her brother's behavior, and she has been in a state of fear of stress, which made her feel depressed and anxious.

For the first session, she worked on “the door for myself, inside and outside,” an activity that involves collaging and crafting. By making a door, it represents the inside and outside of yourself, then she decorated the door with colors and images that come from the client’s understanding. It could help the client ease into the session, and feel comfortable talking about herself. Jessica drew a heart on the outside and something she liked from magazines. There are flowers, animals, peaceful colors, and food. She started to open up to talk about why she picked them, including her childhood, her family, and her school.



Figure 1 Jessica: the door for yourself

For the second session, she worked on the activity called "the crystal ball." On watercolor paper the client creates a big circle in the middle. They then imagine this is a crystal ball. "What would you see in it for your future?" Jessica came in and talked about something she loved to play, a kind of slime she liked. She said she likes the feels when she touches slime and likes the look when she pulls it. Then she looked around the table, and was thinking about how to make her crystal ball. She started to move herself with words, she took a tissue paper, and kneaded the tissue into quarters, placed them into four cups, added food color and water, and placed the toilet paper on another piece of colored paper. Then she put some little things inside, put the sand of the box on the paper, and used the stick to smooth it out like a wall. I asked what she was feeling, and she said calmed down and stressed out. She said her art teacher let her do something to calm down before she started doing the art, because she felt stressed easy. Then she placed the sequin, star, and flowers on the top. Then she put sand on the color paper, and scribbled the sand with her finger on the paper. She said to let them dry. She said, "now, let us pick three items from the table, and put them in the cup, then talk about why you picked them." She picked water, blue food

coloring, and glue to put into the cup. She said she likes the ocean, but she thinks the blue is too dark, so she put glue to let the water looks lighter. She said she likes the ocean because she likes the animals under the ocean. Then she said her crystal ball was like the universe. She likes flowers and her friend's name is star, so she put a star on top. She likes the artwork she made, so she took them home. She was moving during this process to find new art materials. She focused her attention on her creation and showed a lot of emotions like anxiety and confusion. She put many different materials together, like glue, sand, sequins, beads, and water, one layer after another, and it can be seen there are a lot of things in her mind that are going on like messy and unstructured material.



Figure 2 Jessica: Crystal ball

During the third session with Jessica she worked on self-awareness and positive activities through her current life and her future life. This activity would help her organize her life. The activity was to think that one hand is what are you holding now/what you have now, while the other hand is what do you want to have/hold in the future by writing and tracing your hands on the paper. You then use your hand and press the back of the paper with shaving cream to represent the real touch of your present and future. Jessica drew a bunny and a bike that is for her birthday. She also drew blue slime and a scooter. She talked about her experience with scary movies. She watched the movie "walking Da" five times. One times, when she was at her friend's house, she saw a man with all black dress up on the street outside and watch her through the window. Only she saw it, because when she asked her friends to come and check it out, he was gone. It happened again when she was in the kitchen at her home. Nobody was around her, and she saw the black man staring at the window. She told her uncle at that moment. Her uncle said there was nothing outside. She did not

feel safe at that time, and said she was afraid that the guy would come to people's houses or steal something, even if the door was locked, he would break the window. She was thinking of calling 911, but thought that maybe they would not believe her. She said she was really scared when she saw the guy with all black. Then she drew her dog, and she talked about how the dog hugs people. Then she said, "when my brother hugged me, he always worked very hard and made my arm hurt. We called the police three times because of him. He ran away and we could not find him. He even lied to the police. He also stole stuffs from store. He went to the behavior school for one year, but we all think he did not change." For her right hand, she drew a car, and she said it was a Jeep. Then she drew 100 dollars, because she said her classmates and friends said they have \$1000. But I just have "specific to a number of dollars" in the bank she said. She saves money for college and a car. The dad said you don't need to do this. She wants to do it. Then she drew a military suit. She has wanted to be in the military since she was in kindergarten. She said her dream is different with others because her grandparent, father, and neighbor are all military. Her bother said he wanted to be a military too, she doesn't want him to have same dream as her. She said I want to share to my country. Then she drew a coconut tree and said, "My father used to work in Hawaii. Even though I know he is not there now, I still want to be there." Through this activity she recalled and discussed her life. She mentioned a lot of scared feelings in her life in this session. She mentioned horror movies, strange men, saving money, and the military. These manifested her insecurities to a certain degree, which may come from her brother, her family, and the environment around her. Through doing art, she found an outlet for expression.



Figure 3 Jessica: "the current hand and the future hand"

Through three sessions, I observed that she lacked a sense of security and was accompanied by many individual horrible associations. These are all because the previous fright has turned into

trauma. It looks like an alarm and makes Jessica feel out of control. It is important for her to establish a safe environment. For the next two sessions, she worked on making a safe box. Using materials like cardboard boxes, popsicle sticks, or folded poster board could be more fun for an older age group, but for young children using materials on a two-dimensional surface would be easier. Arrange the materials to create or depict a place that feels safe. Participants may not have a real place where they feel safe, and if so, should be encouraged to imagine it in whatever way they'd like; Talking about what went into the space, whether real or imagined, and whether it's feasible to create can help clients actualize their safe spaces in real life. She chose a box and said she felt safe when she's in a place near the park and train tracks. She started to draw the area, and she told the intern where they are. She drew the train tracks, rocks, streets, cars, houses beside the area, her friend's houses. There is a tree and rocks, and there is a hill. She likes to sit on the top of the hill and read books with her friends. She used green paper and beans to make a hill. Then she made trees with beans. She said her friend climbed the tree sometimes. Then she cut some images from a magazine. She glued the door for her friend. She talked a lot about the houses near the area. She said there is a guy who is weird. They say "hey" to him, but he never says something back but he always sits there and look at her. She said he has a dog and she does not want to play with the dog, but her friend wants to. Then she talked about the train. She said she saw one girl sitting on the train track reading a book, and another day, she saw a boy lay on the train track at night. She felt so weird and does not know why they did this. She put images about nature and trees around the box. She took some rocks from outside and put them in the box. She used tissue as herself and her friends. She told me where they like to play games and talk. During the process, she said: "I felt more safe staying here than at home, because of my brother. My mom bought a lock for my door to prevent my brother from entering my room. Then I am able to fall asleep. We thought about taking the lock off recently, because my brother gets better and better, but I am not sure." I told her make sure you feel safe like the safe box you made to protect yourself. Then we showed the safe box to her mom and talked about not rushing to remove the lock. In the process, she mentioned again that someone was staring at her, and once again there were unsafe pictures in her mind, such as seeing someone lying on the track. By making the safe box, and describing and planning the settings, she could organize

the feeling of security in the box, and talk about what the safe place looked like, the color, the smell, and the feelings about this area. This project may help her reflect on ways to find a safe space, or may simply help her feel like she has some control over her environment.



Figure 4 Jessica: safe box

The safety box worked well in the last session, but we can see that she may still be suffering from fear and pressure, or might be expecting more attention from others. This time we will work on body mapping, to help her enhance self-awareness and gain positive power from the body. I introduced the activity to her, by assisting her in thinking about each part of her body including the color, shape, and function. We talked about her feelings about each part of the body. She started coloring the right hand with blue, saying, "I want my hand be blue, blue is my favorite color, it is cool, I like blue and like my right hand, I used my right hand to do everything. Red for the left hand, I do not know how to use my left hand, it is hard. And red is wrong, whenever something is wrong, it is always red. Red means bad, not good. My feet are brown. Because it is slow, I cannot go fast, I run slower than my friends. My leg is green, because green can work always, can keep going, keep moving everywhere and they never get hurt. The leg supports the foot to work." She drew a pizza for her stomach with a sad emoji. She said it is sad and confused, because "the stomach tells me I am hungry and it is confused, because sometimes I am so hungry, I feel like I can eat the whole pizza, but then I just eat a piece of it. I feel not hungry anymore and do not want eat more. It makes me so confused." For the mind, one part of it is rainbow, one side is green and blue. She said "I am a green blue girl, I have some creative ideas." For the rainbow, she said she has different feelings, like sad, angry, happy. she also said: "I felt nervous when people are around me that I don't know", she does not know what to say, and said if there are some people she does not know here in this office, she will play in the corner, and wait for the people to leave. This session the client worked on a body

map, thought about her feelings, and talked about them. The result was that improve the self-awareness, control her own body. She expressed a lot of positive thoughts about powers. At the beginning of the session, she was anxious and kept moving, changing her position and moving her hands. She slowly calmed down. We talked about her many feelings together, stayed with her, and paid attention to what she said to encourage, understand, and support her.

Figure 5 Jessica: body mapping

The whole process of art therapy for Jessica helped her enhance her self-awareness and build a sense of security and control. At the same time, we also played games together, did slime, and



performed plays to relax and vent her emotions through other media than just verbal expression.

Case studies 2

Jake: Jake is an eight-year-old boy who is living with his mom and two sisters. His mom has had struggle with borderline personality disorder, PTSD, and depression. His older sister suffers from severe depression.

Quarrels and fights between his sister and mom are happening every day at his home. Being in a stressful and fearful environment for a long time has caused trauma and symptoms of depression and fear. Jake is a quiet and shy child. I was able to work with him for one semester. We focused on expressing emotions and building confidence and happiness.

In the first session, he was kind of shy and nervous. I asked what kind of art he would like to do, and he said coloring and cutting, or drawing with markers and pencils. I asked if he wanted to introduce himself to me. He said not right now, then picked up the purple paper and cut some pictures and decorated the outside of the paper with rainbow and some black lines and black squares. He said he likes rainbow and black colors, he also put some trees and something about nature. The color images he cut are lighter or soft. With half the time left, he said, “can we play balls?” He checked each ball and chose a springy ball. He drew a scoreboard, and he told me the rules. And then after a while, he changed to play football with me. The game was very exciting, he had a good time

and sweat a lot. He was active and passionate when he was designing a game. This session is the first session between the client and therapist. It showed how to start the session with an art activity, the "who am I" collage, which is a good activity for all groups. It is helpful to know the client and build the relationship with the client and make them feel safe. We can also see he became more and more comfortable during the session.

In the second session, he was still so quiet and lacked initiative in talking. I put some wavy line on the paper, asked him, what it looked like. He said it looked like an ocean. "What do you want to see in the ocean?" He started with fish, seaweed, tortoise, treasures, boats, and birds. He explained the artwork to me. He superimposed a lot of bright colors. He named the artwork "Young and old." He said he chose this title, "because the tortoise is old and the fish is young." During this process, he began to speak aggressively and took the initiative to tell me what color he wanted to use, the color of ocean, and tried to make every step clearly. His expressions are increasing, and we can see through two sessions, that he may be under pressure. He may need more space for breathing after choosing the natural symbols. It is important for Jake to express emotions and release stress.

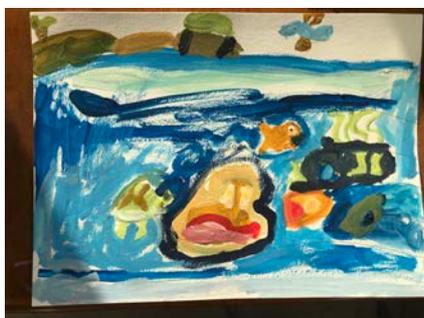


Figure 1 Jake: old and young

For the third session, he did the activity called "I can cool off by..." I told him, "when you feel angry or mad at someone, what will you do to cool off?" He wrote down Buddha sitting with an image. He said his school counselor told him this way to cool off, and he showed to me how to do the motion, and he wrote slim. He said I can cool off by playing slim, he also wrote cards, by playing games, and stress ball. Then he said, "I think I am done," and he designed a game. He said, "now, we need to make a card." He gave each one a paper. He said let us make a card. I asked if you can add a power for the card, what will you add to yours? He said scratch. In this session Jake worked on how to deal with anger or anxiety. He learned to think about and discuss with the art therapist what would

help him cool off. The result was him saying meditation, slim, stress ball, and playing games will help him cool off. The next session the client will work on safe places or positive activities.



Figure 2 Jake: "I can cool off by"

For children with trauma, establishing a safe environment is a decisive event for them. Next, we will work on security construction and help Jake get more control of his life. The intern guided him to think about where he would feel safe and who he would feel safe stay with? Jake said, "by drawing and collage." He said school, mom's house, dad's house, and grandma's house were all safe places. He said mom's house is blue, dad's house is yellow, grandma's house is gray, and school is brown. He cut some images from a magazine. He said, "the image of the big bed and couch for the school, the cat in dad's house, the phone in mom's house. Big house is like coming to grandma's house." He described in detail what each house looked like. There are several rooms, where the doors and windows are. He also described what the neighbor's house looked like. The neighbors would always stand by the windows to look outside, and the neighbor's home had a cat and dog. In this session, Jake worked on describing the places he feels safe with. He feels safe at school and home. Exploring the safe places can enhance the feeling of being safe.



Figure 3 Jake: safe place

Jake has become more outgoing and livelier. In the next few sessions, he showed me his new book and toys and played with me. He also built a house with sand and toys, and he invited "friends" come to his house to play with him. He defined some things in a positive way, such as "lucky tree"

and “lucky star”. We kept working on the positive activities. We did “the best day and the worst day.” This activity asks clients to fold their paper in half and draw one of the best days they ever had on one side of the paper and one of the worst days on the other side. Discussion focuses on the depiction of the experiences and exploration of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that occurred. Goals include awareness that life is characterized by change; it has its high points and low points. He thought for a while. He said, “my good day was at school with my teacher, one teacher in kindergarten, one in my first grade, and one in my second grade.” I said, “So being with them is a good day for you?” He said yes. For the bad day. He said, “maybe today, because I lost one of my snow pants at the school.” He started to draw each teacher. Ms. Niren with a light blue and dark blue shirt, orange pant, and blond hair. He said he like this teacher because she is nice. Then he described the teacher for his first grade. He said that Ms. Kasey had short brown hair and orange and black pants. He drew every detail. He likes this teacher because she is nice and taught him a lot. Then the teacher who is his current teacher. Ms. Else with brown and blond hair of medium length. He likes this teacher because she is nice and asks them how his weekend was and always gives comments and help. For the bad day, he started to draw himself with today’s outfit and some circles come from his mind with “where is my snow pant?” and the place to hang clothes, with the name of his school on the top. Then he designed a game to play with me. He said he wanted to keep the good day and wanted me help him to keep the bad day. In this session, Jake worked on expressing the good and bad emotions he had. The result was he used his way to express himself and built self-confidence. He likes to talk more about school than family, from this side, we can see that his family may put pressure on him.

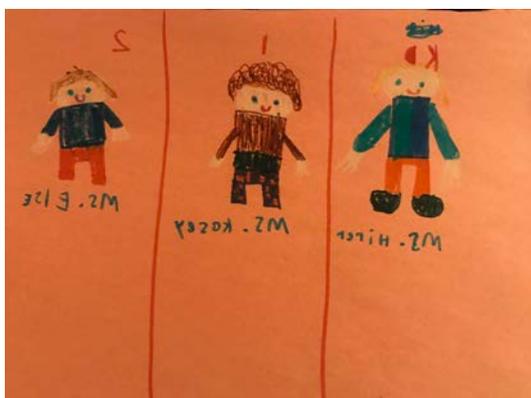


Figure 4 Jake: “the best day”

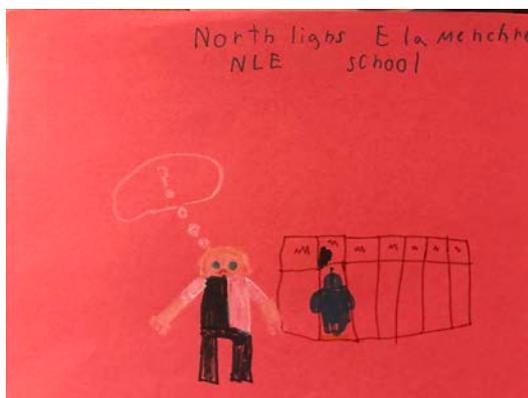


Figure 5 Jake: “the worst day”

The art therapy sessions were a time where Jake was able to control what he wanted to express and what he wanted to focus on. He was able to work through his feelings, thoughts, and emotions relating to possible events occurring in his life. This allowed him to find a sense of control among the chaos in his life with various activities during his art therapy sessions.

Case studies 3

Nate: I worked with Nate for one semester who is a ten years old boy. He has had a language barrier since he started talking and struggling with initiative, attachment, depression, and emotional control problems. He studied in a special school, sometimes could not communicate with his classmates. His father abused him before because of his language problem in his childhood. It all caused trauma during his growing up. Grandma told me that he often hid in the corner to play by himself in school. He often pushed his classmates because they couldn't understand him. He was also easy to get angry and frustrated when others could not understand what he said. He needs to manage and transform bad emotions and build confidence.

At first, we got to know each other, he talked about what he likes the fish he has, so I think about something related to fish, I put some wavy line on the paper. He started to draw a fish with blue and black. He drew a brain with many parts above the fish, he said this is fish's brain. Then he drew three more fish and in the big frame, he said this is fish tank, then I gave him another paper and asked him "where will make you feel relaxed or where do you want to go?" he drew two eyes with a frame, he said it is himself, some scribble as his hair. He said: "I am an apple tree, I feel relaxed with an apple tree." We also worked on the sand, including art therapy and play therapy. Play therapy can ameliorate the effects of trauma and loss, reduce anxiety and depression, improve children's behavior, and help children manage social and academic difficulties. Nate likes to play with sand. He always divided the sand into two sides from the middle. He tried to pretend to have a conversation with each other, but he could not organize the sentences. He always put many pine trees as a circle, he put a toy in the center, he said it is himself, he tried to protect himself, always closed himself from outside. He built safe space, a hole/cave to protect himself, trees around the cave. He did a lot of work to keep himself safe, in his house. Asked bad guys get out.



Figure 1 Nate: "fish's brain"

Figure 2 Nate: "the relaxing place"

Through the previous sessions, I realized that building confidence would be helpful to him. I started letting him design games and I followed his steps. In the process, I deliberately angered him, saying I couldn't understand what he said. He was very angry and frustrated, slapped his head. I encouraged him: "It doesn't matter, explain a few more times. I believe you can." What's more, to simulate the dialogue between friends and help him adapt to the environment of communication by role play. He shared food and games with me. Even though he is still not good at expressing clearly, he was willing to communicate and share with others.



Figure 3 Nate: storytelling

Figure 4 Nate: role play

Then he worked on expressing emotions and feelings, he did "what is in my heart?" that let the client draw a heart, and talk about what emotions/ mood are there in your heart? Write down the mood, and then pick a color to represent the emotion, mark out how much space does this mood occupy in your heart, and where is it? He wrote down happy, sad, "?", excited and mad. Yellow means happy, black means "?", blue means sad, rainbow color means excited. He said meeting people made him feel happy, he said: "if friends invite me to a party, I will feel happy, but I never been invited." "When pats died or people died, I felt sad." For "?", he said it was freely. He felt mad when people hate me, he said he always hate back. When he meets people and hug them he felt excited. We also talked about why he

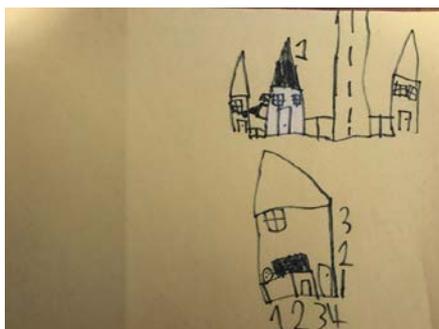


Figure 6 Nate: safe place



Figure 6 Nate: "I can cool off by"

got mad and how to deal with anger. He said: "When I felt angry, I need clam down instead of pushing people." he opened up to talk about his feelings and story. Help him make everything sense to himself and also help his cognition for something happened in his life.

As Nate was able to work with the art materials, he was able to express and release the emotions and thoughts that she had been holding onto. This process allowed him to feel a sense of relief that let him find a safe spot to contain his thoughts that he had shared during his sessions. The art acted as a bridge of communication for Nate to get the real but difficult information out. This, in turn, allowed him to remove some of the anxiety, stress, and fear from holding onto this information.

Review

Working with children has taught me a lot. On the one hand, establishing the relationship between the therapist and the child is closely related to the subsequent treatment. As the therapist, giving the child a safe and trusted environment to express themselves would contribute to healing the trauma. One the other hand, companionship and listening should always come first when working with a child with trauma.

Children feel comfortable to express themselves unconsciously through art, and call the wounds into artistic expression. "The normal sequence of development in child art has been observed, collected, described, and categorized" (Rubin, 2005). The therapist can use different materials or different methods, such as games, dramas, storytelling and so on. They are all expression media of art therapy. It is easier for children to release themselves in a relaxed environment, as an art therapist, it is also important to think about how to create a stress-free environment.

Conclusion

Children can express emotions through artistic activities, improving their feelings about everything around them, help them to understand things correctly and exercise their basic skills, such as language skills, acting abilities, the result that develops abilities to face difficulties. Different artistic activities have different therapeutic values. If children participate in artistic activities, they will express emotions, build their emotional world, and influence the brain from the psychological level, then it will influence the action because the brain delivers positive signals, finally, it also can achieve a good therapeutic effect. As we can see, targeted art activities can help children solve different problems. Art therapy plays an important role in the psychological area with children.

There are a lot of differences between psychological trauma and common mental illnesses. Children would be stimulated by the outside world, not just such as family abuse, insults, school bullying, and teachers' insults. However, children do not tell anyone many times. On the one hand, they feel that these wounds cannot be exported, they are afraid to be ridiculed and punished, sometimes they are afraid and shy. On the other hand, the cognitive abilities of children are weak, they can't make correct judgments on everything they have suffered. However, language often fails to allow children to express the true thoughts of children. They are not adults. Because of their age, children are still in the stage of development, and they cannot get mature expression skills. They also cannot fully state something that has happened and their true reactions and feelings about this matter, so the language is limited. If we were a therapist, we would not clearly understand the real reasons, it is not conducive to the treatment behind, we cannot determine where the real problem and what kind of help is needed.

As a part of intervention therapy, art has overcome the shortcomings of language therapy to a certain extent, given the corresponding environment and gradually intervened in children's thoughts and actions with artistic activities. Using artistic therapy, the first step should guide children to understand the wounds clearly and find the root causes of the problems. The second step should help the children express and vent their emotions, establishing a positive environment for children, adjusting emotions and perceptions of children, and building a safe and healthy structure to make children strong and brave.

The psychological development stage of children is a development stage that works from the inside to the outside on children. Internal thinking affects children's actions and language. It will pass the positive information to children. On the other hand, it is very meaningful for special groups to outlet the emotion, such as autism, social disorders, irritability, and anxiety. Art as a non-verbal communication medium that does not rely on drugs, words, and ordinary treatments, that can guide children to have own thoughts and feelings through art therapy. What's more, 'Images give visible form to external and internal experience that shape the person's encounter with life.

Dissanayake(1992) says 'art is a normal and necessary behavior of human beings that life talking, exercising, playing, working, socializing, learning, and nurturing should be encouraged and developed in everyone''(Moon, B.2015) Children can express emotions through artistic activities, improving their feelings about everything around them, help them to understand things correctly and exercise their basic skills, such as language skills, acting abilities, the result that develop abilities to face difficulties.

Different artistic activities have different therapeutic values. If children participate in artistic activities, they will express emotions, build their emotional world, and influence the brain from the psychological level, then it may influence the action because the brain delivers positive signals, finally, it also can achieve a good therapeutic effect. As we can see, targeted art activities can help children solve different problems. Art therapy is an increasingly important role in the psychological area with the development of children.

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