



Expressive Arts Therapy , As Far As You Reach

“Arts” is usually associated with going to museums visiting exhibitions, participating in concerts, or enjoying stage performances. However, this is very different from the arts used in psychotherapy! The former is entertaining or exciting, focusing on sharing with others, including aesthetic and technical requirements; while the latter has treatment methods and goals, focusing on the expression of oneself. When arts applied in psychotherapy, it becomes a bridge to communicate with oneself, and it also acts as a platform for self-expression. For instance, Expressive Arts Therapy focuses on free and authentic expression, and there has no requirement of any artistic skills or knowledge.



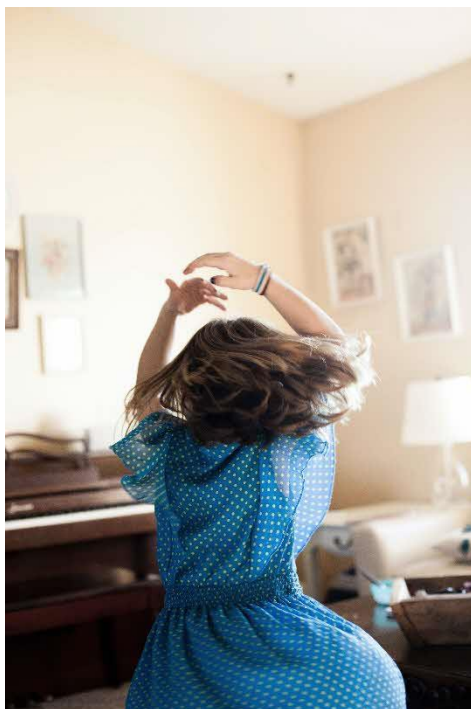
Engaging in common arts-related activities may make people feel relaxed and happy, if one wants to achieve further therapeutic effectiveness, the intervention of a professional therapist in psychotherapy is essential. During the

process of artmaking, people can release or express emotions easier. However, emotions are abstract and invisible.

Once there are too many negative emotions burst out, it may cause a loss of control. When loss of control embodied with the “dark side” of a person (that hidden in the unconscious), it may enhance and constitute a “backfire” effect. Sometimes, it creates difficulties for people to get rid of the psychological barriers composed of negative and complex emotions. In severe cases, it will cause tragedy. This also highlights that engaging in arts-related activities or work, does not mean resistance to mental illness or emotional problems. One of the art masters, Vincent van Gogh, is a typical example.



Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear 1889 by Vincent van Gogh



Thus, the role of an Expressive Arts Therapist is critical, who are not only assisting and accompany the client to release and transform negative emotions, but let go of the burdens and listen to the soul. Through the non-verbal and illogic characteristics of art, the therapist will lead the client with a free, open, and non-judgmental attitude, recognize and accept the injured, neglected or hidden part of your unconsciousness. This is a breakthrough. It is also an essential pathway of psychotherapy.

The therapist will use different art forms according to the client's situation, such as painting, music, dance, role-play, creative writing, to promote emotional expression and self-awareness in the creative process. The client will be guided to review and understand the crux or cause of the matter. At the same time, the client will be encouraged to do self-interpretation of the artmaking process and the artwork, in which, it allows the client to return to the inner voice and go for deeper understanding. The length of therapy varies from person to person, but through proper precipitation and reflection, some people may suddenly become enlightened, or the problem is unintentionally transformed. Transformation brings not only new aspects, but also inspires new ideas and initiates new hopes. In the process of transformation, the client can mindfully observe and accept oneself. As a result, therapeutic treatment and healing results are achieved.

Treatment Case Sharing

There is a pupil with excellent grades, who lost interest in learning and beloved activities suddenly, indulged in mobile games and sleeping that replace the normal daily activities. After several treatments, the therapist found that the child was forced to transfer to another school, due to consideration for the promotion of secondary school. The unfamiliar classmates,



environment, coupled with pressure of learning, make this child extremely anxious. Since there is no way out and lacking solution, the child accepts the reality reluctantly. It is combined with negative emotions such as helplessness, loneliness, unwillingness, resentment. Under this huge sense of helplessness complexes, the motivation to live and study gradually disappears, and the child chooses to escape and delay for encountering the hopeless future.



Part of the artworks created by the captioned child. (Left) Artwork of the nightmare(s) which made at pre-treatment stage of the therapy. (Right) Artwork of happy memory which created at the post-treatment stage.

Ironically, parents thought their children were rebellious at the early stages of the problem emerged, so they responded with criticism, blame, and punishment. When the child came to see the therapist, who was already experiencing insomnia, nightmares, and loss of appetite. These are the symptoms of depression. Fortunately, after timely treatment, the child began to regain self-confidence and get back on the right track. In this case, the therapist would like to remind parents of the importance of effective communication with their children. Do not mainly pay attention to study performance, nor tend to criticize success or failure. Provide more appropriate emotional supports, and mutual understanding cover both study and other aspects of their children. Special care and consideration should give to those children who are entering middle school or transferring school.