

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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What is art therapy? It is about reaching out, being creative, and feeling good about yourself. That is what art therapy is all about. The creative process of art can help resolve conflicts, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, **reduce stress, and build the self-image of children, adolescents, and adults with epilepsy.**

It can help develop artistic expression, build autonomy, empower, and build a stability and a sense of self-worth as well as connecting with others in a new and wondrous way. “Art therapy can be especially helpful to people with epilepsy who isolate themselves and have difficulty engaging with others and feeling comfortable in social settings.

Because parents and people with epilepsy are often concerned with safety and the possibility of embarrassment, their lives can become further limited in terms of interaction, socially, educationally, or in the workplace. For those reasons, children with epilepsy may not make a confident transition to a more autonomous lifestyle as they become adults.

“Therefore, art therapy can be very helpful in the processes of engagement, transition, and socialization,” states Elizabeth Coss, MA, ATR-BC & Steven C. Schachter, MD. Many people with epilepsy say that the freedom of art helps them to express their experiences of seizures.

“Individuals with epilepsy face many challenges including coping with the unpredictability of seizures, possible side effects of medications, perception or fear of stigma associated with their medical condition, and social barriers. Art therapy groups can provide an opportunity for individuals living with epilepsy to creatively explore some of their experiences — including their resources and strengths — in a safe and supportive environment. Art-based processes engage participants with a variety of sensory-rich art materials and enjoyable methods for the discovery of each person’s unique capacity for problem solving and self-expression.

Janice Havlena, ATR-BC, Professor of Art Therapy, Edgewood College, Madison, WI states that the sharing of artwork within the group and in carefully and ethically considered exhibitions for the public, may enhance participants’ sense of belonging and self-esteem and promote increased awareness and understanding of epilepsy. Not to mention, it is also a way to reduce stress which, in turn, can lower seizure frequency.

A paintbrush is a powerful communication tool for experiences that are hard to explain in words. It helps and allows your mind to wander without any restriction. The mixture of colors and the strokes define the inner feelings you want to express.

Your art is the extension of who you are, what you want and where you want to be. Your masterpiece, no matter how you made it, is priceless.

It has no monetary value; it is a piece of your history and the expression of yourself. It is your specialty.

Danielle Jweid, an art therapist, said her early love of art initially led her to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Old Dominion University, with a painting concentration.

“An art therapy course inspired me to change my goal from art professor to art therapist,” she said.

“Art therapy makes the nonverbal tangible; people are able to express thoughts and feelings that they don’t have words for or that the words are hard to say.”

Making art sometimes allows more underlying content to emerge than would be verbalized,” said Jweid, stressing that the process is as important as they product.

“Once artwork is created, discussing thoughts and feelings that occurred during its creation and finished state, helps people to fully obtain the healing benefits on a more cognitive level.”

Cathy Hozack who has had epilepsy since she was a young child, says: “My mind makes sense of the world in its own way, using a compilation of images and memories to create a permanent record of my emotions and experiences.”

And look what you can achieve! Leonardo Da Vinci, Lewis Carroll, and Michelangelo were some of the famous artists who lived with epilepsy. And it could well be that their epilepsy played a part in their fantastic talents.

“It has often been said that Van Gogh’s use of yellow was a result of his suffering from xanthopsia, a condition that causes the person to see everything as though through a yellow filter. Xanthopsia was a side effect of digitalis, often used to treat epilepsy.” — Nicola Swanborough, Epilepsy Review

Quentin Bruckland, an art therapist once said “Art is a way of making sense of the huge impact that recurring seizures can have on your life. Art can help a person develop greater self-awareness and come to terms with the uncertainties of epilepsy.”

Editor’s Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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