

## **The Benefits of Art Therapy in Addiction Treatment**

**By Jacquelyn A. Jeanty**

Addiction recovery is a personal journey that unfolds in different ways for different people. The effects of addiction leave behind a shell of the person that once was. It leaves you feeling lost as to who you are and what you really need to be happy.

Art therapy, a widely recognized treatment approach, is unique in that it sidesteps the deep, dark corners of addiction's "mess" and allows you to tap into the essence of who you are. While art therapy may seem like some extraneous, "feel good" activity, the healing and growth benefits to be had from this treatment approach are many.

### **What Art Therapy Does**

Art therapy can take place in a group setting or on a one-on-one basis. In effect, art therapists use the medium of art to help you tap into your creative self.

Your creative self lives in the subconscious mind and is a natural problem-solver. Unlike logic and reasoning (which stems from the conscious part of the mind), creativity can tap into the highly personal issues that you grapple with in recovery. In the process, the act of creativity allows you to find new perspectives and access solutions that are unavailable to the conscious areas of the mind.

## **Emotional Growth & Healing**

Art therapy encompasses a range of different mediums, including:

- Painting
- Sculpting
- Map-mapping
- Poetry
- Sand
- Mask-making

Once drug or alcohol use stops, sorting out the emotions left behind is one of the biggest challenges in addiction treatment. The process of creating art becomes a form of expression that allows you to process emotional issues that may be blocking your growth in addiction recovery.

### **Creating a Clean & Sober Identity**

During the course of drug or alcohol use, the “high” these substances produced became your primary source of joy and contentment. Once drug/alcohol abuse stops, creating an identity that can experience wholeness without the need to get “high” is critical to your success in recovery.

As an addiction treatment approach, art therapy opens the door to your authentic self, the part of you that has hope. The authentic self also dreams and plans for a happy future.

As you move forward in the recovery process, your authentic self emerges along the way. Art therapy helps this process along.

### **Stress & Anxiety Relief**

If you struggle with high stress levels or feelings of anxiety, the act of creating art can be soothing and calming in itself. Feelings of stress and anxiety develop out of the left-brain, where patterns of faulty logic and reasoning disrupt the body's natural equilibrium.

The creative process is a right-brain activity. It takes place in the area of the brain that works with spatial patterns, hears music and experiences intuition. When your area of focus draws from the right-brain, the areas of the brain that fuel stress and anxiety shut down. Art therapy has this same effect.