

# MINDFULNESS BASED ART THERAPY

Clinical and practical applications for children and families

October 2019

Michelle Swerin, LPCC

**Together, all the way.®**



# OBJECTIVES

---



Review the 2 tools that are the foundation of Mindfulness Based Art Therapy (MBAT):

- Mindfulness Meditation
- Art Therapy

Better understand Mindfulness Based Art Therapy

- Background and Theory
- Research
- Benefits
- Applications for Children & Families



# Mindfulness Meditation

## What is it?

A simple, systematic, practical insight oriented meditation practice with direct, functional life applications<sup>1</sup>

A foundational stress management tool

Mindful meditation is the practice of being in the present moment – with awareness and acceptance of mind and body

With the assistance of focus on an anchor or object<sup>1</sup>



# Mindfulness

## A Brief Background

### Mindful Meditation

- Ancient Buddhist Practice<sup>1</sup>
- The practice of present awareness, non-judgment, acceptance<sup>2</sup>
  - Of physical state, cognitive thoughts, and emotional feelings
  - Spirit of curiosity with Anchor or Object<sup>3</sup> – breath, mantra, activity, color
  - Practice of reflection/observation

### Meditation is NOT

- Emptying your mind, it is engaging it
- Escaping the world, it is acknowledging it<sup>4</sup>
- “Put Mindfulness Before me” - A lifestyle that encourages awareness, acceptance and full participation in life<sup>3</sup>

### Popularized in Western Health

- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)<sup>5</sup>
- Dialectic Behavior Therapy skills
- Mindfulness Based Art Therapy



# Mindfulness: Myths

1. MYTH #1: Mindfulness is meditation.
2. MYTH #2: Mindfulness is about taking time out to rest and relax.
3. MYTH #3: Mindfulness is having no thoughts.
4. MYTH #4: The ultimate goal is to be mindful all the time.
5. MYTH #5: Mindfulness is bliss.
6. MYTH #6: Mindfulness is not for active minds or kids.
7. MYTH #7 Mindfulness is a religious practice or conflicts with some religious beliefs.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-5-biggest-myths-of-mindfulness/><sup>6</sup>

<https://mindful.usc.edu/myths/><sup>7</sup>



# Mindfulness for Children

## Mental Health Benefits

- reduce the severity of depression,
- anxiety and ADHD in children
- builds resilience and stress
- management on neurological level
- Increase happiness
- Brain development – beneficial from infant to 100<sup>8</sup>



## How is it utilized in our communities?

- Hospitals, schools, clinical mental health settings, DBT / intensive groups, eating disorder clinics, addiction centers, yoga and wellness centers
- Mindful education – Boosts sense of well-being and increased academic performance in middle schools (October 2019 study from Yale/Harvard/MIT)<sup>9</sup>
- Trauma informed mindfulness and yoga

# Children and Family Mindfulness Tools and Resources

## **Cigna resources**

[https://iris.cigna.com/tools\\_and\\_resources/formstoolsandresources/northamerica/mindfulness/guided\\_sessions](https://iris.cigna.com/tools_and_resources/formstoolsandresources/northamerica/mindfulness/guided_sessions)

Available to all veterans and Cigna customers and employees

Ways to try mindfulness with your child <https://parentswithconfidence.com/25-mindfulness-practices-for-kids-who-cant-sit-still/>

Modeling mindfulness by developmental age / Mindful child - New York Times resource <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>

Annaka Harris <https://annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/><sup>10</sup>

Mindful Parenting – Practicing ‘Respond vs React’ <https://www.gottman.com/blog/mindful-parenting-how-to-respond-instead-of-react/><sup>11</sup>

Mindful Parenting podcasts <https://michellegale.podbean.com/><sup>12</sup>



# Art Therapy : What is it?



## What is it?

- Use of art, creative process, and resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, and foster self awareness and expression
- Assisted by an art therapist who has knowledge regarding visual art, the creative process, human development, psychotherapy, and counseling<sup>13</sup>

## How utilized in our communities?

- Health and wellness centers, hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation facility programs, clinical mental health clinics, and community organizations<sup>14</sup>
- Individual, group, and family methods





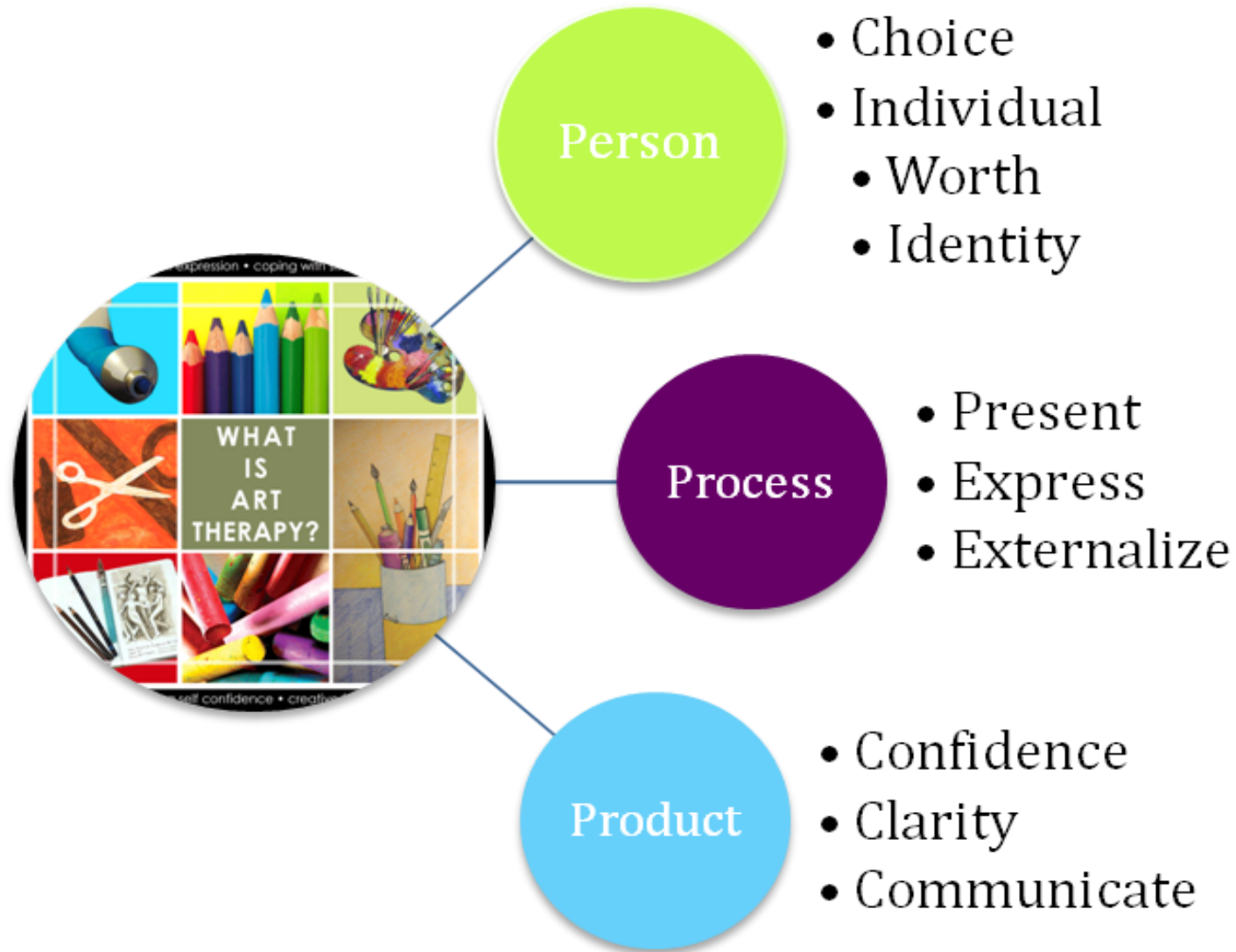
# Art Therapy: Myths

1. Art therapy is only for kids
2. Art therapy is for people who are developmentally disabled, severely mentally ill, or brain injured and can't express themselves verbally.
3. I can't draw, I won't be any good at art therapy.
4. An art therapist will look at my art and see things I don't want to reveal.
5. Art therapists are not "real therapists."
6. An art therapist won't be able to talk through my problems with me / we have to make art at every session.
7. Anyone can call themselves an Art Therapist because it isn't a real type of therapy<sup>2</sup>

<https://mindfulartstudio.com/7-art-therapy-myths-busted/><sup>2</sup>



# Art Therapy



# Art Therapy for Children and Families

## Mental Health benefits

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- resolve emotional conflicts
- manage behavior and addictions,
- develop social skills,
- improve reality orientation<sup>13</sup>
- cortisol (a [stress](#)-related [hormone](#)) lowers significantly after just 45 minutes of making art<sup>13</sup>
- Fosters self expression, awareness, self efficacy, self regulation, self esteem<sup>2</sup>
  - Access nonverbal processing of trauma impacting brain and body
  - Provides non-threatening approach to psychotherapy
  - Proven to help verbal processing with groups / multiple participants



## Tools and Resources

American Art Therapy association

[www.arttherapy.org](http://www.arttherapy.org)



How to locate an art therapist

- ATR (Registered Art therapist) / ATR-BC (Registered Art therapist Board certified)
- If you are a Cigna customer, Call Cigna - We can help you find in-network (INN) therapists that specialize in art therapy
- Art Therapy website
- Psychology Today website

Check INN status and coverage with your specific plan



# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: What is it?

## Utilizing art as a tool to explore mindfulness

Founder Lisa Rappaport – also known as ‘focusing-oriented art therapy’<sup>15</sup>

Based on Gendlin theory on focusing.

- Gendlin noticed that the clients who improved the most in therapy were the ones
- who connected to their inner physical self.
- MBAT connects mind and body through imagination – allowing expression of feelings that cannot be accessed or expressed verbally<sup>16</sup>

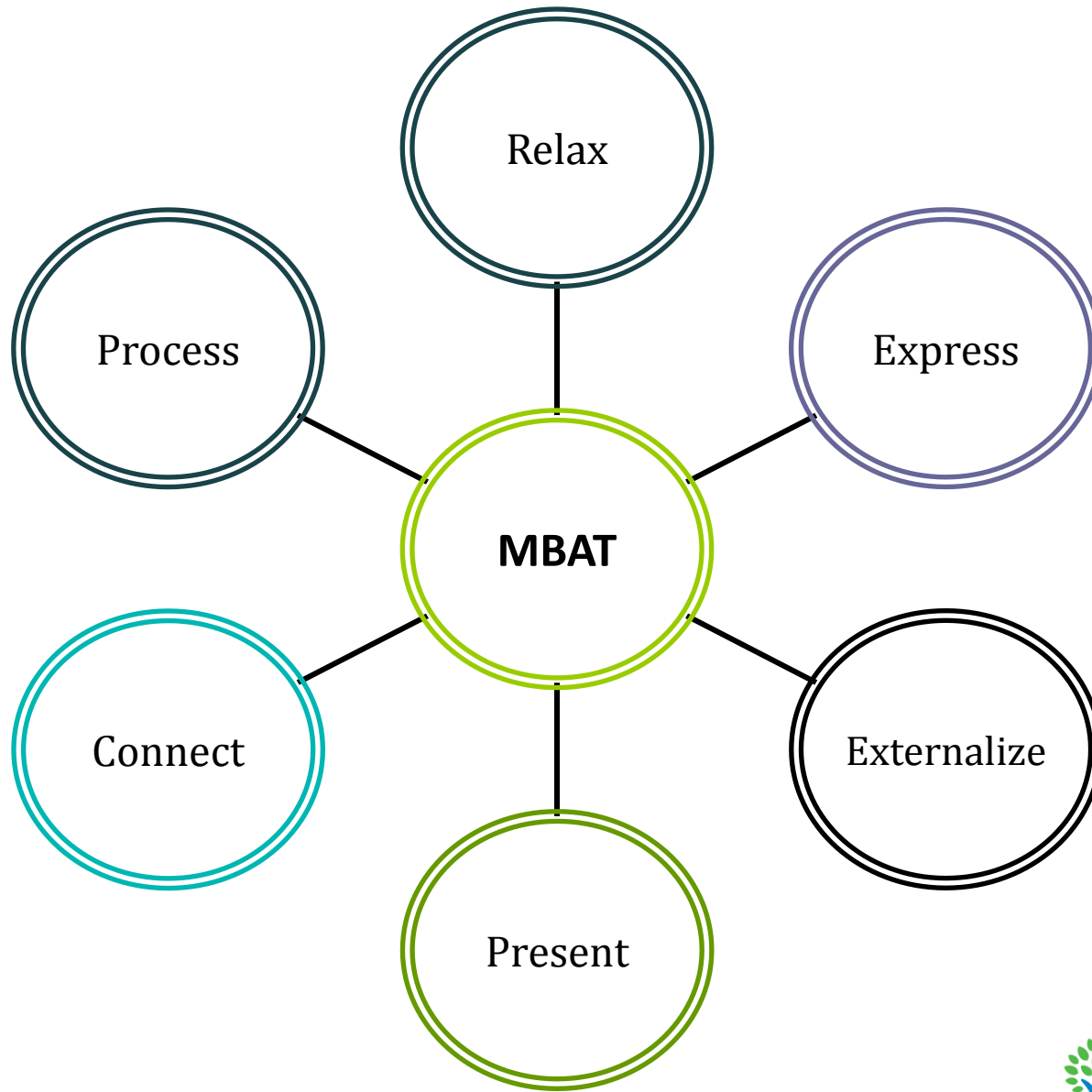
Combining mindfulness concepts with art therapy results in the therapeutic treatment. This treatment combines the philosophy of mindfulness within an art therapy setting. Engage in the creative process of making art in a mindful manner<sup>1</sup>

Mindfulness and art-based therapies activate the same areas of the brain, so combining the two methods into one experience can come naturally for the human mind and also enhance the benefits experienced by both approaches<sup>17</sup>



Image credit: Cam Henry

# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy



# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy : Research

## Physical Illnesses

- First research study involving MBAT – cancer patients participating in daily mindful art therapy practice<sup>18</sup>
- Most recent study – coronary artery disease patients<sup>19</sup>

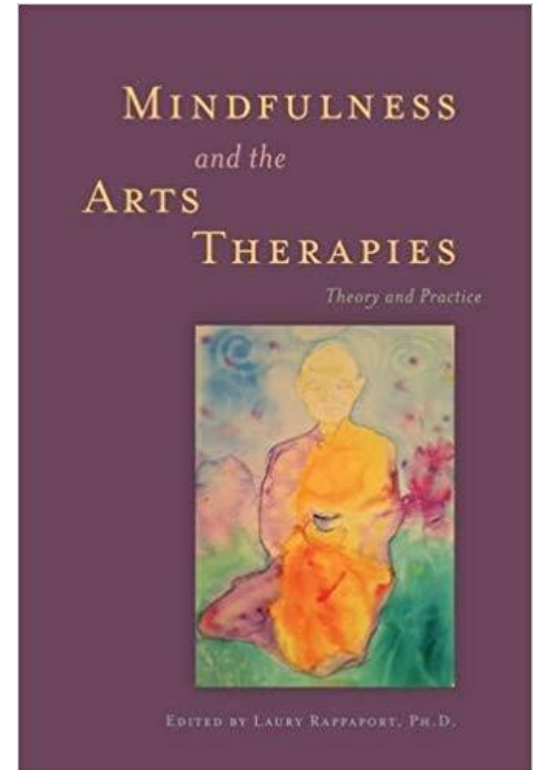
## Mental / Emotional concerns

- anxiety disorders
- eating disorders
- substance abuse (relapse prevention)
- depressive disorders
- stress-related issues
- anger-related issues<sup>16</sup>

## Self Esteem / Self Acceptance

- Neurological impacts<sup>4</sup>

**Lack of Research:** Overall more research needed, specifically with a control group to determine differences in utilizing this type of mindfulness vs. other types and this integration with art therapy vs. traditional art therapy<sup>12</sup>





# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy : Benefits

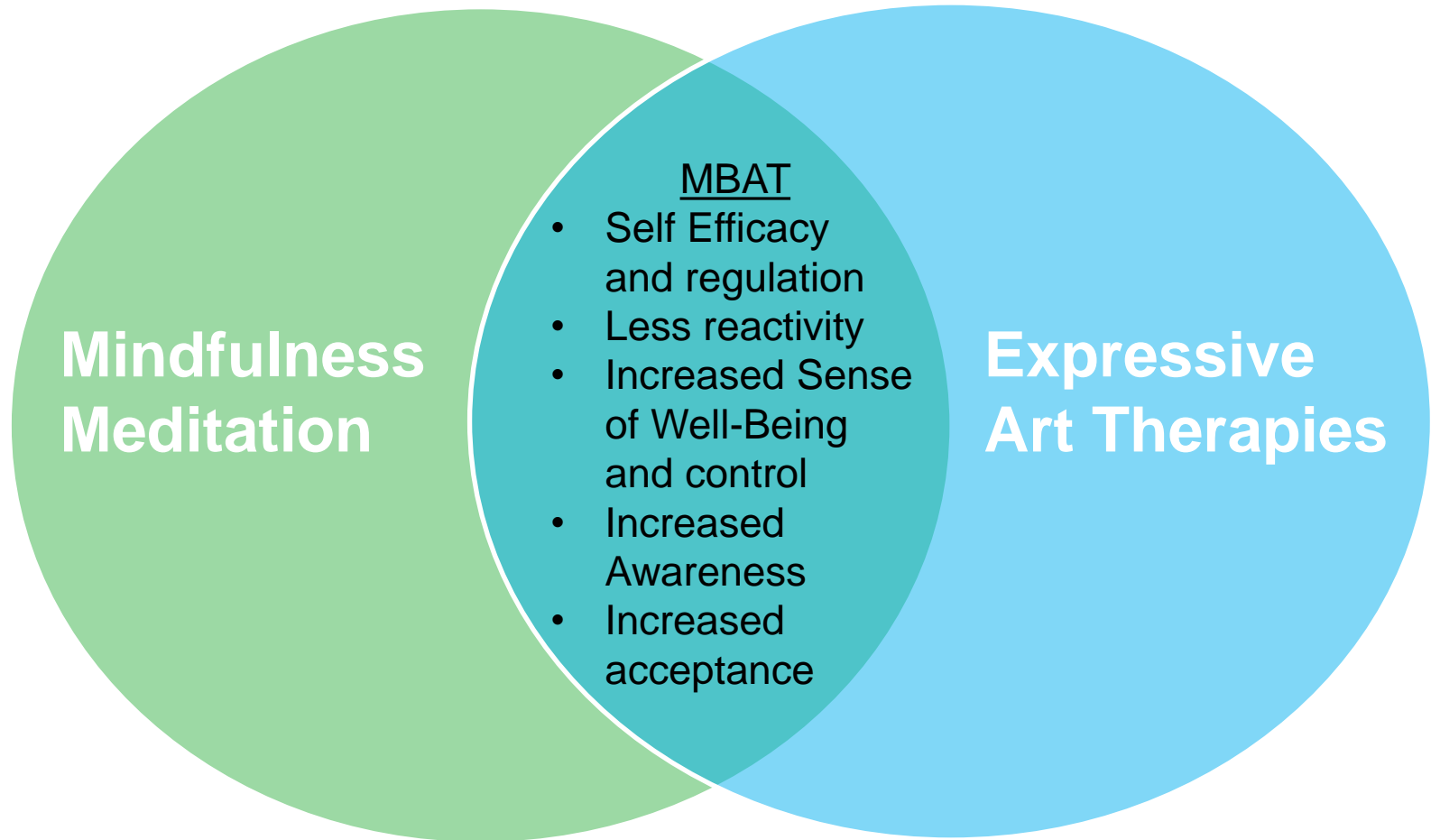


- Some of the specific psychological benefits of MBAT that have been demonstrated in the literature include the following:
- Improved psychological stability, Improved quality of life
- Changes in brain patterns reflecting a calm, focused state of attention
- Thicker and more developed gray matter areas in the brain
- Development of neural pathways in your brain that enable you to create and focus on art making
- Reduced cognitive avoidance in which you become less aware of what you are thinking and doing when experiencing psychological distress
- Improved intuition and trust in your own body (how you are feeling and what it means)
- Increased emotional awareness
- Increased sense of control and ability to share inner thoughts
- Improved awareness of underlying issues that have been hidden
- Ability to communicate abstract feelings
- Increased self-esteem and self-acceptance
- Improved attention span<sup>16</sup>





# Benefits of Mindfulness Based Art Therapy



Reference: Peterson, 16/17

# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: With Children and Families

## Where is it in our communities?

Applied in same settings as art therapy,  
most commonly with trauma, hospitals  
– physical illness, schools

## Benefits for children:

- improve their abilities to pay attention and focus
- regulate emotions and improve decision making
- improve mood, self-confidence, and encourage positive thinking
- manage symptoms of anxiety, depression, and chronic pain
- explore creativity with courage
- provide outlet for nonverbal processing
- provide outlet to communicate emotions<sup>8</sup>



# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: Applications

## Directive vs. Nondirective

### Nondirective Examples



- **Open art time** – create art together or alongside one another with no intention other than being present – optional: talk about how it makes you feel during the process
  - **Optional** – begin and/or end with a mindful meditation / body scan / deep breathing
- **Mindful coloring and drawing** - Mandalas / Zentagles<sup>20</sup>
- **Mindful Exploration of Art Materials (MEAM)** Examine art with a mindful eye using all five of your senses. What do you see, feel, touch, hear, taste? Engage in sensory stimulation and monitor your responses to all forms of art in your daily life<sup>16</sup>
- **Use art to express emotions.** As you paint, sculpt, draw, or otherwise create art, try to channel the emotions and feelings you are experiencing in your body. Observe any physical sensations while you are drawing or coloring. Express happy or stressful<sup>21</sup>

# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: Applications

## Directive Examples

- **Draw your family doing something** – Kinetic Family Drawing
- **Notice pain changing.** If you live with chronic pain due to a physical illness, notice how your pain changes as you create art.
- **Create a collage** about a goal or vision
- **Verbal vs. nonverbal** – option of processing the art-making process or product before or after<sup>13</sup>



# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: Applications

## Idea for at home with your child:

Create a mindfulness-based art and play box Having a special set of tools and materials at your fingertips can make it easier to do MBAT when your child needs it the most. It does not have to be elaborate or expensive and most items can be found around the house, at the dollar store or a thrift store. Having a tool box such as this can help transition your child from co-regulation (with you), to self-regulation (on their own) as they grow more independent in their skills and confidence.

## Some ideas are:

personalized encouraging letter from parent to child • tactile objects such as a comfort toy/stuffed animal • playdough or kinetic sand and plastic placemat • pens, pencils, coloured markers and crayons and paper • simple water colour palette and brushes • access to music • fidget toys (ones that you can pull and push, or click) • simple sticks, dominos, beads, or beans that can be used to arrange in designs and patterns (mandalas, spelling out words) • Breathing Buddy (create it together) • Therapy Pillow (create it together)

Use it as a go to for playtime or carve out a weekly or daily parent-child art time – they learn most from modeling!<sup>22</sup>

<https://www.alongsideyou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ArtandMindfulnessForFamilies.pdf>





# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: Applications

## Things to keep in mind when doing mindful art with your child

- **Be prepared** - If during the art making process your child is getting escalated, stay aware of this and have a go to calming technique to walk through together
- **Stay aware** – notice how your child responds to different materials and mediums, this may impact what choices you give them depending on their mood in the future
- **Honor the art work and give them choice and control** – ask them how they want to take care of it – in a box, book, throw it away on their own if that's what they want, or hang it up in their room or on the fridge
- **Choice of verbal processing** – what can you tell me about your art? Don't make assumptions or tell them your interpretations before they can share their perspective



# Mindfulness Based Art Therapy: Applications

## Benefits of utilizing support of trained art therapist or practitioner

- Clinically trained to support process in the treatment of a mental health or health diagnosis
- Help contain emotions accessed that may be difficult to process
- Help guide focus and bring back to mindful anchor
- Help explore art mediums and materials in safe and developmentally appropriate ways
- Help manage dynamics of multiple participants
- Objective, outside, trained party to help monitor, guide, assess for safety and crisis management throughout experience
- Awareness and knowledge of safety / triggers related to art materials
  - <https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/5015.pdf> <sup>23</sup>



shutterstock.com • 655281925



## References

1. Cleveland Clinic. (2014). *Harnessing the power of the mind-body connection*. Retrieved from <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/services/heart/prevention/emotional-health/stress-relaxation/mind-body-exercises>
2. <https://mindfulartstudio.com/7-art-therapy-myths-busted/>
3. Smith, Steve. (2014). *Mindfulness and Meditation*. Retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/meditation>.
4. Shapiro, S. L., Astin, J. A., Bishop, S. R., & Cordova, M. (2005). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for health care professionals: Results from a randomized trial. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 12, 164 – 176.
5. <https://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mindfulness-based-programs/mbsr-courses/about-mbsr/history-of-mbsr/>
6. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-5-biggest-myths-of-mindfulness/>
7. <https://mindful.usc.edu/myths/>
8. New York Times resource (<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>)
9. <https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-middle-schoolers/>
10. Annaka Harris (<https://annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/>)
11. Mindful Parenting – Practicing ‘Respond vs React’ (<https://www.gottman.com/blog/mindful-parenting-how-to-respond-instead-of-react/>)
12. Mindful Parenting podcasts <https://michellegale.podbean.com/>
13. Malchiodi, Cathy. (2013). *Art Therapy and Health Care*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.





# References

14. American Art Therapy Association. (2013). *What is Art Therapy?* Retrieved from <http://www.arttherapy.org/upload/whatisarttherapy.pdf>.
15. [Effects of Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy on Psychological Symptoms in Patients with Coronary Artery Disease](#). Jang SH, Lee JH, Lee HJ, Lee SY. *J Korean Med Sci*. 2018 Mar 19;33(12):e88. doi: 10.3346/jkms.2018.33.e88.
16. Rappaport, Laury. (2014). *Mindfulness and Art Therapies: Theories and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
17. <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1737/mindfulness-based-art-therapy-a-review-of-the-literature>
18. Monti, D., Peterson, C. A randomized, controlled trial of mindfulness-based art therapy (MBAT) for women with cancer. *Psycho-Oncology*, Volume15, Issue 5, pages 363–373, May 2006.
19. Carel, Havi. (2009). *Objective and Subjective wellbeing in ill health*. Humanities and Arts Research Centre, Royal Holloway University of London. Retrieved from- <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2009/11/havi-carel-objective-and-subjective-wellbeing-in-ill-health/>
20. Krahula, Beckah. (2012). *One Zentangle a Day*. New York, NY: Quarry Books
21. Rubin, Taylor. (1999). *Art Therapy: An Introduction*. Pennsylvania, PA: Taylor & Francis Group.
22. <https://www.alongsideyou.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/ArtandMindfulnessForFamilies.pdf>
23. <https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/5015.pdf>

## Image Credits

Shutterstock images

Cam Henry artist, permission given 12/4/19



# Questions?

Contact: Michelle Swerin

[Michelle.Swerin@cigna.com](mailto:Michelle.Swerin@cigna.com)

The information provided in this document is for educational purposes only. It is not medical advice. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing and care recommendations. References to third-party organizations or companies, and/or their products, processes or services, do not constitute an endorsement or warranty thereof.

All Cigna products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Cigna Corporation, including Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company and Cigna Behavioral Health, Inc. The Cigna name, logo, and other Cigna marks are owned by Cigna Intellectual Property, Inc. All pictures are used for illustrative purposes only.

