

Where Words Fail, Music (or Art or Movement) Speaks: The Impact of Expressive Arts in Healing Trauma

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TMc

TRUMAN MEDICAL CENTERS

*Center for Trauma-Informed
Innovation*



Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to describe at least one neurobiological process that indicates the potential impact of the expressive arts in healing trauma.
- Participants will be able to describe at least one way in which they can apply expressive arts within their current context.
- Participants will be able to identify situations in which professional consultation with a trained music, art, or dance/movement therapist is indicated.



Neurobiology of Trauma



Trauma

- Psychological impact
- Physiological impact
- Interpreted by the body as a life-threatening experience



Autonomic Nervous System

- Sympathetic Nervous System
 - Fight, Flight, or Freeze
- Parasympathetic Nervous System
 - Rest and Digest
- Polyvagal Theory (Porges)
 - Ventral Vagal Complex (Social Nervous System)
 - Dorsal Vagal Complex



What happens in the brain

- Stress response
- Stimulates the HPA axis
- Hormones released
 - Catecholamines
 - Cortisol
 - Opiates
 - Oxytocin



What happens in the brain

- Hippocampus
 - Information → Memories
- Amygdala
 - Emotional information
- Medial prefrontal cortex
 - Impaired function



Broca's area

- Located in left frontal cortex
- Speech and language
- Observed to shut down when person remembers traumatic event



Right brain

- Important in attachment
- Linked to implicit, emotional, and body-based processing
- Reduced neural function in person with trauma



Neurobiology of the Arts





Creativity

- Divergent Thinking
 - Associate/combine memories
- Convergent Thinking
 - Strategic, logic, discretion



Music

- Increased or decreased activity levels in brain areas associated with emotional behaviors, including hypothalamus, hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex
- Stimulates release of dopamine
- Promotes neuroplasticity



Art

- Activates emotional, memory, and motor areas
- Improvement in attention, concentration, and organization
- Trauma memories often are strongly visual



Dance/Movement

- Motor functioning, sensory awareness, and emotional states are closely linked
- Proprioception and the vagus nerve
- Right/left brain integration



Mindfulness and Trauma

“For real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present.”

--Bessel Van der Kolk



Mindfulness and the Arts

- The experience always begins in the present and goes into the future
- The arts allow for non-verbal processing of the past in the present



Expressive Therapies



Creative Arts Therapies

- Music Therapy
- Art Therapy
- Dance/Movement Therapy



Music Therapy

- Credential = MT-BC
- American Music Therapy Association
- The most neuroscience research
- NIH: Sound Health Initiative



Art Therapy

- Credential = ATR, ATR-BC
- Many also obtain counseling licensure
- American Art Therapy Association



Dance/Movement Therapy

- Credential = R-DMT, BC-DMT
- American Dance Therapy Association



Other Expressive Therapies

- Drama therapy
- Poetry/Creative writing
- Play therapy
- Sandtray therapy



PLEASE

- Use the arts
- Use them often
- Be responsible
- Be ethical



Ethical Use and When to Refer



Use of Expressive Modalities

- Establishing safety is most important—expressive arts can be very intimate experiences
 - Allow choices
 - Do not continue to offer (or insist on) expressive modalities if the client firmly declines
 - Check your intention, follow the lead of the client



Use of Expressive Modalities

- Provide opportunities for clients to express themselves non-verbally
 - Ask them to bring a song or play an instrument
 - Provide art materials or display art
 - Support movement
 - Find ways to combine the verbal and non-verbal methods



Use of Expressive Modalities

- Be cautious of offering your own interpretation of their expression
 - Ask for their explanation
 - Listen, reflect, point out incongruence
- Be comfortable with the modality
- Don't assume the effect



When to Seek Consultation or Refer

- For music-, art-, or movement-based assessment
- If interpretation would be helpful, particularly with repression of memories
- If you feel uncomfortable with the modality
- If the client has a response that was unexpected (particularly to music)
- When you wish you could do (x,y,z) with the modality



Questions



Thank you!

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