

Art Therapy

Art Therapy is the application of visual arts and the creative process within a therapeutic relationship, to support, maintain, and improve the psychosocial, physical, cognitive, and spiritual health of individuals
(Source: Malchiodi, 2013)

Art Therapy is not about being artistic, it's about being creative. It's about having a creative outlet for emotional expression. The focus is on the process and not the finished product.

Art Therapy Programs at Covenant House Vancouver

Open Studios

Open Studios are a space for creative self-expression and a means of exploring positive, non-traumatic emotions. Youth can also come to Open Studios to get to know our Registered Clinical Counsellors, meet other youth, and experiment with different art material.

One-on-One Counselling Art Therapy

An opportunity for youth to heal through working with an art therapist, who guides the young person through their creative process. It's a place to "talk" about mental health concerns through creative communication and a safe space to work on trauma and debilitating mental health issues.

Closed Art Therapy Groups

These sessions are an integration of the previous two. Group art therapy is conducted in a confidential space. A specific theme or skill is addressed through work with a variety of art mediums. This is a space where trauma can be discussed in a group setting.

Art Therapy and Trauma

Talking is not enough *(Cathy Malchiodi, 2020)*

From a neuroscience perspective, when individuals experience trauma, studies show that the part of their brain that links the left and right halves is damaged — creating a disconnect between their experiences and their ability to talk about them. Engaging in creative acts helps to repair this damage, allowing communication to once again be restored between the two sides of the brain. This explains why individuals can sometimes only "talk" about their experiences after they've been able to creatively express themselves.

Covenant House Vancouver provides Art Therapy in conjunction with our other programs and services as a more integrative approach based on our trauma-informed and attachment-informed framework.

Qualifications for Art Therapists at Covenant House

Art Therapists at Covenant House Vancouver have the same counselling psychology training as Registered Clinical Counsellors and are registered with the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors. They are also trained in using art and creativity in their practice and may be registered with Art Therapy Associations at the provincial, national, or international level.

Five Senses Grounding Exercise

We invite you and your loved ones to try this activity in the comfort of your own home. This is an exercise that we share with many of the youth as a way to interweave the senses into their understanding of what safety can look like – this is an art therapy approach to the traditional five senses grounding exercise used in talk therapy.

Supplies you'll need:

- A piece of paper
- A pen or pencil
- Crayons, markers, glitter, paint, etc. (Anything fun and creative!)

Step 1: Take a moment to notice how you are feeling at this current moment. Take notice of the things around you: objects, sounds, or colours, to bring yourself into the present moment, without judgment.

Step 2: With your pen or pencil in hand, trace your hand onto a sheet of paper. Each finger will represent one of our five senses.

Step 3: You are now invited to identify aspects of each of your five senses that brings you comfort. For example, for taste: chocolate, tea, or freshly baked cookies; or for touch: blankets, a pillow, or a cozy sweater. Then, decorate each finger according to each of the senses, creating a visual reminder of what brings you comfort or joy.

Step 4: Once this is completed, you now have a visual reminder of things that bring you comfort.



5 Things you can see

Sun, picture on the wall, people walking



4 Things you can feel

Wind blowing, feet on the floor, pencil in hand



3 Things you can hear

Bird chirping, clock ticking, car horns



2 Things you can smell

Food from the cafeteria, laundry detergent on clothes



1 Things you can taste

Mint, breakfast, toothpaste

Note: We invite you to try this activity as a fun mindfulness exercise only. Participating in this activity does not mean Covenant House Vancouver is facilitating Art Therapy services. As we mentioned above, Art Therapy is a very specific type of program we offer for youth, and the above exercise just happens to be one of the activities we introduce to them.