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Expressive art as medicine for mental health issues

Introduction: Art has been widely recognized as a form of visual language since ancient time. Art making is not a play thing but rather a continuous journey of exploring and learning about the self and a therapeutic tool for people who are dealing with mental issues. Mental illness like depression and anxiety, can happen to anybody at any age. It does not matter your career. One can be a successful actor, singer, author, designer, writer, husband, wife or a child. People who are suffering from mental illness often find themselves having issues with self-Identity. A child can even suffer from depression and anxiety at the young age due to trauma they have experienced. Children suffering from war, women being captured into sexual slavery or being abused by their partners, men having problems with relationships and the list goes on. Unfortunately not everyone is willing to open up to their problem and reach out for help.

How do you know you are having Depression and Anxiety? The feel good mood comes and go like a roller coaster. The mode of happiness is not consistent meaning one day one can be extremely happy and in a split second one can be sad when something triggers their sensitive feelings. It is like pressing the “wrong button /switch” the mood will just change. How many of us are familiar with this kind of feelings? Identify and accepting is an important step to trying to find ways to manage the feelings. There are many ways to manage depression and anxiety when one is aware of experiencing this burnout that may feel like one is scrapping on rough road. Talk about it. Be more open to our inner feelings and emotions. Stop being silent and share your difficult feelings and emotions with people you can trust. Reaching out is the first step to self-healing. We must end the stigma of not talking about mental illness that affects most people lives.

What is Expressive Art? Expressive art is a form of artistic expression whereby one is focuses on the process of making art at that moment. It is often spontaneous and unfinished. It can be a process that combines other elements like music and dance with making art. There has been a growing interest in art in health initiative where the process of art making is seen as a therapeutic and healing for children and adults who have learning differences and mental health issues.

How Expressive Art can manage depression and anxiety? Engaging in art can help people with mental issues stay in the present moment. This activity also promotes the art of mindfulness because the mind and the body work together at the moment. It helps to put the mind at ease from other worries that have been stuffing and pressuring in the brain. Expressive Art helps a person stay conscious, centered and focused, allowing the mind to relax and let the energy of the body take over in the art making process. At the moment of mindfulness, art making process can even stimulate thoughts and ideas at the subconscious level. The process can open up the senses in our body and helps the flow of energy. Channeling the energy into symbols, lines, shapes and colours. Many people who suffer from depression, sadness, pain and anxiety disorders find art making as a safe and practical tool to release their feelings, thoughts and emotions. This presentation includes slides showing images of paintings and explaining the feelings, emotions and transformation of energy from art making. The presentation also encourages participants to register for a workshop on Expressive Art (- a room to just being me).

Biography

Seeling Tan is an Artist and Art Educationalist who is specialized in working with children and young adults with learning differences. She is currently based in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia and provides intensive training for young artists diagnosed with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Down's syndrome. She is also a picture book maker, illustrator and author of three books “Discovering Serenity” (2009), “Sketches and Drawings around Orosei Sardinia” (2017) and “Expressive Art as therapy- an insight with special needs” (2018). She was with Horizon Expatriate School Malaysia as an Art Educator from 2001 to 2010. In 2011 she set up Tutti Art Club to promote the works of special needs artists providing a sustainable platform for many of her students who are now able to create bridges on their own to promote their work. Her passion in teaching also motivates her to volunteer at Chin Student Organization (CSO) Refugee School as art educator young children. She is actively involved in art exhibitions, talks and workshops on child psychology development through art.

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