

# Art Therapy For High Functioning Autism How To Get Started

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People who have high functioning autism can be taught at an early age to express themselves through different forms of therapy. In order to lead relatively normal lives, a high functioning autistic requires a certain level of social skills. The development of these skills can be accomplished through a number of therapies including play therapy, social skilled classes or groups, psychotherapy, social stories and expressive therapies.

One expressive therapy that has proven to be quite beneficial is art therapy. Art therapy can help an autistic develop social response by allowing them to express their emotions through art. This form of complimentary therapy may be an ideal way for an autistic to develop social skills.

What is art therapy? It is a therapy that involves using a number of various art materials such as paints, batik (a way to dye fabric), clay, etc. as a method of expressing thoughts or feelings through visual representation. Art therapy is based on psychological research and theory that art is naturally therapeutic. This therapy takes into account the behaviors, thoughts and feelings experienced by those with high functioning autism and other disorders.

Art therapy allows an individual to explore various issues including those that involve family, relationships, life change, loss, abuse and overall development. It may be carried out as a group process or individual counsel. The artwork that is created during therapy may be of spontaneous creations or based on suggestion provided by a therapist.

What are the benefits of art therapy? Art therapy has many benefits, especially for an autistic because it doesn't rely on verbal or language skills, is a fun activity, and does not require any art skill or experience. The following is a list of other benefits -

- Increases self awareness
- Develops social skills
- Changes behaviors
- Develops problem solving strategies
- Allows an individual to engage in creative thinking in a safe environment
- Allows an individual to focus solely on the activity at hand and shut out other thoughts that may be intrusive.

Keep in mind that all of the above positive outcomes of art therapy may not be experienced by someone with high functioning autism. Remember, not every autistic functions the same.

Where can I find an art therapist and what should I look for? If an individual with high functioning autism is interested in art therapy, an art therapist will need to be sought out. An art therapist can practice in a number of environments, but can usually be found in psychiatric or general hospitals. They may work in oncology or geriatric wards, schools, rehabilitation centers, and counseling centers. The best way for you to find an art therapist locally, is to speak to your child's health care provider or call your hospital.

When choosing a therapist, keep the following in mind:

- Find out about their education background and where they received training
- Find out if they have previous experience with high functioning autism patients
- Ask what types of therapeutic approach do they use
- Ask what to expect during a lesson

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## About the Author

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