**Module 7: Building The Therapeutic Relationship**

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# Module Introduction

In this module, we will introduce you to what you need to know to practice art therapy in a professional setting. We will discuss how ethical considerations are integral in art therapy practice and their importance to protect not only you but also your clients. We’ll also explore the limits of what an art therapy practitioner can do.

We will also look at counseling skills for art therapy practitioners and how to incorporate them into practice. This includes learning how to be an effective listener, communicating effectively with clients, being analytical about their artwork and responses, and being empathetic towards each individual’s needs. You will then develop the confidence necessary for successful art therapy practice.

In this module, we will cover foundational topics like therapeutic obstinacy—how it can be avoided—as well as best practices for working with clients with different backgrounds or experiences than yourself. We’ll also go over common challenges that arise when practicing as an art therapy practitioner. By understanding these fundamentals of art therapy practice—as well as some theoretical concepts behind it—you’ll be on your way to becoming a competent professional practitioner.

## Module Objectives

By the end of this module, you’ll be able to:

* Act as a professional art therapy practitioner
* Master counseling skills to help your clients

# Act as a Professional Art Therapy Practitioner

Being an art therapy practitioner carries responsibility: it is about approaching others with the goal of enabling them to take a path of transformation, to "review" known patterns, often loaded with frustrations and wounds.

The art therapy practitioner approaches the other in what is truest and most vulnerable in them: their emotions. To become a professional art therapy practitioner, you need a good dose of empathy and above all humility, allowing both to take a step back and to maintain the connection while keeping a necessary personal balance with your clients.

## Ethical Considerations

In the context of art therapy, ethics refers to a set of principles and guidelines that govern the behavior and decision-making of art therapy practitioners in their professional practice. These principles aim to ensure that the rights, welfare, and autonomy of clients are protected, while also promoting the integrity and credibility of the profession.

Art therapy practitioners also have an ethical responsibility to provide safe, effective, and appropriate treatment to clients, and to continuously update their knowledge and skills through ongoing education and training. Additionally, it is important for art therapy practitioners to be aware of the laws and regulations that govern the profession, and to comply with these regulations in their practice.

Generally, art therapy practitioners base their decision-making on core values that uphold basic human rights. These values align with ethical principles that include:

### Confidentiality of Client Information

In terms of confidentiality, art therapy practitioners have an ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of their clients and to keep client information confidential. This includes ensuring that client information is not shared with anyone without the client's consent, except in cases where there is a risk of harm to the client or others.  
In terms of confidentiality, be sure to respect the following rules:

* Obtaining written informed consent from clients before beginning therapy, which should include information about how client information will be protected and shared.
* Keeping client records in a secure location, such as a locked cabinet or password-protected electronic file.
* Using code names or other identifiers instead of clients' real names when discussing client information with colleagues or supervisors.
* Being cautious when using digital technologies, such as email and video conferencing, to communicate with clients, as these may not be as secure as in-person communication.
* It is important to note that laws and regulations regarding confidentiality may vary by country and state, and it is the responsibility of the practitioner to be aware of and comply with these laws and regulations.

### Professional Boundaries

In terms of maintaining professional boundaries, art therapy practitioners have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the therapeutic relationship is maintained and not exploited. This includes avoiding dual relationships, such as becoming friends or romantically involved with clients, and ensuring that the therapeutic relationship is kept separate from any other personal or professional relationships.

* Avoiding socializing or communicating with clients outside of art therapy sessions.
* Avoiding any form of physical contact with clients other than a professional handshake.
* Being aware of one's own personal issues and seeking professional help if necessary to avoid transference and countertransference issues.
* Avoiding any form of gifts or favors from clients, and not accepting gifts or favors from clients.
* Not providing therapy to anyone with whom the practitioner has a close personal or professional relationship.
* Ending the therapeutic relationship if it is determined that the practitioner-client relationship has become detrimental to the client or the practitioner. For example, if the client or the art therapy practitioner find it hard to maintain professional boundaries, it is best to end the therapeutic process.
* Being aware of any laws and regulations that pertain to the maintenance of professional boundaries, such as those related to sexual misconduct in therapy.

### Cultural Proficiency

You have an ethical responsibility to provide inclusive, sensitive and non-judgmental care to clients from diverse backgrounds. This includes being aware of one's own biases and working to provide care that is respectful of and responsive to the unique cultural and individual needs of clients. To make sure you develop that work ethic, follow these instructions:

* Becoming knowledgeable about different cultural beliefs, values, and practices, and understanding how these may impact the therapeutic relationship.
* Being aware of one's own biases and working to minimize the impact of these biases on the therapeutic relationship.
* Being aware of and respectful of clients’ preferred pronouns, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
* Being sensitive to the specific needs of clients who may be experiencing discrimination or marginalization based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other factors.
* Being aware of and respectful of clients' religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, and incorporating these into the therapeutic process when appropriate.
* Being aware of and respectful of clients' age and developmental stage, and providing appropriate therapy for clients of different ages and developmental stages.
* Being aware of and respectful of clients' disability status, and providing appropriate therapy for clients with disabilities.
* Seeking supervision or consultation with a culturally proficient art therapy practitioner when needed.

It is important to note that cultural proficiency is an ongoing process of learning and self-reflection.

### Honesty and Integrity

Art therapy practitioners have an ethical responsibility to be honest and transparent in their communication with clients. Some specific steps that art therapy practitioners can take to maintain honesty and integrity include:

* Being transparent about their qualifications, training, and experience, and not misrepresenting their credentials or qualifications.
* Being honest about their limitations as art therapy practitioners and seeking supervision or referral when necessary. (You will learn about this later in the course).
* Being honest and transparent in their communication with clients, including providing clear and accurate information about the therapy process, the benefits of therapy, and the practitioner's role and responsibilities.
* Being honest and transparent in their billing and record-keeping practices, and avoiding any form of fraud or deception.
* Being honest and transparent in their professional relationships, including avoiding any form of deception or manipulation.

Honesty and integrity are essential to maintaining trust and credibility with clients, colleagues, and the public and that any violations of honesty and integrity can have serious consequences for the practitioner and the profession.

## The Limits of the Art Therapy Practitioner

A person who comes to art therapy is someone for whom "things are not going well", meaning they feel divided or split, and whenever one is divided, they are in pain. The art therapy practitioner finds himself to be in the middle of this attempt to heal and it may be difficult to find the right balance between being compassionate and empathetic towards the client while also maintaining a healthy therapeutic distance. On one hand, the practitioner needs to be able to connect with the client on an emotional level and understand their experiences in order to effectively help them. On the other hand, the practitioner needs to be able to keep a certain level of detachment in order to avoid becoming emotionally overwhelmed or enmeshed with the client's issues. It can be challenging for a practitioner to find this balance, as it requires a high degree of self-awareness and emotional regulation. Practitioners may also need to be mindful of their own boundaries and to set appropriate limits in order to protect themselves from burnout.

### Helping, not Healing

An art therapy practitioner can help a client by providing them with a creative outlet for their emotions and helping them to realize the true reasons behind their feelings. It is important to note, however, that while art therapy practitioners can provide assistance and guidance, they cannot heal clients.

When it comes to healing, there are many different factors at play that are not under the control of the practitioner. An art therapy practitioner can provide support and resources, but ultimately it is up to the client to make changes in order to achieve personal growth in order to reach wholehearted healing.

The notion that an art therapy practitioner cannot heal a client comes from understanding how art therapy works as a holistic modality. Art therapy practitioners facilitate clients’ expression of thoughts and feelings; they do not tell clients what their artwork should be or what aspects of their life need work – rather, clients must come up with this realization themselves through self-reflection. Art therapy practitioners may point out different aspects that appear within artwork but ultimately it is up to the client how they want to interpret themselves and use art as a tool for self-growth.

This type of exploration requires patience, trust, open communication between practitioner and client in order for any lasting change and healing to occur over time. As an art therapy practitioner, you’ll indeed have knowledge and skills, but you certainly don’t have superpowers. While the practitioner indeed has knowledge and skills, they do not have the power to make the other person change them against their will.

### Therapeutic Obstinacy

Therapeutic obstinacy refers to the concept of continuing treatment despite little or no evidence of its effectiveness. It is a situation where the art therapy practitioner continues treatment despite the fact that the client’s condition is not improving, or even getting worse. The professional may be motivated by a belief that the treatment is working, or that the client will get better if the treatment is continued. It is also a situation where the art therapy practitioner may feel a sense of responsibility for the client, and a desire to not abandon them.

It can be problematic for many reasons, for the client it may prolong unnecessary suffering, it may prolong the healing process and it may drain the client’s resources. It can also be problematic for the practitioner, it may lead to burnout, it may lead to a sense of frustration and it may lead to a sense of guilt. To avoid cases of therapeutic obstinacy, make sure to:

* Continuously assess the client's progress: An art therapy practitioner should regularly assess the client's progress and check if the treatment goals are being met. If the client is not showing any improvement or is not benefitting from the treatment, it may be necessary to reevaluate the treatment plan and consider alternative options.
* Be open to feedback from the client and other professionals involved in the treatment. This can help to identify if the treatment is not working and if a change in approach is needed.
* Continuously Reflect and Self-evaluate: An art therapy practitioner should continuously reflect on the work being done, the progress being made and the client's needs. Self-evaluation can help to identify if the practitioner is becoming too attached to the client's case, or if the practitioner’s personal biases are affecting the therapy.
* Consult with Peers or Supervisors: A professional should consult with peers and supervisors regularly. These people can provide different perspectives on the case and can help to identify if the professional is becoming too attached to the client's case, or if the art therapy practitioner’s personal biases are affecting the therapy.
* Keep case notes: An art therapy practitioner should maintain accurate and detailed case notes. This can provide a good reference point for the practitioner to evaluate the progress of the client and the progress of the therapy.
* Be aware of your own limitations: An art therapy practitioner should be aware of their own limitations. If the practitioner is not comfortable treating certain conditions, it is essential to refer the client to a specialist who can better help them.

As a responsible art therapy practitioner, it is crucial to avoid cases of therapeutic obstinacy. You should be humble enough to assess when a client no longer needs your help. That’s why it’s important to have a clear treatment plan and to regularly evaluate the client’s progress. If the client’s condition is not improving, the art therapy practitioner should consider alternative treatment options, or refer the client to another health professional. They should also be open to the client’s perspective and preferences, and respect their autonomy. The practitioner should also be aware of their own biases and limitations and seek supervision and consultation when necessary.

## Summary of Key Points

* In the context of art therapy, ethics refers to a set of principles and guidelines that govern the behavior and decision-making of art therapy practitioners in their professional practice.
* In terms of confidentiality, art therapy practitioners have an ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of their clients and to keep client information confidential. Be sure to:   
  Obtain written informed consent from clients before beginning therapy   
  Keep client records in a secure location   
  Using code names or other identifiers instead of clients' real names when discussing with colleagues or supervisors.  
  Being cautious when using digital technologies  
  It is important to note that laws and regulations regarding confidentiality may vary by country and state, and it is the responsibility of the practitioner to be aware of and comply with these laws and regulations.
* In terms of maintaining professional boundaries, art therapy practitioners have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the therapeutic relationship is maintained and not exploited. Be sure to: avoid socializing outside of therapy, avoid any form of physical contact with clients, be aware of your own personal issues, avoid any form of gifts or favors from clients. Do not provide therapy to anyone with whom the client has a close personal or professional relationship and make sure to end the therapeutic relationship if it is determined that the practitioner-client relationship has become detrimental.
* You have an ethical responsibility to provide inclusive, sensitive and non-judgmental care to clients from diverse backgrounds. This includes being aware of one's own biases and working to provide care that is respectful of and responsive to the unique cultural and individual needs of clients.
* Art therapy practitioners have an ethical responsibility to be honest and transparent in their communication with clients.
* An art therapy practitioner can help a client by providing them with a creative outlet for their emotions and helping them to realize the true reasons behind their feelings. It is important to note, however, that while art therapy practitioners can provide assistance and guidance, they cannot heal clients.
* While the practitioner indeed has knowledge and skills, they do not have the power to make the other person clear-sighted or to change them against their will.
* Therapeutic obstinacy refers to the concept of continuing treatment despite little or no evidence of its effectiveness.
* As a responsible art therapy practitioner, it is crucial to avoid cases of therapeutic obstinacy.

## Exercise: Cultural Considerations in Art Therapy

You’re on the path to becoming an art therapy practitioner. You now know how you should behave ethically when you have a client in front of you. For this exercise, let’s take the case of a client coming to your office for the first time.

### Part 1: Cultural Considerations

The client, a Chinese woman, walks into the art therapy session with a sense of hesitation and uncertainty. She is dressed in conservative clothing and carries herself with a sense of restraint. As she sits down, she introduces herself as Mei, a recent immigrant to the country who is currently facing discrimination from people outside of her community. She explains that she has come to the art therapy session because she feels like she doesn't deserve the racism she is experiencing and that it is affecting her mental health. Mei shares that she has been feeling isolated, anxious, and depressed since the discrimination began. She has been struggling to find a sense of belonging in her new community and is struggling to cope with the constant feelings of rejection and marginalization. Mei speaks softly, her voice trembling at times as she shares her experiences. She explains that she feels like she doesn't fit in and that she doesn't belong in the country. Mei shares that she has been experiencing difficulty sleeping, and has lost her appetite, and that her mood has been low. As she speaks, Mei's eyes well up with tears and she takes a moment to compose herself. She expresses that she hopes that the art therapy session will help her to find a way to cope with the discrimination and help her to find a sense of belonging in her new community.

#### Materials:

* A pen or a pencil
* A sheet of paper
* A highlighter

#### Instructions:

* Read the text presenting Mei several times if needed. Then, with your highlighter in hand, determine the parts where you have indications of Mei’s particular cultural background, whether in how she is dressed or in the way she talks, or in her experience of racism.
* When you have a global view of the cultural specificities of Mei, take a moment to reflect on the possible questions you’ll ask her to understand things better.
* The goal here is to offer Mei the best possible care taking into account her Chinese identity. In order to do so, you need to have a good understanding of who she really is.
* Make a list of all the possible questions you could ask Mei to get to know her.
* Beware of the ethical considerations that you have to keep in mind when working with a client who is from a different cultural or religious background.

It is important for an art therapy practitioner to take into consideration a client from a culturally different background because cultural background can play a significant role in shaping a person's experiences, beliefs, and values. Cultural competence can help to build trust and rapport with the client, which is essential for effective therapy. Practitioners who are aware of and respectful of a client's cultural background can create a safe and inclusive space for the client to explore their thoughts and feelings, which can ultimately lead to better therapeutic outcomes.

It also helps to understand how cultural values and beliefs shape the client’s understanding of their problem, and how they might want to deal with it. This understanding can help the practitioner to develop a treatment approach that is sensitive to the client’s culture, and to avoid any cultural misunderstandings or insensitivities that could lead to resistance or frustration.

### Part 2: Art Therapy And Cultural Considerations

#### Materials:

* A blank sheet of paper or a canva
* Art materials of your own choice

#### Instructions:

* Take a few minutes to reflect on the principle of cultural proficiency within art therapy.
* Create an artwork about your understanding of the principle and how it relates to the therapeutic relationship.
* Once finished, take time to reflect on your artwork and what it represents to you.

This exercise will help you understand the importance of ethical considerations in art therapy which is an important ethical principle, in a creative and reflective manner. You’ll develop critical thinking skills and ability to navigate ethical dilemmas in the therapeutic relationship through the use of art.

# Counseling Skills for Art Therapy

Counseling is a type of mental health support wherein an individual works with a professional art therapy practitioner to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The goals of counseling vary from client to client, depending on their needs but often include :

* Gaining insight into their personal struggles,
* Developing healthier coping mechanisms,
* Finding effective solutions to problems,
* Overcoming traumatic experiences,
* Improving relationships, and managing stress and anxiety.

Counseling is based on the premise that every individual has an inherent capacity to discover solutions to their own struggles if they receive the right kind of support. The practitioner is there to provide support by creating a safe space for honest dialogue free of judgment that encourages exploration of emotional issues at both conscious and unconscious levels. Through this process clients can gain valuable insight into their feelings and reactions which can help them make positive changes in their life.

Counseling gives people the opportunity to be heard without judgment or criticism which often allows them to experience relief from emotional distress. It also allows clients the opportunity to explore certain topics more deeply which can open up new perspectives about themselves or their relationships with others. Additionally, it offers individuals the chance to connect emotionally with another person who is not personally involved in their life experience. This connection can often be healing and liberating in itself as it allows clients a chance to express themselves openly without fear of repercussions or negative reactions from those close to them.

Though the aim of counseling is ultimately self-empowerment, it does require patience and effort in order for it to be successful. The practitioner’s role is to provide guidance as well as empathy throughout the process; however, the client needs to be actively engaged with the process so that change occurs. By committing himself fully in therapy sessions, the client will go through positive changes that can manifest such as improved self-esteem, better problem solving skills, enhanced communication abilities, increased self-awareness and understanding of one's experiences, which all lead towards growth and improved wellbeing overall.

## How to Practice Counseling in Art Therapy

Counseling in the context of art therapy refers to the verbal and emotional support that a practitioner provides to their clients. It is an integral aspect of the art therapy process, as it allows clients to express their thoughts and feelings, gain insight into their emotions, and develop coping skills.

It often takes place through verbal discussion and reflection on the client's artwork and the therapeutic process. Art therapy practitioners may use various therapeutic techniques to help clients process their emotions, understand the meaning behind their artwork, and develop strategies for coping with difficult situations.

Art therapy practitioners should integrate counseling with the creative process in order to support clients in addressing their emotional and mental health issues. Through counseling, clients are able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their experiences, which can lead to positive changes and personal growth. Integrating counseling in the art therapy process involves several key steps:

### Step 1. The Assessment:

The art therapy practitioner should start by assessing the client's needs, goals, and concerns. This can be done through verbal communication, observation, and examination of the client's artwork. This section will be developed in detail in module 8: How To Prepare and Conduct an Art Therapy Intervention.

### Step 2. Setting the therapeutic goals:

After assessing the client, the art therapy practitioner should establish specific therapeutic goals with the client. This will help the art therapy practitioner to focus on specific areas of concern and track progress throughout the therapy process. Again, you will learn exactly how to set goals in the course of the next module.

### Step 3. Encouraging self-expression:

The art therapy practitioner should create a safe and supportive environment for the client to express themselves through art. The practitioner should provide different materials, such as paint, clay, or collage, and encourage the client to explore different forms of self-expression. In order to do that, there are several elements to take into consideration:

* Establishing a safe and non-judgmental environment: Creating a physical space that is comfortable and conducive to expression, as well as verbally communicating to the client that their thoughts, feelings and expressions are accepted and respected. The client can express their feelings without fear of judgment or ridicule. Don’t judge, don’t criticize. Respect everything your client produces and everything your client has to say. Take him seriously.
* Encouraging exploration: Providing a variety of art materials and encouraging the client to experiment with different mediums, colors, and techniques.
* Providing guidance and structure: This can involve offering specific prompts or themes for the client to explore, or providing guidelines for the art-making process such as time limits or materials to be used.
* Facilitating the client's own process: Allowing the client to lead the art-making process and not imposing your own ideas or interpretations on their work.
* Reflecting on the client's work: Facilitating dialogue about the client's artwork and encouraging them to explore their own thoughts and feelings about their work.
* Encourage the client to express themselves in any form they choose, whether through paint, sculpture, music, or any other medium that resonates with them.

### Step 4. Facilitating verbal communication:

As the client creates artwork, the practitioner should facilitate verbal communication by asking open-ended questions, encouraging the client to reflect on their artwork, and providing feedback.

### Step 5. Integrating specific counseling therapies:

The art therapy practitioner should integrate counseling therapies, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy to help the client process and make sense of their emotions and thoughts related to the artwork.

#### Cognitive-behavioral therapy:

Cognitive-behavioral therapy or CBT is a type of therapy that focuses on the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The goal of CBT is to help individuals identify and change negative patterns of thinking and behavior, in order to improve their emotional well-being and functioning.

CBT is based on the idea that our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected and that negative patterns in one area can affect the others. For example, if an individual has a negative thought about themselves such as "I am not good enough," this can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of motivation, which can in turn lead to behaviors that reinforce this negative thought pattern.

The practitioner works with the client to identify these negative thought patterns, called cognitive distortions, and to challenge and replace them with more realistic and positive thoughts. The practitioner will also teach the client coping skills and other strategies to help them manage their emotions and behaviors.

CBT is a structured and goal-oriented approach, and therapy sessions are typically focused on specific issues or problems. CBT is an evidence-based treatment and has been found to be effective in treating a wide range of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and eating disorders.

When integrated into art therapy, CBT can help clients process and make sense of their emotions and thoughts related to the artwork. It can also help clients understand and change the negative thoughts and behaviors that may be hindering their ability to fully engage in the therapeutic process and benefit from it.

**How to identify negative thought patterns?**

In cognitive-behavioral therapy, identifying negative thought patterns is an important step in helping clients change their negative beliefs and behaviors. Negative thought patterns are often automatic and unconscious, so it can take some effort to become aware of them. Here are some ways to help identify negative thought patterns:

* Keep a thought diary: Encourage clients to keep a diary of their thoughts throughout the day, noting the time, situation, and the thoughts that came to mind. This can help clients become more aware of their automatic thoughts and patterns.
* Use the ABC model: The founder of this model is an eminent American psychologist, Albert ELLIS. The acronym stands for Activating event, Belief, and Consequence. The ABC model is a CBT tool that helps clients identify the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The client records an Activating event, the Belief they have about the event, and the Consequence of the belief. The model works by breaking down the thought process that leads to negative emotions and behavior.
* Activating event: This is the specific situation or event that triggers a negative emotion. For example, a person may feel angry or upset when they are criticized by a coworker.
* Belief: The belief is the person's thoughts and attitudes about the activating event. For example, a person may believe that they are not good enough or that they are being treated unfairly.
* Consequence: The consequence is the emotional and behavioral response to the belief. In the example above, the person may experience anger or frustration and may lash out at the coworker.

By identifying the activating event, belief, and consequence, the individual can begin to challenge their negative thoughts and attitudes. The art therapy practitioner can then help the client to develop more balanced, positive thought patterns and coping mechanisms to deal with similar situations in the future.

* Pay attention to emotions: Negative thoughts often lead to negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or anxiety. Encourage clients to pay attention to their emotions and try to identify the thoughts that might be causing them.

Clients can identify when a negative emotion is being felt by paying attention to their physical sensations, thoughts, and behaviors. Physical sensations such as increased heart rate, tightness in the chest, or butterflies in the stomach may indicate a negative emotion. Negative thoughts such as self-doubt, criticism, or fear can also be a sign of a negative emotion.

Behaviors such as avoidance, aggression, or withdrawal can also indicate the presence of a negative emotion. It's important to remember that emotions can often be complex and layered, and it may take some time and exploration for a client to fully understand and identify their emotions. Tell your clients to be patient and that with time and practice, they’ll know how to identify these emotions.

* Identify cognitive distortions: CBT identifies a number of cognitive distortions or negative thinking styles such as all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, and personalization.

Another way to help clients identify cognitive distortions is by teaching them to challenge and question their thoughts. Clients can be taught to ask themselves questions such as “Is this thought rational or logical?”, “What is the evidence for and against this thought?”, and “What are some other ways of looking at this situation?”

Tell clients to record their thoughts and emotions in a journal or diary, and then later reflect on them in therapy sessions. This helps clients become more aware of their thoughts and patterns of thinking, and can also be used to challenge and change negative thoughts.

The art therapy practitioner can provide feedback and guidance to clients on how to challenge and change negative thoughts, and encourage clients to practice these skills in their daily lives. This will help them develop the ability to identify and change negative thought patterns on their own.

**How to stop the negative thought patterns?**

The practitioner can use various techniques to help the client stop negative thinking patterns. Some of these techniques include:

* Reframing: It involves helping the client to reframe their negative thoughts into more positive or realistic thoughts.
* Challenging the thoughts: Questioning the evidence for and against the negative thought, and helping the client to identify any cognitive distortions that may be present.
* Mindfulness: Teaching the client to become more aware of their thoughts and emotions, and to observe them without judgment.
* Encourage the client to practice self-compassion, remind them that negative thoughts are common and that everyone has them.

It's important for the art therapy practitioner to regularly check in with the client to ensure that the techniques are effective and to make any necessary adjustments.

### Step 6. Evaluating progress:

The practitioner should regularly evaluate progress and adjust the therapy process as needed to ensure that the client is achieving their therapeutic goals.   
An art therapy practitioner can evaluate progress within an art therapy intervention by using a variety of methods.

**How to evaluate progress?**

* One approach is to establish specific goals or objectives for the therapy at the beginning of the intervention and then regularly assess progress towards those goals throughout the process. For example, if the goal is to improve self-esteem, the practitioner may ask the client to rate their self-esteem on a scale before and after each session or at the end of the intervention.
* Another way to evaluate progress is to analyze the artwork produced by the client during the therapy sessions. The practitioner can look for changes in the themes, symbols, and techniques used in the artwork over time, which may indicate changes in the client's emotional and psychological state.
* The art therapy practitioner can also use qualitative methods, such as interviews or journaling, to gather feedback from the client about their experiences during the therapy and how they feel about their progress.
* It's important to note that evaluating progress in art therapy can be complex and may require a combination of methods and perspectives. The art therapy practitioner should work with the client to determine which methods are most appropriate for their specific needs and goals.

## Important Counseling Skills and Traits for Art Therapy Practitioners

There are certain counseling skills and traits that are essential for effective art therapy practitioners. These skills and traits will serve you very well as an art therapy practitioner. Not only will it help make all parties in the communication more receptive and open, they will build trust and rapport, ensuring that the communication is respectful, clear, and accurate.

The following is a list of the most important skills a practitioner should have and how you can develop them:

### Effective Listening

Effective listening is a critical skill for art therapy practitioners, as it allows them to fully understand and empathize with the client's thoughts and feelings. This includes not only paying attention to the words being spoken, but also to nonverbal cues such as body language and tone of voice.

To practice effective listening, the art therapy practitioner should actively engage with the client by maintaining eye contact, nodding, and asking open-ended questions to encourage further discussion. They should also avoid interrupting the client and instead allow them to speak without interruption.

It's also important for the practitioner to be mindful of their own thoughts and feelings, as it can be easy to become distracted or form judgments that may affect the therapeutic relationship.

Another important aspect of effective listening is to reflect on what the client says. This helps the client to feel heard and understood, it also enables the practitioner to gain more insight into the client's thoughts and feelings.

In addition to these active listening skills, it's also essential for art therapy practitioners to have a strong sense of empathy, the ability to think creatively and critically, and to be able to communicate effectively with their clients.

### Being a Good Communicator

Being a good communicator is an essential skill for art therapy practitioners. It is important to be able to effectively communicate with clients in order to build trust and establish a therapeutic relationship. Good communication skills can also help to ensure that clients feel heard and understood, which is crucial for their healing and growth.

An important aspect of good communication is the ability to express oneself clearly and effectively. This includes being able to articulate one's own thoughts and feelings, as well as being able to explain complex concepts in a way that is easy for clients to understand. Art therapy practitioners should also be able to adapt their communication style to suit the needs of different clients, such as those from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Art therapy practitioners should be able to use their communication skills to set boundaries, manage conflicts, and address any ethical concerns that may arise. This includes being able to communicate effectively with other healthcare professionals and stakeholders, as well as being able to communicate professionally and respectfully with clients.

### Being Analytical

Being analytical as an art therapy practitioner is an important aspect of the therapeutic process. It involves the ability to observe, interpret, and understand the artwork and the emotions and thoughts that are being expressed through it. This skill allows the art therapy practitioner to understand the client's inner world and to make connections between the artwork and the client's experiences and emotions. To be analytical, the art therapy practitioner should have a good understanding of art, symbolism, and different art forms. They should also be familiar with different theories of art and psychotherapy, such as psychoanalytic, humanistic, and cognitive-behavioral theories.

In order to develop this skill, the art therapy practitioner should engage in ongoing professional development, such as attending workshops and conferences, reading relevant literature, and participating in supervision and peer consultation. They should also practice analyzing their own artwork and the artwork of others.

It's also important to remember that the art therapy practitioner should not be the only one analyzing the artwork, but instead should encourage the client to reflect on their own artwork and the emotions and thoughts that it expresses. This can be done through reflective questions, such as "What were you feeling when you created this artwork?" or "What does this image represent to you?" This helps the client to develop their own understanding of the artwork and to take ownership of the therapeutic process.

### Being Empathic

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It is a crucial skill for art therapy practitioners as it allows them to connect with their clients on a deep emotional level, which is necessary for the therapeutic process. To be empathic, an art therapy practitioner should try to put themselves in the client's shoes and imagine what it would be like to experience their emotions and thoughts. Additionally, art therapy practitioners should be able to validate their clients' feelings and experiences, and avoid judging or dismissing them.

### Counseling Techniques

Encouragers, paraphrasing, and summarizing are all counseling techniques that are used to help clients feel heard and understood, and to help them process their thoughts and emotions. Encouragers are verbal or nonverbal expressions of support, such as nodding or saying "I hear you." Paraphrasing is the process of restating what the client has said, in your own words, to ensure that you understand what they are saying. Summarizing is the process of condensing the main points of a conversation into a short statement, to help the client see how their thoughts and feelings are connected.

#### Encouragers

Encouragers are a type of counseling technique that are used to help clients feel understood and validated in their thoughts and feelings. This technique can be used in art therapy to help clients feel seen and heard, and to build a sense of trust and connection with the practitioner. Encouragers can take many forms, including verbal statements, facial expressions, and gestures. Some examples of encouragers that an art therapy practitioner might use include:

* "I can hear how much that means to you."
* "That must have been really difficult for you."
* "I can see how that would make you feel that way."
* "I can imagine how hard that was for you."
* "You've been through a lot."

It is important for the art therapy practitioner to use encouragers in an authentic and genuine way, and to tailor them to the individual client and their unique needs. Encouragers can be used in various stages of the art therapy process, from the initial assessment to the final stages of closure, to help clients feel heard and valued throughout the process.

#### Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a counseling technique that involves restating what the client has said in the practitioner's own words. This technique helps the practitioner to better understand the client's thoughts and feelings, and it also helps the client to feel heard and understood.

It is important for the practitioner to use their own words to paraphrase, rather than repeating the client's words verbatim, as this can come across as insincere or dismissive.

Additionally, paraphrasing can be used to help the client to clarify their thoughts or to express themselves more clearly. It can also be used as a way to help the client to identify patterns or themes in their thoughts and feelings.

#### Summarizing

Summarizing is a counseling technique that involves the art therapy practitioner condensing and simplifying the main points or themes discussed by the client during the art therapy session. This technique is used to help the client understand their thoughts and emotions more clearly, and to make connections between different ideas. It is also used to help the client identify patterns in their thoughts and behaviors, and to gain a better understanding of the underlying issues that may be contributing to their difficulties.

To use this technique, the art therapy practitioner might ask the client to summarize what they have said during the session, or they might summarize the client's statements themselves, being careful to use the client's own words and to maintain the client's perspective.

Additionally, the art therapy practitioner might also use summarizing to help the client to see the progress they have made throughout the art therapy process. This technique is used to help the client to focus on their strengths and achievements, rather than their difficulties and failures, which is an important part of maintaining motivation and engagement in the therapy process.

## The Artwork as Counseling Material

At this point, you may be wondering how the counseling part of art therapy and the actual artwork come together to form an effective art therapy session.

The link between the artwork of the client and the counseling is that the artwork can be used as a tool for self-expression and communication. The artwork can also be used as a means to explore and understand the client's emotions, thoughts, and experiences. Through the process of creating art, the client gains insight into their inner self and identifies patterns of behavior and thought that may be contributing to their current difficulties.

Analysis and interpretation of artwork (covered in Module 4) will be used by the practitioner to engage and counsel the client.

The art therapy practitioner can then use counseling techniques to help the client process and make sense of these insights, and work on making positive changes in their life. Additionally, the artwork itself can serve as a visual representation of the client's progress and can be used to track changes over time. The artwork is an integral part of the art therapy process and it must be used to enhance and support the counseling work.

The artwork serves as a visual representation of the client's inner world, which the practitioner can use to gain a deeper understanding of the client's experiences and to guide the counseling process.

## Summary of Key Points

* Counseling is a type of mental health support wherein an individual works with a professional art therapy practitioner to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
* It often takes place through verbal discussion and reflection on the client's artwork and the therapeutic process.
* Integrating counseling in the art therapy process involves several key steps: the assessment, setting goals for the therapeutic intervention, encouraging self-expression, facilitating verbal communication, integrate counseling therapies like cognitive-behavioral therapy called CBT and finally evaluating progress.
* There are certain counseling skills and traits that are essential for effective art therapy practitioners: effective listening, being a good communicator, being analytical, and being empathic.
* Encouragers, paraphrasing, and summarizing are all counseling techniques that are used to help clients feel heard and understood, and to help them process their thoughts and emotions.
* Encouragers are a type of counseling technique that are used to help clients feel understood and validated in their thoughts and feelings. This technique can be used in art therapy to help clients feel seen and heard, and to build a sense of trust and connection with the practitioner.
* Paraphrasing is a counseling technique that involves restating what the client has said in the practitioner's own words.
* Summarizing is a counseling technique that involves the art therapy practitioner condensing and simplifying the main points or themes discussed by the client during the art therapy session.
* The link between the artwork of the client and the counseling is that the artwork can be used as a tool for self-expression and communication.
* The artwork is analyzed and interpreted and used as the basis of engagement and counseling. Additionally, the artwork itself can serve as a visual representation of the client's progress and can be used to track changes over time.
* The artwork serves as a visual representation of the client's inner world.

## Exercise: Challenge Your Own Thoughts

If the art therapy practitioner wants to be in his rightful place in the helping relationship, it is necessary that he is capable of introspection and self-criticism, far from any moral judgment, but that he also has confidence in himself and his intuition. As you would expect your client to open-up and try to heal through counseling methods, you should be able to do the same for yourself.

The ABC exercise is a tool that helps individuals identify and challenge negative thought patterns by breaking them down into three parts:

A: The activating event or situation that triggers a negative emotion or thought.

B: The belief or thoughts that the individual holds about the event or situation.

C: The consequences or emotions that result from the belief or thought.

### Instructions:

1. To complete the exercise, start by identifying a specific negative thought or emotion that you have experienced recently. Next, you should write down the event or situation that triggered this thought or emotion (A). Then, you should write down your belief or thoughts about the event or situation (B). Finally, you should write down the consequences or emotions that resulted from this belief or thought (C).
2. Once you have completed the ABC exercise, you can then use CBT techniques such as cognitive restructuring and reframing to challenge and change your negative thoughts and beliefs. For example, you can ask yourself questions like "Is this thought or belief accurate? What is the evidence for and against it? How would I think or feel about this event or situation if I held a different belief? "
3. You could also share their ABC exercise with someone you trust and discuss it in order to get feedback and new perspectives.

This exercise can be repeated over a few times to help you become more aware of your negative thoughts and beliefs and to learn how to challenge and change them. This way, you’ll feel more confident presenting this method to your future clients dealing with negative thoughts because you’ll know exactly what it’s about and you know that it works.

# Module Conclusion

This module has helped us further understand what it takes to be an art therapy practitioner. Becoming a professional art therapy practitioner involves understanding ethical considerations, such as confidentiality of client information, professional boundaries, cultural proficiency, honesty and integrity. You also saw that there are limits to the art therapy practice and that you should absolutely avoid therapeutic obstinacy as it can be counter-productive.

We have also explored some key counseling skills and traits that are essential for any successful art therapy practitioner. These include but are not limited to: effective listening, being a good communicator, being analytical and empathetic.

These skills come together to create an environment in which meaningful insights can be uncovered through the medium of art. By gaining an understanding of these foundational components of the field, we can begin to take steps towards becoming a successful and respected art therapy practitioner.

It is important to remember that while art can provide comfort and healing, it is not capable of providing a cure or completely resolving issues on its own. The most effective art therapy practitioners possess excellent counseling skills as well as creativity and empathy – all of which will help them assist others in their journey towards growth and self-discovery.