**Module 8: How to Prepare and Conduct an Art Therapy Intervention**

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# Module Introduction

Welcome to the “How to Prepare and Conduct an Art Therapy Intervention” module of your course. You are now taking a crucial step in your journey to become an art therapy practitioner. This module will play a key role in the practice of your future profession. It is designed to help you get not only an overview of what a session looks like, but also what practical steps you must integrate into your practice the moment a client books an appointment with you.

In this module, we will go in-depth into the world of art therapy interventions. By the end of this module, you will have a clear understanding of how to prepare for and conduct an art therapy intervention that is tailored to meet the needs of your clients.

We will get into actually conducting an art therapy session from A to Z. We will cover everything from how to facilitate discussions related to artwork pieces and evaluate their progress throughout the process. You’ll learn how to create a safe and trusting environment for clients, helping them feel comfortable enough to express themselves through creative activities.

By understanding how to effectively prepare and conduct an art therapy intervention, you’ll be able to confidently provide high-quality services that best serve your client’s needs. And when it comes time for you to practice on your own, you can do so knowing that you have the proper tools needed for success.

## Module Objectives

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

* Prepare your first session with a client.
* Set goals for the art therapy intervention.
* Select appropriate materials and techniques.
* And conduct an art therapy session from A to Z.

# Your First Session with a Client

At the beginning of the very first session you have with a new client, you have to make sure to explain some facts concerning the art therapy practice. This will give you a professional attitude, reassure the client as to how you’ll use his dialogue and art work, and set a context for the intervention.

## Say the Right Things From the Start

Your goal is to establish a therapeutic relationship and set the stage for the art therapy process. Here are the important elements you have to explain your client:

* **Confidentiality:** explain to your client that the information they share in art therapy sessions is confidential, and that you, as an art therapy practitioner will not disclose this information to anyone else without the client's written consent. The art therapy practitioner will also explain the exceptions to confidentiality, such as when there is a risk of harm to self or others.
* **Professional boundaries:** you’ll have to explain to the client the importance of maintaining professional boundaries in the therapy relationship. This may include explaining that the practitioner is not a friend or a family member, and that the therapy relationship is different from other types of relationships.

Explain to the client that professional boundaries are in place to protect the client's confidentiality and privacy, as well as to create a safe and professional environment for the therapy work. You can discuss the types of boundaries that exist: physical boundaries to maintain appropriate distance during sessions, like not sitting too close to the client or touching them in any way that could be perceived as inappropriate; emotional boundaries to not become overly involved in the client's personal life or allowing their own personal feelings to interfere with the therapy work; and ethical boundaries like not becoming friends with the client outside of the therapy relationship.

* **Encourage open communication:** The art therapy practitioner can encourage the client to ask questions or raise concerns about boundaries at any time, and can encourage open and honest communication about any issues that may arise in the therapy relationship. The practitioner can also explain that they are committed to maintaining the integrity of the therapy relationship, and that they will always act in the client's best interests.
* **Role of the client:** the client needs to understand their role in the therapy process, including the importance of actively participating in the therapy sessions and engaging with the material and activities presented. The art therapy practitioner may also explain the importance of taking an active role in setting and working towards therapeutic goals.
* **Process of art therapy:** When explaining the process of art therapy to a client coming in for the first time, it is important to be clear and concise while also providing enough detail to help the client understand what to expect.

Begin by providing an overview of what art therapy is, including that it is a form of therapy that uses art-making as a means of expression and exploration. Explain that the art practitioner will guide the client in using art materials to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

Next, explain that the client does not need to have any prior art experience or skills to benefit from art therapy. The focus is on the process of creating, not the final product. The artwork doesn’t need to be beautiful or good because it doesn’t matter. Emphasize that the client will be encouraged to express themselves freely, without fear of criticism or evaluation.

It can be helpful to provide some examples of the types of activities that may be used in art therapy sessions, such as drawing, painting, collage, or sculpture. Let the client know that the practitioner will provide materials and guidance, but the client will ultimately decide what to create.

Make sure to also explain that the practitioner will use the art created in sessions to explore the client's thoughts, feelings and experiences.

It is important to let the client know that art therapy is a collaborative process and that they will work together with the practitioner to set goals and objectives for their sessions.  
To finish with the discussion of the art therapy process, you can explain how a typical art therapy session would unfold:

1. It would begin with the client and the practitioner discussing how the client is doing, talk about any concerns or issues that the client would like to address during that session.
2. The practitioner would then guide the client in selecting art materials and provide instructions for the art activity that will be done during that session.
3. The client will then have time to work on their art piece while the practitioner observes and offers support and guidance as needed. During this time, the practitioner will also be paying attention to the client's use of materials, the client's nonverbal communication, and the client’s overall process.
4. After the client has completed their art piece, the practitioner will then help the client to reflect on their experience and the art they have created. This reflection can involve discussing the client's thoughts, feelings, and emotions that arose during the art-making process. The practitioner will help the client to make connections between the art and their life experiences, and use this insight to help the client to make positive changes in their life.
5. It's important to note that art therapy sessions are client-centered, meaning that the client's needs and goals are the focus of the session, and the practitioner adapts their approach to best meet those needs.

Make sure to discuss all of these facts to every client that comes into your office for the first time. You may need to keep notes right besides you for the first sessions but with time, this will become second nature and you’ll have a clear idea of everything you need to say.

## Take Into Consideration the Client Population and their Needs

Each population group has unique needs and abilities that must be addressed in order for the therapy to be effective. Not taking into consideration the client's population can lead to a lack of understanding of the client's needs and experiences, which can result in a lack of progress in therapy or even a harmful experience for the client. Adapting the therapy to the client population helps to create a safe, inclusive and effective environment for the client to express themselves and work towards their therapeutic goals. You’ll learn everything you need to know concerning how to adapt art therapy interventions for different populations in module 9.

## Prepare the Environment of the Art Therapy Intervention

How often do you avoid going to certain places just because the environment doesn’t feel right? Because you are aiming to become an art therapy practitioner, you have to make sure you receive your clients in a proper space. Whether you choose to work from a private practice or within a hospital, here are the essential elements you have to respect.

### Safety

Ensuring that the therapy space is safe and free from potential hazards is essential. This may involve securing potentially dangerous materials, such as scissors or sharp tools, and ensuring that the space is well-lit and free from hazards. If you are to receive young children in your office, safety is particularly important. It goes the same for disabled people.

### Comfort

The therapy space should be comfortable for the client, with appropriate lighting, seating, and temperature. The practitioner may also want to consider providing blankets, pillows, or other comfort items as needed. Make sure there are several seats available if a client comes accompanied.

Allow the client to set up the session environment (arrange an art table, the supplies etc..) in a way that makes them feel comfortable and in control. Playing music that the client finds calming or soothing can also be a way to create a sense of control. Encourage the client to personalize the space, by allowing them to bring in items from home or decorate the space in a way that makes them feel comfortable. If your client is a child, you can let them have their favorite teddy, for example.

### Privacy

Having an art therapy space that is private and free from distractions can be important for some clients. This may involve selecting a room or location that is free from noise and interruptions, and providing the client with a sense of control over the environment. Facilitating a sense of control over the environment of the art therapy session can help the client to feel more comfortable and secure during the therapy sessions

### Adaptability

The therapy space should be adapted to the needs of the client and the goals of the therapy. This may involve having a range of materials and resources available, and being willing to make changes to the space as needed.

Preparing the proper environment for an art therapy intervention requires careful consideration and attention to detail. By considering factors such as safety, comfort, privacy, and adaptability, the art therapy practitioner can create a supportive and effective space for therapy.

## Summary of Key Points

* Your goal is to establish a therapeutic relationship and set the stage for the art therapy process. Here are the important elements you have to tell your client.
* Confidentiality: explain to your client that the information they share in art therapy sessions is confidential, and you will not divulge them unless there is a risk of harm to self or others.
* Professional boundaries: remind your client that there are physical, emotional and ethical boundaries to be respected.
* Role of the client: the client needs to understand their role in the therapy process, including the importance of actively participating in the therapy sessions and engaging with the material and activities presented.
* Process of art therapy: expose your client to the process of art therapy, including the ways in which art-making can be used to explore emotions, experiences, and behaviors.
* Because you are aiming to become an art therapy practitioner, you have to make sure you receive your clients in a proper space.
* Ensuring that the therapy space is safe and free from potential hazards is essential.
* The therapy space should be comfortable for the client, with appropriate lighting, seating, and temperature.
* Having an art therapy space that is private and free from distractions can be important for some clients.
* The therapy space should be adapted to the needs of the client and the goals of the therapy.
* You have to prepare the environment of the art therapy intervention making sure all these criteria are met: safety, comfort, privacy and adaptability.
* Each population group has unique needs and abilities that must be addressed in order for the therapy to be effective.

## Exercise: Meeting With Your First Client

It can be difficult to imagine yourself explaining the professional boundaries to your client the first time you meet him. In this role-playing exercise, the goal is to show you a way to inform your client of the professional boundaries without making it sound boring to him, and completely robotic to you.

### Materials - People to involve :

* A friend or relative playing the role of the client.
* A quiet, comfortable space with 2 seats.

### Instructions:

* Prepare the environment: create a space where your clients can feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment; arrange chairs so that everyone has enough space; light a candle or play soothing music if appropriate.

Your client gets into your office. You welcome him.

Client: Hello. So, I'm new to art therapy. I like arts and I know art therapy can help me cope with my problems and I wanted to try it. But I'm not sure what to expect from art therapy.

Practitioner: It's nice to meet you. Art therapy is a form of therapy that uses creative expression, such as drawing or painting, as a way to explore and process emotions and experiences. It can be a helpful tool for self-discovery and personal growth.

Client: Okay, that makes sense. I've never done anything like this before.

Practitioner: That's completely normal. Many people are unsure of what to expect when they start art therapy. It's important to know that I am here to support you and help you feel comfortable in the therapy process.

Client: Alright, thanks. I'm a little nervous.

Practitioner: It's completely normal to feel nervous when trying something new. I want to make sure you feel safe and supported during our sessions. That's why it's important for me to explain how we will work together.

Client: What do you mean?

Practitioner: There are guidelines that help create a safe and professional environment for the therapy work. They help protect your confidentiality and privacy, and they allow us to focus on your needs in the therapy relationship. And I want to assure you that I am committed to maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of our work together. I will never share any information about you or our sessions with anyone else without your express permission.

Client: Okay, I understand.

Practitioner: Another important thing is that we must make sure to maintain appropriate distance during sessions and not touch in any way that could be perceived as inappropriate. These are all part of what we call professional boundaries. There are also emotional boundaries, which involve not becoming overly involved in your personal life or allowing my own personal feelings to interfere with the therapy work. And there are ethical boundaries, like not becoming friends with you outside of the therapy relationship.

Client: That makes sense.

Practitioner: I'm glad you understand. It's important for us to have open communication about boundaries, and I encourage you to ask questions or raise any concerns you may have about them at any time. I am committed to maintaining the integrity of the therapy relationship and always acting in your best interests. Do you have any questions about what I've explained so far?

Client: No, thank you for that. It helped me a lot to picture what our relationship will be like.

Practitioner: Amazing, now let’s move on.

Role play is a powerful learning tool that allows individuals to practice and develop new skills and knowledge. It allows learners to try out different approaches, make mistakes, and learn from their mistakes without real-world consequences. Role play also allows learners to understand and practice appropriate behaviors and responses in a given situation, as well as to consider and reflect on the thoughts and feelings of others. Role play will build confidence and improve communication skills, as it allows you to practice speaking and interacting with a potential future client.

# Set Goals for the Art Therapy Intervention

Achieving clear goals is crucial in your work as an art therapy practitioner as it will guide your actions. Setting goals should be done in the very first session with your client. Goals are what will allow your client to know what he is here for and how your intervention will eventually have a positive impact on his life and solve his specific problems.

It will also increase the client's motivation to participate in the art therapy intervention. They’ll have the goals in mind and they will visualize them. This simple visualization exercise will play a big part in their recovery. When you picture yourself getting better, you train your brain to accept that reality.

## Identify the Needs of the Client

The first step in setting goals for an art therapy intervention is to identify the needs of the client. This may be accomplished through an active dialog with the client, using prompts to go deeper and reflective questions to clarify and confirm. Copious notes should be taken. The practitioner will analyze these notes after the session to create a treatment plan.

### Conduct an Initial Assessment

An initial assessment is a process that is used to gather information about the client and their needs at the start of an art therapy intervention. The purpose of an initial assessment is to help the art therapy practitioner gain a better understanding of the client's physical, emotional, and mental health needs, as well as their social and cultural backgrounds.

Before anything, it is important for the practitioner to be aware that some clients may be more open to discussing certain topics than others, and the practitioner should respect the client's boundaries and comfort level. It is also important for the practitioner to allow the client to guide the conversation and to follow their lead in terms of what they would like to discuss.

1. What brings you to art therapy today?
2. What particular problem that is affecting your life you want to solve through art therapy?
3. For how long did you have these problems?
4. How/ Why did they start?
5. What solutions have you tried before thinking of art therapy?
6. Are you receiving medical care for that particular problem? If yes, by who/ where/ for how long now?
7. How do you hope art therapy will help you?
8. What are your strengths and challenges?
9. How do you cope with stress and difficult emotions?
10. What are your hobbies and interests outside of art therapy?
11. How do you typically spend your time?
12. What is important to you?
13. How do you see yourself and your life right now?
14. How do you see yourself in 5 years?
15. How do you think art therapy can support you in achieving your goals?
16. Can you tell me about your physical health and any medical conditions or treatments you are currently receiving?
17. How do you typically manage your emotions and mental health?
18. Have you experienced any traumatic events or significant stressors in your life?
19. Can you tell me about your family and social support system?
20. How do you identify culturally and how do you think your cultural background may impact your experience in art therapy?
21. Are you sensitive to art?
22. What is your favorite art?
23. How do you feel when you listen to music?
24. What do you feel in front of a work of art?
25. What is your favorite movie?
26. What are your favorite colors?

Adapt these questions to the person in front of you. If the client doesn’t want to elaborate on a certain point, don’t pressure him. If he leads the conversation in another direction than the one set by your question, then let him talk as well. If the client needs to say something then it means it is important and it should be taken into consideration.

### Seeking Input from Health Professionals

To identify the needs of the client, you can work in collaboration with other professionals, such as doctors, nurses, social workers, or counselors. You’ll thus gain a more comprehensive understanding of the client's issues and needs. Here is how you can proceed:

1. Obtain consent from the client: Before contacting any other health professionals, the practitioner should make sure that the client has given their consent for the practitioner to do so. Written consent from clients is necessary to share information with other healthcare providers in order to work together on the client's treatment.
2. Identify the relevant professionals: The art therapy practitioner should determine which health professionals are already involved in the client's care and how they can be contacted. This may include the client's primary care physician, mental health practitioner, or other specialists.
3. Reach out to the professionals: The art therapy practitioner can contact the other health professionals through phone, email, or in person, depending on the preference of the professional and the client. It may be helpful to introduce oneself and explain the role of art therapy in the client's treatment.
4. Coordinate care: The art therapy practitioner should work with the other health professionals to coordinate the client's treatment plan and ensure that all aspects of the client's care are addressed. This may involve sharing progress updates, discussing treatment goals, and collaborating on interventions.

Don’t ever neglect an initial assessment which can be achieved thanks to a dialogue with the client and from gaining insight from other health professionals. Both are important steps in the process of planning and conducting an art therapy intervention.

## Determine the Specific Goals of the Intervention

You should have a good understanding of what the client expects from your intervention after your dialogue with him and after getting feedback from other health professionals.

Most of the time, your client will be very straightforward about their goals and what they want to achieve. For example, a client may want to better manage their emotions and reduce negative emotional states, such as anger, sadness, or anxiety. Or maybe the client may want to reduce the severity of their mental health symptoms, such as depression, or trauma-related symptoms. In module 9, you’ll learn how to adapt art therapy interventions taking into account the population and its specific issues.

### Guidelines to follow to determine the goals of an art-therapy intervention

Identify themes: During the initial assessment, the practitioner should look for themes in the client's responses and use this information to identify potential therapeutic goals. Look out for stories and ideas that the client repeats or focuses on. Observe and make notes about body language and evidence of discomfort or pleasure. Clarify your understanding as you proceed to ensure that you accurately capture information that will inform your treatment approach.

Pay attention to repeated words and phrases: When listening to the client's dialogue, the practitioner should pay attention to any words or phrases that are repeated frequently. They may indicate a theme or issue that is particularly important to the client.

Notice body language and nonverbal cues: The practitioner should also pay attention to the client's body language and nonverbal cues. These cues can provide additional information about the client's thoughts and feelings, and may help the practitioner identify themes for therapeutic focus.

Ask clarifying questions: If the practitioner is unsure about a theme that has emerged in the client's dialogue, they can ask clarifying questions to get a better understanding of the issue. For example, the practitioner might ask the client to elaborate on a particular topic or to provide examples of specific situations.

Reflect back to the client: After the client has finished speaking, the practitioner can reflect back to the client what they have heard and to ensure clarity. This can help the practitioner confirm that they have correctly identified the themes in the client's dialogue and avoid misunderstandings.

Make the goals specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART):

Specific:

* Identify the specific area of concern or challenge that the client would like to address in therapy.
* Be clear and specific in defining the goals, using language that is precise and unambiguous.
* Use specific, concrete examples to illustrate the goals to make them precise for the client.
* An example of making a goal specific would be: the client will learn to identify and express their emotions through art, using a variety of materials and techniques.

Measurable:

* Use measurable language to define the goals, so that progress can be tracked and evaluated.
* For example, the client will identify at least two emotions in each art piece they create, and will use at least three different materials and techniques per session. If you think only 2 sessions are sufficient for the client to achieve his goals, tell them.

Achievable:

* Take into account the client's strengths and challenges when setting the goals.
* Set goals that are challenging but achievable for the client, given their resources and current level of functioning, and also their availability.
* Consider the client's motivation and commitment to achieving the goals when determining their feasibility.
* An example of making a goal achievable would be: the client will be provided with appropriate materials and techniques, and the therapist will provide guidance and support throughout the process.

Relevant:

* Ensure that the goals are relevant to the client's needs and priorities by talking with them.
* Communication is key. When you have set the goals of your intervention, make sure to discuss it with the client to make sure this is what he wants.
* Align the goals with the client's values. Again, communication will tell you if the client feels emotionally open to proceed with the goals set.
* An example of making the goal relevant would be: The client has expressed difficulty identifying and expressing their emotions, and has expressed interest in using art as a tool for self-expression.

Time-bound:

* Set a clear timeline for achieving the goals, with specific targets and benchmarks along the way.
* Set realistic deadlines for achieving the goals, taking into account the complexity and duration of the therapy process.
* Encourage the client to stay focused and motivated by reminding them of their progress towards the goals and the benefits of achieving them.

Determining the goals and objective of the intervention is a collaboration between the art therapy practitioner and the client. The practitioner should involve the client in the goal-setting process. This can help to ensure that the goals are meaningful and relevant to the client, and can increase the likelihood that the client will be motivated to work towards achieving them.

Make sure to review and revise the goals as needed throughout the course of the intervention. You’ll learn about how to do that in the section called Conduct An Art Therapy Section. This can help to ensure that the goals remain relevant and that the client is making progress towards achieving them. Under exceptional circumstances, goals might change during the course of an intervention. An event might happen to the client between two sessions, then you’ll have to adapt the goals to help them to the best of your ability.

## Summary of Key Points

* Process of art therapy: expose your client to the process of art therapy, including the ways in which art-making can be used to explore emotions, experiences, and behaviors.
* Setting goals for the art therapy intervention is important to:   
  1. Provide focus and direction.  
  2. Increase motivation.  
  3. Facilitate assessments.  
  4. Guide the therapy process.
* An initial assessment is a process that is used to gather information about the client and their needs at the start of an art therapy intervention.
* It is important for the art therapy practitioner to be aware that some clients may be more open to discussing certain topics than others, and the art therapy practitioner should respect the client's boundaries and comfort level.
* To identify the needs of the client to then be able to assess the goals of an art therapy intervention, you can work in collaboration with other professionals, such as doctors, nurses, social workers, or counselors.
* Most of the time, your client will be very straightforward about their goals and what they want to achieve thanks to your help.
* The art therapy practitioner should look for themes in the client's responses and use this information to identify potential therapeutic goals.
* Make the goals specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

## Exercise: Set Goals for a Specific Problematic

### Materials:

* Highlighters

### Instructions:

* Here is a possible dialogue between a client consulting for the first time and an art therapy practitioner.
* Read the dialogue, several times if needed.
* Highlight the sentences where the client evokes a certain issue he is facing. Pay attention to repeated words and phrases. Try to determine the painful points of the client.
* Put the sentences together and read them several times.
* Determine the needs of the clients. Set the goals of the art therapy intervention.

Art therapy practitioner: So, what brings you to art therapy today?

Client: Well, I've been feeling really anxious and depressed lately. It's been affecting my work and my relationships with people. I've tried a few things like going to therapy and taking medication, but nothing has really helped. A friend of mine recommended art therapy, so I thought I would give it a try.

Practitioner: I see. And what particular problem are you hoping to solve through art therapy?

Client: I just want to feel less anxious and depressed. I want to be able to enjoy life again and have healthy relationships.

art therapy practitioner: How long have you been struggling with these problems?

Client: It's been about a year now. It started gradually and then just kept getting worse.

Practitioner: Do you have any idea why it started or what might be causing it?  
Client: I think it's a combination of things. My job is very stressful and I've been going through some personal issues as well.

Practitioner: Have you tried any other solutions before thinking of art therapy?

Client: Yes, like I mentioned, I've been seeing a psychiatrist and taking medication. But it just doesn't seem to be enough.

Practitioner: Why do you think this has not been enough?

Client: Medication for me came with a lot of side effects that were difficult to handle. I want to try some non invasive methods that wouldn’t harm my body. Art therapy seems to be the solution.

Practitioner: How do you hope art therapy will help you?

Client: I'm not really sure. I just have a feeling that it might be able to provide some relief in a way that the other things haven't. Plus, I've always enjoyed creating art, so it feels like it could be a positive experience.

Practitioner: That's a good point. What are some of your strengths and challenges?

Client: I'm a pretty creative person, so I feel like that could be a strength in art therapy. But I also tend to be pretty self-critical, so that's a challenge for me.

Practitioner: How do you cope with stress and difficult emotions?

Client: Not very well, to be honest. I usually just try to ignore them or distract myself, but that doesn't really work in the long run.

Practitioner: What are your hobbies and interests outside of art therapy? How do you typically spend your time?

Client: I enjoy reading and painting. Sometimes I like to dance.

Client: Well, I think the most important thing to me right now is feeling better mentally and emotionally. I feel like my life has been really out of balance lately and I'm trying to find some sort of equilibrium again.

Practitioner: How do you see yourself and your life right now?

Client: Right now, I'm not feeling myself because of all the stress. I was a joyful and resilient person. Sometimes I feel like I just want to get out of my head and run very fast.

Practitioner: How do you see yourself in 5 years?

Client: In five years, I hope to be in a much better place mentally and emotionally. I want to be more present with family and friends and have more meaningful connections with them. I would also like to be more productive at work and feel a sense of accomplishment from it.

Practitioner: How do you think art therapy can support you in achieving those goals?

Client: Art therapy gives me the opportunity to express myself without words which can be very therapeutic for me. It also helps me get in touch with my emotions in a different way which can help me gain insight into what might be causing my current mental state. Additionally, art therapy allows me to tap into my creativity which can help reduce stress levels.

Practitioner: Can you tell me about your physical health and any medical conditions or treatments you are currently receiving?

Client: Yes, I am generally healthy although I do have some seasonal allergies that flare up during certain parts of the year. Apart from that, there are no major medical conditions or treatments that I'm receiving at this time.

Practitioner: How do you typically manage your emotions and mental health?

Client: To manage my emotions and mental health, I try to stay active by going for walks or joining an online yoga class. Additionally, journaling is something that helps me process my thoughts so that they don't become overwhelming for me later on. Talking things through with people is also something that has helped me cope in the past as well as just taking some time away from everything if needed.

Practitioner: Have you experienced any traumatic events or significant stressors in your life?

Client: Yes, unfortunately there have been some stressful experiences in the past few years that have had a lasting impact on my mental health such as going through a divorce.

Practitioner: Can you tell me about your family social support system?

Client: My family consists mostly of my parents who live across the country from where I live currently but we keep in touch regularly via video calls or text messages throughout the week . I’ve got several close friends who act as an extended family for me here. They check up on how I’m doing frequently.

Practitioner: How do you identify culturally? And how do you think your cultural background may impact your experience in art therapy?

Client: I identify as South Asian descent, which means being raised within traditional values such as respect for elders, being compassionate towards others etc.

What was asked of you in this exercise was to set the goals of the art therapy intervention, taking into consideration the answers of the client.

### Possible Assessment Result:

Here is a possible discussion you could have with your client:

Practitioner: Based on what you've shared with me, it sounds like you're looking to improve your emotional well-being by coping with negative feelings of depression and anxiety to be able to have more positive relationships. I believe that art therapy can be a great tool to help you achieve those goals.

Client: Amazing, how will we proceed?

Practitioner: We can do this by setting SMART goals. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals.

So in each session, you will identify and express at least one emotion per art piece you create, and use at least three different materials and techniques if needed. Does that work for you?

Client: Completely. I can’t wait to start.

Practitioner: Great! Through your art, we’ll explore your negative thoughts and emotions and determine what triggers them. After you complete each artwork we will discuss your thoughts and feelings and will plan exercises that you can do during the week to deal with some of the issues we uncover.

So if we set a reasonable time frame, let’s say that we will reduce your symptoms of anxiety and depression in 8 sessions, each session per week, and then we’ll reassess. How does that sound?

Client: I think this is reasonable.

# Select Appropriate Materials and Techniques

There are several criteria to consider when selecting the right materials and techniques. The materials and techniques used in art therapy sessions can have a significant impact on the therapeutic process and the outcome of the therapy. The practitioner must consider the client's individual needs, preferences, and goals when selecting materials and techniques.

Different materials and techniques can be used to explore different emotions, thoughts, and experiences, and can be tailored to the specific needs of the client. From traditional art materials such as paints, pencils, and clay to found objects and technology-based tools, the options are varied and diverse.

## The Client's Interests and Preferences

The art therapy practitioner should consider the client's interests and preferences when selecting materials and techniques. You’ll learn about this during the initial assessment in the very first session. For example, if the client enjoys drawing, the practitioner might use drawing materials in the therapy sessions. If the client prefers to work with clay, the practitioner might use clay as a medium.

The art therapy practitioner should observe the client's interests and preferences during the therapy sessions. For example, the practitioner might notice that the client becomes more engaged and motivated when working with certain materials or techniques, even if it is not what the client said they preferred in the first place.

You can also encourage the client to experiment with new materials and techniques and try things that are outside of their comfort zone. This can help the client to expand their creative skills and explore new interests, and can help the practitioner to find materials and techniques that are particularly engaging and meaningful for the client.

## The Client's Developmental Level and Cognitive Abilities

As an art therapy practitioner, you should consider the client's developmental level and cognitive abilities when selecting materials and techniques. The practitioner may need to use simpler materials and techniques with children. Materials and techniques that are appropriate for children may not be appropriate for adults. Similarly, if the client has cognitive or physical disabilities, the practitioner may need to use simpler materials and techniques that are easier for the client to understand and manipulate. In module 9, we’ll review the appropriate materials and techniques for each population in depth.

If you went for a certain technique or material that seems irrelevant now that the client is using it, then feel free to change the materials and techniques as needed: The art therapy practitioner should adapt to the client and make the materials more appropriate for the client's developmental level and cognitive abilities. Indeed, the practitioner might use larger or thicker materials for clients with fine motor challenges, or might provide verbal or visual instructions for clients with cognitive disabilities. This can be adapted in the course of a session.

Use multisensory materials and techniques according to the developmental level and cognitive abilities of the client. The art therapy practitioner can use materials and techniques that engage multiple senses, such as sight, sound, touch, and movement, to help support the client's learning and development.

## The Therapeutic Goals of the Intervention

The art therapy practitioner should consider the therapeutic goals of the intervention when selecting materials and techniques. For example, if the goal is to help the client express and process their emotions, the practitioner might use materials and techniques that encourage emotional expression, such as painting or collage. Painting can be an effective tool for addressing a wide range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and substance abuse. It can also be used to promote relaxation and stress relief, enhance self-awareness, improve cognitive and motor skills, and enhance social skills and relationships. For example, you can consider finger painting which is a technique where the artist applies paint to the canvas or surface using their fingers, rather than a brush. Don’t hesitate to go back to module 5 for more painting techniques.

## The Client's Physical Abilities

The art therapy practitioner should consider the client's physical abilities when selecting materials and techniques. If the client has limited fine motor skills, the practitioner might use materials that are easier to manipulate, such as crayons or markers, rather than materials that require more precision, such as paintbrushes.

So you need to adapt your choice of materials and techniques to:

1. Your client’s tastes.
2. Your client’s age.
3. Your client’s physical and cognitive abilities.
4. The goals of the art therapy intervention.

## Summary of Key Points

* The art therapy practitioner should consider the client's interests and preferences when selecting materials and techniques.
* The art therapy practitioner should observe the client's interests and preferences during the therapy sessions.
* As an art therapy practitioner, you should consider the client's developmental level and cognitive abilities when selecting materials and techniques.
* If you went for a certain technique or material that seems irrelevant now that the client is using it, then feel free to change the materials and techniques as needed.
* The art therapy practitioner should consider the therapeutic goals of the intervention when selecting materials and techniques.
* Painting can be an effective tool for addressing a wide range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and substance abuse.
* The art therapy practitioner should consider the client's physical abilities when selecting materials and techniques.
* If the client has limited fine motor skills, the practitioner might use materials that are easier to manipulate.

## Exercise: What Material(s) and Technique(s) Would You Choose For an Elderly Woman?

### Instructions:

* Imagine a situation in which an 80-year-old woman comes into an art therapy office. She has been diagnosed with cognitive problems, most likely caused by the onset of dementia. She enjoyed drawing as a young adult and also gardening.
* Think about and determine which materials and techniques are best for her to cope with this condition. You can also go back to module 5 to help you choose.

It is important to remember that this woman is old, and so it must be taken into consideration when determining materials and techniques. For example, a technique that calls for a lot of physical manipulation may not be suitable as she may lack the strength, balance, or coordination required to execute it properly. Furthermore, due to her age she may have difficulties comprehending complex instructions or using tools for a prolonged period of time. Therefore the practitioner must choose materials that require little physical or mental effort on the part of the client.

### Possible answer:

The most suitable materials could include items such as paints, pencils, colored markers, crayons and other similar media that are easy to use and allow for creative expression without placing too much strain on her body or mind.

Possible activities could be scrapbooking – assembling old photos and mementoes into a book – or collage making which involves cutting up images found in magazines and gluing them onto paper or canvas in any desired pattern.

The art therapy practitioner should also take into consideration any previous hobbies that the client may have had prior to her condition worsening; if they enjoyed drawing as a young adult then they may respond positively to traditional drawing exercises while if they were more interested in gardening then perhaps creating “garden” themed artwork would provide comfort and familiarity as well as positive feelings.

Ultimately it is important that whatever activity is chosen should be enjoyable yet achievable so that the client will not become overwhelmed by its complexity but instead feel empowered by their accomplishments.

# Conduct an Art Therapy Session

Once you’ve prepared the art therapy intervention, established a safe and secure environment, determined the goals according to the needs of the client, selected the right techniques and materials depending on the client, the next step for you is to conduct the art therapy session.

Here is how the art-therapy session should be organized when you meet a client for the first time:

1. Explain the principles behind your art therapy intervention:
   1. Confidentiality
   2. Professional boundaries
   3. The role of the client
   4. The process of art therapy
2. Conduct the initial assessment
3. The Art-making
4. The reflection
5. Ending the session

Here is how the art-therapy session is organized when you meet a client for the second time, and beyond:

1. The check-in part
2. The art making
3. The reflection
4. Ending the session

## Client Check-in

This step comes right before the art making and it allows you to introduce the session. Of course, if you're meeting your client for the first time, you should replace this part by conducting the initial assessment.

The check-in process at the beginning of an art therapy session is an opportunity for the art therapy practitioner to assess the current state and well-being of the client. This can include asking about any significant events or changes that have occurred in the client's life since the last session, as well as discussing any current concerns or challenges the client may be facing. It is also a time for the practitioner and client to assess the client’s progress and potentially adjust their goals.

Here are some questions you can ask your client during a follow-up session to assess their progress in art therapy:

* What has been most helpful for you in our previous sessions?
* How have you been using the art-making process in your daily life?
* How have your feelings and thoughts changed since our last session?
* How has your artwork changed since our last session?
* Can you tell me about any specific moments or memories that came up for you during the art-making process?
* Have you noticed any patterns or themes in your artwork over the course of our sessions?
* Have you been able to apply the insights you gained from our art therapy sessions to other areas of your life?
* Are there any issues or concerns you would like to focus on in our next session?
* How do you feel about the progress you have made so far in our art therapy sessions?
* Are there any changes or adjustments you would like to make to our art therapy sessions?

The check-in process allows the practitioner to create a safe and supportive space for the client to engage in the process and to ensure that the therapy is meeting the client's needs and addressing their concerns in a meaningful way.

Here is some guidance on how you can do that:

1. Ask open-ended questions: Rather than asking yes or no questions, the practitioner can ask questions that encourage the client to open up and share what's been happening in their life since the last session. Some examples of open-ended questions include: "How have you been since we last met?", "Is there anything you'd like to talk about today?", or "What's been on your mind lately?".
2. Encourage the client to share any updates or changes in their life: The practitioner can ask the client if there have been any significant changes or updates in their life since the last session, and encourage them to share any challenges or successes they've experienced.
3. Use active listening skills: The practitioner should be present and fully engaged with the client, using nonverbal cues such as nodding and eye contact to show they are listening and interested in what the client has to say.
4. Reflect back to the client what they've shared: The practitioner can summarize what the client has shared and reflect back their feelings and experiences, to show that they understand and are empathetic to what the client is going through.

If your client has specific demands for this specific session, make sure to respect that. Don’t rush that conversational part of the session, as your client may feel like sharing things he didn’t on the initial assessment. If something has occurred in this life since the last time you saw them, give your client the necessary time and space to open-up. Adapt to the client’s needs and feelings.

## The Art Making

The art-making process refers to the steps that a person goes through when creating art. The art-making process typically involves:

* The preparation: This includes selecting materials and setting up the art-making space. The client may also want to engage in a little exercise before jumping in the art-making.
* The exploration: This is the stage where the person begins to experiment with the materials and techniques, allowing their imagination to take over, and allowing themselves to play with the materials.
* The development: During this stage, the person begins to refine their ideas and develop a specific direction for their art.

### Before The Art Making

Some clients may find it difficult to engage in the art-making part of the session. To make it easier for them, there are several quick exercises you can suggest, such as:

* Mindfulness exercises: The client can take a few minutes to focus on their breath and observe their thoughts and feelings without judgment. This can help to create a sense of calm and focus before starting the art-making process.
* Free-writing exercises: The client can spend a few minutes writing down whatever comes to mind without worrying about grammar or structure. This can help to clear the mind and get in touch with emotions and thoughts that may come up during the art-making process.
* Guided imagery exercises: The client can spend a few minutes visualizing a peaceful place, such as a beach or a forest, and focus on the sights, sounds, and sensations. This can help to create a sense of calm and focus before starting the art-making process.
* Body scan exercises: The client can spend a few minutes scanning their body and noticing any areas of tension or discomfort. This can help to release tension and create a sense of relaxation before starting the art-making process.
* Setting intentions: The client can spend a few minutes thinking about what they would like to get out of the art-making process and setting an intention for the session. This can help to focus their mind and create a sense of purpose before starting the art-making process.

These exercises are quick and easy to implement, and they can help the client to focus and relax before engaging in the art-making process. It also can serve as a tool to help the client to be more mindful and present in the art-making process, which can lead to deeper self-discovery and personal growth.

When it comes to art making, there are two main types of structure that can be suggested to the client: unguided and guided.

### Unguided Sessions

In an unguided art-making session, the client is given complete freedom to choose the materials and techniques they want to use, and to create whatever they feel drawn to create. This allows the client to lead the art-making process and follow their own creative impulses.

If your client feels like he wants to produce art without being guided, tell him this: "Take some time to explore the art materials in front of you and see what catches your attention. There is no right or wrong way to do this, just let yourself be drawn to what feels meaningful to you in this moment."

The art therapy practitioner could also offer some suggestions for materials or techniques that the client could try out, but ultimately the choice of what to create and how to create it is left up to the client. The art therapy practitioner's role in this case is to create a safe and supportive environment for the client to freely express themselves and to be a nonjudgmental witness to the client's process.

### Guided Sessions

In a guided or structured art-making session, the art therapy practitioner provides a specific prompt, and may also suggest materials for the client to use. This structure can help guide the client in their art-making process and can be particularly useful for clients who are struggling to find direction or focus.

A prompt is a specific task or theme that the art therapy practitioner gives to the client to guide their art-making process. For example, the art therapy practitioner may say "I want you to draw something representing the facets of body image perception" for a client who may be experiencing eating disorders. Or "I want you to sculpt a clay figure that represents how you feel today", for a client who had trouble explaining his emotions.

The purpose of the prompt is to provide a specific focus or theme for the client to explore through their art-making, according to the goals set. It contributes to a focus for exploration of the client's thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

It is important for the art therapy practitioner to be specific and clear in their directives, while also allowing the client to have some freedom and creativity in their art-making process. The art therapy practitioner should also be open to adjusting or modifying the directive based on the client's needs and preferences. For example, if the client is struggling with a particular directive, the art therapy practitioner may offer additional support or guidance, or provide a different directive that may be more suitable for the client.

During the art-making process, the art therapy practitioner can take on various roles. They may simply witness the client's process and offer support and encouragement as needed, or they may collaborate with the client and create art together. The art-making process can be quiet or talkative, depending on the needs of the client and the goals of the session.

## The Reflection

Once the art-making portion of an art therapy session is complete, the therapy session transitions into the reflection phase. During this stage, the art therapy practitioner helps their client identify and explore feelings that arose while creating their artwork.

### Feelings and emotions arising from the artwork

Start by asking them to validate or reject any emotions present in the artwork and encouraging your client to explore these further by telling them they can talk about it.

Important questions to ask are:

“What did you feel when you were representing this or that element of the artwork?”

“Did you think of a particular person or situation when you were in the process of making this or this representation?”

“If so, what did you think of?” and then “Was it negative or positive for you?”

### Symbolism

Then, you have to help clients interpret any symbolism present in the artwork. Ask questions such as “what do you think this symbol means?” or “how does this color represent your feelings?” It is important for practitioners not to make assumptions about what a symbol could mean but rather guide clients into exploring what it could mean for them personally.

Try to find out about this:

“What elements of the artwork stand out to you?”

“Why have you chosen that specific color?”

“Why have you chosen that specific symbol?”

The goal is for the practitioner to encourage clients to talk about how they were feeling before, during, and after creating their artwork without judgment or expectations, again. Stay aware of nonverbal cues as well as verbal ones; often people's body language will provide important insight into how they are feeling and thinking about their work.

To ensure that all aspects of emotional processing are explored, art therapy practitioners should keep an eye out for signs of distress such as changes in breathing patterns or posture shifts which indicate discomfort with certain topics being discussed. If something like this happens, make sure to end the discussion and allow your client to sit, offering them a glass of water. In such a context, it would be better to consider ending the session.

## Ending the session

At this point, it is important for the practitioner to provide closure by summarizing what has been discussed and revisiting any goals that were set at the beginning of the session. This is beneficial for the client as it allows them to understand how much progress they have made during their session and gives them something tangible to work off of in future sessions.

There are a few ways an art therapy practitioner can determine if a client has made progress in a particular session through their artwork:

Changes in the artwork: The art therapy practitioner may notice changes in the client's artwork from session to session, such as increased detail or more expressive use of color. These changes can indicate that the client is processing and working through their feelings and experiences in a more healthy and productive way.

Changes in the client's verbal processing: The client may be more able to express their thoughts and feelings about their artwork and the issues that it represents. They may also be able to make connections between their artwork and their life experiences that they weren't able to make before.

Changes in the client's behavior: The client may also mention changes in their behavior outside of the therapy sessions, such as an improvement in their ability to cope with stress or better communication with others.

The practitioner should also leave some time for processing and concluding remarks such as affirmations, encouragements or positive thoughts that can help motivate and empower the client going forward. This ensures that the end of the session is filled with positive energy instead of simply ending abruptly without any conclusion or action points being discussed. It can also be helpful for setting up a plan for future sessions if necessary.

Finally, before ending an art therapy session, art therapy practitioners should ask their clients about any action steps they intend to take following this session; this helps make sure that there is a clear sense of direction after each encounter so that progress can continue outside of these sessions. By doing this, practitioners are making sure that some kind of tangible change occurs between each session – whether it’s taking steps towards healing or understanding something better – rather than simply talking about issues without creating a plan going forward.

## Creating Files And Taking Notes During The Session

An art therapy practitioner should take detailed and accurate notes during a session with a client in order to document the client's progress and to inform their treatment plan. Also, you may need to read those notes to remind yourself of the client’s case before each session you have together.

### Create A File For Each Client

Creating a file for each client is essential for documenting progress, facilitating communication, allowing the continuity of care and facilitating the reflection of the practice to improve the quality of the practitioner’s work by reviewing the client's notes. Here are some advice for creating files:

* Be organized: Create a new file for each client to keep all relevant documents in one place: This includes client information forms, consent forms if you need to collaborate with other health professionals, treatment plans, session notes, and artwork.  
  Use a consistent format: To organize the client's file, so that the information is easy to find and reference.  
  Keep the client's personal information confidential: Personal information such as name, address, and contact information should be kept confidential and should only be shared with other healthcare providers with the client's written consent.  
  Keep track of important dates: Such as the start and end of intervention, and each session date.
* Keep track of progress: Keep track of the client's progress over time by regularly reviewing the session notes and treatment plan, and updating them as needed.

Following these guidelines, the practitioner can ensure that the client's file is organized, confidential, and informative, which can help to inform the client's treatment plan and to track their progress over time. It also helps the practitioner to make sure that they are meeting the ethical and legal standards of the profession.

### Taking Notes

Inside each file, you’ll have several pages, each one corresponding to a particular session with a particular client. Each page should contain notes. To make sure you take notes effectively, follow these instructions:

* For each session, take a blank sheet of paper. Keep track of the date, time, and use a consistent format for taking notes.
* Be objective: Avoid making assumptions or interpreting the client's artwork, instead, document what you see and what the client says about their artwork and the process.
* Be descriptive: Describe the client's artwork, including the materials used, the size, and any symbols or themes that appear in the artwork.
* Record the client's verbalizations and nonverbal behaviors, including any emotional reactions or physical sensations that the client experiences during the art-making process.
* Record the client's reflections and insights about their artwork, and any connections they make between their artwork and their feelings, thoughts, and experiences.
* Record any therapeutic interventions and techniques that were used during the session, and any observations made by the practitioner.
* Review the notes after the session to ensure that they are accurate and complete.
* Use the notes to inform the client's treatment plan and to track their progress over time.

## Summary of Key Points

* Client Check-in: This step comes right before the art making and it allows you to introduce the session. Of course, if you're meeting your client for the first time, you should replace this part by conducting the initial assessment.
* During the check-in, assess the current state and well-being of the client.
* This can include asking about any significant events or changes that have occurred in the client's life since the last session.
* Ask open-ended questions: Rather than asking yes or no questions, the practitioner can ask questions that encourage the client to open up and share what's been happening in their life since the last session.
* Use active listening skills.
* Reflect back to the client what they've shared.
* There are two main types of structure that can be suggested to the client: unguided and guided.
* In an unguided art-making session, the client is given complete freedom to choose the materials and techniques they want to use, and to create whatever they feel drawn to create.
* In a guided or structured art-making session, the art therapy practitioner provides a specific directive for the client to follow, and may also provide specific materials for the client to use.
* The next step in the art therapy session is the reflection.
* During this stage, the art therapy practitioner helps their client identify and explore feelings that arose while creating their artwork.
* Then, you have to help clients interpret any symbolism present in the artwork.
* At this point, it is important for the practitioner to provide closure by summarizing what has been discussed and revisiting any goals that were set at the beginning of the session.
* There are a few ways an art therapy practitioner can determine if a client has made progress in a particular session through their artwork:  
  Changes in the artwork  
  Changes in the client's verbal processing  
  Changes in the client's behavior
* An art therapy practitioner should take detailed and accurate notes during a session with a client in order to document the client's progress and to inform their treatment plan.
* Create a file for each client to keep all relevant documents in one place, use a consistent format and keep track of important dates.

## Exercise: Reflect on a Drawing to Explore Feelings

You should now be able to identify the elements and features of an artwork and then analyze them in terms of emotions and symbols. This means connecting it to a personal experience. For the sake of this exercise, ask a relative or a friend to create a painting or drawing giving them that direction: the artwork needs to show how you feel on the inside, versus how you present yourself to the world. Make sure to explain the art therapy process to the person concernent and get assured to have their consent.

### Materials:

* The drawing, or painting made by a relative or a friend.

### Instructions:

* Once the artwork is finished, take a few minutes to look at it, paying attention to details.
* Pay attention to everything: colors, objects, facial expressions, shapes, size of things, ect.
* Take notes of your observations. When you think you have analyzed everything, take a moment to reflect on the artwork.
* To explore feelings and emotions arising from the artwork, ask the client questions similar to:

“What did you feel when you were representing this or that element of the artwork?”

“Did you think of a particular person or situation when you were in the process of making this or this representation?”

“If so, what did you think of?” and then “Was it negative or positive for you?”

* Then, you have to help interpret any symbolism present in the artwork. Ask questions such as “what do you think this symbol means?” or “how does this color represent your feelings?
* “How can I use this analysis to better understand the client’s feelings?”
* Conclude with a written reflection on what has been learned during the activity and how the artwork reflected the direction given.

By completing this exercise you should have gained an understanding of how to analyze an artwork, interpret it and how to discuss it with its author. Feel free to repeat this exercise with 2 or 3 other individuals. You can even make a drawing yourself and interpret it the exact same way you would do with someone else.

# Module Conclusion

You have now completed the module on “How to Prepare and Conduct an Art Therapy Intervention.” This module gave you the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for, and conduct your first art therapy session with clients, as well as the following sessions.

You have learned how important it is to set goals prior to conducting art therapy interventions; this allows you to continuously monitor and adjust the intervention approach depending on the client's needs. Additionally, you have become knowledgeable in selecting appropriate materials and techniques that would be beneficial to your particular client's situation or diagnosis. Finally, we discussed how to guide a client through an art therapy session while keeping their individual needs in focus.

It's natural to feel intimidated when starting out as an art therapy practitioner, but remember that with time and practice, conducting art therapy sessions will become easier and more natural for you. Your skills and abilities will grow and develop, and you will become more confident in your ability to create a safe and supportive environment for your clients. Remember that it's okay to make mistakes and to ask for help when you need it, to fellow colleagues that have more experience for instance. You’ll then be able to effectively guide your clients in their journey towards well-being and self-discovery through the use of art.