



Arts and creative therapies

Explains what arts and creative therapies are, the different types that exist and how to access them.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email: publications@mind.org.uk

Contents

What are arts and creative therapies?.....	2
Types of arts and creative therapies	3
How can I access arts and creative therapies?	5
Useful contacts	7

What are arts and creative therapies?

Arts and creative therapies are treatments which involve using arts-based activities in a therapeutic environment, with the support of a trained professional. You don't need to have done these activities before, or have any particular skills or knowledge.

Different people will have different experiences of arts and creative therapies, but they all aim to:

- give you a safe time and place with someone who won't judge you
- help you make sense of things and understand yourself better
- help you resolve complicated feelings, or find ways to live with them
- help you communicate and express yourself, which might include feelings or experiences you find hard to put into words.

Therapy sessions can take place in a one-to-one setting or a group, and are offered in a range of settings including charities such as [local Minds](#), day centres, hospitals and therapy centres.

For more information, see our page on [accessing arts and creative therapies](#).

"It helps quiet my mind. Concentrating on the colours, lines and shapes takes me away from the noise in my head."

How are they regulated?

It's good practice for any therapist to be a member of a relevant professional body, as this means they have signed up to meet certain professional standards. For some types of therapists this is required.

Art, drama and music therapists

Anyone who refers to themselves an art therapist, dramatherapist or music therapist **must be registered** with the [Health and Care Professions Council \(HCPC\)](#). You can check if a therapist is registered using the HCPC's [Check the Register service](#).

They must also belong to the relevant professional body:

- [British Association of Art Therapists](#)
- [British Association of Dramatherapists](#)
- [British Association for Music Therapy](#)

Dance movement therapists

Dance movement therapists aren't regulated by HCPC, so aren't on their register. But it's good practice for them to belong to a relevant professional body such as the [Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK](#).

Can they treat mental health problems?

Research suggests that arts and creative therapies may help with mental health problems, but it's difficult to be sure because many studies have included fairly small numbers of people.

More research is needed to establish which problems or conditions arts and creative therapies can treat, or if particular aspects of each type of therapy are especially important in helping with mental health problems.

Some people say they find these sorts of therapies helpful because they provide ways of addressing painful feelings and difficult experiences without talking about them – which can sometimes include experiences of trauma.

Guidelines from the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) recommend that arts therapies are considered for everyone who has [psychosis](#) or [schizophrenia](#), which includes related conditions such as [schizoaffective disorder](#).

You can read the [full guidelines for schizophrenia and psychosis](#) on the NICE website.

“The therapists were able to tell a lot from what you had created... and it helped open up topics for conversation or get a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions out of your head.”

What if they don't work for me?

As with all treatments, different things work for different people at different times and it's not easy to predict which type of therapy you might find useful or effective.

Although some people find arts and creative therapies helpful, not everyone does. If you've tried something and it hasn't helped, try not to blame yourself. There are other options you can try.

See our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) for other options you could explore.

“It helps me when I struggle to find the words, when I'm too angry, despairing or confused to know what I think. It gives me a voice.”

Types of arts and creative therapies

Dance movement therapy

Dance movement therapy (also known as dance therapy) involves using body movement and dance. For example, you might explore different types of movements and rhythms. You don't need to have any dance skills or experience.

Some people say dance movement therapy has helped them to feel more in touch with their body and their physical surroundings, address difficult feelings about their body or appearance, or explore difficult feelings or experiences through movement rather than words.

Find out more from:

- [Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy](#)

“Arts therapies allowed me to use my imagination for something positive.”

Dramatherapy

Dramatherapists are trained to help you explore different types of drama and performance activities that might be helpful for you. For example, you might invent characters, tell stories, improvise scenes, do physical mimes or use puppets or masks. You don't need to have any acting or theatre skills or experience.

For some people this can provide a way to express or resolve difficult feelings or experiences, or to safely explore being playful and using their imagination.

Find out more from:

- [British Association of Dramatherapists](#)

Music therapy

Music therapy involves exploring music and sound. You don't need to have any musical knowledge or experience – for example you don't need to know how to read music, or be able to play any musical instruments.

All human beings are able to respond to music, and music therapy uses this connection to help you have a therapeutic experience. Music therapists often provide instruments that are fairly easy for most people to use, such as cymbals, wood blocks or bells.

Together with your therapist, you might listen to music or use different types of instruments to explore ways of communicating and expressing your feelings. For example, you and your therapist might make sounds together in a way that feels therapeutic for you.

Find out more from:

- [British Association for Music Therapy](#)

[Read Laura's story](#) about how listening to and playing music has helped her mental health.

Want to add your story? [Find out more about blogging for us.](#)

“Producing music can untangle my thoughts and re-establish order.”

Visual art therapy

Visual art therapy (also known as art therapy) involves using visual art materials. For example, you might use pens, pencils, crayons, paint, chalk, clay or collaging. You don't need to have any art skills or experience.

With support from your therapist, you might use art materials to express your feelings or experiences. Your therapist might sometimes provide ideas or prompts – for example, some art therapy groups might focus on a particular theme or activity each session.

Find out more from:

- [British Association of Art Therapists](#)

“My hope is that I make people smile with my art work and through doing art therapies I can challenge my mind to get to a better place.”

How can I access arts and creative therapies?

Arts and creative therapies aren't always easy to access, and what services are available often depends on where you live. You may be able to access arts and creative therapies through the NHS, third sector services or the private sector.

Things to ask before starting a therapy

You may want to ask your therapist (or the person referring you for therapy) about:

- their [background and qualifications](#)
- the [type of therapy](#) they practise
- if they have a specialism (for example, some therapists specialise in working with particular issues or groups)
- their experience of working with the problem or difficulty you're experiencing
- whether there is a waiting list and how long it will take you to get an appointment
- how long the therapy will last and what you can expect from it
- if you should wear a particular type of clothes or shoes (for example, wearing loose comfortable clothes you can easily move in)
- the benefits and risks involved
- what happens if you cancel or miss a session
- their [confidentiality policy](#)
- if you have a disability and need [reasonable adjustments](#) to make the sessions easier for you to attend or take part in.

It's also important to **mention any special requirements or preferences** you have. For example, if you'd feel most comfortable seeing a therapist of a particular gender, or who speaks your first language, or has a particular specialism.

Our pages on [talking therapies](#) have more information about starting a therapy, including [getting the most from therapy](#).

“When I feel sad, picking up my violin, feeling it nestling against me and playing a tune takes me on a journey and I come back much better.”

NHS

In some areas, you may be able to access arts and creative therapies through the NHS as part of a mental health service, either in the community or as part of the treatment provided if you spend time in hospital. However, this varies from area to area.

Your GP or community mental health team (CMHT) should be able to tell you what's available in your area. They may be able to refer you to a local service.

For more information about speaking to your GP, see our guide to [seeking help for a mental health problem](#).

Third sector services

Some community and third sector (charity) organisations offer arts therapies, including some local Minds and specialist charities like [Nordoff Robbins](#) (which provides music therapy) and [Roundabout Dramatherapy](#).

These kinds of services aren't always easy to find, so it's worth asking around.

- [Your local Mind](#) might offer arts and creative therapy sessions, groups or workshops, or have details of other local services that do.
- [Your GP](#) or [community mental health team \(CMHT\)](#) might be able to recommend local organisations you could contact.
- [Mind's Infoline](#) might be able to help you find services in your area.
- Your local library, community centre or council website might have details of [charities or groups](#) in your local area.

“I had art therapy as part of a combination of therapies for six months as part of a group... It was really interesting to look back at the end at how our art work had changed as we got more used to the experience, and with different thoughts and feelings.”

Private sector

You can also access arts therapies privately, although this can sometimes be expensive. Private therapists may offer one-to-one or group sessions.

You can find details of accredited therapists in your area by searching the register of the relevant professional body for each type of therapy:

- **Dance movement therapy** – [Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK](#)

- **Dramatherapy** – [British Association of Dramatherapists](#)
- **Music therapy** – [British Association for Music Therapy](#)
- **Visual art therapy** – [British Association of Art Therapists](#)

You could also try searching the [Counselling Directory](#) website to find accredited arts and creative therapists near you.

For more information on accessing therapies privately, see our page on [seeking help through the private sector](#).

What can I do if I'm not happy with my treatment?

If you have a serious concern about any treatment you've received, you can complain.

Your therapist should tell you their complaints process if you ask them for it. If that doesn't feel possible you could ask your therapist what professional body they're registered with, then make your complaint through that body (all professional bodies should have a complaints procedure you can follow).

See our legal pages on [complaining about health and social care](#) for more information about your rights.

“Art therapy allows you to express those feelings that you can either not find words to explain or are simply too difficult to even attempt to. Then you can talk through the image with your therapist and communicate through it, taking the pressure off yourself. The connection with your therapist becomes even stronger.”

Useful contacts

Mind's services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
 - Mind's Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
 - Mind's Legal Line – 0300 456 5453, legal@mind
 - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as [talking treatments](#), [peer support](#), and [advocacy](#). [Find your local Mind here](#), and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our [Elefriends page](#) for details.

Who else could help?

Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK

admin@admp.org.uk

admp.org.uk

Professional body for dance movement psychotherapists. Provides information about dance movement therapy and a register of accredited therapists.

British Association of Art Therapists

020 7686 4216

info@baat.org

baat.org

Professional body for visual art therapists. Provides information about art therapy and a register of accredited therapists.

British Association of Dramatherapists

01242 235 515

info@badth.org.uk

badth.org.uk

Professional body for dramatherapists. Provides information about dramatherapy and a register of accredited therapists.

British Association for Music Therapy

020 7837 6100

info@bamt.org

bamt.org

Professional body for music therapists. Provides information about dramatherapy and a register of accredited therapists.

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

0300 500 6184

hpc-uk.org

Regulates some types of health professionals including art, drama and music therapists.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

nice.org.uk

Information and clinical guidelines on recommended treatments for different conditions.

Nordoff Robbins

020 7267 4496

musicservicesadmin@nordoff-robbins.org.uk

nordoff-robbins.org.uk

Charity that provides music therapy and accepts self-referrals.

Roundabout Dramatherapy

020 8665 0038

info@roundaboutdramatherapy.org.uk

roundaboutdramatherapy.org.uk

Charity that conducts long-term and short-term dramatherapy projects.

© Mind November 2018

To be revised in 2021

References are available on request.