

ART THERAPY RESOURCES



ART THERAPY CASE STUDY BACKGROUND: PTSD

Kate began art therapy a month ago after receiving a diagnosis of PTSD related to sexual abuse she experienced as a younger child by 3 male relatives. Kate came to therapy today highly anxious and agitated. She explained she is required to teach new employees procedures on how to use safety equipment. The thought of addressing her first group of students in 3 weeks has created an enormous amount of stress. She likes teaching new employees individually, however, the group dynamic is creating stress. Once Kate starts to think about the task and the stress it is creating she starts feeling powerless and under attack. The idea of this tasks makes her feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. Kate and her art therapist discussed exploring the parts of the group presentation that represented the most stressful. Breaking the task down into elements may give Kate an insight into a specific trigger behind her fear.

- Discuss with your client the type of art supplies they may like to work with in this session.
- Ask your client to engage in some deep breathing if necessary to help alleviate any current feelings of anxiety and fear. Your client should feel safe and secure in this environment to explore and discuss their feelings.
- Ask your client to reflect on the situation that is currently triggering a fear response.
- Discuss with your client the individual stages of the situation and the elements of the situation including the location and people involved. These elements may represent a direct threat or memory of a threat to your client. Your client can do this in discussion with you or using art materials to create artwork.
- As your client walks through the situation in stages, ask them to be mindful of their physical reactions to each stage. A strong physical reaction at a certain stage or when thinking of specific elements of the situation may indicate a link to the strong fear response.

EXAMPLE EXERCISE:

Kate discussed with her art therapist the individual elements of the group presentation. Kate felt anxious when considering being in a group. She decided to explore that element more in her artwork. Kate felt threatened by the group. Kate also felt this reaction to a group was a common theme in her experiences.

In her experience of abuse, she was physically assaulted by a group (3 relatives). When she went to court about her abuse, her experience in front of the group of people in the court was traumatic and she felt she received little support from family, friends or professionals.

In Kate's experience being in the presence of a group was traumatic and one that she avoided where possible.



NOTE: more details can be found at www.arttherapyresources.com.au/case-study-ptsd