



## ENCOURAGING THE CREATIVE PROCESS FOR CHILDREN

Below are some strategies that art therapists often employ to help children embrace a more open and relaxed attitude towards their creative process:

- 1. Create a Safe and Non-Judgmental Environment:** The foundation of art therapy is a safe and non-judgmental space where children can freely express themselves without fear of criticism. This environment allows them to let go of anxieties related to perfectionism or fear of making mistakes.
- 2. Start with Preferred Materials:** Begin with art materials and techniques that the child enjoys. If a child has a particular affinity for drawing with coloured pencils, for example, starting with this familiar medium can make the process more comfortable and enjoyable.
- 3. Gradual Exposure:** Introduce new materials or techniques gradually. The therapist can observe the child's reactions and readiness to experiment with new options. This step-by-step approach helps reduce anxiety and resistance to change.
- 4. Modeling:** Art therapists often demonstrate different techniques or approaches, providing a visual and sensory example for the child to follow. Modeling can help demystify new materials and show the child that it's okay to try something different.
- 5. Use Prompts and Themes:** Providing specific prompts or themes for art-making can inspire creativity and reduce the pressure of starting from a blank canvas. Prompts might include "draw your favourite place" or "create something that makes you feel happy."
- 6. Offer Choices:** Allow the child to make choices about their art-making process. This can include choosing materials, colours, and themes. Empowering the child to make decisions fosters a sense of ownership and control over their creative experience.
- 7. Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:** Incorporate mindfulness exercises into art therapy sessions to help children become more aware of their thoughts and feelings in the present moment. Breathing exercises and relaxation techniques can reduce anxiety and promote a relaxed state of mind.
- 8. Focus on the Process, Not the Product:** Shift the emphasis from the final artwork to the creative process itself. Encourage the child to enjoy the act of creating without worrying about the end result. This mindset shift can reduce performance-related stress.
- 9. Celebrate Small Achievements:** Acknowledge and celebrate every step of progress, no matter how small. This positive reinforcement encourages children to take risks and try new approaches.
- 10. Artistic Exploration:** Encourage playful exploration of materials. Children can experiment with textures, colours, and techniques without the expectation of creating a finished piece. This can lead to surprising discoveries and a more relaxed attitude towards art.
- 11. Supportive Feedback:** When providing feedback, focus on the child's effort, creativity, and unique expression rather than judgment or critique. Positive reinforcement builds self-esteem and encourages continued exploration.
- 12. Create a Routine:** Consistency can help children with autism feel more comfortable. Establishing a routine for art therapy sessions can create a sense of predictability, reducing anxiety.
- 13. Use Sensory Integration:** Incorporate sensory-friendly art materials to accommodate sensory sensitivities. For instance, offer soft or textured brushes, noise-cancelling headphones, or adjustable lighting to make the environment more sensory-friendly.
- 14. Collaborative Art:** Engage in collaborative art projects where the child works alongside the therapist or peers. Collaborative art can be less intimidating and provide opportunities for shared creativity.
- 15. Provide Time and Space:** Allow for extended periods of art-making if the child is engaged. Some children with autism may require extra time to process and express themselves through art.

**BLOG POST LINK:** <https://arttherapyresources.com.au/children-autism>