

# ART

## IN FOCUS

Art in Focus is a series of therapeutic art sessions offered for children and adolescents with a developmental age of at least 6-years with developmental or physical disabilities, behavioral or emotional difficulties, including students on the Autism Spectrum. Children must be able to function in a small classroom setting, with individualized assistance. Art in Focus greatly benefits these children in a multitude of ways:

- **Increases communication skills** – Each child describes his project at the end of the session in front of the entire group with his/her therapist at his/her side, if needed. This allows the children the opportunity to make eye contact with the other students, parents, volunteers and therapists. It allows them to practice speaking in public and work on expressive language skills. For those children who are non-verbal, the art itself is an outlet for the children to speak in other ways, thus giving them an avenue for nonverbal expression. It is a method of expressing thoughts or feelings through visual representation. Since we take a photo of the child with his/her creation at the end of each session, children, then, also learn to look at a camera while working through issues such as shyness, and self-confidence in a safe environment.
- **Develops Social Skills** – Often many of our students find it difficult to make friends. This group environment allows them to meet other children, sit next to them, and practice relationship building and socializing in an appropriate manner. They benefit from modeling and positive behavior supports set up to encourage good behavior, reciprocity, sharing of art materials, and playing fairly. It also teaches them patience, as they may have to wait in line to retrieve art supplies, take their turn at an art station, or raise their hand to be called on before answering.
- **Improves Sense of Self-Worth** - Children are able to take pride in their own work. Showing off their work to others and receiving positive feedback for their creations helps them tremendously.
- **Allows for fine motor skill improvement** – Often projects require the use of small beads, shells, beans, and sequins just to name a few. To utilize these items properly without dropping them takes good in-hand manipulation and dexterity skills. Utilizing plastic and darning needles to learn to sew also improves eye-hand coordination and visual closure skills. Mixing and stirring concoctions such as colors for paint, sand, and various recipes insures good use of tools and hand strengthening.
- **Facilitates Sensory Integration** – Using art techniques improves our ability to organize sensory information in the brain and make adaptive responses to environmental demands such as roller skating, rocking or using a hobby horse.
  1. **1. Input to our touch system** - Desensitizes tactilely defensive children by working with various media such as clay, beans, seeds, bird seed, pastas, papier-mâché, carving and gutting out pumpkins, sand play and sculpture, painting with funny foam, shaving cream, finger paint, pudding, peanut butter, lentils, bark, sawdust, plaster, and, natural materials, just to name a few. Working with tactile art media helps to improve attention span, enhances our self-image, improves our body scheme and helps balance emotional response.
  2. **2. Input to our proprioceptors** – Proprioception is the ability to know where a part of your

body is without looking at it. To do this we must appreciate position, balance, and equilibrium during movement through our muscles, tendon and joints. An easy way for a child to develop good proprioception is to utilize deep pressure treatments to gain a calming sensation. Art is a great way to provide deep pressure or heavy work to the muscles. Various techniques used such as working with clay, wedging it, pulling it pushing it, squeezing it, rolling it, all provide excellent deep pressure. Other art media which also lend itself to deep pressure are hammering wood pieces to make picture frames, weaving frames, building bird houses, nail string art, etc. Children also work on tearing paper with their hands, which tells their brains where their body parts are and what they are doing. Knowing where your arms and legs are to complete various activities is important for coordinated and efficient movements.

- **Releases stress and alleviates anxiety** – Working with art allows the child to focus solely on the activity at hand and shut out other thoughts that may be intrusive. When you place purposeful items such as art materials in children's hands it gives them a way to engage themselves in purposeful behavior rather than hand flapping, rocking, or head banging. It serves a similar purpose just as giving a fidget device to a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- **Builds Imagination** – Children with Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders often lack imagination. They may use a toy in a perseverative way and lack the ability to change the way in which they play with that toy. Using art materials such as clay one week to build masks, and another week to make pots changes their mind set and behavior and helps them to develop problem solving strategies for the future. Art allows children to engage in creative thinking in a safe and secure environment.

[Return to Home](#)