Handout of ideas for

Therapeutic Art Activities

You may want to think about having an area in the class set up with a selection of art materials for children to use in a non directed way. I would particularly recommend having clay or soft dough if you want something a little less messy, along with the usual pens, pencils and other drawing materials. You could think about having some print outs for colouring such as mandalas. Make sure the child has some choice without it feeling too overwhelming.

The following are a few ideas of exercises that could be done in the class with children either individually, as a small group or with the whole class. Some will be more suitable for the art room depending on what materials are to be used and what the intention of the exercise is.

Careful thought needs to go into what exercises will be helpful for which children as some might be experienced as too threatening and stir up too much anxiety. Some exercises will be helpful as tools to develop creativity, imagination, emotional literacy and relationship building etc whereas others could be carefully chosen as a way to support children in containing strong emotions and reactive behaviours.

In order to support children more effectively you could reflect on the kind of attachment patterns that are evident and what kind of art activity would be most supportive. It is really important to think about how the activity is introduced in relation to the adult and how the adult supports the child as well as the activity itself (ref presentation on 2.9.19).

This is not an exhaustive list and you will find many more ideas and resources are available in books and online. The curriculum provides many opportunities to explore hidden or dangerous feelings. Boxes, bridges, houses, castles, journeys are the basis of many stories and all have symbolic significance about closeness and distance, containment and fears. Without any conscious disclosure, many strong feelings can be given words and meaning. Emotional literacy can begin by drawing images from a story or trying to describe the experiences of characters in stories.

**Individual exercises**

# Doodles

* There are many ways of doodling but the essence is to let the pen or pencil wander aimlessly, or 'go for a walk with a line', until something meaningful emerges. This is then worked on. Some variations:
* Keep a 'doodle diary' and see if doodles change over a period of time.
* Close eyes to doodle, let the pencil draw as it wants. Open eyes, find image and develop.
* Use lines, colours and sounds without feeling there 'should' be an end product. Let a colour 'pick you'.
* Evolve a story from a spontaneous doodle.

# Scribbles

* Use whole body to make scribbles with large movements, possibly with eyes closed. Looking from all sides, find forms that suggest a picture and develop it.

# Mandalas

Have print outs of mandalas that children can colour in - can be very absorbing and soothing thus can help manage intense anxiety.

# Animal marks

* Imagine that your paintbrush is an insect (e.g. a grasshopper) and make marks on the paper. Then imagine it is a snake and make marks as it if were sliding across the paper, and so on for other creatures.

# Colour explorations

* Using one colour only, on white paper, explore the meaning of this colour for you, e.g. by drawing shapes and lines in that colour.

Variations:

* Select colour most liked / disliked
* select 2 or 3 colours and represent a harmonious group, or express strands of personality or show moods
* Do 2 paintings with colours most liked/ disliked and compare.

# Large scale work

* Large scale work using rollers, decorating brushes, sponges, rags, feet, hands etc.

Variations

* + Individual free expression on large sheet of paper.
  + Roll liquid paint onto large card, then use shakers to shake powder colour on.
  + Use variety of rolling objects to train paint from paint trays over long piece of paper.
  + Left / right hands

Try painting with opposite hand from usual one. This is good for loosening up**.**

# Eyes closed

* Draw or paint with your eyes closed. Good for those worried about being unable to control their drawing or who are product orientated, as perfection is recognisably impossible.

# Wet paper techniques

* Wet the paper and use wet paint, brushed, splattered or poured on. Watch the colours merge, and notice feelings involved.

# Just Paper

* Each person in the group has one sheet of paper to use in some way for e.g. 20 minutes. The paper can be torn, selotaped chewed etc but not drawn on. The process can be reflected on by describing it; describing the product if any; noting any personal association.

Variations:

* + pass paper around the group, doing anything you like to it in silence until the paper is disintegrated.

# Collage

There are many ways of experimenting with collage materials and magazine pictures e.g.

* Class mural where a collaged mural develops with class members adding to it over time.
* Cut out and stick pictures of people, and write down what they might be thinking or saying
* Stick different fabrics on paper, then colour in between to create abstract design.
* Cut out pictures of landscapes and write down any associations.

# Work with clay

There are many ways of working with clay e.g.

* getting to know it as a material - feeling, pressing, squeezing, shaping etc using all the senses to experience it.
* make ball of clay into something with eyes closed
* make impressions in clay with other implements
* make simple slab or coil pots
* make a clay monster

# Colour meditations

* These are done on wet paper using water colours and soft brushes. Thoroughly wet the paper (cartridge or water colour paper). Then apply one particular colour and watch what happens. The process of doing colour washes can be treated as a relaxation or meditation. combinations of different colours can evoke different feelings and give rise to definite forms which 'grow' out of the painting.

# Engaging in Conversation about Pictures

* Have pictures around the space (or in books) that clearly represent emotions and feelings and encourage child to pick one out and engage in conversation about it.

# Make a postcard that you will never send

* Help for children to express feelings about someone without telling them directly
* Write message to someone that they might be frustrated with or hurt by or with whom they have something to share.
* On the blank side they can express their feelings with art. Could use this as a way to start a conversation about what's being expressed with the postcard.

# Mindfulness Beads

* Have a collection of beads that child can chose from to create a bracelet or keychain etc. Allow them to thread the beads in the order that they wish. Can have calming and meditative affect.

# Creating a safe space image

* Create an image which shows what your safe space would look like. Where would it be? outside? Inside? What would it have in it - people, furniture, pets, favourite toy, blankets etc.

# IPads

* Have a drawing App on the ipad that the child can use. This could be 'colouring in' a ready made image or could be free expression. May be helpful for those who don't like getting their hands dirty.

# Blob Tree (www.blobtree.com)

* Have print outs of Blob trees from the internet. Child might like to identify with one of the characters, colour in the blob tree or engage in conversation about the different characters. They may like to draw their own Blob character or blob tree.

# Feeling Journals

* Each child has a journal that they can use at appropriate times to journal how they are feeling using art materials, collage or writing. Help the child to identify feelings and develop emotional literacy.

**Working in Pairs**

This could be done with a child and adult or 2 children

# Drawing and painting in pairs

* Draw in pairs on the same piece of paper. May want to bring in some rules e.g.
  + one person draws curves, the other straight lines
  + Each person sticks to a certain colour or colours

# Conversations

* Have a conversation in pen or paint on the same paper, each using one colour, one at a time.
* Use colours, shapes, any sort of marks and reply to them.

# Winnicott squiggles

* Do a squiggle and then swap with partner, who tries to make an image out of it. Good for 'warming up' or for getting imagination going when a group is stuck or flagging.

# Sequential stories

* First person draws characters, second person writes dialogue, etc. to create continuous story.

**Group work**

# Group Paintings

* Each person selects one colour and keeps it; or changes it later if desired; or negotiates with others for colours to mix with the first one. present group with huge piece of paper on floor / tables / wall. Ask to work as a group on one large picture with no specified theme.
* All start painting at the same time
* Work in teams
* Theme can be decided in group or arrived at in the course of the painting.
* All start at centre or all start at edge
* Take turns for 2 minutes and then 'free for all'
* Use fingers and hands
* Huge group painting on unspecified theme but working in with each other, linking own part to neighbours part. Build up shared experience.
* Moving on: everyone starts around a huge sheet of paper, does some painting or drawing and the moves on one place.
* Picking out images
  + The group covers the paper with spontaneous colours and shapes. Then the paper is passed around and members pick out images they see and emphasise them by drawing them in.
* Group 'mandala'
  + On a large sheet of paper, draw a large circle and divide it into sectors like pieces of cake, according to the number of people in the group. Individuals can decide whether they wish to remain in their own territories, portraying anything they wish, or whether they also want to enter other people's spaces; individuals also decide whether their boundaries are to be firm or blended in with those of neighbours on either side. Discussion can look at how people's decisions affected the whole painting and the interaction between people.

# Group Collage

* Many of the ideas listed can be translated into collage by using magazines and ready-made images instead of paints or pens. e.g. using collage for a them mural, making a world etc.
* Variation: each child is given total control of at least one piece of equipment (e.g. scissors) which only she / he may use.
* Feelings collage
  + Cut out pictures which clearly express emotion and paste into a collage. Write what each character might be saying.
  + Variation: group members can mime or act the feelings expressed.
  + Jigsaw: cut blank group shape into smaller shapes. Each member fills in one shape, then the large shape is reassembled.

# Round Robin Drawings

* Number the papers around the group. Everyone draws for 2 minutes then passes their paper on and continues on the next one for one minute; and so on until everyone receives back the one she / he started with and finishes it off for 2 mins. No talking. Discussion can focus on people's feelings about the changes in their pictures.
* variations: specify no obliterations
* close eyes, take pen for a walk, open eyes to do some drawing, then pass on to someone else.
* Child starts a drawing and asks next child to add to it according to their instructions e.g. I've drawn a car; I'd like you to put some wheels on it.

# Conversations in Paint

* Start with pairs opposite each other along long sheet of paper. One colour each, start conversation with opposite person (different colour) then let conversations develop with neighbours on either side etc.

**References**

'Art Therapy for Groups, A handbook of themes, games and exercises', Marian Liebmann

'The Art Therapy Source Book', Cathy A. Malchiodi