

Somatic Skills for Resilience and Trauma Informed Law

Your Brain As a Muscle

Neuroplasticity is often referred to as the muscle-building component of our brain as it represents the physiological changes that the brain undergoes in response to learning and processing stimuli.

How Art Improves Brain Function, Resilience and Central Nervous System Self-Regulation

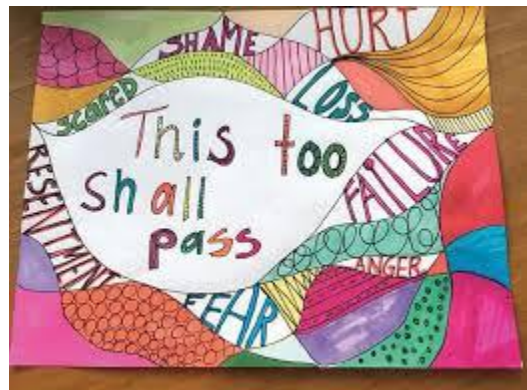
Art plays an important part in developing and maintaining important brain functions. Art activates neural networks and functions in the brain including the below:

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| - Learning | - Reduces stress through lowering cortisol levels |
| - Memory | - Improves cognitive function |
| - Emotions | - Develops neural connections |
| - Pleasure | - Facilitates communication |
| - Sensory-motor integration | - Facilitates decision making |
| Direct benefits of art improving brain function include: | - Provides focused attention |
| | - Develops sensory understanding |

Through art, we reframe experiences and explore personal insights about the world around us. Art can help us engage in abstract thinking processes that we might not have previously considered on our own. From this perspective, the role of art as stimulation ensures that our brain actively engages in processes similar to a muscle.

Art Making, Art therapy and Trauma Recovery

Art making heals trauma by providing a *safe, non-verbal pathway to express and process fragmented, overwhelming memories and emotions that are often difficult to articulate verbally*. The creative process relaxes the nervous system, helps to organize traumatic experiences by externalizing them into symbols, and fosters self-awareness and integration by creating a narrative through visual forms. This process can be guided by a professional art therapist, who helps patients use art materials to explore trauma, engage their bodies, and eventually integrate their experiences into a life narrative.



Non-Verbal Expression and Symbolic Representation

- **Trauma is non-verbal:** Trauma often involves fragmented and jarring memories that are difficult to express with words.
- **Art as a parallel process:** Creating art allows individuals to communicate these experiences through images, symbols, and metaphors, which can bypass the verbal centers of the brain.

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- **Externalizing trauma:** The art piece becomes a "[symbolic container](#)" for traumatic memories, allowing individuals to express and externalize their pain in a physical form that can be observed and processed.

Cognitive and Emotional Regulation

- **Engages the body:** The physical act of manipulating art materials, such as clay or paint, can engage the body and promote a sense of relaxation, helping to reduce stress and open up for further processing.
- **Provides emotional distance:** Creating art offers a controlled distance from the traumatic experience, allowing the individual to depict and then view the experience from a safe physical distance.
- **Fosters self-awareness:** Art making encourages introspection and a deeper connection to one's emotions, thoughts, and reactions related to the trauma, fostering self-understanding.

Integration and [Narrative Building](#)

- **Bilateral brain integration:** The process of creating art is believed to involve [bilateral stimulation](#), engaging both the left and right hemispheres of the brain to help sequence and integrate traumatic narratives.
- **Bringing order to chaos:** Art can help individuals bring structure and meaning to fragmented traumatic memories by giving them form and creating a visual narrative.
- **Facilitating dialogue:** The finished artwork provides a tangible subject for discussion with a therapist, enhancing the therapeutic relationship and providing a safe way to examine thoughts and feelings.