Why Color

How Art Therapy Coloring Books Provide Stress Relief and Focus

If you're struggling with addiction or illness, you have a lot of difficult emotions to deal with. Stress, fear, and anger might be filling your days, even if you try to fight them, and you might feel like you're losing your sense of purpose or your focus on what matters. These feelings are very trying, but you can work through them. The best solution is well-rounded therapy with help from professionals, and art therapy can provide an important part of that therapy. If you've never tried art therapy, it may seem trivial or even childish to you, but in reality it can make a huge difference in how you feel. A wide range of studies have shown that art therapy can help to relieve the symptoms of a number of disorders.
In fact, that childishness is part of why art therapy works. An art activity such as coloring is simple. It’s easy to focus on and easy to accomplish. Because of this simplicity, some people have compared art therapy to meditation. Some studies have even shown that art therapy with a focus on mindfulness can reduce distress and improve health. Coloring in a coloring book will calm you. As you physically focus on the act of coloring, your mind has a chance for quiet self-reflection. You might find that art therapy helps you to work through feelings that are hard to put into words, including your fears and subconscious emotions. The process of art activates the right side of the brain (the creative side), which helps you to process abstract concepts (such as your emotions or internal struggles) into more concrete forms. This can really help you to work through your struggles and communicate about them.

Buddhist monks creating a sand mandala may be seen as a kind of art therapy and spiritual meditation combined.

The other side of the childlike nature of art therapy (and especially coloring) is joy. If you can remember coloring as a child, you probably remember feeling happy as you did it. Art infuses us with a simple happiness. Art therapy as an adult can do the same thing. Using a
coloring book can reconnect you with a pure childlike joy. While you’re struggling with the pain of illness or addiction, you deserve those moments of joy; art can help you find them.

Remember the last time you felt this happy doing something this simple? Photo credit: Jim Pennucci

The final major benefit of art therapy is that it significantly reduces stress and anxiety. Stress is a terrible thing; it makes it harder for you to focus on what’s important, hard to sleep well, and hard to feel good. Ultimately, stress builds itself up. Relieving stress can help you in many ways, and art therapy is one way to dissipate it. A number of studies have shown that art therapy reduces cortisol, the hormone tied to stress. A 2008 study, in particular, showed that producing art gave participants a “creative high” that decreased stress. This will help to give you a break from anxiety, make you feel more positive, and give you an increased sense of clarity.

Photo credit: Andrés Nieto Porras

In conclusion, art therapy can help you in many ways, particularly if you are working to recover from illness or addiction. Something as simple as coloring can provide you with relief from stress and anxiety, and you’re likely to feel yourself growing more and more calm as
you draw. You can also find a simple sense of joy in art, a feeling that may seem missing from your life right now. In addition, art is a great way to subconsciously work through feelings, thoughts, and doubts that are clouding your mind and holding you back. It may seem like too much to hope for, but many people have reached breakthroughs with the help of art therapy. So if you haven't tried art therapy yet, pick up some markers and a coloring book and see what a sense of calm and joy it can give you.

References


