

How Creative Therapy Can Enhance Your Counselling Practice

Part One (of Three)

Get Started

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Therapy can
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Introducing Jacki Short



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Hello and Welcome

Thanks for joining me for this free, three-part, mini course: How Creative Therapy can Enhance Your Counselling Practice. Whether you are a seasoned mental health professional, or newer to counselling, my hope is that you will find some new information, inspiration and support for understanding more about and being able to start to use creative therapy in some way to enhance your practice.

My name is Jacki Short and I have been using Creative Therapy in my counselling, group work, supervision and training for over 30 years. My four-year undergraduate psychology training only really covered CBT and some group therapy methods that all focused on talk-based therapy. While I value these and other foundational skills I learned in psychology, especially around ethical and professional practice and human development, it was the close supervision and ongoing professional development I benefited from post-graduation that grew my love for and confident practice in creative therapy.

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And you? You might currently be using some forms of creative therapy and have seen the powerful benefits for your clients so want to know more about how to use these methods or other types. You might be completely new to the field and are curious what Creative Therapy is and how it works. Regardless of your background and level of experience, I am excited to be able to share some thoughts for getting started to enhance your counselling practice with creative therapy.

I am hearing so many mental health professionals and those working in helping roles being exhausted, overworked and overwhelmed. Coming through these challenging pandemic years, the demand for counselling and support services has never been higher. Many providing these support services are wondering if they can (or want to) continue. What if you could add more creative spark, fun and enjoyment to your work that re-energised you? What if you looked forward to going to your counselling job each day? What if you could find a community of like-minded professionals to share support, ideas, resources and new methods with? This is what I would like to offer you here.

What is Creative Therapy?

Creative therapy is an innovative approach that integrates different forms of artistic expression into counselling to help clients explore emotions, improve self-awareness, and promote healing. While traditional talk therapy can be effective, some clients, especially children, struggle to articulate their thoughts and feelings verbally. Creative therapy offers an alternative mode of communication, allowing individuals to process experiences through art, play, music, dance, drama, and writing.

Creative therapies are methods of counselling that invite new ways of thinking, feeling and being through a form of creative expression. I believe that anything that invites a manifestation of imagination can provide the seed for a new germination of self. Whether through art, music, drama, play, movement, nature, story or symbols, when we can imagine and physically create a

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metaphor of how it was, is or could be, we can do creative therapy in promoting expression, release, understanding and change.

Creative therapies are based on theory and supported by evidence. They have been around for thousands of years and continue to be actively used by First Nations communities for healing and growth. From a Western perspective, Ancient Greeks and Egyptians used music, drama and art for healing. From the 1920's different form of psychotherapy grew, including fields of Creative Therapies such as Music Therapy, Art Therapy, Drama Therapy and Dance-Movement Therapy. From the 1960's many fields of Creative Therapy were not only supported by sound theories but also by specific therapy associations that provided therapists with training, certification and supervision. To work ethically and effectively, training is required.

There are many training bodies and associations that provide specialist training in Creative Therapies to those who are currently, or are training to be, mental health professionals. Since 2000, thousands of counsellors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, welfare workers, school counsellors, chaplains and other mental health practitioners have completed courses in a range of creative therapies with us at Sydney Centre for Creative Change. Creative therapies can be used with children and adults, individually and in groups. It can be used successfully for a range of client presentations from depression and anxiety to grief and loss, eating disorders, dementia, addictions, trauma and many others.

What are the Benefits of Creative Therapies?

One of the key benefits of creative therapy is its ability to access emotion and less conscious experiences. Often, people are unaware of deep-seated emotions or traumas affecting their behaviour. Through forms of play, art, sandtray, or story creation, clients can externalize inner conflicts and better understand their emotional landscape. Similarly, movement-based therapies like drama and dance can help individuals release tension and express feelings that may be difficult to verbalize.

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Creative therapy is also beneficial for clients who have experienced trauma. Traditional counselling methods may inadvertently retraumatize individuals by requiring them to recount distressing events. Creative expression allows for a nonverbal release of these emotions, reducing psychological distress while fostering a sense of empowerment and control.

Moreover, creative therapy can be particularly useful for children and adolescents. Younger clients may not yet have the vocabulary to express their thoughts and emotions effectively. Through play therapy, storytelling, or music therapy, children can convey their experiences in ways that feel safe and natural. These methods not only aid in emotional expression but also build resilience and coping mechanisms that serve them into adulthood.

By incorporating creative therapy into counselling, professionals can offer a holistic approach to healing. It provides clients with a unique way to explore their emotions, engage in self-reflection, and foster personal growth in a non-threatening, therapeutic environment.

Some of the healing effects for clients from Creative Therapies include:

- Improved physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing
- Expression and understanding of emotions
- Increased self-discovery and awareness of self and others
- Personal development
- Increased coping skills
- Enhanced cognitive function
- Induced relaxation and stress relief
- Reduced heart rate and blood pressure
- Aided emotional reparation

Specific Evidence for Play Therapy

For the last 80 years, play therapy researchers have provided evidence of positive impacts on clients across ages, ethnicities, presenting issues/needs,

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settings, and countries. There were 137 quality play therapy research papers published just between 2000 and 2023 that included:

- 56 were randomized controlled designs
- 20 were quasi-experimental group designs
- 28 were experimental single-case designs
- 33 were repeated measures of single-group designs

Reference:

Ray, D. (2025). Research in play therapy. In D. Crenshaw, A. Stewart, and D. Ray (Eds.), *Play therapy: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 259-269). Guilford.

A link with more comprehensive research can be found in the facebook group this week for you to access from Ray, D. C, & McCullough, R. (2015; revised 2016). Evidence-based practice statement: Play therapy (Research report). Retrieved from Association for Play Therapy website:
<http://www.a4pt.org/?page=EvidenceBase>

Practical Exercises to Get Started

Even if you feel you are not creative at all, please know you are. At its simplest, creativity is the use of imagination or original ideas to create something. Even if you don't remember your dreams, you dream. And how creative are dreams! Even if you don't feel any creative bones in your body, they are there (but perhaps a little hidden).

If creativity is the use of imagination or original ideas to create something new, then how ideal is Creative Therapy for counselling! We can help people use their imaginations to create something different for themselves. No one comes to counselling (or is brought, as in the case of children) if they are completely happy with how things are going. The agenda for change is omnipresent. We can talk and talk and think and think it all through and this can help. But it won't always, especially for children. And especially for adult clients who have

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already been talking and talking and trying to think their way through a challenge or stuckness with no success. Working with imagination opens another portal for change, an indirect path at times, that can lead to real insight, understanding and practical steps to different outcomes.

Before you can use creative therapies with others, or believe in your own creative potentials, it is worth recognising it and seeing it in action for yourself.

Reflection Exercise One

Take a moment now. Remember when in your life you have enjoyed a creative pursuit or experience. Not been good at it necessarily – and this is a critically important point - but just enjoyed it. Lost yourself, even for a little while, in the enjoyment of being, while making something (or appreciating someone else's creation) – a drawing or painting, a craft project, a mud pie, a scarf, a dessert, a story, a movie, a dance performance, a piece of music.

Taking even one of these positive creative experiences you enjoyed, ask yourself these questions.

What did I enjoy about it?

Did it speak to my heart?

Did I lose myself in it?

Did it relax, inspire, energise, challenge me?

Are there no words for it but an awareness of a pull somehow, a trigger of strong emotion, identification or remembrance?

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Journal or draw your responses

Reflection Exercise Two

In Reflection Exercise One, you already had an experience in how Creative Therapy can begin to work.

Part of the value in Creative Therapies is that they can allow us some time in an activity that is time out or away from that which might be troubling us. This can provide relief and relaxation. It can provide psychological distance from the otherwise all-consuming emotional pain of the present. It can also help with self-recognition and meaning-making. Part of the indirect way Creative Therapies can work is through symbolic or metaphoric thinking and meaning making.

Here is another exercise to demonstrate this. If you did have a strong positive remembrance of a creative pursuit or experience from the previous exercise go with that again. Alternatively, find an image or a piece of music that makes you feel good. Give yourself 3 minutes to listen in a focussed way to that music or really look at that one image (might be a piece of art on a wall nearby or for

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inspiration, something growing outside your window or type in a search for "evocative images" on the free site <https://pixabay.com/>). After 3 minutes of focussed attention ask yourself the questions below.

What part of this most interests me?

What does it remind me of?

What does it evoke in me?

If it could speak, what message might it want to share with me now?

How could this be helpful for me right now?

Journal or draw your responses

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Always Start with the Relationship

In order to be able to use creative therapies successfully, clients do need to be active and willing participants. Sufficient time and opportunities to warm up to the therapeutic relationship, space and ways of working are critical for success.

It is also important to remember that not every client (especially children) referred for therapy are interested in, ready for or can benefit from counselling, even creative therapy. Careful pre-screening and assessments are necessary to establish a clear contract of engagement and working intervention plan.

Continue Learning Here

Regardless of your background and level of experience, I am excited to be able to share interviews in the coming days that I have recorded with highly skilled clinicians who use a range of creative therapies in their practice. Each of these amazing mental health professionals are also part of our training team at Sydney Centre for Creative Change.

These interviews will give you a practical and personal introduction to how these clinicians got inspired and active in their fields and provide you with a warm insider look at the amazing work they do. Each of these interviews will give you tips for better integrating Creative Therapies into your counselling practice and ideas of where to go for resources. Look out in the coming days for your email to access these.

There are also further learning resources for you on our **Enhance Your Practice facebook page** so please join us there. I would LOVE to hear your comments, feedback, questions about any of this material so do leave a message.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/734043418353724>