

art therapy

for children experiencing cancer

Roughly 11,050 children between the ages of 1-14 years old were diagnosed with cancer in 2020 (Siegel, Miller, & Jemal, 2020). Though recent studies have reported over an 80% survival rate for childhood cancers (Siegel, Miller, & Jemal, 2020), the effect of the illness and the treatment process can be a physically and psychologically stressful experience in this population (Li, Chung, & Chi 2010; Councill, 1993; Favara-Scacco et al., 2001; Kars et al., 2015).

Treatment plans that include chemotherapy, radiation, surgeries, intravenous medicines, and long-term hospitalization (Siegel, Miller, & Jemal, 2020) are found to often cause side-effects such as anxiety, fears related to treatment, aggressive behaviors, isolation, loss, and disruptions to typical developmental milestones in children experiencing cancer-- to name a few (eg. Councill, 1993; Favara-Scacco et al., 2001; Kars et al., 2015).

Art therapy is a known effective treatment for the psycho-emotional effects caused by a cancer diagnosis (Nainis et al., 2006; Councill, 2012; Koolae et al. 2016). Art-making provides children the opportunity to communicate complex emotions and experiences without the need for verbalization and is cognitively appropriate and natural for them (Malchiodi, 1999; Rollins, 2005; Nainis et al., 2006; Koolae et al. 2016).

Over **80%** of individuals receiving cancer treatments also seek supplemental therapies such as art therapy (Richardson et al., 2000; Nainis et al., 2006)!

Children under 18 years old are below the age of medical consent, meaning that physical and mental treatment plans are decided by caregivers and teams of medical professionals (Kars et al, 2015; Stewart, Pyke-Grimm, & Kelly, 2012). In consequence, the child's voice goes unheard when making important decisions about their own physical and mental wellbeing (Kars et al., 2015).



So, as a known form of approachable and therapeutic communication...

...can art therapy serve as an appropriate vehicle for giving voice to children experiencing cancer treatments?