The Epilepsy Foundation of America partnered with the American Art Therapy Association to develop this practice toolkit. It provides art therapy information and resources for healthcare professionals as well as those individuals living with seizure disorders, their families, and caregivers. The information-rich toolkit offers practical guidance to assist in building or expanding an effective art therapy program and addresses some of the many opportunities for successful application and engagement of art therapy.

**Engaging Expression Through Creativity**

“Art therapy can be especially helpful to people with epilepsy who isolate themselves and have difficulty engaging with others and feeling comfortable in social settings. Because parents and people with epilepsy are often concerned with safety and the possibility of embarrassment, their lives can become further limited in terms of interaction-socially, educationally, or in the workplace. For those reasons, children with epilepsy may not make a confident transition to a more autonomous lifestyle as they become adults. Therefore, art therapy can be very helpful in the processes of engagement, transition, and socialization.” Elizabeth Coss, MA, ATR-BC & Steven C. Schachter, MD

**About Art Therapy**

Art therapists are Master’s level and above health professionals who use art as a means of communication and support. The art making process is used to guide people in: attaining enhanced communication and socialization; easing stress, pain, and loss; improving cognitive and motor skills; gaining mental health resilience and coping skills; and, increasing a sense of empowerment through illness, transitions, and end-of-life concerns.
MODEL ART THERAPY PROGRAMS

Feedback for the Studio E program was overwhelmingly positive, with 96% of participants stating that they agree or strongly agree that they found the program valuable and would recommend the program to others with similar needs. Epilepsy, Art Therapy, and Quality of Life (*An Excerpt) - Lacy Vitko, MA; Beth VanDerMolen, MS; Haley Rittenhouse, MA, ATR; & Jill M. Gattone, RN, MEd

National Epilepsy Center – Detroit, MI  Click to learn more
The art therapy program, held at a nationally recognized, Level 4 epilepsy center, is designed to accommodate 15 participants living with epilepsy. The six-week program meets once weekly. It is led by two credentialed art therapists, and attended by a psychologist and a center representative.

Open Studio – Studio E: Epilepsy Art Therapy Program, City, ST  Click to learn more
Studio E is a multi-week art therapy program open to people with epilepsy in 30 U.S. cities, where participants are given the opportunity to creatively express themselves and their emotions. The Studio E art therapy program aims to promote the following: artistic expression, building autonomy, art as empowerment, emotional stability, sense of self-worth, and connection with others.

Research & Focus Groups – Madison, WI  Click to learn more
The team engages in an ongoing research and consultation collaboration on art therapy and epilepsy. Areas of interest include children’s self-perception of neurologic disorders through art, the usefulness of art therapy in enhancing quality of life for children and adolescents who are living with epilepsy, and the correlation of medical outcome with qualitative art expression.

American Art Therapy Association is an organization of more than 5,000 professionals dedicated to the field of art therapy. Its mission is to serve its members and the general public by providing standards of professional competence, and developing and promoting knowledge about the field of art therapy.
IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

People with epilepsy and seizure disorders can face challenges due to limitations on activities, concerns about potential seizures and their implications, as well as lack of understanding from others. There are a number of options for implementing an effective, thriving art therapy program.

In order to properly treat and protect those seeking assistance, the American Art Therapy Association strongly promotes art therapy programs that employ art therapists credentialed through the independent Art Therapy Credentials Board. The ATCB defines appropriate and established standards for art therapy education, training, ethics, and competence in practice.

“One really successful project we did was hand mandalas on black paper with colored pencils. It was a very non-threatening way to introduce the idea of non-representational art and relax into the art making process. I introduced what a mandala was, and showed how one can create a design by overlapping tracings of your hand. The discussion at the end of the session was amazing, especially with the woman who created the image (right). She said that the shape and colors on the black paper reminded her of a brain scan. She was able to relate something that had previously been a source of stress to her (a medical test), to something that was relaxing to create and also beautiful as an end result.” Heather Hutchinson, MA, LCAT, ATR-BC, Studio E Art Therapist, Northeastern NY
OUTCOMES & MORE

“The program was a great way to express emotions I never knew I had. My confidence did increase when I realized I accomplished something new and different. It felt intimidating at first, but the counselor and the group gave me the courage and support I needed to complete the work. It was a well-rounded experience.” Los Angeles participant

“Individuals with epilepsy face many challenges including coping with the unpredictability of seizures, possible side effects of medications, perception or fear of stigma associated with their medical condition, and social barriers. Art therapy groups can provide an opportunity for individuals living with epilepsy to creatively explore some of their experiences—including their resources and strengths—in a safe and supportive environment. Art-based processes engage participants with a variety of sensory-rich art materials and enjoyable methods for the discovery of each person’s unique capacity for problem solving and self-expression. Sharing of artwork within the group and in carefully and ethically–considered exhibitions for the public, may enhance participants’ sense of belonging and self-esteem and promote increased awareness and understanding of epilepsy.” Janice Havlena, ATR-BC, Professor of Art Therapy, Edgewood College, Madison, WI

Outcome Bibliography

Select Reading

Art Therapy & Clinical Neuroscience BOOK
Art Therapy & Health Care BOOK
Art Therapy Focus Groups For Children & Adolescents With Epilepsy
Artistic Vision
Blinded Pilot Study Of Artwork In A Comprehensive Epilepsy Center Population
Complementary & Alternative Therapies for Epilepsy BOOK
Developing A Projective Drawing Test
Epilepsy Across The Spectrum
Healing Through Creative Expression
Kids With Disabilities: Art As An Outlet For Thoughts And Emotions
Seizure Drawings: Insight Into Self-Image Of Children With Epilepsy
Using Artwork To Better Understand Patients With Neurologic Disorders
“This experience was amazing. I believe I learned a lot about myself and from others as well. To hear and come into contact with others that have epilepsy made me feel like I’m not alone. Thank you for this experience, and I will be able to keep this with me forever.” Michigan participant