

What is an Arts Therapist?

An Arts Therapist is a psychological therapist who has arts-based experience plus training in psychological interventions using drama, music or art as their primary mode of communication. Arts therapies can help to improve general development, social interaction and communication skills, and support mental and physical rehabilitation.

Psychological interventions aim to improve a person's state of mind and wellbeing; for example, to reduce symptoms such as anxiety, confusion, pain and depression. An Arts Therapist does this by helping the individual to experience themselves and others in different ways through an arts-based activity within a therapeutic framework. Using arts-based psychological interventions is particularly helpful when emotions are too confusing to express verbally; when verbal communication is difficult; or when words are not enough or too much to bear.

What are the key roles of an Arts Therapist?

Arts Therapists provide unique psychological therapeutic interventions, supporting clients of all ages - children, adults and older people - facing a range of issues, disabilities or diagnoses. These can include emotional or mental health problems, ranging from depression and psychosis to issues of identity and recovery from addiction or abuse; learning or physical disabilities; developmental disorders; life-limiting conditions, brain injury or neurological conditions, such as a stroke or dementia; or physical illness.

Arts Therapists deliver a range of psychological resources, including:

- **psycho-social intervention:** allowing people to participate in exploring new relationships with other through the arts medium without always having to speak or communicate directly;
- **mentalisation-based treatment:** an evidence-based approach aiming to help service users understand their own thoughts and the thoughts of others;
- **mindfulness:** a specific cognitive approach to aid relaxation and alertness, helping to reduce anxiety, pain and intrusive thoughts;
- **compassion-based treatment:** based on viewing suffering as part of the human condition, aiming to de-pathologise and remove labels thus enabling the exploration of self-compassion processes.

Arts Therapists actively participate in multi-disciplinary teamwork and also extend their scope of practice through further training. Working in a wide range of settings - including independent or third sector organisations as well as mainstream health, education and social care services - additional roles involve working with families and carers, carrying out assessments and writing reports, as well as mentoring and providing supervision to staff.

How does someone qualify to become an Arts Therapist?

In order to qualify as an Arts Therapist, applicants need to have successfully completed one of the postgraduate education and training courses approved by the

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Only then can they apply to join the HCPC's Register of health and care professionals, and use the protected professional titles of Art Therapist, Art Psychotherapist, Dramatherapist, or Music Therapist.

Many Arts Therapists come from a formal arts background and have an arts degree. If they are not an arts graduate, individuals wishing to train as an Arts Therapist are required to have an undergraduate degree or professional qualification in a relevant field, such as nursing or social work. They will also have to demonstrate their proficiency in their respective art form. Some pre-training work experience may be required. This does not have to be arts-related, but has to be a task that puts the applicant in charge in a professional capacity of the welfare of a vulnerable person within the helping professions.

What's the difference between an Arts Therapist and an arts in health practitioner?

The key difference is that an Arts Therapist is a psychological therapist, trained in their respective art forms. An arts in health practitioner is not. Through their approved training, Arts Therapists are skilled to offer psychological assessments; an intervention and/or series of on-going interventions that specifically address the client's individual needs - specifically areas of distress or discomfort; a focus on sustainability of the psychological intervention; an approach integrating evidence-based practice and research findings.

A second important difference is that Arts Therapists are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This means that they are required to meet national standards for their training, professional skills and behaviour. It also means that the public is protected should any professional fail to meet these standards. Arts in health practitioners are not regulated.

How can I check whether an Arts Therapist is registered with the HCPC?

To check if an individual is listed on the HCPC Register, visit www.hcpc-uk.org/check and enter their surname or registration number. Alternatively you can download the free Check the Register app, available for both Apple and Android mobile devices.

For employers and managers, the multiple registrant search function on the HCPC website is a simple and effective way to check whether employees regulated by the HCPC are currently registered. Up to 100 registration records can be searched for at any one time. Visit mrs.hcpc-uk.org.

Why should I employ a registered Arts Therapist?

Arts Therapists are statutory regulated and are fully accountable to the HCPC, whose primary remit is public protection. An Arts Therapists' right to practice is linked to continuing registration and compliance with additional obligations, such as undertaking continuing professional development (CPD). This ensures continued learning and development throughout their careers, keeping skills and knowledge up-to-date, and ensuring they are able to work safely, legally and effectively.

Working with clients creatively and psychologically attempts to secure an emotional wellbeing that is core to the potential impact of other health and social care interventions; which is why Arts Therapists are recognised for providing cost-effective psychotherapeutic interventions.

Arts Therapists are skilled at engaging hard-to-reach clients of all ages, regardless of their conditions. The benefits for service users can extend well beyond therapy sessions, with outcomes including improved social and communication skills, and increased confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to play a more integrated role in their local community.