

# Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy

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Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy integrates Eugene Gendlin's method of Focusing with the practice of art therapy. Both Gendlin's original teaching method of Focusing (1981), and the principles of Focusing-Oriented Therapy (1996) are intertwined with art therapy theory and practice.

Focusing, offers a gentle yet powerful way for accessing the body's wisdom while art therapy harnesses and activates one's creative intelligence. While Focusing and art therapy are each complete practices for self-awareness, growth and therapeutic change, a rich transformational alchemy occurs when wedding the two disciplines. Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy benefits Focusing-Oriented Therapists, art therapists, expressive arts therapists, Focusers, and others interested in applying Focusing and art therapy to their discipline.

Methods from art therapy can be integrated into Gendlin's original six step method for teaching Focusing, and other variations of Focusing instructions (e.g. Weiser-Cornell; Friedman, Hinterkopf)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, art therapy is easily integrated into various aspects of the Focusing process including:

- I. **Clearing A Space:** art materials and exercises can be used to help Clear a Space.
- II. **Symbolizing the felt sense:** After getting a felt sense, the Focuser sees if there is a word, phrase, image, gesture, or sound that matches the felt sense. An image is easily translated into an art form. Words and gestures can also be expressed through artistic means.
- III. **Combining art therapy with Gendlin's six step focusing method** (and others).
- IV. **Adding art therapy into Focusing moments**, such as in meditation, psychotherapy, expressive arts, journaling and body-work.

See the **Basic Instructions for Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy** and **articles** on the website for specific ways of integrating Focusing and art therapy.

## Benefits of Using Art Therapy in the Focusing process:

1. Art can be used to concretize and symbolize a felt sense and felt shift.
2. The art product enables both client (Focuser) and therapist (Guide) to see the exact same image that symbolizes the felt sense.
3. The physical act of drawing helps the felt sense to open and to move, thus bringing about a felt shift, supporting the life forward direction.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.focusing.org/partnership/partner\\_info/short-forms.html](http://www.focusing.org/partnership/partner_info/short-forms.html)

4. The visual image is a reminder of where Focusing began, where felt shifts occurred, and where the Focusing process concluded.
5. The visual art product can be used as a tangible reference point to return to in later sessions.
6. Art can be used at all phases of Focusing: at the beginning, to clear a space; throughout the Focusing process (steps); and at the end to bring the session to closure.
7. The art piece can be taken with the client as an affirmation of what occurred in the session that was meaningful and for a reminder to integrate into life.

Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy also works in the other direction—integrating Focusing into art therapy. The basic methods for adding Focusing into art therapy include:

- I. **Beginning art therapy:** Prior to engaging in an artistic process, the client can be guided into the body to access the felt sense of an issue or experience—and to see if there is a handle or symbol which can be expressed through visual art.
- II. **During artistic expression:** The client can be reminded to stay connected to the felt sense while creating—e.g. she or he can be invited to choose art materials, colors, and images that match the felt sense. The therapist can invite the client to ask the felt sense questions. In art therapy, questions can be directed to the imagery and art work—listening as the felt sense answers. The client is encouraged to receive what comes from the felt sense and art.
- III. **Concluding an art therapy session:** The client can be invited to check back in with the felt sense after creating art-- how am I on the inside now? Does it need anything? (This grounds the client and art experience).

### **Benefits of Using Focusing in Art Therapy:**

1. Focusing offers a mindful awareness to the art therapy process.
2. Focusing helps to ground imagery through awareness of the bodily felt sense.
3. The first step of Focusing, “Clearing A Space,” provides art therapy with an exercise for stress reduction and access to the self that is inherently whole.
4. The Focusing steps offer art therapy a structure for therapeutic direction and change.
5. Knowledge of Focusing and Focusing-Oriented Therapy deepens the clinical skills of art therapists, teaching how to accompany clients in their experience, help clients access their felt sense, overcome obstacles, and demonstrate effective empathic listening.