

Painting with Parkinson's: Art as Therapy A Resource Manual for Parkinson's Art Groups

“During each session I am able to relax and put all of my thoughts into expressions of color.” Glenys



FOREWORD

Anne Atkin has been an active volunteer, public speaker, ambassador and librarian with Parkinson's Victoria since 2006.

Driven by her love of art, her own journey with Parkinson's and a rich professional career in teaching, Anne began her first 'Painting with Parkinson's' group in 2007. Committed to helping others experience the benefits of art, Anne now travels throughout Victoria to conduct art seminars for Parkinson's support groups.

Anne hopes to set up as many art groups as possible and has devoted many hours developing this booklet as a resource. This booklet contains advice, methods and techniques specifically designed to overcome Parkinson's challenges to the creative process.

Anne kindly offers her mentorship to anyone interested in starting an art group. Please contact Parkinson's Victoria (ph) 03 9551 1122 to get in touch with Anne or for more information.

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1. ART AS A THERAPY FOR PARKINSON'S

- Art gives chronically ill people the chance to make choices and decisions so that they take back some control in their lives
- Parkinson's can often lead to social isolation and low self-esteem due to difficulties with speech
- Inability to move the facial muscles can make you look different to how you feel, but art allows you to express yourself
- Learning new skills helps with self-confidence and self-esteem
- Through planned activities, your creative ability can be encouraged to 'kick in'
- Art allows you to use both sides of your brain (*Drawing on the right side of the brain* by Betty Edwards)
- Art teaches you to see things around you differently
- Lessons can be planned to allow people to choose to work independently or as part of a group
- Art lets you express your feelings and moods
- Art allows you to express yourself in a totally different way

2. HOW DOES PAINTING WITH PARKINSON'S HELP?

- When in the creative mode the brain is working subconsciously with low stress levels
- Learning new skills helps to keep you active and helps to combat depression
- There is improved mental health
- There is evidence to suggest that Parkinson's Disease actually enhances creativity rather than decrease it
- Art activities help you to become physically and mentally relaxed
- Research shows that physiological functions, such as heart rate, blood pressure and respiration slow when people are deeply involved in an activity they enjoy
- Also making art provides an opportunity for someone to exercise their hands and their eyes, improve eye-hand co-ordination and stimulate neurological pathways from the brains to the hands.
- Stress reduction is also of significant benefit as stress can intensify pain and other symptoms of disease

“When participants arrive they sit at the tables with tea or coffee and chat. Usually there is laughter. After about 10 minutes it's down to art. Each takes something from one of the many containers on the tables- a crayon, pastel, felt pen, charcoal pencil and so on. The music starts and with eyes closed quiet descends, some bodies sway in time, some don't. It doesn't matter because as the drawing implements move over the paper you can see people's faces relaxing. Art as a therapy has started.” (Nancy Tingey)

3. PRE-DRAWING RELAXATION

“Listening to music and relaxing through breathing exercises and other forms of meditation help the nervous system to function properly. As tension is released, painting begins. Absorbed in the process, movements free up. One thing leads to another. Creative pursuits seem to defuse stressful situations.” (Nancy Tingey, 1998)

Our group starts ‘officially at 9.30am but over the months this has changed slowly. Now most people arrive between 9.00 and 9.30am, grab a cup of tea or coffee, maybe a scone and have a chat with others as they arrive. This half hour has become a very important time for people to off-load any problems, talk about whatever and from distance you hear the sound of chattering and more importantly, laughter.

Then at 9.30 we are ready to set up and our brains are more receptive to what we are about to do.

- We sit in a chair and let our bodies, thoughts and breathing slow down. Eyes are closed.
- I talk them through listening to the sounds around them.
- Then one by one you take a sound, put it into a box and let it sit to the side where it’s out of the way.
- Do this till you can focus on just one thing – your breathing.
- If an unpleasant thought enters, don’t panic; just look at, put it into a box, lock it and push it away.
- Breathing slowly and deeply.
- Raise your arms and point your fingers – just do the best you can
- Roll your shoulders; do some shoulder shrugs and open your eyes.

4. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

You are ready for: The Power of the doodle

- Pick up any drawing implement and listen to the music (Peer Gynt's Morning is a good one to start off with)
- Close your eyes and move your pencil, crayon, pastel etc over the paper in time to the music
- Listen to the music and use circular movements only
- Eyes still closed, try to draw a simple object in your mind's eye. See yourself drawing it without taking the pencil off the paper. Now you will do the same thing on paper but remember, it's without lifting the pencil off the paper. Keep it simple e.g. trees, flowers
- Close your eyes, listen to the music and feel yourself becoming part of it. Bodies may start to sway and the relaxation sets in fairly quickly. I tell them to open their eyes and continue doodling but now use other colors and see what develops.
- Then I asked them to make the whole top of the table one big doodle. Loads of fun if done in felt pen and then spray water over it – watch the colors start to spread
- This is the art version of musical chairs -great fun! Everyone has a different type of art material eg, a green crayon, a purple oil pastel, a red felt pen, a yellow soft pastel, charcoal etc. As the music plays(one or two minutes to start off with) they draw anything they like but when the music stops they pass their drawing to the person beside them and continue their drawing, music stops, pass it on, start drawing etc until your drawing gets back to you. This produces lots of laughter.



- Cover the whole table with one long sheet of paper and let everyone just 'doodle' on the 'tablecloth' in front of them. After a few minutes, tell them that they are to somehow 'join' their drawing to the drawing opposite them - this activity is one you would do later when people are comfortable with each other and have more confidence.
- Put up on the wall as big a piece of paper as you can and someone put a scribble or small pattern in the middle. When people are comfortable they can add to this initial mark anyway they want in any direction with any art material but it must be a continuous drawing – no starting elsewhere. When the sheet is full it is a rather attractive 'abstract' work.
- Those who are able to stand and move around the table can do this- the others can watch. All facing one direction move around the table and with the pen in your left hand and as you move around, make a continuous line on the paper. Now stop; face the other way, put the pen in your right hand and do a continuous line again.
- Finger painting - mix up wallpaper paste and use only 3 colors - red, blue and yellow. Mix the now fairly thick paste with each color (this gives it 'body') Each group member wears latex gloves and on a large piece of paper they have a large blob of the 3 colors. You will get lots of other colors being produced. When something looks good, put a piece of paper on the top and run a roller over it- makes a lovely print.



“Anything which will calm down the nervous system will help the messages to flow smoothly from one set of dendrites to the next. If the ‘lubricant’ dopamine is missing it is possible to compensate to some extent by introducing the body to stress-free activities which do not agitate the nervous system. Meditative processes work for sound scientific reasons,”
 (Nancy Tingey, 1996 Churchill Fellow)



This session usually lasts approx 15min. Sometimes the results of these activities give people ideas for a piece of art for the rest of the session.

5. PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

A good idea for storage -

- I bought two very large tubs on wheels - one is for drawing materials and the other is for painting/wet material,
- Have a smaller tub for paper.

You will need:

- Paper towelling - lots
- Latex gloves
- Wet ones
- Spray bottles of water - try this yourself first and you will see how effective this is - do an abstract/scibble pattern on cartridge paper using water based felt pens. Now spray water over the lot. You can let the colors run or blot them with paper towelling.
- Lots of plastic containers of different sizes
- One of those tall clothes drying stand - use pegs to hang wet art work
- A hair dryer – to dry a painting/drawing enough for more drawing to be added

List of materials.

- Oil pastels
- Lumber crayons
- Soft pastels
- Acrylic paint - chromacryl in 2litre bottles and just get the primary colors and white
- Charcoal
- Graphite pencils 8B to 8H
- Thick water based felt pens
- Brushes - get more of the thick handles than thin for people who have trouble gripping
- Good quality drawing cartridge paper A4 and A3 plus paper on rolls so you can get wall murals and group work ***check out paper wholesalers***
- Food coloring/ and colored inks - drip onto wet paper and let it run!

This is a basic list and you will be amazed how much you can do with simple things. For example, lumber crayons - draw a picture or do patterns with heavy coloring in but you don't cover every bit of paper because over the top you will brush on diluted paint which of course will not cover where the crayon has gone and you can get some great effects.

I often set up an art activity nearby so that anyone who is unsure or lacking in confidence can have a go at something and it seems to get the creativity flowing.

Last week we did marbling and it was great fun – instant results!

Painting with Parkinson's is not a formal art lesson. It is art as a therapy but if you find some people finding it hard to get it into perspective, then use this analogy.

Exercise has become an important part of helping people with PD because it releases chemicals in the brain and this is thought to have some neuroprotective elements but *doing exercise as a therapy doesn't mean you are training for the Olympics.*

Painting with Parkinson's will one day be an important part of helping people with PD because it releases chemicals in the brain and this is beneficial in the long term for relaxation and depression but *doing art as a therapy does not mean you are training to be the next Picasso.*

Now, apart from the normal art supplies, try to build up collections of these things for activities such as collage, and printing.

- Ice cream sticks
- Textured materials eg. Corrugated cardboard, rough sandpaper
- Material eg onion bags, hessian, velvet, the rippled carpet underlay
- Old sterilized toothbrushes: for painting with and for spatter work
- Wire: soft bendable stuff like florists wire to make shapes
- Different types of paper: tissue, crepe
- Sponge
- Paper plates
- Plastic plates, bowls: handy for painting

6. PAINTING IDEAS

If you give most people a paintbrush they will draw with it, not actually paint so try these ideas first.

PS very messy!

- I only put out on a paper plate 4 blobs of color – red, yellow, blue and white. Never black because it is not easy to use. If someone is determined to use black, tell them to add it last because it overpowers everything they will have done.

Use large pieces of paper and paint with

- A piece of sponge
- Crumpled paper
- Ice-cream sticks
- Cardboard with different edges cut along it
- Using these will give wonderful texture and beautiful colors as the primary colors mix



Now, the toothbrushes! Do you remember doing spatter work at school as a child? Again, put paint on a plate. You can use anything for this but leaves are very effective. Put one large leaf on your paper. Dip your toothbrush into the paint (not too much) and either use your finger to flick the paint over the leaf or rub the toothbrush over the flywire. Now very carefully move the leaf into a new position, use a different colour and spatter again.

7. ACTIVITIES SMORGASBOARD

For most activities, remember **wet on wet!**

If you have done finger-painting as a warm up, you can print from it.

(Keep a spray bottle of water nearby to keep the painting wet)

- Just place a sheet of paper over the top and go over with a roller; peel off the top sheet and you have 2 pieces for the price of 1!
- Smooth out the paint and using a stick or anything, draw a pattern in the wet paint and print from that. Or on top of the wet paint add an arrangement of leaves and print. There is no such thing as failure in art – there is only “next time I’ll try this instead.”
- Coil string that has been dipped in paint onto a sheet of paper. Another piece on top; use the roller and pull off top sheet – you never really know what you’ll get!
- When printing from a finger painting, try rolling with different pressure – sometimes very soft or sometimes hard- you will get different results.
- Draw on wet paper (paper must be cartridge at least for strength) with brightly colored chalks.
- Draw on wet paper using thick water based felt pens. When it’s dry you can draw some more either using felt pens or anything else! It’s called mixed media and it is very effective.
- Draw using a white crayon on white paper then paint over with diluted paint.
- Printing is a great way to have wonderful surprises- lift the paper off and underneath will always be something unexpected. Just because you have stuck down different textures onto cardboard and the spread paint over it doesn’t mean that it will work out the way you expect - it could be better!
- Remember – keep spray bottles on hand because working on wet paper gives wonderful results but more importantly, it makes using certain media easier to use.
- Pigmented inks dripped onto wet paper using eye droppers can give the most beautiful colors and patterns. It is a great way to help someone overcome a hand freezing – just follow the drips!
- Printing activities are wonderful because of the surprise element; have a collection of materials with textures on hand eg, corrugated cardboard, onion bags, hessian, bits and pieces of differently shaped anything! Arrange them and glue onto a piece of thick cardboard or ply, let dry, add paint, paper on top, roll over carefully and peel off paper.
I find that the rest of the group watches to see what is produced and it is a very happy sharing time too.
- Have a blow dryer on hand to dry a drip painting as done above, and then you can use a different media on top. Eg. Outlining with felt pens as you see shapes within shapes.
- Drawing on wet paper with soft pastels
- Marbling – gives beautiful swirls of color instantly
- Fluro paint on black paper
- Water-based oil paints- no need to use turpentine

- Use a sloping board for participants who have trouble holding a brush or reaching the paper. There is the advantage that colors will run.
- Spreading color with wet sponges. Let dry. What can you see in the streaks of color? What can you add with another type of media?
- Good quality oil pastels have beautiful bright colors. Using artist quality turpentine, carefully brush over your drawing. The turps 'melts' the oil pastel and the effect is quite lovely. Do this in a well ventilated area.

Sometimes a group member (who has no previous art experience) will come along with a large photo they would like to copy and PD can make it very difficult to 'see' the whole picture without getting lost in it.

I have found that if you ask which part of the photo is their favourite and mask everything else except this one part, it is easier for them to cope.

PD also seems to take away your ability to do complex planning so trying to copy even something in front of you is very frustrating and become counterproductive as stress levels rise. Encourage painting from the subconscious; experiment with different materials – 'happy accidents' are inevitable.

Even with previous art training and experience, it can be difficult to find where you are up to when using a photo to copy. I find that if I place a small sticker on the section of the photo I'm reproducing, then I can easily glance up from my drawing and find straight away where I am up to.

- Make time for a cuppa and chocolate biscuits – the chatting and sharing of stories, ideas and art is a valuable and enriching time for the group. As one group member said, this is the time of the week where he laughs the most.



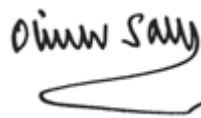
8. AWAKENINGS

Something to think about

"[The] therapeutic power of art is temporary - it can liberate the patient only while the performance or the creative act is occurring. But knowing that they can be liberated in this way, and in doing so, reclaim, for a while, their healthy selves, is profoundly encouraging and therapeutic for patients with Parkinsonism.

Moreover, I suspect...**that the ability to turn to creative activity may, perhaps, slow the advance of the disease.** And even if it does not, **it can activate the patient, allowing him to fight and sometimes conquer it for years on end.**

Is there anything we can learn about the actual mechanisms of disease from this extraordinary power of art and creativity in overcoming Parkinsonism? This is for a future generation of neuroscientists to discover, but I cannot help thinking it is a subject ripe for exploration.... The Parkinsonian patient knows, and can express, the experience of Parkinsonism as no mere scientist or physician can, and we doctors and therapists must continue to learn from this."



Oliver Sacks, M.D.
Renowned Neurologist
Author, *Awakenings*

PDCreativity Project: c2007 Parkinson's Disease Foundation

9. FINISHING A SESSION

It's time to finish, so now what?

- Each group member is given their own art folio to keep their work in.
- Date the work!
- I frame one piece of work for each group member and display the art at Parkinson's Victoria
- We also hope to make calendars for next year.
- An art exhibition!



Glenys

A simple framing idea – photo frames with multiple cut-outs – just place the matt board on top of your painting.



Joy



By Kevin

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FURTHER RESOURCES

The website *Art for Parkinson's*, which put into words what I had been thinking and once I started, one idea led to another.

Nancy Tingey The Founder, Coordinator and Tutor 'Painting with Parkinson's'
Without Nancy I don't know how far I would have gone. It's all very well to have ideas and enthusiasm but to have someone like Nancy behind you who had already 'been there, done that' was wonderful. Nancy was a Churchill Fellow in 1996 and some of her observations I have added to this because they're so 'spot-on'.

Parkinson's Victoria

When members of staff come along and sit down and join in you know you are not only supported but made to feel that what you are doing is valuable.

So thank you Catherine and Amanda for actually joining in with the class. I hope your efforts are still on the fridge! And also a thank you to our CEO Glenn Mahoney who has always shown an interest in what is happening with the Narre Warren Painting with Parkinson's Support group.

Anne Atkin
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