

FREE PARENT & CARER TOOLKIT

Preparing Your Child for Art Therapy

A gentle first-session guide with questions, checklists and child-friendly worksheets.

FIRST APPOINTMENT | PARENT WORKSHEETS | ILLUSTRATED CHILD GUIDE

Preparing is about helping your child know what might happen - not asking them to explain feelings or make a particular kind of art.

14-PAGE ILLUSTRATED WORKBOOK

Printable | Fillable worksheets | No sign-up needed

WELCOME

What is art therapy for children?

A short introduction for adults preparing a child for an appointment.



Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy in which a qualified professional supports children to explore experiences and feelings through art-making and a therapeutic relationship. Children might draw, paint, use clay, talk or work quietly. The approach is adapted to the child and the service.

Art therapy and ordinary creative activities are different

Professional art therapy

Delivered by an appropriately qualified, HCPC-registered professional as part of therapeutic support.

Everyday art activities

May be offered by parents or teachers for enjoyment and expression; not automatically treatment.

Does your child need to be good at art?

No. The session is not about producing a perfect picture. There is no single correct way to use the art materials.

FIRST APPOINTMENT

What might happen at the first session?

The first visit may be an introduction or assessment rather than a full therapy session. Arrangements vary between services.

01 **Arriving**
Meet the therapist and get familiar with the room.

02 **Settling in**
Talk, listen, or see which materials are available.

03 **Making or talking**
The child may make art, talk, or choose to stay quiet.

04 **Finishing**
The therapist can explain what happens next.



Will my child have to talk about feelings?

Not necessarily. Some children speak, some make art, and some need time to settle. Ask the therapist how your child can choose whether to participate and communicate.

Will I stay in the room?

Parents may attend part of a first meeting, or wait elsewhere. Ask the service who attends, how the meeting is structured and how family involvement works.

SAYING IT SIMPLY

Explaining art therapy to your child

These are suggestions for a gentle conversation, not promises about how a particular service will run.

For younger children (approximately 5-8)

"You are going to meet someone who helps children with their feelings. There may be paints, pencils or clay. You can ask questions, and your picture does not have to be perfect."

For older children (approximately 9-13)

"Art therapy gives you a space to express things in different ways. You might make art, talk or take time to think. You can ask the therapist what will happen and how your privacy works."

Useful things to say

- "It is okay to have questions or feel unsure."
- "We can ask the therapist about anything you want to know."
- "You do not need to make artwork that looks a certain way."

Avoid making promises

Do not promise that the child will feel better immediately, must talk about an experience, or will share everything about the appointment afterwards.

Questions my child would like to ask (optional)

PARENT CHECKLIST

Preparing without pressure

Tick the steps that help your family prepare. No child needs to complete every activity in this guide.



- [ ] I explained the appointment in simple, reassuring language.
- [ ] I gave my child space to ask questions or say they feel unsure.
- [ ] I checked the appointment time, location and travel arrangements.
- [ ] I asked whether parents or carers attend the first visit.
- [ ] I told the service about relevant access or sensory needs.
- [ ] I avoided promising a particular outcome.
- [ ] I know whom to contact if my child is reluctant or uncomfortable.

If your child does not want to attend

Listen without pressuring them. Contact the therapist or referring professional to talk through their concerns and discuss suitable options.

Our preparation notes (optional)

BEFORE THE VISIT

Questions to ask the art therapist

Use this list to make an informed decision about the service and prepare for the appointment.

QUALIFICATIONS	Are you currently HCPC-registered as an art therapist?
EXPERIENCE	What experience do you have with children of this age?
APPOINTMENTS	What is the first session likely to involve?
FAMILY INVOLVEMENT	How will parents or carers be involved?
PRIVACY	What is kept confidential, and when might information be shared?
SAFEGUARDING	What happens if a safety concern arises?
ACCESSIBILITY	How can sensory or communication preferences be accommodated?
REVIEW	How will goals, progress and future appointments be discussed?

Check registration

Use the HCPC Register to check the therapist's registration and recorded profession, not just a certificate or course title.

Questions I would also like to ask

THIS PAGE IS FOR CHILDREN

Things that help me feel comfortable

There are no right answers. A child may point, draw, write, ask for help or skip the page.



Things I might enjoy doing

- [ ] Drawing
- [ ] Painting
- [ ] Making things
- [ ] Talking

Something that helps me feel comfortable

Something I would like to ask

My choice matters

I can ask for help, ask a question or say if something feels uncomfortable. I can also leave this worksheet blank.

OPTIONAL PLANNING SHEET

Sensory and communication preferences

Share only what is helpful for planning suitable adjustments with the service.

Communication preferences to discuss

- [ ] Short, clear instructions and visual prompts
- [ ] Extra time to understand or respond
- [ ] A preferred communication method or support
- [ ] Opportunities to take breaks
- [ ] A quieter space or reduced background noise
- [ ] Adjustments to light, noise or seating
- [ ] Choice about different art materials or textures

Materials or sensations that my child prefers to avoid

What might help the first visit feel manageable?

> **Individual preferences first**
>
> No single adjustment suits every child. Discuss preferences and potential adaptations with the qualified professional rather than assuming what will work.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Privacy, consent and safeguarding

Parents can ask how confidentiality, records, safety and participation work before therapy begins.

Art therapy involves professional confidentiality, but privacy is not absolute. Safeguarding concerns and other lawful information-sharing duties may mean some information must be shared appropriately. The therapist should explain these boundaries clearly.

Confidentiality	What information is usually private?
Information sharing	When might information be shared with family or professionals?
Safeguarding	What happens if a concern about safety arises?
Artwork and records	Who keeps artwork and how is it stored?
Consent	How will permission and the child's participation be considered?
Review	How will progress and next steps be shared?

Questions or answers to follow up

Do not assume all details are shared

Ask what your child can expect to keep private and what safeguarding-related exceptions apply. The therapist should discuss arrangements appropriate to the child and service.

PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

First appointment planner

This page is for appointment arrangements, not for storing detailed health or safeguarding information.

Appointment date

Appointment time

Service contact or phone

Address / online meeting details

Before the day

- [ ] Parent / carer attendance arrangements confirmed
- [ ] Travel or access requirements considered
- [ ] Sensory and communication preferences discussed
- [ ] Questions prepared
- [ ] Contact details checked in case plans change

Next appointment arrangements / other practical notes

If urgent help is needed

Do not wait for a scheduled art therapy appointment if you are worried about an urgent change in a child's safety or wellbeing. Seek appropriate urgent support.

FAMILY PARTICIPATION

How parents and carers may be involved

The therapist should explain the arrangements for your child. These may vary by age, needs, setting and service.



1

Before the session

Prepare relevant practical information and ask how introductions, consent and communication preferences are handled.

2

During the session

Depending on the service, a parent may attend part of the meeting or wait separately. Ask how this works.

3

After the session

Be available to listen. Follow any agreed guidance without pressuring the child to describe or show everything.

If your child does not want to talk afterwards

"You do not have to tell me everything about the session. I am here if you want to share or ask anything."

GENTLE FOLLOW-UP

After the first appointment

These are optional prompts. Do not expect your child to feel better immediately or to discuss their artwork.

Parent / carer notes

Questions my child raised about returning

Practical changes to discuss with the therapist

Optional prompts for the child

One thing I liked or felt comfortable with

One thing I would like to be different next time

One question I want to ask

There is no required reaction

A child can feel curious, uncertain, relieved, unsettled or something else after a first visit. Discuss persistent worries or concerns with the appropriate professional.

A CHILD-FRIENDLY GUIDE

My first art therapy visit

A short page to read together before an appointment. Every service can be a little different.



1 **I might meet someone new.**
They are there to help children express themselves.

2 **There may be things to draw or make.**
I do not have to be good at art.

3 **I can ask questions.**
I can say what I feel comfortable with.

4 **I can take things at my own pace.**
The therapist can explain what happens next.

There is no perfect picture to make.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Reliable guidance and next steps

Official and professional sources help families check registration and discuss support with suitable services.

BAAT: What to expect when starting art therapy

What sessions may involve, and how people can participate.

HCPC: Check the Register

How to verify an art therapist's professional registration.

NHS: Children and young people - where to get support

Where families can begin exploring appropriate mental health support.

BAAT: Professional code of ethics

More about confidentiality, safeguarding and involving carers.

Checking a professional

Art therapist and art psychotherapist are protected professional titles in the UK. Use the HCPC Register to verify the person's registration.

Further learning with Thames College

Thames College's Art Therapy Certification Diploma introduces relevant principles and creative wellbeing concepts for adult learners. It does **not** qualify someone for HCPC registration as an art therapist.

View the Art Therapy Certification Diploma

Educational-use note: This pack offers general preparation information, not professional assessment or individual clinical advice. Do not use public worksheets to store sensitive identifiable information. Follow the guidance of your child's qualified professional and relevant safeguarding arrangements.