

Benefits of working with clay

- 3-dimensional, so the model can be viewed from different directions and angles and placed in different settings e.g. sand tray
- Sensory, and both stimulates the senses and regulates the body
- Releases emotions and memories
- Unlocks unconscious material
- Widens awareness of the client's inner world, becoming a symbol or metaphor for it
- Cathartic
- Rich in metaphor: Constructing, pulling it or cutting it apart and deconstructing and then repairing can become a metaphor for trauma and becoming whole again
- Allows for play
- Projective identification occurs

Ethical considerations

- Client needs to be able to ground themselves because of the buried emotions which may surface. Clients may also be anxious about this element of the work.
- The clay, once dried, can become fragile and pieces may even break off, which can add an extra challenge for the client.

Explorative exercise with clay

Client to be given a lump of clay which fits comfortably in their hand.

"Close your eyes and allow yourself to explore the clay in your hand. Press your fingers into it. Feel the clay move between your fingers. Mould and press the clay and pay attention to how it changes its shape. Now caress the surface very gently. Allow yourself to explore the texture of it: push against it very gently. Circle the surface of the clay with your finger...with your palm... press it between your palms... between your fingers... pinch it... press harder. Take the clay and slam it down onto the table in front of you. Allow it to really make a noise as you slam it down, then pick it up again and slam it down. Hit the clay in front of you, listen to the smacking noise it makes... hit it with the edge of your hand... with your palm... with your fist.

Now start rolling the clay into a sausage. Keep rolling it, making it longer and thinner until it breaks. Now form the clay into a ball again. Lift the clay to your nose and smell it. As you continue exploring the clay in any way you like, begin to discern a form hidden within the clay. Begin to bring out that hidden form, liberating it; giving it shape.

When you are ready, open your eyes and look at the form you have created. What does that form mean to you? Is it a part of you?"

Points to remember:

- Tactile senses are developed in this exercise
- Encourages tactile exploration, dissociated from rational and analytical mind
- Form that evolves tends to represent a part of the person shaping it

(credit to a tutor on a Waverley Diploma years ago)

Creating a Healthy Place

For this exercise, clients need to think of an animal: perhaps the first animal that springs to mind.

1. *Take a few minutes to meditate on the animal you have selected. Notice its characteristics and imagine what it would look like if it were life-size. Where would this animal live (jungle, rural area, forest, and so on?) What would it need to survive? To feel safe and comfortable? What would it need to feel well cared for and nurtured? Take a few more minutes and, with eyes closed, imagine an environment for this animal that would meet these needs.*
2. *Create this safe, comfortable, and nurturing environment for the animal. Create the animal as part of the actual art piece.*

Questions to answer:

- *What items, surroundings, circumstances, or qualities are important to make your animal feel safe, comfortable, and nurtured?*
- *How did you decide what elements to include?*
- *Are there any elements you wanted to include but didn't?*
- *What helps you to feel safe, comfortable, and nurtured?*

Points to remember:

- Most children and adults who have a serious or chronic physical condition not only need to identify healthy aspects of their lives but also need to explore self-care as part of their healthy maintenance.

(Taken from 'The Art Therapy Sourcebook, 2007')

Saboteur Experiential Exercise

For this exercise, clients need to think of something that stops them from moving forward in their therapy journey or stops them doing something that they want to do.

1. Take a few minutes to meditate on what your saboteur would look like as a visual form. Think about the size of your saboteur - this could be relevant to how much your saboteur is stopping you moving forward or doing the thing that you want to do. Think about what characteristics or special markings maybe on your saboteur. Always have in mind that you will be using this piece of clay after you have created your saboteur to make something that is going to help you to move forward or to do the thing that you want to do.
2. Now that you have made your saboteur, you're going to use the same piece of clay to create a new visual form. Take the clay and squash it in your hands and as you do this, picture yourself taking control of that saboteur so that it can no longer have power over you. Roll the clay into a ball.
3. Take the ball of clay, and meditate on what your ball of clay is going to now look like. Think about something that's going to help you with the things that you want to do.

For example: A client's saboteur is a hammer that represents the negative thoughts that stop them from trying something new. They squash the hammer whilst picturing those negative thoughts in their mind. They then make the piece of clay into a candle holder that will hold a candle to remind them there is always light at the end of the tunnel and that they will get there eventually. They use the candle holder whenever they have negative thoughts that stop them from doing something that they really want to do.

(written by Cara Cramp)

Reading materials:

Touching Clay: Touching What?: The Use of Clay in Therapy by Lynne Souter Anderson

Healing through Creativity by Fiona Horrobin