



The American Art Therapy Association Ethics Committee provides this series of “best practice” papers as non-binding guidelines to help art therapists interpret and apply the *Ethical Principles for Art Therapists*.

Responding to Media Requests

12.0 ADVERTISING: *Art therapists engage in appropriate publicity regarding professional activities in order to enable clients to choose professional services on an informed basis.*

Because the typical art therapist is not accustomed to being interviewed for the camera, being contacted to represent art therapy for the media can be exciting. It also can provoke anxiety which might interfere with effective decision making in the unfamiliar situation. It is important to remember that our ethical principles address how we “advertise” ourselves, and any time art therapists are asked to represent the field of art therapy it can be considered an advertisement. It is our ethical obligation to represent the profession accurately and to ensure that explicit written consent is obtained from clients to use photos or videos of them, and/or their artwork. Such consent includes whether and how the client wants to be identified (AATA, 2013). It also is imperative to remember that a power differential exists between client and art therapist with the professional having more authority; therefore, the possibility of subtle coercion exists when asking clients to participate with the media. When working with any requesting individual, it is the responsibility of the art therapist to ensure that the power differential is considered and ethical procedures are followed.

Moon (2015) recommends that when contacted by the media, that art therapists familiarize themselves with the style and content of the requesting entity. Determine the intent of the project and the manner in which it will be embedded in a website, print media or television news episode. It is important to approach any media request with the knowledge that it might be the only exposure to art therapy that many people have. Consequently, art therapists should be cautious and considered with any interview or posting. A positive approach to ethical decision making would ask how the media exposure benefits all of the persons involved, first and foremost the client (Hinz, 2011). Is it in the client’s best interest to have his or her art therapy sessions videotaped or artwork displayed in ways that he or she cannot control? Many would argue that it is never appropriate to publicly display actual art therapy sessions or artwork created in art therapy sessions. Instead, clients may be asked to simulate therapy sessions or to create artworks for public display that are not personal or revealing. In this way, clients might benefit from being involved with promoting the field but not risk exposure that they cannot control. Clients should be given ample time to consider their options, while not in the presence of the art therapist or any other requesting entity. In the event that clients agree to simulate art therapy, part of informed consent is the knowledge that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time without penalty. To best protect client interests, the terms of display should be written in contract form for all involved to sign.

References

- American Art Therapy Association. (2013). *Ethical principles for art therapists*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Hinz, L. D. (2011). Embracing excellence: A positive approach to ethical decision making. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 28(4), 1-4.
- Moon, B. (2015). *Ethical Issues in Art Therapy*. 3rd ed. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.