



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*.

Storing Art Created in Art Therapy

"4.1.a The client is notified in instances when the art therapist and/or the clinical agency retain copies, photographic reproductions or digital images of the artwork in the client file as part of the clinical record."

"4.7 Art therapists explain how client artwork will be stored while the client is receiving art therapy services and the duration of retention for the actual artwork, photographs or digital images."

Given space limitations, it can be unreasonable and unwieldy to store large amounts of client artwork for a long period of time. As part of the informed consent process, art therapists should have a conversation with clients as to how artwork is stored and for how long. The amount of time should be consistent with federal and state laws, institutional regulations, and setting accommodations.

Sometimes art therapists begin a new job in which they inherit client artwork from a former art therapist. Although it is the responsibility of the former art therapist to manage, return or destroy artwork, this is not always possible. In such a situation, the new art therapist should strive to determine how long the art was expected to be maintained, contact former clients to determine what should happen to the art, digitally photograph the art, and/or respectfully dispose it.

In deciding which artworks (or photographic representations of artwork) to store, Hartsell (2006) suggested basing one's decision by answering the following questions:

- "1. What information would be useful to defend against a board complaint or malpractice allegation? *and*
- "2. What information would be useful to any subsequent art therapist treating the client if the original art therapist dies or becomes incapacitated?" (p. 2)

If storing artwork as a digital photograph, Atkins (2007) offers the following considerations:

- When photographing the artwork, include a slip of paper as part of the photograph with client initials and date of session for file management.
- Have camera visible, so, clients are aware that the art is being photographed.
- Allow clients the opportunity to stage their artwork as they want it documented.
- Ensure proper data protection protocols to ensure that photographs are stored confidentially.

References:

- Atkins, M. (2007). Using digital photography to record clients' art work. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 12 (2), 79-87.
- Hartsell, T. (2006, Fall). Ethical issue: Client Artwork. *ATCB Review*, 2.