

Psychotherapy Guidebook

MANDALA THERAPY



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Mandala Therapy

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Mandala Therapy

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DEFINITION

Mandala Therapy encourages and directs the making of original circular designs in color. The circle, the Mandala, as a symbol of self provides a ground of being on which to project symbolic relationships of conscious and unconscious dynamisms. As a projective method of centering and balancing personality, it is a meditative and relaxing procedure that reflects or anticipates stages in ego or self-integration and the individuation process.

As a psychotherapeutic tool it involves therapist and client in an insight-directed dialogue similar to dream analysis.

HISTORY

“Mandate” is a Sanskrit word meaning circle. Most of the literature concerning Mandalas deals with it as a sacred art form of the Orient, as in Tibetan Buddhism. Although there has been no fully developed concept of the universality of Mandala symbolism, contemporary interest, initiated by Carl Jung, has prompted research relating the Mandala to other cultures and

traditions. The American Indian sand paintings of the Southwest are closely related in form and content to those of Tibet, as are the circular dance patterns occurring in Dervish monasteries. The spiritual foundations of many diverse religions and philosophical considerations, as in Sufi Doctrine and the I-Ching, include Mandala symbolism, and the reevaluation of such esoteric studies as astrology and alchemy provides new insights concerning its psychological implications.

The history and theory of the Mandala as a universal integrative principle was introduced to Western psychiatric spheres by Carl Jung. It provided the key to his entire system, the basis of analytical psychology. Jung observed that as a psychological phenomena, Mandalas occur spontaneously in dreams and paintings and drawings composed during certain states of intrapsychic conflict. This discovery, and its relationship to findings in his studies of primitive and medieval cultures, led him to abandon the idea of the superordinate position of the ego and inspired him to formulate his theory of the collective unconscious, the self, and its symbol, the Mandala.

The Mandala as a diagnostic and psychotherapeutic tool was researched in the 1960s and 1970s by Joan Kellogg, ATR, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Paterson, New Jersey, and at Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. Patients who had not spontaneously produced Mandalas, when encouraged to compose the circular design, produced self-expressive symbols. Ms. Kellogg's

recognition of the common symbolic elements of pathology in these personal Mandalas broadened the possibilities of the use of the Mandala.

TECHNIQUE

The method of introducing Mandala Therapy varies somewhat according to the kind of population and type of mental health facility in which it is used. Whether or not the person involved in therapy is made consciously aware of the transpersonal potential of the symbol depends upon factors of time, client goals related to degree of disturbance, intellectual capabilities of the client, and the education and training of the therapist.

The simplest application of the therapy is allied with Art Therapy technique in its general approach. The therapist asks the client to compose an original circular design as a means of centering and relaxing. The client is presented with a sheet of white paper large enough to include a circle, inscribed lightly in pencil, or 10 inches or approximate head size and with surrounding ground area approximately equal in proportion to that of the circle. A set of pastels or oil pastels is provided that include a wide range of colors and specifically those colors that are primary in Lüscher Color Theory.

The client is asked to choose a preferred color and with it make a center shape of any sort. After coloring in this shape with the outlined color or another, the client is directed to pause and meditate on this center, consider

its possibilities as the nucleus of a design, and then begin spontaneously to compose the Mandala. The client is informed that the edge of the circle is a fence but not a barricade and that he may extend or contain his design in whatever manner is pleasing to him. Upon completion he is asked to view his design from all sides and decide which is the top.

If the client is not ready for insight-directed therapy, he is encouraged to continue to make Mandalas that are pleasing to him. If he is an appropriate candidate for psychotherapy, he is asked for comments about his design. The therapist with a knowledge of universal symbolism is able to assist the client in interpreting his Mandala and guide him toward an understanding of his present psychic situation, the growth potential within him, and whatever impediments there may be blocking growth.

APPLICATIONS

Mandala Therapy is universally applicable. As a psychotherapeutic method, it requires the therapist to be educated and trained in Jungian analytical psychology and knowledgeable in the many allied fields of study that contribute to its theoretical basis. It is a useful means of Art Therapy in psychiatric settings, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and private practice. Its transpersonal aspect enriches growth-oriented centers and consciousness-raising programs.

