

# Art Therapist interview questions

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## What to expect

Interviews for art therapy roles typically explore your therapeutic approach, your ability to engage clients creatively, and how you manage ethical and safety considerations. Employers want to see that you can build rapport, work within a team, and reflect on your practice.

- **Process:** Questions about how you plan, deliver, and review art therapy sessions.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for examples from your past work with clients, often using STAR.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your clinical judgement and ability to respond under pressure.
- **Technical:** Questions about your understanding of art materials, therapeutic techniques, and interpretation.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about how you communicate with clients, families, and other professionals.
- **Ethics and safety:** Questions about confidentiality, boundaries, and mandatory reporting.

The interview may start with a conversation with a hiring manager, followed by a panel that includes a clinical supervisor or senior therapist. Some employers include a practical component, such as discussing a case study or responding to a creative scenario. You might also be asked to reflect on your own artwork or creative process.

## 1. Walk me through how you plan and facilitate an individual art therapy session from first assessment to closing.

### Why they ask

This shows your clinical reasoning and ability to structure safe, effective sessions.

### How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through: assessment, goal setting, session planning, facilitation, observation, and review. Highlight how you involve the client in decisions.

### Example answer

*"At the first session I conduct a psychosocial assessment, asking about the client's history, current stressors, and what they hope to gain. I then collaborate with them to set goals, such as improving emotional regulation. Before each session I choose a range of materials, like pastels, clay, or collage, that match their comfort level and therapeutic aims. During the session I start with a brief check-in, invite them to choose an activity, and stay present while they work. I observe their engagement and any shifts in mood or behaviour. At the end I ask what they noticed and how they felt, and we discuss any insights. I document the session and adjust the plan for next time based on their feedback and progress."*

## 2. Tell me about a time when a client was reluctant to engage in art-making. How did you respond?

### Why they ask

This reveals your creativity, patience, and ability to build rapport.

### How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Focus on how you adapted your approach and what changed.

### Example answer

*"A teenage client in a mental health service refused to touch any art materials for the first three sessions. He said it was childish. I acknowledged his feelings and we spent time talking instead. I noticed he often doodled on his hand during our conversations. I offered him a blank sketchbook and said he could draw whatever he liked, even just lines, and that he did not have to show me. He started drawing small figures. Over the next few weeks he began bringing his sketchbook and eventually shared a drawing about his family. His engagement in sessions increased, and he told his caseworker that the art helped him express things he could not say aloud."*

### **3. Imagine a client becomes distressed and starts to dissociate during an art therapy session. What do you do?**

#### **Why they ask**

This tests your ability to manage risk and maintain safety in the moment.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use a calm, step-by-step judgement structure: assess, ground, support, follow up. Prioritise safety and the client's dignity.

#### **Example answer**

*"First I would stay calm and speak in a low, steady voice. I would gently invite the client to notice their surroundings, perhaps by feeling their feet on the floor or holding a cool object. I would not touch them without permission. If they are able, I might suggest a simple grounding activity like drawing slow circles or focusing on a single colour. I would ask if they want to stop the art-making and just breathe with me. Once they are more present, I would check in about how they are feeling and whether they want to continue or take a break. I would document the incident and follow my organisation's policy for supporting a client after dissociation, including any necessary referrals."*

### **4. How do you interpret a client's creative work while respecting their own meaning-making?**

#### **Why they ask**

This assesses your theoretical knowledge and your ability to avoid over-interpretation.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Explain your framework, give an example, and emphasise collaboration with the client.

#### **Example answer**

*"I use a person-centred, trauma-informed framework. I do not impose meanings on a client's artwork. Instead, I invite them to describe what they made and what it means to them. For example, a client might draw a dark storm and say it represents her anxiety. I might reflect that she chose to place a small light in the corner and ask what that light might be. She said it was her hope. I then explored with her how she could nurture that hope in daily life. If I notice recurring symbols or themes, I might gently share my observation and ask if it resonates, but I always check with the client before making any clinical interpretation."*

### **5. How do you explain the purpose of art therapy to someone who is sceptical or unfamiliar with it?**

#### **Why they ask**

This shows your communication skills and ability to advocate for the profession.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use a clear, empathetic explanation, include an analogy or example, and invite questions.

#### **Example answer**

*"I start by saying that art therapy is not about making good art. It is a way to use creative activity to express feelings that can be hard to put into words. I might compare it to how some people feel better after writing in a journal or listening to music. I explain that the therapist provides a safe space and*

*helps the client understand what comes up. I often give a simple example, like how drawing a feeling can make it easier to talk about. I then ask if they have any questions and reassure them that they do not need any art experience. If they remain unsure, I suggest they try one session with no pressure to continue."*

## **6. How do you maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries when working with clients in a community setting?**

### **Why they ask**

This checks your understanding of ethical practice and risk management.

### **How to structure your answer**

Outline key principles, give practical steps, and reference relevant guidelines.

### **Example answer**

*"I follow my organisation's confidentiality policy and the professional code of ethics from ANZACATA. I explain the limits of confidentiality to clients at the start, such as if there is a risk of harm to themselves or others. I store records securely, either in a locked cabinet or a password-protected system like Cliniko. For boundaries, I avoid dual relationships, I do not accept gifts of significant value, and I do not share personal details unless it is therapeutically helpful. In community settings, I make sure sessions are conducted in a private space and that I have a clear plan for what to do if a client becomes distressed or if I need to make a mandatory report. I also seek supervision regularly to reflect on any ethical dilemmas."*