

Art Therapy for Trauma: Wounded Warrior Project Explains the Healing Power of Creativity

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (June 20, 2024) -- Trauma impacts millions of people around the nation, sometimes with debilitating side effects. While some benefit from traditional therapy, others are finding alternative ways to heal.



Art therapy is [proven](#) to help process emotions and experiences. Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) uses creative expression to help veterans, active-duty service members, and their families on their healing journeys. It's not just about finding a hobby; it's about learning to express feelings and see experiences differently.

Former U.S. Marine and professional musician [Sal Gonzalez](#) has lost friends to suicide and uses music to navigate challenging times. [Dr. Erin Fletcher, Psy.D.](#), leads a WWP™ program that pairs art with clinical treatment for post-9/11 veterans. Together, they explain how being creative can be a powerful tool for dealing with trauma, stress, or emotional difficulties.

Q: What is art therapy?

Dr. Fletcher: Art therapy is using creative activity to improve mental health and well-being. Formal art therapy involves participating in a creative activity with a licensed provider and having a guided discussion after. Being creative can be therapeutic even when it's not in a clinical setting.

Sal: Being creative lets me take the chaos in my heart and pour it out through a pen and paper. Turning pain into a song has become an effective coping tool for me.

Q: How does art impact the brain?

Dr. Fletcher: Research shows creative activity can change your brain chemistry, like [reducing stress hormones](#). Imagine your brain is like a garden. After experiencing extreme stress, the garden might look gray and wilted. Being creative is like bringing the sun out and watering the garden. The garden begins to grow and bloom again.

Q: How can art help process emotions?

Dr. Fletcher: Art offers an indirect way to start a conversation about complex emotions. It can lead you closer to handling challenging topics directly.

Sal: Songwriting helps me transform struggles into something others can understand. I can play it for them and say, "Listen, it's hard for me to talk about what I'm going through, but here's how it feels."

Q: What if someone is not naturally creative, or feels less creative after a traumatic event?



WWP uses creative experiences to help veterans and their loved ones heal, including painting and drawing, cooking, poetry, music and more.

Dr. Fletcher: The creative process is healing, even if you don't produce something you want to share. We often have veterans do creative activities in a group to create a supportive environment. This helps if they are feeling stuck or trying to regain creativity and confidence after a traumatic event.

Sal: Sometimes art is a tool, not a destination. I've written a lot of songs for myself that no one has heard. Those were moments when music was my tool. Feeling better was my goal. Art can be personal and private.

Q: What tips can you give others to start using art to help heal?

Dr. Fletcher: It's best to pair creativity into a personal wellness plan that includes things like peer support, physical activity, and perhaps formal therapy. At Wounded Warrior Project, we have found great success with an approach that offers a combination of clinical and non-clinical mental health resources for wounded veterans and those who support and care for them – an

approach that can be helpful to anyone who is struggling.

[Watch Dr. Fletcher and Sal share more about creative therapy and how it helped him.](#)

Some ways to begin your journey could include:

- **Start an art journal.** A notebook gives you a portable, private space to experiment with different forms of creativity like drawing, collage, or creative writing.
- **Take an art class.** Look for courses at community centers, colleges, or art studios that can introduce you to new forms of creative expression in a supportive group setting.
- **Ask your therapist.** Your current counselor or therapist may already have ways to incorporate guided creativity into your sessions.
- **Attend local art exhibits or meetups.** Being around others who share your interests offers a sense of belonging. WWP, for example, provides wounded veterans with various social connection events and activities that help connect with others and build support networks that are key to proactively maintaining mental wellness.

Sal: Just do it, pick up a guitar or a pen and paper, and let your feelings guide you.

Do you know someone who might benefit from art therapy? Many nonprofits offer low- or no-cost programs. Wounded Warrior Project provides accessible options for post-9/11 veterans and their loved ones. Visit woundedwarriorproject.org/mental-health to discover how WWP empowers veterans to embrace their journey toward mental wellness with confidence and support.

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. [Learn how the organization supports veterans](#) and service members.

SOURCE Wounded Warrior Project

For further information: Rob Louis, Public Relations, rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org, 904.627.0432

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/2024-06-20-Art-Therapy-for-Trauma-Wounded-Warrior-Project-Explains-the-Healing-Power-of-Creativity>