



ART THERAPY MANUAL

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Welcome! I am so excited that either you have allowed your incredible child(ren) to be a part of or you yourself will be a part of these groups and hope that you all will enjoy creating art projects while you all learn a little more about yourselves and how the art process can help them to express themselves more appropriately, clearly and deeply. These groups, are facilitated by LAF staff art therapist, Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC, or another LAF contracted service provider and will provide an opportunity to experience the unique process of art therapy in a creative, safe and supportive environment.

We are constantly growing to fill the needs of the autism community. If you have any interest in future groups that you don't see offered here, please contact Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC (amillard@lafinc.org) to express your needs and interest. Many of the art therapy groups are offered on an on-going basis, with an open format. This means that there will often be a repeating group throughout the school year and you may sign your child up to attend all that you care to have your child attend. You may register for all groups through the LAF website at lafinc.org under the current events tab. YOU MUST register yourself or your child for EACH monthly group. DO NOT assume that because you registered for one group that you are signed up for every group and can show up to all following groups without registering. There are a limited number of spaces for each group and if you arrive without prior confirmation for that specific day and time, you may be turned away from this group due to no spaces being available.

We are currently offering the following art therapy groups, listed below:

Neurotypical Siblings Support Groups

Participants will be able to create, process and share their story of what it is like to be the sibling of someone with autism. This program, designed specifically for neurotypical siblings, will ideally leave participants with a greater understanding of themselves and a sense of feeling heard and understood by others. These groups are now being presented in a new on-going, monthly open group format. This means that your child can attend every month, or as it fits into your schedule. Your child must be registered to attend each monthly group as there are only ten available spaces per group per month.

Social Skills Groups for those with ASD

This group, an art therapy social skills group for adolescents with autism spectrum disorder, facilitated by art therapist Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC, is designed to immerse your child, in the unique process of art therapy. Art therapy integrates the fields of human development, visual art and the creative process with models of counseling to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. Your children will have the opportunity to make art as they work on building or improving social skills, building a greater understanding of their emotions, exploring appropriate ways to express themselves and stretching their personal definitions of creativity is to them, while making art within

a group of like-minded peers. These groups are now being presented in a new on-going, monthly open group format. This means that your child can attend every month, or as it fits into your schedule. Your child must be registered to attend each monthly group as there are only ten available spaces per group per month.

Introduction to Art Therapy and Make Art for Autism Education Workshops

Be an autism education superhero and share your strengths and talents while learning about art therapy! Children ages 7-17, bring a parent along and join LAF art therapist, Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC, for an opportunity to learn about the process of art therapy, while you create art! This brief workshop style group is designed to give parents and their children with autism a chance to participate together, in the life affirming pleasure of making art in a supportive group environment. Through your art you will get to educate others about autism and neuro-diversity, as well as spread the word about the services that LAF provides to the community. No previous art experience is necessary to participate. These workshops are offered at various times throughout the year, so be sure to check the LAF website at lafinc.org under the current events tabs for the latest offerings.

Parent Support Groups/Self Care Workshops

We are still in the process of formulating these groups but they will be designed to focus on the importance of self-care and introduce the concept of self-care in new ways while providing an opportunity for respite and practicing self-care in action!

If you have any concerns or need special accommodations, before beginning any group, please let LAF or Alyssa know in advance.

LAF is thrilled to be able to offer these groups I look forward to working with you and your child through the art therapy process! Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns or comments at amillard@lafinc.org or via voice call or text at (843)259.5609. If I do not answer immediately I will respond ASAP. Thank you so much!

Always, Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC



Professional Disclosure Statement

Educational background, training and biographies of all LAF employees and contracted service providers available upon request

Policies

Fees and Insurance

All LAF services are free to LAF families.

Diagnostics and Assessments

*According to the State Of SC, Art Therapy is considered an adjunctive treatment based mental health service. As such any diagnostics or assessments completed or presented are performed for informational purposes to inform the creation of a treatment plan and best clinical practices in creating the treatment program and do not constitute an official diagnosis(es). If it is determined that an additional treatment or assessments are required, in order to provide the best treatment and promote the best care, you or your child will be referred to another provider for this service.

*Art Therapists do not prescribe medication

Ethics

*Art Therapists follow the Code of Ethics for the American Art Therapy Association (AATA www.arttherapy.org) and The Art Therapy Credentialing Board (ATCB www.atcb.org)

*Any type of sexual behavior between therapist and client is unethical. It is never appropriate and will not be condoned.

*Your therapist does not accept gifts of any kind

In order to view our complete code of ethics and conduct or for more information about art therapy please refer to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) website at www.arttherapy.org. If you would like a physical copy of our complete code of ethics, I would be happy to provide you with one for a fee of \$0.65 per page.

In session behavior

*The therapeutic process can sometimes be very difficult. Your child is encouraged to talk about their feelings and thoughts during the therapy session. I am only as good as the information they provide me. If I don't have all of the pieces then I cannot put together a complete puzzle.

*It is okay to express your anger in a therapy session, but loud shouting and throwing things (unless encouraged to do so in an appropriate way) is never appropriate.

*If you or your child feels that you or they may harm yourself/ themselves in any way, this should be discussed immediately with your therapist. Suicidal threats may result in notifying the client's emergency contact and other people who can keep you/them safe. You and your child's safety is our number one concern. Please read our privacy rules and HIPAA policies for more detailed information on this and other policies.

*It is never appropriate to bring any form of weapon into therapy, concealed, permitted or otherwise, and clients who bring in a weapon will be asked to leave. If you or your child has a license to carry a weapon please leave it in a safe location during our session.

Informed Consent

You will be asked to sign several pages within this document including informed consent for art therapy treatment, your rights as a client, and a HIPAA form. Your signature verifies that you have been given these documents, that you have read and understand the document, and that you consent to treatment. Further you need to be aware:

*Treatment is **not** always successful and may open unexpected emotionally sensitive areas

*The art therapy process can often elicit emotions

*Art therapists are not physicians and cannot prescribe medication and furthermore in the state of SC are permitted to provide treatment only.

*The Art therapist may need to consult with your physician, attorney, or other counselor and if necessary to do so, the necessary documentation will be provided for you to complete in order to protect your privacy and rights as a client.

Communication

*Your health and happiness is important to us and we believe that clear and open communication is an important part of the journey, to include our communication. However, I am not available 24 hours a day. Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC, LAF art therapist, is available during the following hours:

Monday- Friday 9 am – 5 pm via phone or text and email is available at all times, but I will only respond during my business hours. Please note that these hours of availability are not the same as my work hours. Furthermore, I may take up to 24 hours to return texts and phone calls and up to 48 hours to reply to emails. If I do not answer my phone or a text during these hours I will return your call or text as soon as possible. If it is an emergency, especially a life threatening emergency, please dial 911.

*. In general no protected PHI or psychotherapeutic information will be sent via text or email, as there is always a possibility of your information being compromised. However, with your signature on this document, and if there is no other way to reach you certain limited documents or more sensitive conversations may be had via the secure and HIPAA compliant LAF email server. Most of the time these sensitive documents will need to be picked up in person by the client or will be securely mailed. If you require said reports, or copies of your PHI or psychotherapy information, then you must pick this information up in person or provide a mailing address for it to be sent, after signing a specific release to do so. Blank forms will be sent at your request.

Policies for Registration for Groups, Communication and Cancellations

*Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC is a confidential provider under state and federal law. She will be your major contact for appointments, problems, complaints, or commendations. Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC will also be a contact for appointments and scheduling. Her email is amillard@lafinc.org.

* You may register for all groups through the LAF website at lafinc.org under the current events tab. YOU MUST register yourself or your child for EACH monthly group. DO NOT assume that because you registered for one group that you are signed up for every group and can just show up to a group. There are a limited number of spaces for each group and if you arrive without prior confirmation for that specific day and time, you may be turned away from this group.

* Given the limited number of spaces per group, we require that any participants who are unable to attend a group give a minimum of 24 hours advance notice of their inability to attend . If you have been placed on the waiting list you will be contacted a minimum of 24 hours before the group is to take place, or as soon as we have an opening for the group that you have expressed interested in. If you have interest in being place on a waiting list for a group please contact art therapist, Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC at amillard@lafinc.org . LAF's cancellation policy allows for three missed or cancelled sessions, without an approved excuse (such as sickness with doctor's note or a death) before your case will be closed due to inconsistent attendance. An excused absence will not have any impact on your or your child's ability to attend groups. If the therapist cancels a session with short notice, as much advance notice as possible will be given. All holidays will be scheduled in advance with prior notice. Please contact Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC directly for last minute appointment cancellations.

Waiting and Building Policies

*This is a drop off group and you are welcome to explore the surrounding area during this group. However, we ask that you remain close by in case of an emergency , in case your child is ill, or they just need you. We respectfully request that you remain in the general area, easily accessible by phone at all times and prepared to return immediately should the need arise. Often times a child may need or want the parent to join us in session if something has come up, or they may want to show you something. We ask this for the safety and well-being of your child. Since art therapy can elicit powerful emotions, sometimes unexpectedly, it has happened where a parent has left the premises and the child decided mid-way through the session that they wanted their parent to come into session due to rising anxiety levels. When they came out to get them and found them not there, they had a panic attack. We request that you return a minimum of 5 minutes prior to the end of the session time.

* No child is ever allowed to be left unattended 18 years old and an adult must accompany them at all times during this group, including other children that you may have with you that are not a part of this group. This is for the safety of your child and the consideration of the others that may be present in the building at the time of the group. We appreciate your consideration in this matter. I will not hold Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC, any employee or contracted service provider of LAF, LAF volunteer or representatives liable should any injury occur during this group, nor will I hold them liable should I leave them unattended. I further understand that I may be liable for replacing or providing for the cost of fixing any property damage or missing property should I allow my child to touch things within the building or on this property without permission.

*If you have other children or family members with you please remember that this is a shared space where there are often several other events happening at the same time. As such we ask that you and your family please remain respectfully quiet and that you do not allow your children to run around the room, the building or knock on or slam doors. If this happens, the building staff, Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT,ATR-BC, any employee or contracted service

provider of LAF, LAF volunteer and any representative of any of those entities reserve the right to ask you to leave the waiting room until the end of the session when your family member or friend will be expecting you to be there.

* Please do not bring pets into the building with the exception of service animals.

*This is a smoke-free building and any kind of smoking, including e-cigarettes.

Who Do I Offer Services To?

*All families, siblings, and individuals who have been registered as Lowcountry Autism Foundation families and/or clients.

Under HIPAA all of your information that is shared both verbally and in your art work and art process, as well as in any notes and documentation kept by the art therapist are protected and are confidential. You have certain rights under HIPAA and there are specific areas where HIPAA confidentiality does not apply. These have been explained in the informed consent / release you signed to be able to participate in these groups but a full copy of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 and HIPAA Security Rule of 2003, updated January 2018, is available upon request.

***Right to Report a Complaint.** As a client, you have the right to register a complaint with the Secretary of Health and Human Services if you feel your rights, herein explained, have been violated. You can mail this complaint to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights at 200 Independence Ave, SW Washington, DC 20201 or by visiting www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/complaints. I would respectfully request that you also contact my office and speak with me about your concerns and complaints before doing so, in order to give me a chance to resolve the situation. Most concerns can be addressed by communicating clearly with each other and clarifying the issues involved.

As an art therapist you may also lodge a complaint with the Art Therapy Credentialing Board (ATCB) located at

7 Terrace Way
Greensboro, NC 27403-3660
Toll Free: 877.213.2822
Phone: 336.482.2858
Fax: 336.482.2852
Email atcbinfo@atcb.org
"The ATCB oversees the ethical practice of art therapists and may be contacted with client concerns."

Frequently Asked Questions

- To see Privacy Rule FAQs, You can go to http://answers.hhs.gov/cgi-bin/hhs.cfg/php/enduser/std_alp.php, then select "Privacy of Health Information/HIPAA" from the Category drop down list and click the Search button.



Art Therapy Group Rules

*We have a no talking when others are talking or when there is a quiet/focused rule in place. Please reinforce this with your child outside of group if we let you know that this is a skill they will be working on.

*We teach and model active and whole body listening to help your child attempt to do the same. However, we also understand that there are many different learning styles and that some need to move in order to focus best. We will provide fidget objects and allow standing to work and other alternatives as long as it is not harmful, disruptive, or distracting to your child or others.

*No cell phones or tablets are allowed in session unless there is a specific reason (i.e. If it is an accommodation that helps your child understand and communicate more effectively)

*We model using respect and kindness to our fellow group mates and will practice using "I" statements to help your child do the same. We have a zero tolerance bullying policy and will be learning all about bullying, how to deal with it and how to express oneself appropriately.

*We also model and stress being kind to yourself and ask for your child to practice being positive with themselves.

*We model using quiet, "inside" voices, to help your child do the same

If your child has trouble following these rules the art therapist and volunteers will do their best to help your child follow them in a way that makes sense and feels appropriate to them, while maintaining the safe environment for the group. If your child cannot, or chooses to not follow these rules, and the behavior of your child provides a physical threat to the safety of themselves or the other group members, the art therapist may have no choice but to ask your child to leave the group.

The art therapist may talk about concerns and worries that they may have about your child with you, in order to provide the best support and to connect you with any necessary resources. Sometimes the art therapist may request to meet with you, without your child present, if she feels that sensitive topics are best to be discussed privately, or with adults before presenting things to your child.

Your child will be engaged in a safe, appropriate and supervised environment by the trained volunteers should the art therapist have to leave the room briefly for any reason.

The things your child may talk about within group are private and confidential. The art therapist will not tell others about the specific things you or your child shares with her. Everything discussed or created within this group is considered confidential and will not be shared in any way without my permission. However, there are two exceptions to this. First, according to HIPAA and the ATCB code of ethics, the art therapist is bound by law to report any evidence of you harming yourself or others, or of your child harming themselves or others. Second, if the art therapist has reason to believe that you or your child are being abused in any way, she is obligated by law, to report this information to maintain your and your child's health and safety.

Good Things to Know for Art Therapy Group:

*** Wear old clothes:**

Please be sure that you and your child wear old clothes as we WILL get messy! :) We want to be respectful of other's experience and space while using the art materials appropriately during this group but we are not afraid of making a mess. As long as long as no one is hurting themselves or another then we allow everyone to explore and express in a way that fits for them. We call this process discharging (like the concept of catharsis) and they may be releasing and discharging pent up energy (impulsivity) or emotion (emotionally regulating) in an appropriate way! However, we are also always monitoring whether your child may be moving into a more anxious or impulsive state (chaotic discharge) and if so then we model a new way of using the material or substitute a new and different material to shape this behavior appropriately. For example if your child is pounding, splashing or tearing the paper and we see that they are losing control, then we might model a return to smoothly and slowly painting on their piece. Or we may substitute a piece of clay that is more appropriate for them to pound, scrape and shape.

*** Art supplies may get consumed:**

While I wouldn't encourage this, and it is an opportunity to reinforce, model and practice appropriate behavior and practice daily living skills around the use of art materials, your child might eat the supplies. This is ok. All materials used in this group will be non-toxic and, when possible, allergen free (like latex and gluten free). They may not taste good, but for most without allergies, they are the safest art materials available.

What is Art Therapy?

Art therapy is a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight.

Art therapy integrates the fields of human development, visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other art forms), and the creative process with models of counseling. Art therapy is used with children, adolescents, adults, older adults, groups, and families to assess and treat the following: anxiety, depression, and other mental and emotional problems and disorders; substance abuse and other addictions; family and relationship issues; abuse and domestic violence; social and emotional difficulties related to disability and illness; trauma and loss; physical, cognitive, and neurological problems; and psychosocial difficulties related to medical illness. Art therapy programs are found in a number of settings including hospitals, clinics, public and community agencies, wellness centers, educational institutions, businesses, and private practices.

Art therapists are masters level professionals who hold a degree in art therapy or a related field. Educational requirements include: theories of art therapy, counseling, and psychotherapy; ethics and standards of practice; assessment and evaluation; individual, group, and family techniques; human and creative development; multicultural issues; research methods; and practicum experiences in clinical, community, and/or other settings. Art therapists are skilled in the application of a variety of art modalities (drawing, painting, sculpture, and other media) for assessment and treatment.

Art Therapy Basics

"It's the Process not the product!":

If you hang out with an art therapist on a regular basis, you will hear this expression over and over. While the end product has value (in that it gives us information and is the solid externalization of those internal processes that you can view and interact with and is often pleasing or interesting to look at), sometimes the process itself (the method, path taken, choices made, and way the individual used the materials to create the art piece) communicates and expresses more about the individuals and their thoughts, feelings and needs, than the actual end product itself. In other words, if a person is yelling and pounding as they make a clay sculpture this may tell us more about how they are feeling and what they are thinking as opposed to the end piece viewed separately. In this same way, sometimes the process and connection the artist develops to the process itself can become more informative and important to them, helping them to be able to make discoveries about themselves and/or use this discovered information to process or develop strategies for coping with difficult situations or traumas.

"Children's art, especially non-representational, is often an expression of an internal, emotion-laden and mental impression and it is usually what is important to them and sometimes they draw what they see." (Arnhem)

In other words, in this group and in art therapy in general, we often do not worry so much about making something pretty. Instead we will focus on working with intention, honesty and emotional expression in order to activate and express the authentic self! Process not product!!!!

How Did Art Therapy Begin?

Visual expression has been used for healing throughout history, but art therapy did not emerge as a distinct profession until the 1940s. In the early 20th century, psychiatrists became interested in the artwork created by their patients with mental illness. At around the same time, educators were discovering that children's art expressions reflected developmental, emotional, and cognitive growth. By mid-century, hospitals, clinics, and rehabilitation centers increasingly began to include art therapy programs along with traditional "talk therapies," underscoring the recognition that the creative process of art making enhanced recovery, health, and wellness. As a result, the profession of art therapy grew into an effective and important method of communication, assessment, and treatment with children and adults in a variety of settings. Currently, the field of art therapy has gained attention in health-care facilities throughout the United States and within psychiatry, psychology, counseling, education, and the arts. For more detailed information on the history of art therapy, please see AATA's publication list for A History of Art Therapy in the United States.

*Excerpt taken from The American Art Therapy Association's website (arttherapy.org) 2008

Why ART Therapy With Your Child?

Art has the power to convey the unspeakable, sometimes much more profoundly and clearly than the spoken word. "We believe that art, as a means of symbolic expression, gives a particular form to that which is being experienced, expressed and communicated. Like language, art has its own structures and mechanisms for creating, shaping and concretizing 'meaning'" (Evans & Dubowski 2001).

Through attunement and gentle informed interaction one can hope to identify the symptoms from the developmental milestones and begin to build new lines of understanding and communication.

How I practice Art Therapy...

Interactive Art Therapy Model

“A method which seeks to use the art making process as an effective way to establish a therapeutic relationship with children with autism. By using developmental categories of early infant mark-making, it may be possible to identify the schematic (or anomalous) nature of the development of children with autism’s approach to mark-making and relate this to the specific difficulties they experience with communication.

By directing social interactions (Thereby diffusing the innately intense typical therapeutic relationship) through a focus on the art making activity, a form of relating which children with autism can tolerate, and build up a tolerance for, becomes established. By introducing further materials and activities or limiting these in the art therapy with children with autism, they are exposed to a quality of experience equivalent to phases of the very early stages of infant development, the dynamics of which pre-form the development of the capacity to symbolize” (Evans & Dubowski 2001).

Developmental Art Therapy

As an individual develops they are essentially putting together a cognitive puzzle as they move through various stages of physical, psychosocial and cognitive development. They first become aware of the world around them (this is known as the ‘emergent self’ - Stern 1985). Eventually they become aware that they interpret the things around them and that, in turn, they are separate from those things (this is known as the ‘core self’ - Stern 1985). Finally the individual realizes that they are then able to share these developing realizations in a variety of ways (known as the ‘subjective self’ - Stern 1985). As the sense of self develops and language comes, communication becomes more complex along with an understanding of this (cognitive reasoning and understanding moves from concrete to abstract), imaginative responses come, and the sense of self blossoms. Often in an individual with autism this development of verbal communication gets disrupted or garbled, as well as the capacity for understanding/connecting imaginatively and “normal” development is derailed.

The development of artistic expressions or mark making appears to parallel the development of self and verbal communication and is in itself a language - a non-verbal language. Where signs always stand for the same thing, symbols have a deeper meaning and often change meaning/feeling/vitality as the situation changes. An individual with autism most often uses signs and not symbols- schematic formulas (without emotional connection/understanding/awareness) to accomplish a task and it often functions as a “cut-off” to assist that individual in withdrawing from and coping with an unpleasant or intolerable stimulus.

Through attunement and gentle informed interaction (once and if it is possible to establish a therapeutic relationship) one can hope to identify the symptoms from the developmental milestones and form new lines of understanding and communication. (Aach-Feldman& Kunkle-Miller, 1981)

Art has the power to convey the unspeakable, sometimes much more profoundly and clearly than the spoken word. “We believe that art, as a means of symbolic expression, gives a particular form to that which is being experienced , expressed and communicated. Like language, art has its own structures and mechanisms for creating, shaping and concretizing ‘meaning’.” (Evans & Dubowski 2001)

Three basic methods of working:

Non Directive= sometimes its the interaction (movement, rhythms, pauses, activity, eye contact) that is the session

Directive= some are more contained ("compliant") and need structure and so we would provide structure, investigate schema and attempt to widen experiences and tolerance.

Acute Sensitive= for some, everything is overwhelming so a retreat/approach strategy, as well as other strategies need to be used to assess whether a therapeutic relationship development is possible and great care and awareness is needed in sensitive approach and meeting the client's (& being respectful of) needs and boundaries.

Some Typical art therapy based goals with individuals with autism

The way of working is tailored to the needs of each individual but here are some typical goals:

- * Appropriate Social Interaction (like turn taking, sharing, eye contact, appropriate touching etc)
- * Exploring and expressing emotion appropriately
- * Developing verbal communication or highlight new avenues of communication for your child, possibly improving communication (once you figure out how your child may use art to communicate you can then use it in the same way to communicate with them)
- * Developing the ability of being creative and spontaneous (developing the capacity for or access to imagination)
- * Identifying and harnessing socially appropriate physical and emotional coping strategies
- * Identifying and attempting to break through (and understanding) schema and stereotypical echolalic behaviors in order to increase tolerance for change and dynamic environments and social situations
- * Increase tolerance for sensory sensitivities especially textural and olfactory sensations but also to visual sensitivities (Auditory and taste issues could be addressed but are not as commonly addressed in the course of art therapy) in working toward sensory integration
- * Learn to use empathetic listening
- * Identify methods, unique to your child, that may provide new ways of redirecting your child during times of anxiety or activities that may be incorporated into a new coping strategy
- * Help your child to build or improve social skills within a group setting
- * Help your child to build connections to like-minded peers thus expanding a sense of a larger support system and provide a greater sense being heard AND understood
- * Increase self-awareness, self-understanding, self-esteem and self-confidence
- * Provide an opportunity for parents to connect with other parents of neurotypical children and children with ASD

* Work toward expanding your child's artistic process (perhaps advancing developmental understanding) and scope of the artwork by encouraging naming/labeling, identifying symbols and signs and encouraging storytelling

1. Practice appropriate limit setting
2. Improve emotional regulation and distress tolerance
3. ...AND MORE!

The Basics of Emotions Work

Your Emotions

I will be introducing various calming strategies, throughout the groups from deep breathing to guided visualization and other art techniques to encourage a calm affect.

There are six basic emotions, which include: Happiness, Sadness, Fear, Anger, Surprise and Disgust. Emotional theorists believe that all other intricacies of emotion are offshoots of these six basic emotions. I have included an emotions wheel, which is one of my favorite visual examples of this concept. I believe that if one is able to develop a deeper connection with and understanding of one's own emotions, identify triggers and resulting ways in which they cope with stress, they should then be able to cope more efficiently and appropriately. This should, in turn, result in a reduction of over-all stress, psychosomatic illnesses and anxiety reactions like meltdowns/panic attacks as they will possess a greater ability to communicate their needs and/or desires, and regulate their emotions in a socially acceptable, safe and appropriate way.

Art therapy is especially effective in coming to understand and appropriately express one's emotions in that it allows one to give physical form to one's emotions, emotional reactions and/or anxiety. This, in turn, allows one to externalize and define them as an element that is separate from the individual. Once these things are expressed in physical form, one can then begin to address any issues in a more direct way and perhaps uncover the root cause. One can do things like rid themselves of issues in a representational more socially appropriate and safe way (e.g. the same idea behind, albeit a more positive way, as the concept of an effigy), fully explore and process their reactions to and understanding of something, begin to gain control or regulate one's emotional responses, give themselves a greater emotional vocabulary with which to communicate, as well as identify the effect that emotions can have in our physical bodies as well as where we experience stress physically (if one can identify the physical effects on the body, i.e. where they feel tension when they are feeling stressed then later this can be used as an identifier or precursor to an onset of, say, a panic attack).

Regulating Your Emotions

We will also be focusing on various techniques and strategies to help with regulating one's emotions and expressing them in appropriate ways. Unregulated emotional expression can lead to inappropriate and often disruptive behaviors that may begin as tantrums and lead to meltdowns, even in adolescents and adults! Tantrums are not limited to toddlers and I include this information here for that reason.

The difference between tantrums and meltdowns:

Tantrums are goal directed behaviors that often have the function of attaining one of the following: Attention (verbalizations or physical interaction), Escape (escape from a person, setting, activity, demand etc), Avoidance (of a person, setting, activity, demand, etc including avoidance of pain), Tangible (access to desired toys, people,

places, activities etc ...preferred sensory experiences and activity), and Sensory (automatic reinforcement ...sensory based...where the activity itself is reinforcing independent of the social environment like rocking, hand flapping etc). It is the human condition to attempt to get what we want/satisfy our desires physically and emotionally, but every child pushes boundaries of behavior and discipline to test to see if we are strong enough to maintain that structure and those boundaries in order to keep them safe.

Meltdowns are a fight or flight response that are not goal directed in nature. We all have certain strategies that we have developed and put into to place to help us to cope with stress and each of us responds to stress differently. Often those with autism have developed self- stimulatory (stimming) and/or coping behaviors which surface in times of elevated stress. A sudden increase or change in these behaviors can often be an indicator that a meltdown may be on its way. Some other behaviors to monitor which could be signs of increasing anxiety are perseveration, echolalia (repeating words or phrases over and over), difficulty in speaking or answering questions or even an inability to speak, and a change in the pace of one's speech (pressured speech). If these behaviors are normal for your child then only an increase or change in these behaviors may be an indication of trouble.

There is evidence of success in using art therapy as an intervention to address negative stimming behaviors in some individuals. The idea behind the intervention is to find an alternative, appropriate/more socially acceptable, and safer preferred behavior to replace the negative one. An example of this may be addressing a hand flapping behavior that has become disruptive by teaching the child to paint using the same motions but in essence redirecting their focus to something more positive. Ideally, over time, the undesirable behavior can be faded and fully replaced with the more desirable. This information can also be applied to a neurotypical child, adolescent or adult, providing a healthier, more socially acceptable alternative to expressing intense emotions. (i.e pounding clay instead of their walls with their fists etc)

If you have not already done so, I recommend that you create a crisis plan with your child which should be practiced and then used in a meltdown/panic attack situation. This is something that can be communicated to others such as teachers, babysitters or other family members so that everyone in your child's life know what to do to best support your child in the midst of a crisis situation. In my own art therapy individual work I often encourage adults to create and communicate such a plan as well!

Mandalas are often used in art therapy to help an individual with focusing on a particular feeling or situation in order to sort it out and achieve clarity, express oneself, or as a catharsis to calm oneself. To find out more about the history of mandalas please go to mandalaproject.org.

Recognizing the Emotions of Others (Empathy)

Another concept that we will address in group is empathy. According to Webster's Dictionary empathy is: "1. the psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another and 2. the imaginative ascribing to an object, as a natural object or work of art, feelings or attitudes present in oneself (By means of empathy a great painting becomes a mirror of the self)."

Having the capacity to think about someone or something outside of your own lens or from a different perspective is something that we are not developmentally capable of or hardwired for before the age of 12- adult. This is called the Formal Operational Stage and is the last of four of Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Stages. Often those with ASD (and those who are neurotypical can do the same) experience a delay of varying degrees in this particular area. It may not be that your child is being selfish, they may not yet be cognitively capable of understanding more abstract concepts, logical thinking, deductive reasoning and systematic planning (all of that begins to happen in the Formal Operational Stage). One way that you can help your child continue to progress developmentally (whether on the spectrum or not), is to help them to form a sense of self that incorporates more abstract thinking, in other words to

enhance their ability to think from another's perspective as well as to think of others and not just themselves. This can be done in gently pointing out and explaining the actions and intentions of others. However, it may not be possible to achieve this developmental progression through verbal prompting alone. Often the way we all most effectively integrate this concept into our sense of self is through direct experiences. And of course an individual with ASD would benefit from visual support enrichment and prompting (all visual learners would benefit from this accommodation). This is an area where Art Therapy can provide some of these experiences in a direct, visually based and experiential way within a safe and supportive environment.

In light of this concept of the development of a sense of self and our place in the world as individuals, one of my personal favorite mantras of "Before you become upset, try to remember that 99% of everything has nothing to do with you," came to mind. A lighthearted way to present this concept of thinking of others or from another's perspective is to talk to your child about the fact that there are often a million different reasons that someone may not have responded in the way that you were anticipating or hoping they would. Long ago, in my first Sociology course in college, I remember focusing on the behavior of others in practically any and every situation. I found that I would often become upset when I would smile at or greet a complete stranger passing on the sidewalk, when they would not reciprocate with a smile or hello. I would become upset immediately thinking that they didn't like me and that perhaps I wasn't nice enough or good enough in some way, or that they were not a nice person. In actuality there were many possible explanations for their behavior, in fact, many more that had absolutely nothing to do with me. For example maybe they didn't see or hear me, maybe they were having a really bad day, or maybe they were feeling sick. You can help your child to think and problem solve about many different dimensions of someone else's behavior and the possible cause.

Social scripting is a prompting strategy which can be used to help your child practice for particular social situations that they may have encountered or are anticipating encountering when interacting with their peers. We often see this scripting being used as a receptive communication strategy in individuals with autism, but in actuality we all use this learning strategy when learning a new task to some degree! Essentially it provides an opportunity to practice different responses to different social situations with other individuals in a safe and visually enriched and supportive way. It especially works by clearly communicating the parameters and expectations of the situation to the child with ASD and then allows them to practice appropriate responses without the pressure of a pop-up unexpected "real life" situation or the resulting threat of embarrassment, but again may be a good strategy for us all. Another benefit of social scripting is that it can be faded out slowly and often fades more effectively than verbal prompting.

How Emotions Help Us

Once we have begun to identify and recognize our own emotions and the emotions of others, we are well on our way to developing our sense of self and how we fit into the world around us. Sometimes, however, these emotions can take over and we have trouble controlling/regulating them. When this happens we can see how emotions effect our behavior and ultimately our ability to cope and participate in a healthy way with that word. One there are many ways that we may find to deal with this, some are healthy and some are not. It is often hard to understand how emotions, especially those pesky negative ones (fear, anger and sadness) often help us. Instead the desire is to control and try to eliminate or avoid experiencing them.

But truly, fear, anger and sadness do play important roles in creating who we are as people and to not experience them at all is not an a good option, as we would no longer be human, nor is trying to control or rid yourself of them. If you have tried this, you may already know that to try to control an emotion is to see it increase. A better choice is to accept the distress.

These emotions are not just common, normal and OK, they are actually important and useful to us. For example, fear helps us to identify threats to our safety and survival. What if we had no fear of someone waving a knife in front of us or of a snarling dog on the other side of the fence?

Anger, in turn, helps us to identify when something is wrong or some injustice has been perpetrated to us or another. If we never felt anger we might allow a lot of bad things to happen to us or those around us. It often gets us up and moving to fight for a cause or stand up for ourselves when we are being bullied.

Finally sadness is something that we often feel when we have lost something or gotten hurt physically or emotionally. If we never felt sad we would not know or be able to clearly communicate to others what is important and of value to us. Sadness is also an emotion that often creates bonds with others around us through empathy. For example, if you fell and scraped your knee your mother may come and help you up and bandage your wound. This is one of the ways that she shows that she cares and sadness made this connection happen.

Feelings these emotions is normal and, again what make us human. It is when one emotion takes over, or when you lack a particular one, when that balance is upset, that there is a problem. For example, even the positive emotion of happiness can get to be too much. What if you were happy all of the time? Even when your friend's dog died. Do you think that they would know that you cared if you laughed when they told you? Emotions connect us in so many ways!

FEELING Your Feelings

To remain healthy and to express yourself appropriately is a challenge and to feel all of your feelings is important. But what if that balance is upset and you struggle with keeping anxiety or anger in check? One way to deal with this is again, not to try to avoid, eliminate or control them, but to instead face, accept and problem solve around them.

Understanding that emotions are not permanent and will often pass, rolling through your life like a wave, is sometimes helpful. When we are in the middle of experiencing them, especially those negative ones, it seems like they will last forever. Instead of a gentle rolling wave they may feel more like a tidal wave, leaving a wake of destruction behind, permanently damaging you, your life and those you care about. However, this is not the case and you can learn to visualize them in a different way, retraining your brain and behaviors to accept them, eventually working toward managing and problem solving around them. This does not mean accepting that you are an angry or anxious person and that you will forever be miserable. Instead this means seeing the negative emotion for what it is and changing how you pay attention to the emotion. This is called mindfulness. *Mindfulness* is state of being where you are in the present moment, watching whatever you happen to be experiencing at that time, with an attitude of curiosity, and without judging or trying to change your experience. In this way we become observers of the emotion, allowing it to happen and knowing that it will pass. If this seems strange or scary in itself, ask yourself how well pushing the emotions away and trying to control them, often beating yourself up, has worked for you so far.

Alyssa L. Millard, ATR-BC

**Art Therapy Based Modifications/Adjunctive Use of Mindfulness Based
Distress-Tolerance Therapy Overview**

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BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in these modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behavioral and Mindfulness-Based Therapies. These modules are based on the approach that distress intolerance is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviors and the following is based on the work of the clinicians listed above.

We will be practicing some of these strategies from an arts-based and art therapy based perspective as adapted by Alyssa L. Millard, MAAT, ATR-BC, who has training and educational background to be able to provide this from the art therapy based perspective. Within this group we will not be addressing Mindfulness based therapy as a whole, as there is not the time, nor would it be ethical to do so in this setting with this structure. **This group is not a substitute for long term individual or group therapy but is meant to be an introduction into some arts based mindfulness techniques that, when practiced over time, can be useful as coping strategies when employed as a part of a larger individualized therapeutic program.**

An individualized Mindfulness based Therapeutic Program would begin with this step of recognizing, defining and observing one's emotions and then would move past this into facing your feelings, practicing acceptance, practicing acceptance when distressed, Balancing acceptance and Improvement, Improving Distress, (by exposing yourself over time in a gently informed way to anxiety-inducing situations or experiences (or just not avoiding them) and developing and using some new skill sets like employing the opposite action), and then employ a process of Problem Solving (by breaking down the problem once identified, putting some active skills into action and then evaluating whether they were useful or not and then adjusting as needed).

Ways to be mindful of your emotions

This is by no means an easy or instantaneous event that magically solves all of your emotional challenges. It is a process that you must discover for yourself and practice to find success.

Watch or observe

Foremost is adopting the stance of watching or observing your emotions, paying attention like a third person to whatever you are feeling in the present moment. Observing as the intensity might increase, hold its course, decrease or shift and evolve into a different feeling. Regardless of what the emotion is doing, you are not your emotions, you are the **watcher of your emotions** (Tolle, 2010).

Label or Describe

When being the watcher of your emotions you might find it helpful to label or describe to yourself the emotion you are experiencing. It is a little bit like being the commentator of your emotional experience. The self-talk that goes with this might sound something like "...there is fear, I can feel it in the fast beating of my

heart”, or “...there is sadness, I can feel it in the heaviness of my shoulders”, or “...there is anger, I can feel it in the tightness of my jaw”.

Curious and Non-judgmental

You'll notice that the language used to describe your experience has a sense of curiosity and non-judgement. The fear or sadness or anger that you feel is not deemed good or bad, or right or wrong, it is what it is.

Imagery

The use of imagery can often be helpful in allowing yourself to foster this detached observer perspective. Different images work for different people. The key is that if you can relate to your emotions like they are a wave or cloud or express train or whatever image works for you, then you are watching them for what they are, paying attention to them in a helpful way, and ultimately tolerating them rather than trying to rid yourself of them.

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Tips for helping your child learn to regulate their emotions

1. Name the anxiety (For ex. "Stickiness", "stuck", "Tightness" etc.)
2. Control your own emotions (see emotion regulation and bonding document for more details here) but basically your child mirrors what they see around them and it is true, that often actions speak louder than words and children are very perceptive and can often feel the emotional states of their parents quite keenly and will respond accordingly.
3. Look for and celebrate the small victories versus focusing on the big fails
4. Praise effort! While you need to acknowledge your child's experiences and not discount them, you also don't want to focus on defeat.
5. Help them build coping skills. Instead of saying "You'll be fine" ask what your child had expected and what might make them feel better and then develop a plan and problem solve together ways that they might approach the situation a bit differently next time. Be sure not to tell them that it will definitely work or that this will always work.
6. Diffuse anxiety and frustration through action. Engage their logical brains as a way to redirect or bring them out of a panicked state. Try asking them something they wouldn't expect like math problems, or pick an object and ask them to describe it in as much detail as possible, count the sides of an object or count the number of objects etc. They can also scribble, tear paper, pound or squish clay and deep breathe.
7. Do something to continue to soothe as well as process what just happened once they are more calm and logic has returned. Setting an intention and creating a mandala or tracing their hands, making a scribble and then finding and object within the scribble that they will use to tell a story can be great ways to begin to process WHY they were upset.

Emotion Regulation and Bonding

Roger Olson, PsyD

St. Luke's Children's Center for Neurobehavioral Medicine

Life is like an ocean...

- *With parents and children traveling together
- *Sometimes the ocean is calm and other times stormy
- *You have to try to weather the storms together and enjoy the smooth sailing
- * One key is to look for opportunities to connect

How do we regulate our own emotions as parents and be able to model healthy regulation for our children?

"There is a reciprocal relationship between secure attachment and creative or playful exploration; only when attachment needs are assuaged (Heard and Lake 1986) can the individual turn away from his/her attachment figure toward the world, whether inner or outer." (Holmes 1996 pg.4)

*"It is difficult to give children a sense of security unless you have it yourself. If you have it, they catch it from you."
William Menninger*

Changing our behavior as adults and parents is challenging, especially when we tend to model and reflect what was modeled for us by our own parents, however, this process may be necessary to break the cycle of repeating and passing on maladaptive behaviors and skills. One strategy that may help to shift the dynamic between you and your child is to switch from a focus on trying to "CHANGE BEHAVIOR" to changing your (the parent's) ability to value the relationship you have with your child, instead seeking healthy ways to connect, thus valuing the child and the connection. Often when we alter this perspective and our own expectations for our children that may (or may not) be more about our hopes for them based on our perspective versus theirs, the behaviors of the child may shift on their own.

Mary Ainsworth and the Strange Situation Experiment

This experiment was conducted following children and their mothers from birth to 18 months of age. Investigators visited these families more than 14 times for 4 hours per visit to gather this information. They gathered information based on attachment theory and the bonding process mainly focusing on the mother's response to the child's need (i.e. How quickly did the mom respond to her child's cries and needs? How did she respond (soothing/nurturing, dismissive, etc)? And was this response consistent and predictable?

The experiment concluded when the child was 18 months of age and took place in the investigator's office, where the child and mother came to play. They observed how the mother and child interacted and then they introduced a "stranger into the room" (an unknown investigator) and observed how the child reacted. In the last part of this meeting they left the child alone in the room for a few minutes to see how they might react (they were monitored the whole time and the mother came back in after a couple of minutes). These are the results:

Children who were **securely** attached to their parent had parents that had **consistently nurtured and responded to** their physical and emotional needs. When the stranger was introduced into the room, they **moved toward** their parent and when the parent left the room the child **became upset crying initially, but quickly self soothed and calmed down and greeted the parent when they returned.**

Children who displayed **avoidant attachment** had parents who displayed **inconsistent nurturing and inconsistent responding (dismissive)** to their physical and emotional needs. When the stranger was introduced into the room, they **moved away** from their parent and when the parent left the room they **demonstrated little protest, but when the parent came back in they hovered over them.**

Children who displayed **ambivalent attachment (preoccupied or entangled)** had parents who displayed varying responses from sometimes **involved nurturing and at other times were neglectful** of their physical and emotional needs. When the stranger was introduced they often **moved against** their parent (hitting or flailing the parent) and when the parent left the room they **protested by becoming extremely upset and when the parent returned they remained inconsolable.**

Finally, children who displayed **disorganized attachment** had parents who displayed **no discernible consistent pattern of response moving from overly involved to overly neglectful ("disorganized" with unresolved trauma/loss often associated with severe mental disorders/abuse)** to their physical and emotional needs. When the stranger was introduced the child had **no consistent pattern of response** and likewise when the parent left the room there was **no consistent pattern of response, sometimes they would freeze and collapse or lean on a wall.**

A child with a secure attachment base displays the following benchmarks:

- *Emotional management and resilience
- *Are easily soothed, and engage in play
- *Show a normal amount of stress when a stranger is present and interacts well with parent
- *The parent is often "secure" themselves and is "The good enough mother."
- *Seem to know that expressing emotions works to communicate and that they can rely on another to respond to their needs.
- *Show basic trust
- *Have a positive self-image and high self-esteem
- *Display autonomy, good problem solving skills, goal orientation and determination
- *Have positive beliefs sets and outlook on life
- *Have strong relationships
- *Show good coping strategies and skills

*Show good emotional control and behavioral flexibility

What if my child is not securely attached? There is good news! There is evidence that that seems to indicate that attachment is open to change! Security can be earned!

"Alan Sroufe has suggested that individuals who have come to make sense of their lives in the face of adversity and have had a supportive relationship such as a relative, caregiver, teacher, or friend- that has served as a source of resilience. These findings reinforced the view that attachment is open to change and ongoing development." (Siegel & Hartzell 2003 p 142).

The key is how sensitively you parent and how you make sense of your story, not all based on how you yourself were parented and as long as you are relating versus reacting. Relate to your child versus react!

One way to achieve this is to be able to create a coherent narrative based on our own attachment histories by looking at and processing the following dimensions of your early experiences:

*Regulate and remember things that we try to avoid or defend against

*Look at and express things that cause us to feel fear, anger, discouragement and shame

*Memories that are hard to regulate

*When we move past self-protection then we can parent non-defensively

*Then we can develop a coherent narrative re: attachment relationships

Earned security for the parent= security for the child

How can I get through the "stormy weather" in the ocean that is the relationship with my child while being relational and not reactive?

When we can soothe the daily storms repeatedly and as consistently as humanly possible, the brain is protected from chronic stress

"Feel and deal" -stay cool in hot situations

*step back, take a breath and then respond (not react)

*tune in to child's emotions

*be consistent, firm, but loving

Use John Gottman's attunement strategy (from his book "Raising an Emotionally Sensitive Child")

A= awareness

T=turning toward the emotion

T=tolerance (of different perspectives)...you can agree to disagree respectfully

U=understanding

N= non-defensive responding

E=empathy

Or Daniel Hughes' pace yourself strategy of response to conflict (to diffuse)

P= playfulness

A= acceptance

C= curiosity

E= empathy

Remember to be kind to yourself and think about this strategy to help yourself in the moment of struggle:

1. Take a short break
2. Reflect on your feelings

3. Have empathy and acceptance of yourself
4. Recognize false alarms
5. Recharge/self care/connect to something BIGGER
6. Friendships

Research strongly suggests that regular mindfulness practice can strengthen the brain processes that are important to parenting.

Remember that EMOTION = AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CONNECTION!

The Open Studio Process: by Pat B. Allen, PhD, ATR

The Open Studio process, created by art therapist, Pat B. Allen is a community minded process that I use in my practice with certain individuals and groups as indicated. This process consists of forming an intention as a guide to art making, creating from a place of freedom and experimentation, allowing the image to lead by following its energy, and writing and reading a witness to the art alone or in a safe group environment. This process will be adapted for those that need accommodations with any part of it. For example, if your child has dysgraphia then we will write their intention for them as they dictate it to us.

"The core studio process can be combined with a group or community intention to explore common issues such as our perception of others, visioning community solutions or creating community celebrations or rituals. We can explore and be guided in our personal lives as well as in our actions in the world." Pat B. Allen

Intention: This is a statement of what you would like to receive from the Creative Source at this particular moment. An intention should be made in writing before each art making time. Prior to writing, it is helpful to become quiet, focus on the breath, and relax, allowing the intention to rise up and make itself known. The intention should be worded clearly, in present tense, without using the word 'want.' For example: "I explore my creativity" not "I want to explore my creativity."

Intention can take several forms:

1. **Inquiry:** 'I receive information about...' 'I explore possibilities about...'
2. **Engagement:** 'I commit to learning...' , 'I am guided in my relationship to...' , 'I place myself in service to the Creative Source...'
3. **Celebration:** 'I give thanks for...' , 'I remember...' , "I honor..." , 'I mourn...' . Ultimately, all intention is about coming into alignment with our deepest purpose. To do this we must be in agreement in body, mind and spirit in order to manifest our unique truth.

Art Making: Use any simple materials that you enjoy, follow the marks you make and your sense of pleasure until you feel a sense of completion. Simple art materials and tasks are described in "*Art as a Way of Knowing*" by Pat B. Allen.

Witness: The witness is your chance to actualize your intention by turning your attention and full consciousness to what you have received in your art making. The steps are as follows:

1. Sit in front of your art quietly and just notice what it looks and feels like
2. Describe in writing what you see as fully as you can without coming to conclusions
3. Write down any feelings or thoughts, including judgements that come up for you
4. Dialogue with the image or a part of the image, write it down as it comes, including any seemingly extraneous thoughts or tangents
5. Check in with your intention; ask your image what it has to do with your intention.

Key Concepts (As this group is not religiously based or affiliated the concept of creative source will not be taught from a religious perspective. I include the definition below for your informational purposes. If your

child is curious and/or expresses religious opinions or affiliations this will be welcomed and supported, but the art therapist is not educated in providing in-depth education around this subject matter. All religious beliefs are supported and the scope of the group will reinforce the concepts of treating others with love and kindness in an empathetic way.)

Creative Source: The life energy that is the birthright of every person. It is a vast unending, incomprehensible source of potential. It is called, The Universe, chi, inner wisdom/intuition, or God, as well as other things depending on the tradition. Art and writing are a means to tap into the Source. Other means include prayer, meditation, music and movement.

Safe Group Environment: This is created when each person present is fully engaged in his or her own art process without interfering in the process of others. The no comment rule has proved very effective in ensuring safety.

No Comment Rule: It is important to refrain from commentary when we engage in Studio Practice with others, particularly when the group reads witness writing aloud. We allow ourselves to be touched by the words of another. Sometimes the Creative Source speaks to us through the words and images of others. We make no comments so each person speaking can hear the truth of his or her own words. We hold the space for one another with compassion and respect. We are the embodiment of witness consciousness when we do so. We do not deny any judgements or conflicting feelings, we simply do not speak them aloud. Such responses can be invited into our art and witness practice to reveal their meaning to us.

Witness Consciousness: This is the state one seeks to enter in any form of meditation, when judgements fall away, our awareness clears, our minds quiet and we are in a state of oneness with the Source. Witness consciousness is the reality that exists beyond the rising and falling of our thoughts and emotions, holding them without judgement.

“Art is a way of knowing: a guide to self-knowledge and spiritual fulfillment” by Pat B. Allen

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