

When I was younger, I was always known to be different from other kids. This went beyond my classmates and peers, as my parents found raising me to be much more difficult than my older sister. I had near constant meltdowns, a strong aversion to following rules I didn't understand, and a very morbid brain that seemingly came from nowhere, as I was not exposed to the kinds of things I was coming up with. I was also a compulsive liar and had accidents frequently. I recall peeking in my mother's bedside table to find a book titled "Raising Your Troubled Child." By the time I was 10 years old, it had become increasingly obvious that I was going to need psychiatric help from an outside source.

My mom brought me around to various child psychologists, had me sit in the room as she asked each one about their approach to behavioral therapy. Every time I would sit in near silence, completely dissociating from the conversation, even though it was supposed to be about me.

In one office, there was a small kiddie table with some paper and crayons. At 10, I was a bit big for the table and the crayons, and yet I lit up. It was the first time my mom noticed me engaged in one of those meetings. This was her lightbulb moment, and she began to look into Art Therapy as an option.

We found New York Creative Arts Therapists, and after the first placement meeting we knew it was exactly the right fit. I started weekly sessions and continued them through the end of high school. No matter how terrible I was feeling throughout the week, those Wednesday meetings would always pick me up.

It was through these sessions that my therapist was able to pick up on early signs of Anxiety and Depression, teaching me coping mechanisms and correcting unhealthy patterns of thought before I was even able to admit I had them. The ability to create freely allowed me to open up, to tell the truth, and to feel good about what I'd done in a session even if I was talking about something heavy or triggering.

During the second year of the pandemic, when it seemed like all of my emotions and traumas were catching up to me, I went back to therapy and was able to crawl back from the brink of a full mental breakdown.

At college, I met many people who were a lot like me: "troubled" kids who were heavily creative. I started to notice that almost all of them had been in intensive therapy as a child/adolescent, and many of them came out of it with a distrust or flat out hatred of therapy. They relayed horror stories that were so far from my experience, I couldn't help but mentally (and later, verbally) thank my mother for finding a type of treatment that worked for me specifically.

I recognize the privilege in my situation. My parents were willing and able to spend more money to make sure I got the kind of therapy I needed. Many of the friends I spoke to came from low income households, or middle class families that didn't have the disposable income to spend on specialized therapy. They were sent to whatever therapist was covered by their insurance, and in many cases I wondered if it had done more harm than good. I was so fortunate to have the experience I did, and I always wished they'd had my same opportunity.

Whatever can be done to increase access to mental health care, particularly specialized treatments like art therapy, should absolutely be done. New York Creative Arts Therapists and my therapist have been instrumental in my mental health journey. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that they saved my life. I don't know where I would be today if I hadn't gotten the particular help that I needed. I wholeheartedly support including LCATs in the 2024 Budget for Health and Mental Hygiene.

Sincerely,
Finn Whitney