

Princeton House Behavioral Health

today

THE RESILIENCE ISSUE

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TELEHEALTH ART THERAPY

Creating Characters to Build Resilience

Through the use of the creative process, art therapy helps children and adolescents increase their overall sense of well-being as well as their emotional and psychological resilience for improved day-to-day functioning.

But the COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges for facilitating art therapy among young patients: the lack of access to art materials at home, and the need to find creative ways to keep their attention during telehealth sessions while the world around them was in disarray.

“As we pivoted to virtual therapy, our young patients lost the opportunity to bond with each other during the informal times between groups, which helps make our groups more cohesive,” says Linda Baker, MA, LAC, Allied Clinical Therapist at Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health’s Moorestown outpatient site. “It was important to find ways to help them engage in therapy over a screen while also connecting with one another.”

These goals led Baker to explore “third-hand” art therapy, a concept developed by Edith Kramer, art therapy pioneer. Aiming her computer’s camera at a canvas, Baker served as a liaison between the participants and the art as they took turns guiding her in the creation of a character.

The process began with deciding on the shape of the character’s head and body and continued with the specific features and environment. Once the character was completed, the group worked together to develop a corresponding story that gave it life and dimension.

Because art therapy facilitates healing through the opportunity to externalize internal struggles, the characters and stories often reflect the issues the participants are facing. For example, Boris the Tortoise Turtle (shown on cover) wanted to play jazz on his sax rather than clean up his room, so he drifted on a balloon to the moon where his melodies could be heard throughout the galaxy.

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Dr. Jeremy, the non-binary avian veterinarian and hula dancer

The Resilience Component

During a time when families have been facing high levels of stress and a loss of structure, the character-building approach incorporates elements that help to foster resilience among participants. This includes collaborative problem-solving, emotional regulation in being patient and waiting for one’s turn, a sense of engagement and accomplishment, the benefits of humor, the practice of mindfulness, the vision for an ideal world, and the social support of a therapist and peers.

“Through these characters, they are also creating possibilities—the essence of resilience,” explains Baker. “This process has helped them understand that anything is possible.”

Addressing the Linger- ing Impact of Isolation on Adolescents

Between missed milestones and isolation from peers during a phase in life when socialization is usually a cornerstone, teens have been hit particularly hard by the behavioral health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet the fact that the pandemic is a shared experience for everyone provides behavioral health experts with an opportunity to help patients understand that they are not alone in dealing with its emotional impact.

“The three big factors that have an impact on mental health right now are change, fear, and grief or loss,” says Michelle Reuben, MEd, LPC, ACS, Clinical Manager of the Child and Adolescent Program at Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health’s North Brunswick outpatient site. “It’s a unique time in our lives in that everyone is experiencing all three of these things at the same time.”

“This shared experience means there’s a great opportunity for validation,” she adds. “As a therapist, I can really relate to what my patients are going through.”

Change and fear will continue to be factors as teens face a new school year filled with unknowns. Grief and loss take many shapes—from the death of a loved one and the lack of traditional grieving processes, to the more simple losses of the ability to meet friends at the movie theater, play fall sports, or enter the momentous senior year in a way that was expected.

In addition to an increased incidence of issues like anxiety and depression, rebellious behavior can become more prominent, such as sneaking out to parties with large groups of friends. When addressing situations like these, Reuben recommends the following tips for behavioral health providers working with teens:

- Frame your efforts around parental involvement and validation of the current challenges teens are facing.
- Pair this with an honest discussion of the pros and cons of ineffective behaviors.

- Help parents and teens consider a creative middle path that maintains safety but satisfies emotional needs. Otherwise, when teens constantly hear no, they push back more.
- Create a toolbox that can help teens move from “emotion mind” to “wise mind.” This might include mindfulness practices like using calming apps or quiet time to regain composure.
- Practice cope-ahead strategies. Walking through various scenarios of what the school year might look like can reduce anxiety and fear of the unknown.
- Help teens focus on gratitude, positive thinking, and goal-setting, which can help them face continuing uncertainty.

“All of these strategies can build resiliency and be used to foster mental well-being throughout life,” says Reuben. “If we can conquer the challenges of this unprecedented time, we can conquer anything.”

Setting Up Structure

“Structure is so important for adolescents during this uncertain time,” adds Madhurani Khare, MD, Medical Director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Princeton House. “For example, many teens have been staying up into the night and sleeping during the day, which disrupts the natural release of melatonin and adds to depression and anxiety. Parents need to be mindful that their teens are maintaining healthy sleep, eating, and exercise routines.”

When the Return to Routines Heightens Anxiety

As reopenings were phased in over the summer months in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many new stressors evolved—from widely differing opinions on what’s safe to states experiencing an increase in COVID-19 infection rates. For some people, the uncertainty and ongoing lack of closure during this time has caused more anxiety than the lockdown period.



“Beyond concerns for safety and economic stability, there’s no clear end in sight, which limits the ability to be future-oriented,” explains Amy Hiraldo, MSW, LCSW, Director of Outpatient Services at Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health’s Princeton site. “It’s hard to plan anything in a meaningful way. When your sense of hope and optimism for the future is impacted, there’s a greater risk for depression and anxiety.”

According to Hiraldo, navigating this new terrain is all about finding balance and building resilience. She notes that behavioral health providers can incorporate the following advice when treating their patients.

Set limits. Those struggling with reentry anxiety should give themselves permission to say no. For example, just because relatives are participating in large gatherings doesn’t mean that comfort level is the same for everyone. Focused introspection is key to determining your comfort zone and finding ways to safely connect with others.

Focus on what can be controlled. Life is not perfect even in normal circumstances, and issues come up that can’t be anticipated. But certain things that can be controlled are critical to building a foundation of resilience and improving the ability to handle stressors. These include getting enough sleep, sticking to a regular sleep pattern, eating well, and incorporating exercise or movement into each day.

Practice dialectical thinking. When people experience anxiety or depression, they may lose the ability to see the dialectical nature of situations. But finding the capacity to pause, examine your thoughts, and consider the other side of any situation can foster resiliency. A good place to start can be asking the question, “If I were arguing the other side of this, what would I say?”

Manage expectations. The new normal will come with its own challenges. It’s important to anticipate additional and ongoing limitations rather than expecting a

definitive return to pre-COVID-19 ways of life.

Take advantage of peer support. Hearing how others are dealing with common COVID-19 stressors can be valuable. Online support groups are emerging throughout the region. Start by checking your professional organization for a peer support group.

Hiraldo adds that particularly during these extremely stressful times, an intensive outpatient or partial hospital program and medication when appropriate may help facilitate positive outcomes.

“We’ve all been through a lot, and there’s no one right way to process it,” she says. “Sometimes a higher level of care can be the boost that’s needed to get unstuck and back on track to improved mental health.”

NEW VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUP FOR FIRST RESPONDERS



From COVID-19 calls to unrest and uncertainty, 2020 has been an extraordinarily difficult year to be a first responder. To further support those who serve and protect society, Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health now offers **Too Strong for Too Long**, a free, confidential support group for first responders, led by first responders. This virtual platform fosters an interactive discussion on ways to maintain balance and structure, promote physical and mental well-being, and develop resiliency.

Group facilitators are licensed therapists who are or have been first responders themselves, serving in the military, police, corrections, fire, and EMS services. The group is held virtually via a video conferencing platform that can be accessed from a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Groups meet weekly, and participants can sign up for any number of sessions. All first responders and military members are welcome to participate.

When a higher level of care is needed, Princeton House's First Responder Treatment Services provides customized inpatient care for first responders, as well as intensive outpatient trauma programs for men and women. Princeton House follows CDC guidelines for screening, PPE, and social distancing for patients and staff.

For more information about the support group, go to princetonhcs.org/calendar, and use key words *Too Strong*.



PODCAST SERIES

Focuses on COVID-19 Behavioral Health Topics

There's no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mental health in countless ways that continue to evolve. With a unique wealth of clinical expertise in a wide variety of areas available at Princeton House, Senior Community Relations Specialist Andrew Dean, LCSW found a way to conveniently harness that insight to benefit people throughout the community, including behavioral health providers. The result is a new podcast series called **Mind on Mental Health**.

"My personal goal has always aligned with Princeton House's mindset: it's important to do anything we can for the community at large, especially during times of crisis when anxiety is skyrocketing," says Dean. "We chose podcasts for their accessibility; you can listen to them even when washing dishes or going for a walk."

Featuring psychiatrists and therapists in a free-flowing conversational format, the podcasts focus on topics like tips for managing anxiety, emotional eating triggers, grieving during COVID-19, and building resiliency while recognizing how it might be manifesting differently from person to person.



● To access the latest podcasts, visit mindonmentalhealth.podbean.com.

Social Injustice AND Mental Health



While recent events have put trauma at the forefront of our national conversation, the longstanding weight of racism on individuals, communities, and institutional systems can have a profound effect on the mental health of those impacted.

“Disparities in mental health diagnosis and treatment across culturally diverse groups have been well documented,” says Marguerite Pedley, PhD, Senior Vice President of Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health. “We have known for decades that pervasive trauma and systemic bias can lead to an increased incidence of mental health and substance use disorders in impacted communities. How we respond going forward, emboldened by this moment of national reckoning, will be the key to determining our success at bringing about enduring change.”

The recent protests for racial justice have inspired unprecedented solidarity and the opportunity for our entire community to commit to actions that will have a lasting effect. At Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health, we understand that lasting and meaningful change is long overdue, and that we need to do meaningful work to make that change happen.

As part of a system-wide diversity and inclusion journey over the past few years, Princeton House works diligently to provide a safe, welcoming environment for all patients and staff so that everyone can achieve their full potential. This work is guided by a Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee with representation from across the healthcare system, as well as the Penn Medicine Office of Inclusion and Diversity, which is currently expanding its action items and measurable outcomes toward a more inclusive community. This includes implicit bias training for every Penn Medicine team member.

“Princeton House has a long tradition of being a welcoming environment to all races, ethnicities, creeds, and sexual orientations for both staff and patients,” says Neal Schofield, MD, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Princeton House.



On a summer morning in June, staff gathered in the Healing Garden at Princeton Medical Center to honor the lives that are impacted or have been lost to racism and social injustice and to commit to making lasting change.

“Our provider staff itself is drawn from a diverse array of backgrounds, which strengthens our collective skill set and awareness,” he adds. “We welcome further progressive change.”

As we plan our next steps together, we continue to seek broad input that honors and includes the perspectives of the diverse voices in our community. Together, we will listen, learn, and lead. We will implement rapid actions and develop strategies that will have a sustained impact on our culture and our community. These efforts can no longer wait. Future generations require our action.



Celebrating 40 Years of Service

You may know Nancy Zorochin...who for 40 years has been a key part of Princeton House.

Fresh out of nursing school in 1980, Nancy Zorochin joined Princeton House—then solely an inpatient hospital based in Princeton—as a nurse caring for the needs of patients with acute psychiatric and substance use disorders. Since that time, her career has grown and evolved with the organization, and she is now celebrating 40 years at Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health.

“When I did a nursing rotation at Princeton House, I immediately knew it was the place for me,” she says. “I’ve always enjoyed listening to people and being empathetic, and this was a great opportunity to share those skills.”

After eight years in nursing, Zorochin accepted a position in the admissions department and, 18 years later, moved on to serve as a Community Relations Representative. She has enjoyed seeing Princeton House expand and innovate over the years while always holding true to its patient-first mission.

With 40 years of insight, what advice would Zorochin offer to those entering the behavioral health field?

“Find a role where you really believe in what you do and the services you are offering. It makes all the difference.”

When working in admissions, Zorochin received a call from a former patient who wanted someone to know how thankful he was that Princeton House saved his life 20 years earlier. As it turned out, Zorochin was that patient’s nurse. “It was unbelievable—and one of those moments in my career that was simply meant to be,” she says.

New Physicians Join the Team



Ayesha Ashraf, MBBS joined Princeton House in July as a psychiatrist for the inpatient site. Dr. Ashraf completed her residency in psychiatry at Harlem Hospital Center/Columbia

University Medical Center. She has a broad background in research, including serving as research assistant for the Mood and Anxiety Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore. Dr. Ashraf has coauthored numerous poster presentations and is fluent in English and Hindi.



Kristyn Peci, MD recently joined Princeton Center for Eating Disorders as a psychiatrist. A Central New Jersey native, Dr. Peci recently

returned to the region to practice medicine after completing her psychiatry residency at St. John’s Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway, NY. She has given Grand Rounds and other presentations on eating disorders and women’s behavioral health topics.

Inpatient Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Princeton House continues to ensure safe standards for inpatient care, including COVID-19 testing for every patient at admission, limiting overall capacity and in-person group sizes to allow for social distancing, providing PPE for staff and patients, and expanding the use of single occupancy rooms.



Princeton House has gone social! Follow us on Facebook. facebook.com/PrincetonHouseBH

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**BRINGING
 COMFORT TO
 THE CLASSROOM**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit and behavioral health needs in the community escalated, staff at Princeton House’s Hamilton outpatient site were forging a relationship with the Upper Freehold Regional School District to help teachers better understand the issues that children and adolescents often face.

With the insight of Hamilton Team Coordinator Jennifer Bordner, LPC, Primary Therapist Krista Baksany, LAC, and Senior Primary Therapist Chelsea Mazzara, LCSW, this effort began with on-site professional development presentations on anxiety, mood disorders, and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) skills as they relate to the classroom. The response was so positive that the idea for a more tangible toolkit—classroom comfort boxes—was born.

“Kids today have so many things to remember, so we wanted to put coping strategies right at their fingertips,” explains Bordner. “The comfort boxes contain hands-on items they can access when they feel anxious, sad, or angry.”

Piloted with Princeton House child and adolescent groups to determine favorite tools, the comfort box items engage various senses and range from fidget spinners, kaleidoscopes, and stress balls to silly putty and journals.

According to Bordner, the consistency and structure of this simple approach helps young people better tolerate distress and uncertainty while

practicing mindfulness and building resiliency. Use of these toolkits and related discussions in the classroom also helps to normalize mental health among this age group.

“If we’re not addressing mental health in the classroom, we’re missing a fundamental aspect of education,” she adds.

While distribution of the comfort boxes will take into account the changing shape of education this fall, the hope is to make them available to students when possible, work with teachers to assess the benefits, and continue to expand access to behavioral health resources for both teachers and students. In the meantime, Princeton House therapists are helping young patients create comfort toolkits virtually over telehealth.

“It’s important to reinforce our connection to the community in creative ways given what everyone is going through,” says Bordner. “In a time when consistency is needed, we want people to know that they’re not alone and they have our support.”

For more information, visit princetonhouse.org or call 888.437.1610.