



Keeping the Child in Mind: Fathers' Experiences of Parent–Child Woodworking Art Psychotherapy

לזכור את הילד: חוויותיהם של אבות בטיפול באמנות הורה–ילד בעבודה
בעץ

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“Keep Ithaca always in your mind” wrote Cavafy, reminding us that the destination gives meaning to the journey. For many fathers, their children become their Ithaca: a reason to return from work to provide an emotional presence at home. Although there is growing recognition of fathers' importance in child development (Elkins & Schurer, 2020), few studies have examined their experiences in parent-child art psychotherapy (Ben Ari-Smira, 2012).

This workshop draws on a qualitative study of fathers who took part in group parent-child art psychotherapy with woodworking (Meshulam Heskia et al., 2025). Creating side by side with a tangible, living material opened a relational space where new interaction patterns emerged.

The workshop will begin by reflecting on wood's therapeutic qualities - its warmth, resistance, and organic nature. Wood records each touch, inviting patience, flexibility, and responsibility. We will consider how these material properties mirror relational processes of containment, persistence, and repair. Participants will be invited to engage in a dyadic woodworking experience, exploring sensory and relational dimensions of working with wood such as measuring, connecting, adjusting, and shaping. The shared process functions as a language of connection and attunement; the repetition of gestures reflects the therapeutic movement between control and surrender, structure and improvisation, action and return.

Then, the participants will take part in a group reflection informed by my research on group parent-child art psychotherapy with woodworking. Dialogue among pairs often fosters empathy, mutual learning, and mirroring. A closing circle will invite participants to share their impressions from the joint making, echoing the therapeutic potential found in group dyadic settings where individual experiences expand through witnessing others. Through this integrated process of reflection, making, and dialogue, participants will explore how tangible



materials become bridges for communication, and how artmaking supports meaningful returns to presence, to relationship, and to self.

References

Ben Ari-Smira, K. (2012). **The place of father: Towards restoring the centrality and uniqueness of the father and fatherhood in psychoanalytic thinking: Klein, Winnicott and contemporary writing on the father under their influence** [Doctoral dissertation], University of Haifa. (In Hebrew).

Elkins, Z., & Schurer, S. (2020). **Exploring the role of parental engagement in non-cognitive skill development over the lifecourse**. *Journal of Population Economics*, 33(3), 957–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-020-00767-5>

Meshulam Heskia, S., Regev, D., Gabriely Adler, M., & Saranga, N. (2025). **Fathers' experiences of group parent–child art psychotherapy with woodworking**. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 1-8.

Biography

Shira Meshulam Heskia is an Art therapist (M.A.), graduate of the School of Creative Arts Therapies, University of Haifa. PhD student at the University of Haifa. Works at Shalvata Psychiatric Hospital and teaches art in her private studio.

Recent Publications

Meshulam Heskia, S., Regev, D., Gabriely Adler, M., & Saranga, N. (2025). **Fathers' experiences of group parent–child art psychotherapy with woodworking**. *International Journal of Art Therapy*.

Saranga, N., Regev, D., Friedman, D., & Meshulam Heskia, S. (submitted). **The experiences of art therapists working with clients with physical disabilities who communicate using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)**.

Meshulam, S., Regev, D., Gabriely Adler, M. (February 2025). **Fathers' Experiences of Group Parent–Child Art Therapy with Woodworking** (Presentation). *YAHAT Biennial Conference – The Israeli Association for Creative Arts Therapies*.