



DRAMA THERAPY WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

WHAT IS DRAMA THERAPY?

Drama therapy is the systematic and intentional use of drama/theatre processes and products to achieve the therapeutic goals of symptom relief, emotional and physical integration, and personal growth. Drama therapy is an active, experiential approach that facilitates the client's ability to tell his/her story, solve problems, set goals, express feelings appropriately, achieve catharsis, extend the depth and breadth of inner experience, improve interpersonal skills and relationships, and strengthen the ability to perform personal life roles while increasing flexibility between roles.

Drama therapy is a creative arts therapy method that integrates role play, stories, improvisation and other techniques taken from the theater with the theories and methods of therapy. The result is an active, experiential process that draws on the child's capacity for play, utilizing it as a central means of accessing and expressing feelings, gaining insight, practicing successful approaches to difficult situations. Drama therapists also assess children who need additional services and can make appropriate referrals.

Sometimes the stories drama therapists listen to are real, sometimes they are fantasy. Sometimes stories are told by children in role, sometimes not. Stories are played using objects, such as puppets, dolls, or other toys, using one's body, or one's voice.

With child and adolescent populations, dramatic techniques can help clarify, communicate, and define a child's feelings.

HOW DOES DRAMA THERAPY MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?

Some specific benefits likely to be achieved in drama therapy with children include reducing feelings of isolation, developing new coping skills and patterns, broadening the range of expression of feelings, experiencing improved self esteem and self worth, increasing sense of play and spontaneity, and developing relationships. According to Erikson and other theorists, play allows children to gain mastery over conflicts and anxieties.

Drama therapy provides a developmentally appropriate means of processing events with children and adolescents for whom verbal methods alone may be insufficient. It taps into their natural propensity toward action and utilizes it to engage children in play as a means of safely exploring issues and painful feelings. Because the drama therapist is willing to meet the child at whatever space they are in, be it angry, frustrated refusing to talk, etc., and because drama therapy accesses the imagination, it is a safer, familiar method for young people. This

is particularly true for those who have a hard time trusting or connecting with adults or who might otherwise struggle in therapy.

Often children don't communicate their feelings and thoughts through only words. They have another language – that of play. Children use toys, objects and stories to attempt to understand the world around them, as well as to communicate their needs, wants and fears. A drama therapist working with children is trained to speak this special language.

IN WHAT SPECIFIC SETTINGS DO DRAMA THERAPISTS WORK WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?

Drama Therapists work in inpatient and outpatient mental health settings, educational or school/after school settings, community centers, shelters, group homes, multicultural centers, private practice, early intervention programs, home health agencies, hospices, rehabilitative facilities, and wellness centers.

WHERE CAN ONE FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DRAMA THERAPY WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?

LITERATURE (ABBREVIATED LISTING)

Bailey, S (1993), *Wings To Fly: Bringing Theatre Arts To Students With Special Needs*.

Bannister, A. *The Healing Drama: Psychodrama and Dramatherapy with Abused Children*.

Barranger Dunne, P. *Drama Therapy Activities with Parents and Children: An Exercise Handbook*
Los Angeles: Drama Therapy Institute of Los Angeles.

Barranger Dunne, P. (1997). *Double stick tape: Poetry, drama, and narratives as therapy for adolescents*.
Los Angeles: Drama Therapy Institute of Los Angeles.

Cattanach, A. (1992). *Drama for People with Special Needs*. New York, Drama Book Publishers.

– (1997) *Children's Stories in Play Therapy* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

-- (1993) *Play Therapy with Abused Children* London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

-- (1994) *Play Therapy: Where the Sky Meets the Underworld* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Emunah, R. (1994). *Acting for Real: Drama Therapy: Process, Technique, and Performance*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Gersie, A. & King, N. (1990). *Storymaking in education and therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Jennings, S. (Ed.). (1995). *Dramatherapy with Children and Adolescents*. New York: Routledge

Schattner, G. & Courtney, R. (Eds.) (1981). *Drama in therapy: Volume one: Children*. New York: Drama Book Specialists.

Sternberg, P. (1998). *Theatre for conflict resolution in the classroom and beyond*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Webb, N. B. (1999). Assessment of the Child in Crisis. In Webb, N. B. (Ed.), *Play Therapy with Children in Crisis: Individual, Group and Family Treatment* (pp.3-28). New York: The Guilford Press.

Weber, A.M. & Haen, C. (2005). *Clinical Applications of Drama Therapy in Child and Adolescent Treatment*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. New York: Tavistock/Routledge.

WEBSITES/GROUPS

Drama Therapy with Young People Yahoo Group
http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Dth_Young_People/

The National Association for Drama Therapy
www.nadt.org

WHAT IS THE NADT?

The National Association for Drama Therapy is a non-profit association incorporated in 1979 to establish and uphold high standards of professional competence and ethics among drama therapists; to develop criteria for training and registration; to sponsor publications and conferences; and to promote the profession of drama therapy through information and advocacy.

WHERE CAN ONE FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DRAMA THERAPY IN GENERAL?

NADT
44365 Premier Plaza, Suite 220
Ashburn, VA 20147
Email for general questions: answers@nadt.org
Email the office: nadt.office@nadt.org
Phone: (571)333-5101
Fax: (571)223-6440

This Fact Sheet compiled with the assistance of Kristin Long, RDT-BCT, Craig Haen, RDT, Juliette Zaiser, RDT and Mark Beauregard, RDT.