



DRAMA THERAPY WITH ADDICTIONS POPULATIONS

WHAT IS DRAMA THERAPY?

Drama Therapy is the therapeutic and intentional use of dramatic processes, such as storytelling, role-play, and improvisation, to facilitate personal growth, enhance self-worth, instill more appropriate behaviors, improve functioning, and reinforce proactive choices in a safe and flexible environment.

Through an active, experiential approach, drama therapists guide clients as they work through emotional disturbances, mental illness, trauma, family, social, educational, vocational, and community problems. Through the dramatic process, clients set and work toward measurable and achievable goals, learn to express feelings appropriately, improve interpersonal skills, and strengthen the various roles they play in their personal lives.

When applied to addictions populations, Drama Therapy is especially effective, for it provides chemically dependent clients with an opportunity to safely practice the behaviors necessary for abstinence.

HOW DOES DRAMA THERAPY MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR PERSONS IN ADDICTIONS SETTINGS?

Drama Therapy promotes an environment in which addicted clients can openly express emotions, explore a drug-free future, develop communication skills, make personal connections, and practice honesty. Because it is action-oriented, Drama Therapy allows clients to act out negative behaviors, such as drug-seeking, and consider their harmful impact in a more concrete way than traditional treatment approaches, without consequences. Clients are urged not to rationalize or deny addiction; rather, through the dramatic process, they are challenged to face their issues directly and truthfully.

Through Drama Therapy, clients have the opportunity to practice new skills, such as refusing drugs, and to imagine and take on new roles, such as a sober self. In addition, techniques such as role-play and improvisation offer clients a fresh perspective on their behaviors, choices, and relationships. Clients explore and develop their innate strengths through theatrical techniques that offer the distance necessary to consider their addiction (and resulting issues) without feeling overwhelmed.

Due to extended substance use, clients' emotional development often stagnates at the age at which they became addicted. Many of these individuals also have a history of abuse and/or trauma. Drama Therapy addresses such developmental issues through storytelling and

embodiment, meeting clients where they are and helping them mature in an organic, patient, and creative manner.

The process of Drama Therapy is both insightful and enjoyable. Because addicted individuals tend to be sensitive and creative people, they take quickly to the arts and thrive on being able to express themselves through movement, art, words, music, and drama. Drama Therapy, said one client, “gave me a way to have excitement in my life without the use of drugs. I can have fun being me without having to put on a mask.” By engaging in Drama Therapy, chemically dependent clients learn that they can have fun without being high.

Clients who engage in Drama Therapy will develop the following:

- Positive self-image, self-esteem, and self-discipline. Clients often act according to the “addict” role given to them by society, family, peers, and self. Through performance, they are reminded of their humanity, strengths, potential, and values.
- Communication and social skills. Clients have the opportunity to create new relationships with group members who lead a drug-free lifestyle and to repair or mourn broken relationships from their past.
- Healthy living alternatives and skill building. Through behavior rehearsals, clients practice and develop the skills necessary to obtain/maintain employment, achieve/maintain abstinence, obtain/maintain good legal standing, and contribute productively in their communities.
- Broadened understanding of the negative consequences of continued substance abuse on their bodies, minds, families, and communities.

IN WHAT SPECIFIC SETTINGS DO DRAMA THERAPISTS WORK WITH THOSE WITH ADDICTIONS?

Inpatient Treatment:

Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centers
Residential Treatment Programs
Hospitals

Outpatient Treatment:

Substance Abuse Clinics
Day Treatment Programs
Methadone Maintenance Treatment Programs

Populations:

Adults
Adolescents
Latency age children
Geriatric
Homeless
MICA (Mentally Ill Chemically Addicted)

WHERE CAN ONE FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DRAMA THERAPY IN ADDICTIONS SETTING?

LITERATURE:

Gestaltling Addiction: The Addiction Focused Group Therapy of Richard Lewis Miller, by Angela Browne-Miller, Ablex Publishing, Inc., 1993.

Heartwounds by Tian Dayton, Ph.D., TEP, published by Health Communications, Inc., 1997

The Drama Within by Tian Dayton, Ph.D., TEP, published by Health Communications, Inc., 1994.

Trauma and Addiction by Tian Dayton, Ph.D., TEP, published by Health Communications, Inc., 2000.

Psychodrama: Its Application to ACOA and Substance Abuse Treatment edited by Robert L. Fuhlrodt, ACSW, TEP, published by Thomas W. Perrin, Inc., 1990.

Treatment of Addiction: Current Issues for Art Therapists by D. Waller & J. Mahoney, published by London: Routledge, 1999.

JOURNAL ARTICLES:

Using Live Theatre Combined with Role Playing and Discussion to Examine What At-Risk, Adolescents Think about Substance Abuse Its Consequences, and Prevention, by Robert Bania, Heidi Carty, Carol Gibb Harding, Jack Kavanagh, Lisa Lisnov, L. Arthur Safer, Kathryn Wysocky; *Adolescence*, Vol. 31, 1996

Treating Women Drug Abusers: Action Therapy and Trauma Assessment, by Anne S. Uhler and Olga V. Parker; *Science and Practice Perspectives*, July 2002.

INTERNET:

Arts Horizons

Offers youth-at-risk creative arts programs

<http://www.artshorizons.org/>

Creative Alternatives of New York

Has worked with poly-substance abusing teenagers, such as the program “New Choices” in conjunction with The Children’s Center of Hamden (www.childrenscenterhamden.org)

<http://www.cany.org/>

Fresh Art

Dedicated to serving New York City artists with special needs, including substance abuse Works with Bellevue Hospital’s Chemical Dependency Clinic

<http://www.freshartnyc.org/>

Periwinkle National Theatre

Develops relevant plays to issues affecting youth

Ask about “Halfway There”, a play about young addicts struggling to reclaim their lives

www.periwinkle.org

The United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention

Global Youth Network

Using Performance for Substance Abuse Prevention

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/handbook_performance_english.pdf

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

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