

Drama Therapy Article

Albert Einstein once said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” This emphasis on the value of imagination and creativity coincides with the underlying concept in the field of drama therapy of how anxiety, depression and other mental health issues can take over when we forget how to imagine, play, create, make messes, and laugh. Which is why artistic expressions—such as painting, music, poetry, dance, and drama—are considered to be the most natural, effective and powerful enzymes to consume, break down, process, absorb, release, and transform our human experiences and emotions.

So then, what exactly *is* “Drama Therapy”?

Drama therapy is the intentional use of drama and/or theatre processes to achieve therapeutic goals. It is a uniquely active and experiential approach that skillfully combines theater and psychotherapy that aims to facilitate change, uncover and express feelings, and, as appropriate, achieve catharsis in order to resolve problematic patterns and emotional issues. Through a multitude of various drama and theatre process techniques, such as: storytelling, projective play, games, purposeful improvisation, psychodrama, facilitated enactments of real situations, scenework, ritual and performance, participants are invited to rehearse desired behaviors, practice being in relationship, expand and find flexibility between life roles, and perform the change they wish to be and see in the world. Drama therapy provides participants with a safe, yet stimulating context in which the depth and breadth of inner experience can be actively explored and interpersonal relationship skills can be enhanced. The simultaneously active and reflective factors of drama therapy help people to integrate emotional, cognitive, and physical levels of experience, while the perspective-inducing elements help participants move out of rigid roles and discover more satisfying ways of relating with others. Drama therapy is adaptable, takes on many forms—depending on individual and group needs and does not require participants to have any previous acting or theater experience.

Drama therapy has proven to be effective with numerous populations in a variety of treatment settings and nearly all approaches are suitable for a wide range of age groups—applying on an individual therapy basis, as well as with family, couples, group and organizational work. Drama therapists are rigorously trained to assess and modify the methods and techniques accordingly in order to meet the particular needs of a given population, age group, culture, and context, while holding the infinite range of the unique and multifaceted needs of each client. Drama therapy not only focuses on discovering the personal agency necessary to invoke real change and instill hope on an individual level, but also emphasizes on raising awareness, addressing pressing social issues related to current and historical oppression, and thriving towards social justice by utilizing both process and performance formats in an effort to promote new understanding and even healing inter-generationally.

The therapeutic use of the innate healing function of drama and theatre are ancient and are deeply rooted throughout the history and culture of our collective human experience. Despite all the technological and dis-embodied developments of our current human condition, the use of storytelling and “playing” is embedded in our DNA—an essential part of our human nature. As

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children, we live in the world of imagination, are enraptured by stories and storytelling, and play pretend all the time—acting out all sorts of situations, scenarios, themes and emotions as an attempt to process our daily experiences (as opposed to intellectually analyzing and conversing about them). Simply put, drama therapy is a further development of the dramatic tools we have inherited from our long heritage of utilizing drama for healing for the present and future human beings in need of healing. Regardless of theories and approaches, what lies at the heart amongst drama therapists is the passion for theatre and the deep desire to channel each person’s fullest potential by nurturing presence, cultivating expression, healing and transforming through story and play, and empowering ourselves and others to lead more emotionally healthy, joyful, and enriched lives. The field of drama therapy is ultimately about relationship, intimacy, imagination, creativity, dramatic action, interaction and the possibilities are limitless!

Drama therapy is a humanistic and strength-based approach, which focuses on tapping into each person’s limitless storehouse of resilience and honing their innate ability to heal by allowing clients to give their unspeakable experiences a shape and form, to share their stories in a way that feels most authentic for them, to unlock what has been long trapped inside of them, and to truly be seen for who they are and not only by their illness, pain or suffering. It is the mission of drama therapists to bring about connection and healing through the work and play of imagination, story, empathy and human-to-human encounter. In what the drama therapists refer to as “the playspace”, I/you/we are *not* alone. This is the *real* medicine. It is the prescribed medicine for tears and laughter, for catharsis, for wholeness and health—for being human.

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