



# 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.

## **WHAT IS A DRAMA THERAPIST?**

A Registered Drama Therapist (RDT) is a Master’s level credential requiring coursework in psychology and drama therapy, experience in theater and supervised internship, and work experience. RDTs are board certified in the practice of drama therapy and follow the NADTA Code of Ethics.

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

### **Inpatient Treatment:**

Detoxification & 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:**

Browne-Miller. A. (1993). *Gestaltting addiction: The addiction focused group therapy of Richard Lewis Miller*. New York: Ablex Publishing.

Dayton, T. (1997). *Heartwounds: The impact of unresolved trauma and grief on relationships*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Heart Communications, Inc

Dayton, T. (2000). *Trauma and Addiction: Ending the cycle of pain through emotional literacy*: Deerfield Beach, FL: Heart Communications, Inc

Fuhlrodt, R. L. (Ed.). (1990). *Psychodrama: Its application to alcohol and substance abuse treatment*. East Rutherford, NJ: Thomas W. Perrin.

#### **JOURNAL ARTICLES:**

Bania, R., Carty, H., Gibb Harding, C., Kavanaugh, J., Linov, L., Safer, L. A., & Wysockey, K. (1996). Using live theatre combined with role playing and discussion to examine what at-risk, adolescents think about substance abuse its consequences, and prevention. *Adolescence*, Vol. 31.

Uhler, A. S. & Parker, O. (2002). Treating women drug abusers: Action therapy and trauma assessment. *Science and Practice Perspectives*. 1 (1), 30-37.

#### **WHAT IS THE NADTA?**

The North American Drama Therapy Association 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?**

Please visit our website for more information: [www.nadta.org](http://www.nadta.org)

*This Fact Sheet compiled with the assistance of Meredith Dean, RDT and Natalie Bush, RDT.*