

Psychodrama: An Introduction for a Domestic Violence Treatment Program for Offenders

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Shepherd's Staff Training in Psychodrama

This introduction was part of a presentation for the Utah Domestic Violence Advisory Council Annual Treatment Providers Conference, Provo, Utah, September, 2002, "Psychodrama with domestic violence offenders." An outline of the objectives of that presentation is also included following this *Introduction*. Other materials that were part of this presentation include Psychodrama and Treatment Planning also included on this author's website, www.ssgcc.com.

Psychodrama is a method that uses guided dramatic action to examine problems or issues raised in group or individual counseling. The principals of psychodrama have developed around the goals of growth and fulfillment. J. L. Moreno, M.D., (1889-1974), the creator of psychodrama, believed that the role training obtained in the context of the psychodrama group would influence interaction outside the group. Through the basic technique of psychodrama role reversal, he believed we would become more sensitive to others, strengthening our capacity for empathy and effective responsible behavior. He believed ultimately this would lead to a more compassionate and supportive environment, sustained by institutions truly responsive to the human needs they serve.

Certainly the most basic goals of psychodrama in this treatment program are growth and fulfillment. Psychodrama will be used to examine problems or issues not abstractly but concretely in the situation as they happen. As one person's problems or issues will be in focus, all our own problems and issues will be in focus as well. Participants will learn from and with each other. Members will develop their ability to be supportive and empathetic (walk in the other fellow's moccasins). It is inevitable that strong feelings will come up as a result of what happens, and the group will help to provide the safety for this to occur. Psychodrama was included as part of the treatment program because it uniquely addresses issues or problems as they happen, and the feelings that surround such happenings. Identifying both these events and the surrounding feelings is something I believe is nearly essential for growth and fulfillment, as well as the development of empathy and responsible behavior.

Psychodrama is powerful. Its impact can be deep. It requires being personal and open which sounds risky, especially to those of us who have felt some deep and personal hurt and pain. In the methods and principles of psychodrama this is respected, and no one will be forced to participate in an exercise or play a role in which they feel uncomfortable. Each will be allowed to be involved to the degree he/she is comfortable. On the other hand, participants will be encouraged to take some (calculated) risks because being involved and getting the benefits go together. Psychodrama can be very rewarding, fulfilling and growth producing. This will develop and become more apparent as the group goes on and we learn to understand, trust, risk, and learn together.

We believe psychodrama can address most of the issues identified in other areas of the treatment program. Listed here are issues we believe it will uniquely address. Psychodrama can be used:

- 1) to clarify the meaning of complex (and simple) interactions between persons or confusing issues within a person;
- 2) to uncover needs that affect a relationship that otherwise might be missed;
- 3) to provide an emotionally corrective experience, being able to receive, feel or understand something for the first time and/or in a new way;
- 4) to explore possibilities for the future that perhaps are or would be avoided;
- 5) to explore and try out an alternate approach to a problem;
- 6) to help with grieving or emotionally letting go;
- 7) to understand hallucinations, other symptoms, or dreams;
- 8) to understand and face an addiction or compulsion;
- 9) to face and deal with intense emotions (anger, sadness) or to become aware of one's own feelings;
- 10) to deal with guilt and to practice making amends;
- 11) to clarify the nature of one's higher power and learning how that higher power can be used as a resource;
- 12) to practice "fire drills," or how to cope in difficult situations that could result in domestic violence;
- 13) to develop victim empathy;
- 14) to understand and develop appropriate boundaries and become aware of current dysfunction in one's family or other relationships and change them;
- 15) to learn how to develop personal intimacy (and one's current strengths and weaknesses);
- 16) to become aware of the impact of one's behavior on others, its consequences for others;
- 17) to learn how to be on the "level" with others instead of using them;
- 18) to become aware of the ways the participant has been victimized, how that affects oneself, one's ability to relate to others, and one's relationships;

- 19) to become aware of the needs and purposes fulfilled by domestic violence;
- 20) to understand one's domestic violence cycle and how it can be interrupted at numerous points;
- 21) to understand how one's early childhood history, socialization or what was taught, and early family history contribute to one's offending;
- 22) to learn, develop or practice assertiveness skills in "live" situations;
- 23) to improve self-esteem and the capacity to take care of oneself emotionally.

As part of the psychodrama group, each participant is required to identify and summarize the different issues in each session of which they became aware and/or those issues which were addressed for them. It is expected each session will address numerous issues and these will be different from participant to participant. One may see himself or herself like or unlike the protagonist (the star, central person, or one working on his/her issue) or one may see him or herself like or unlike one of the auxiliary egos (supporting cast). Almost always each psychodrama will help you to identify something you want and need to work on, as in the following entry:

"1/27/92: I became aware of how angry I am at my mother's control, but how much difficulty I have in expressing that anger. If I really said what I sometimes think and feel, she might kill herself. On the other hand, I realize I can stand up to her assertively in terms of encouraging her to get help and limiting the amount of time I spend with her on the phone (aware of new feelings, developing appropriate boundaries, practicing assertiveness, sensitized to impact of my behavior on others)."

Psychodramatic Role Play for Building New Skills for Angry Persons Inside and Out

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Clinicians are generally less comfortable working with anger disordered clients than those experiencing depression or anxiety. In addition, there is a little information available on the treatment of anger disordered persons. DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2001) have developed a treatment model for anger disorders based on reviews of empirical outcome studies. They "strongly recommend that therapists employ some type of exposure, such as exposure to imaginal scenes of anger triggers or actual role-plays of anger triggers to provide a meaningful context for rehearsing new behavioral skills" (DiGiuseppe and Tafrate 2001, p. 268). This workshop will demonstrate the use of psychodramatic role-play "to introduce clients to alternative behaviors and ultimately build in more effective reactions to challenging situations" (DiGiuseppe and Tafrate,

2001, p. 268). The effectiveness of psychodrama in working with both external behavior and internal thought and emotional processes will be shown. The session will be experiential and involve attendees in the role playing to the degree they feel comfortable. This session will serve as an introduction to the method. It will include sharing and a discussion of the method and its application.

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will be able to identify how psychodrama can illuminate internal processes.
2. Participants will be able to identify how psychodrama can provide opportunity for role training, that is the development and learning of new skills.
3. Participants will be able to identify how psychodrama can be used to address client identified challenging situations.

Reference

Digiuseppe, R. & Tafrate, R. C. (2001). A comprehensive treatment approach for anger disorders. *Psychotherapy: Theory/Research/Practice/Training*, 38, 262-271.