



# DRAMA THERAPY FOR A GERIATRIC POPULATION

## 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.

## HOW DOES DRAMA THERAPY MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR ELDERLY PERSONS?

Drama Therapy for the elderly maximizes the person's cognitive and communication skills; fosters creativity and individuality; encourages physical activity; builds community; and strengthens self-esteem. In addition, drama therapy can help the elderly address some specific goals or what Robert Peck describes as developmental tasks.

After retirement, the some elderly folks face the challenge to maintain their identities without their work-roles. They often feel the loss of many other roles as well. With drama therapy, the elderly are given the opportunity to redefine themselves, to revisit or reclaim their old roles, and to audition new roles they may want to acquire.

Many elderly folks must learn to accept and work with disabilities and the limitations of the aging process and to define a new realm of possibilities. Drama therapy ensures the safety for the examination of new choices for their lives.

Drama therapy also provides the means to create a graceful closure to the final stage of life development. With theatre games, enactments, storytelling and poetry, drama therapy provides a venue for reminiscing, life review, opportunities to acknowledge life's achievements and possible conclusion for what is incomplete and needs to be finished.

Drama therapy can be used with persons with dementia. The drama therapist may employ dolls, puppets, hats, scarves, photos, copies of artwork, or sensory devices to evoke memories or encourage residents to use their imagination to create and enact stories. Through use of sound and movement, drama therapy can provide a means of communication and connection for persons who have lost capacity for speech or clear verbal communication.

For higher functioning groups, a drama therapist may apply sociodrama techniques, guiding residents to create enactments that will help them develop ways to cope with stress, solve problems, or rehearse social skills.

Some drama therapy groups are performance oriented. Participants may work with a theme to create and then perform their own plays, choral readings, or poetry. Intergenerational programs can pair residents from a nursing home or members or senior center with college, high school or

grade school students. Intergenerational groups create connection and inspire creativity through the sharing of remembered accounts or the creation of new stories through storytelling, enactment and shared spontaneity.

## **IN WHAT SPECIFIC SETTINGS DO DRAMA THERAPISTS WORK WITH ELDERLY PERSONS?**

Skilled Nursing Facilities (Nursing Homes)  
Rehabilitation Centers  
Assisted Living Centers  
Adult Day Health Care  
Senior Centers

Hospitals  
Community Centers  
Individual Homes  
Adult Day Care

## **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, supervised internship, and work experience. RDTs are board certified in the practice of drama therapy and follow the NADTA Code of Ethics.

## **WHERE CAN ONE FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DRAMA THERAPY WITH THE ELDERLY?**

### **LITERATURE (ABBREVIATED LISTING)**

Crimmons, P. (1997). *Storymaking and creative groupwork with older people*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Johnson, D. R., & Sandel, S. L. (1982). *Waiting at the gate: Creativity and hope in the nursing home*. New York: Halworth Press.

Telander, M., Quinlan, F., & Verson, K. (1982). *Acting Up!: An innovative approach to creative drama for older adults*. Chicago: Coach House Press.

Thurman, A. H., & Piggins, C. A. (1982). *Drama activities with older adults: a handbook for leaders*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

Weisberg, N., & Wilder, R. (Ed.) . (1988). *Creative arts with older adults: a sourcebook*. New York: Human Science Press.

Wilder, R. (1996). *Life drama with youth and elders: Come, step into my life*. Charlottesville, VA. New Plays, Inc.

Wilder, R. (1997). *The lifestory re-play cycle: A manual of activities and techniques*. State college, PA: Venture Publishing.

## **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)

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