



**ASeTTS**  
Assisting Torture  
and Trauma Survivors

# WHAT IS DRAMATHERAPY?

*Dramatherapy uses drama games, exercises and techniques to achieve therapeutic outcomes. For example: improvisation, storytelling, play building, role play, mime, puppetry and character building.*

On the surface it can look much like drama, however it is the intent behind the choice of techniques and their link to therapeutic goals. The aim is not to produce a piece of performance for an audience but rather the processes of the drama that give opportunity for personal and group expression and reflection.

One Dramatherapy session usually takes the shape of having a warm up activity, a focusing phase, a main activity and then some closure and de-briefing.

Dramatherapy can be done with individual children as well as groups (5 – 12 children), depending on the client's needs. Groups can be formed around a common theme (e.g family) and the choice of participants in the group will also be influenced by the presenting needs of the children.

## Benefits for Children

- **Tailored or Emerging theme:** Dramatherapy sessions can be designed to explore particular themes e.g. Family, Anger, Identity, Friendship, Loss. Alternatively sessions can be open to discovering and exploring a theme which emerges during the warm up and focusing exercises e.g. "A fight at lunch time", "Thinking about my father"
- **Child-friendly process:** Dramatherapy allows children to process their thoughts, feelings and experiences through non threatening play including story telling, enactment and creative expression. These processes are more accessible to children than just sitting and talking about issues.
- **Dramatherapy transcends language barriers.** For children who are learning English the language of drama, gesture, movement and sounds can give them a form of expression which is less limiting. Once tuned in, children can use the drama medium confidently without feeling disadvantaged about language difficulties.
- **Learning with the whole body:** Through Dramatherapy children can learn about themselves, others and various themes. They are engaged physically, orally, mentally, aurally and creatively, giving them a rounded learning experience.
- **Confidence Building:** Many Dramatherapy exercises whilst working towards other goals also build up the confidence of children to use their voice, body and creativity.
- **Building Social Skills:** Through interactions with the therapist and the group, children improve their social skills. They have to take turns, follow each other, lead, work as a team, create things together, rely on each other etc.



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# BENEFITS OF DRAMATHERAPY...

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- **Exploration of unconscious processes:** On a deeper level, Dramatherapy gives rise to creative expression which allows non verbal and unconscious processes to be explored. For example a child improvises a puppet story in which the whole family of his main character is killed and he has to find a new place to live. He creates 3 obstacles for the character to get through before he finds safety.
- **Rehearsing for Change:** Dramatherapy allows children to explore other ways of being by rehearsing them in the Dramatherapy space – as preparation for change in their lives. For example a boy who is getting into trouble a lot in class rehearses being a super hero, saving people and being congratulated by all.
- **Distancing Technique:** Dramatherapy allows children to work through their issues at a safe distance. For example a child who is grieving the separation from a parent may find it too painful to tell their own story, but instead creates a story about a Lion cub who gets lost in the jungle and misses his mother. Another child's offer to be the monkey who looks after him creates an internal possibility for self comforting or receiving comfort from another.
- **Fun:** Dramatherapy is a lot of fun and is appealing to a lot of children.

## Who can benefit from this form of therapy?

- Children who have suffered loss, displacement, trauma, are feeling confused by settlement, are having trouble making friends or fitting in, are experiencing or perpetrating bullying, are presenting as withdrawn or lack of concentration in class.
- Children who are quiet and withdrawn are just as at risk than those who are acting out, if not more so. The "acting out" child gets a lot of attention and support. We need to ensure the quieter ones who appear to be good and listening are also okay. Some children may behave well but are withdrawing or deep in worried thought.
- Children who have no or limited English.
- Children aged 5 yrs and up.
- Children with moderate to severe trauma or other high level needs could benefit from individual sessions.
- Groups of 4-5, depending on the social skills of the children.
- Same age groupings are best.

## Timeframe

Usually a Dramatherapy program involves 8 weekly sessions of one hour duration. However, larger groups (of more than 7 or 8 children) will benefit from longer sessions (1.5 hours) as will children in the upper primary or high school age range.

**For more information or to book an Art Therapy course contact Amanda Gillett  
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**Cost for a 10 week Dramatherapy program - \$1,887**

**For more information about ASeTTs Training go to: <http://training.asetts.org.au>**

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