

# transpersonal drama therapy

Transpersonal drama therapy:  
A holistic, psychotherapeutic  
approach combining the  
methods and theories of drama  
therapy and the philosophies  
of transpersonal psychology.

what is drama therapy?

## The National Association for Drama Therapy defines drama therapy as follows:

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.

Drama therapists are trained in theatre arts, psychology, psychotherapy and drama therapy. Areas of study include improvisation, puppetry, role-playing, mask work, pantomime, theatrical production, psychodrama, developmental psychology, theories of personality, and group process. All students of drama therapy must complete supervised clinical internships with a broad range of populations.

## Who does drama therapy help?

Drama therapy has helped people with stress and anxiety, depression, addictions, grief and loss, physical illness, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, behavioral problems, special needs, family dysfunction, relationship issues, anger management, negative thinking, parenting frustrations, divorce, career and financial challenges, mind-body-spirit issues, developmental and physical disabilities, and limitations and struggles of just about any kind. It is also used in the business world to promote leadership, visioning, creativity, and communication and is a wonderful tool for personal growth and creating the life one desires.

Drama therapy is used in a variety of settings including but not limited to holistic wellness centers, mental health facilities, schools, hospitals, substance abuse treatment centers, adult day care centers, correctional facilities, community centers, after-school programs, shelters, adolescent group homes, nursing homes, private practice settings, corporations, theaters, housing projects, medical schools, and training organizations.

Drama therapy is used with children and adults, individuals, couples, families, and groups.

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**Kristi Davis, MA, RDT Candidate** is a Registered Drama Therapist Candidate and holds a Master of Arts in Transpersonal Drama Therapy Studies with a specialization in Psychoneuroimmunology. She is a member of the National Association for Drama Therapy as well as the Society for the Arts in Healthcare.

Kristi's passion for drama therapy and the mind-body-spirit connection was ignited when these approaches helped her greatly improve not only her challenged physical health but also her mental/emotional and spiritual well-being. Her quest for holistic health led her on an incredible journey of self-discovery facilitated through the creative arts and psycho-spiritual study.

In addition to her personal experiences, Kristi's background in psychology—a BA in Psychology from the University of Michigan and Social Psychology graduate training and teaching at the University of Minnesota—coupled with her 12+ years as a professional entertainer provides an excellent foundation for her work as a drama therapist.

Kristi resides and practices in Michigan and is also affiliated with Soul Studies Institute in Stuart, Florida and Omega Theater in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

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## **Why would I want to do Drama Therapy instead of traditional psychotherapy?**

First of all, the beauty of drama therapy is that it offers not only the benefits of traditional psychotherapy but also is extremely effective at uncovering repressed and unconscious beliefs, memories, symbols, thoughts and emotions that may not be accessible through the left-brain methods of talk therapy. Traumatic memories, feelings, and beliefs are often repressed and suppressed throughout life as a protective defense mechanism. While stuffing down feelings and repressing memories may have been helpful — even saved your life — at one time, there comes a point when the repressed pain becomes unbearable and may manifest as mental, emotional, and/or physical symptoms. Drama and other art forms are particularly effective at uncovering this detrimental psychic material to which language often does not have access. Art forms offer methods in which to express information (including pre-verbal information) that can only be accessed through the right-brain world of symbolism. Sometimes there are no words to describe one's experience, but one can express it through movement and sound, art, or music.

Second, through role play, drama therapy is also a superb technique for fostering understanding, empathy, and forgiveness — an integral component of emotional, mental, and even physical healing. True and complete forgiveness for one's self and others, is of paramount important for well-being. We do not condone others' harmful behaviors, but we forgive to free ourselves from pain.

Third, through a deep-healing method called Psychodrama, one can access, release, and transform past traumatic events.

Fourth, through group enactments, healing rituals, and self-disclosure, drama therapy facilitates deep and meaningful connections among participants and makes our life journeys feel like sacred and important parts of the whole history of human existence. As people work in groups, they teach and learn and heal from each other. They share their stories and are encouraged and accepted by the group thereby creating a support system where they can be themselves without fear of being rejected.

Fifth, in drama therapy, by physically acting "as if" certain things are happening, the person gets a viscerally real experience. This enables people to forgive and be forgiven by people not present, to practice new behaviors, to express anger safely, to act as if they already are the person they wish to be, to transform situations, and to try on new roles, and the body interprets these enactments as genuine events. Since the brain does not know the difference between "reality" and imagination, the person benefits from the enacted, pretend experience as if it actually happened.

Sixth, drama therapy engages the body and its own wisdom in the process of healing itself. The body knows what it needs for healing and is constantly giving us signals by way of physical symptoms and emotions. By embodying different scenarios, clients gain vital information from the body and how it feels. In drama therapy, one can even role-play with one's higher self for wisdom and guidance and find one already has the answers within.

And lastly, drama therapy is fun, engaging, active, and imaginative.

## **What is transpersonal psychology, and why do I want a transpersonal approach?**

Trans personal means "beyond and through the personal," and transpersonal psychology views the individual as a spiritual being—i.e. their true Self is not their social identity/ego self derived from past conditioning and cultural beliefs. This is important, because all clients are seen as inherently whole and healthy, divine individuals with infinite possibilities for healing. It is assumed that when clients learn to relax, be still, and listen to their inner wisdom, their Higher Self or Higher Consciousness will guide them toward extraordinary wellness. When obstacles to healing are removed through the therapeutic process, health and wholeness is our natural state of being. Also, by utilizing a transpersonal perspective, we are taking a holistic approach—one that includes mind, body, and spirit—for ultimate healing potential. Clients are taught to remember and discover their own source of inner strength, wisdom, intuitive guidance, and innate healing mechanisms. Most importantly, life and the healing process is considered a sacred journey of personal transformation and spiritual evolution.

## **I have physical health problems. Will transpersonal drama therapy help me?**

Transpersonal drama therapy is a wonderful adjunct treatment for promoting physical healing. Because the mind, body, and spirit are interconnected, mental/emotional and spiritual healing will help set the stage for the body's own natural healing mechanisms to do their job and heal physical dis-ease. When one is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually "at ease," "dis-ease" may more easily abate. Not only is there often (if not always) a mental/emotional component to illness, but reactions to physical illness often cause mental and emotional problems including extreme fear, stress, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. Transpersonal Drama Therapy can help alleviate these problems.