

## What is Psychodrama?

Psychodrama was developed by Jacob Levy Moreno (1889-1974) In the 1920's it was recognised as one of the first forms of group psychotherapy and it is now practised worldwide. Psychodrama is a form of psychotherapy accredited by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP).

Psychodrama is a holistic, action based method of psychotherapy in which people are helped to explore their individual issues – past, present and future- through the use of dramatic action.

## What does Psychodrama offer?

This form of therapy offers the opportunity to gain a better perspective on inner emotional experiences and conflicts. Psychodrama helps develop emotional and physical well-being and builds and strengthens the cognitive, behavioural and affective skills through movement and action. This type of therapy can be appropriate for groups or individuals and focuses on improving a clients sense of overall awareness.

Psychodrama can, for example, help people to better understand themselves and their history, resolve loss and trauma, overcome fears, improve their intimate and Social relationships, express and integrate blocked thoughts and emotions, practise new skills or prepare for the future. Psychodrama allows for the safe expression of strong feelings and, for those who need it the practice of containing emotions. As participants move from 'talking about' into action, opportunities arise to heal the past, clarify the present and imagine the future. Psychodrama can offer a wider perspective on individual and social problems and an opportunity to try out new behaviours.

## What does Psychodrama consist of?

Each psychodrama includes:

- a. The protagonist: The person whose story or issue is presented through guided dramatic action.
- b. The auxiliary egos: Group members who assume the roles of significant others in the drama. This may include significant people, objects or even aspects of the self or a person's internal world, e.g. 'my optimistic self' or 'my internal critic.'
- c. The audience: Group members who witness the drama and who may become involved in auxiliary roles.
- d. The stage: The physical space in which the drama is conducted.
- e. The director: The trained psychodramatist who guides participants through each phase of the session.

Some of the core techniques in psychodrama include role reversal, role taking and role play, the double, the mirror technique, surplus reality, the empty chair, scene-setting and enactment.

## What will I experience in a group Psychodrama session?

Each session is unique and dynamic responding to the nature of the group and their issues. Often a protagonist (the person who is the focus of the action) is chosen whose issue represents the main elements of the group.

As an example, supposing a person brings to the group their issue of anger with a work colleague. They say that they always have this welling up of anger whenever they get into any discussions with this particular person. The director will encourage the protagonist to recall the last time this happened and have them re-create the physical space where this happened and then enact the scene as it is remembered. The members of the group are brought in as auxiliaries to aid the enactment of the scene/s taking on the roles of people, objects or in some cases other internal qualities of the protagonist.

Through the action techniques of Psychodrama, and with the help of the auxiliaries, unexpressed thoughts are brought into the open and the protagonist becomes aware of similar feelings at other times and in other relationships. The director helps the protagonist to explore further scenarios until they connect with the birth of their issue (possibly in childhood). They are now in a position to understand how the original experience impacts on the present. The current scene is done again with alternative endings. This will often empower the protagonist and offer better ways to play out similar scenes in the "here and now".

## How is Psychodrama used in individual therapy?

In "one-to-one" sessions where it is appropriate, and acceptable to the client, the therapist will incorporate psychodrama methods within the work. Such action methods are invaluable. They help to bring awareness to the unconscious thoughts and patterns of behaviour. By creating metaphors and symbols of the relationships, emotional traumas and anxieties, through the use of objects and physical space.