



8 Week Dramatherapy Programme for Education Providers

PAC-UK Education Service

www.pac-uk.org/education

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the programme is to increase the children's emotional well-being, with focus on developing emotional regulation, relational capacity and executive functioning skills.

Objectives of the programme:

- To provide the child with an experience and awareness of emotional regulation
- To develop the child's capacity for relationality
- To promote experience and awareness of executive functioning
- To provide a safe, nurturing, playful and reflective therapeutic space

In addition to the objectives the therapist will:

- Review the referring needs of the child, school and home and deliver appropriate therapeutic interventions
- Evaluate the therapy programme after the 8 week period and, should therapy continue, at regular intervals over the period of delivery from PAC-UK

Week 1: Assessment process

1. PAC-UK therapy referral forms are sent both to home and to school, to ascertain the reasons for referral, hoped for outcomes of the work, background information and awareness of any current interventions in place.

A copy of PAC-UK's Comments, Compliments and Complaints leaflet is also sent.



2. Consent to place a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door is required.
3. PAC-UK requests child protection information and any available professional reports, prior to commencement of the therapy.
4. Once the completed referral forms are returned a regular time-date slot is provisionally offered to the school. This is 50mins for 1:1 sessions and 1 hour for group sessions (both occur once a week for 6 weeks).

5. Prior to the commencement of the therapy, a meeting is arranged with parents and staff at the school, which helps to establish expected outcomes from the work.
6. Before commencing therapy, it is important that the therapist is informed regarding:
 - The reason for referral
 - Difficulties in school
 - What outcomes are hoped for from the 6 week therapy
 - Areas in which the child is doing well
 - Any objective data measurements if problematic (such as peer relationships, attendance and/or attitude to learning, academic focus and/or progress)
 - Any other interventions that are currently being used in/out of school
 - Any safeguarding concerns regarding the child(ren)
7. The time and date of the first session is agreed, the parent should speak to the child and the school too, so the child is aware of the session and also that the dramatherapy leaflet for young people is to be shared.

Weeks 2 to 7: Dramatherapy sessions (structure and process)

Ideally, the child should be brought to the therapy session and collected at the end, by a member of staff. Using the same member of staff is beneficial in setting up routine.

Welcome and check-in

1. Space is given for the child to communicate/express how they are feeling (in themselves, at home, school, socially – the child chooses which).
2. This can be done verbally or in an embodied way (i.e. non-verbally, through mime, body-movement, sound... etc.).
3. Space is also given to reflect on particular events, occurrences, problems, successes, stresses or achievements over the last week.

As the 6 weeks continue, this element of the session can be used for 'reflection' on previous session, new strategies tried, work that may have been done between sessions; also for counting-down the sessions to the end, for reviewing progress and establishing efficacy of the work.



Rationale: This promotes a child-centred approach which fosters safety, receptivity and allows for attunement by the therapist, and the child's attunement to self (this is the beginning of emotional regulation). It also introduces reflectivity/awareness of self in a ritualised and contained process. This meets the objective of providing the child with an experience and awareness of emotional regulation.

Warm-up

1. The child is invited to warm-up physically, often a 'bridge' is found for this from the information shared at check-in i.e. an altercation with a pupil, a wish to be on holiday or a desire to be a superhero.
2. The therapist often joins the child/group in this activity, encouraging awareness of different parts of the body.
3. A more structured exercise may emerge from this activity, such as turn-taking for warming-up with a clear motivation and purpose i.e. 'show me how your superhero moves across the room?'

Rationale: This involves a shift away from cognition and into more somatic and embodied impulses and movements. It opens or widens communication between the child and the therapist, which now includes the non-verbal in movement and promotes relationality (with the therapist and self) on a wider basis. The wider space of the room is also used at this point to promote autonomy/choice and resource. The movement is usually spontaneous and playful and therefore allows and promotes less conscious/considered expression.

This activity further enhances the child's awareness of emotional regulation; including relating their emotional experience to their physical experience. The use of a more structured exercise works towards helping the child to develop their executive functioning skills.



Bridge-in

1. This is a link or bridge into a more devised piece of drama, play, story, game (etc.). It comes from the warm-up and is negotiated or 'found' in the relationship between therapist and child.
2. For example, a bridging activity may introduce a 'portal of entry' i.e. a door, a cave, a aeroplane... etc. which 'transports' us into a more imaginative/theatrical and playful space.
3. The child may be ready for the therapist to join or may prefer to travel alone – again the choice is given to the child. A 'talent show' or ideas for artwork are other examples of bridging techniques.

Rationale: This prepares and contains the space for playful and more unconscious interactions. It seeks to use and validate the motivation of the child and helps to form safe, reciprocal attachments, prior to the more expressive 'main event'. At this point the child harnesses emotional and (often repressed) energy, ideas and images which are supported, scaffolded and validated by the therapist, whom provides a containing outer boundary for which the main drama/play occurs.

This activity begins to help develop the child's capacity for relationality, as does the overall process of developing a therapeutic relationship with a trusted adult.

Main event

1. An improvised piece of drama, a performance by the child and/or therapist, the enactment or creation of a story, the telling of a story, a dance, the creation of an artwork.
2. This is often the deepest point of the session and therefore the most 'cathartic' – feelings can arise which can be associated with anger, fear, elation, creation.....i.e. peak experiences. It is also the key moments when new attachments can be formed (with oneself, with others in the group and/or with the therapist).
3. Techniques of dramatic improvisation can help to bring free-associative play and for new images, feelings and thoughts to emerge.

Rationale: This promotes cathartic expression of emotion and provides a safe place for real creativity and difference to occur. The child/group has an experience which they are not fully in control of. It is often driven by story narrative, or aesthetics or the improvisatory encounter. It can be quite energetic and physical, though not always. For example in artwork, a child may choose to write a letter or enact a very still character.

The emphasis here is on the vital emergence of an experience, artwork or a thought, image or feeling. The focus of connection for the child helps promote their relational capacity and allow for free expression of emotions in a safe, nurturing, playful and reflective therapeutic space.

Bridge-out

1. Plenty of time and notice is provided to the child for return back (often through the portal).
2. The child is invited to 'bring back' something from the Main-Event i.e. an image, a feeling an object or a sentence
3. Ritual transition 'through the portal' can help to introduce transition, that something of value can be left, can be returned to and can be trusted
4. A calmer time and discussion is promoted at this point with the child. Parallels and connections are invited from the play to the child's own life, own feelings.
5. Emphasis is given at this stage to separation of self from the character/play-world – but one that survives and that we can return to next week
6. This is often a time for artwork, for reflection and for returning back slowly to more conscious and considered thought, in the present.

Rationale: This element of the session is vital to promote awareness of 'executive functioning'. It is very important that it occurs at the child's pace and in an understandable, safe and nurturing way. The child can experience a new sense of self at this moment, or an empowered sense of self (by the experience), they can come up with suggestions for their week ahead, for changes, for resolutions. Attention at this stage is brought also to the overall process – how the images (from different sessions connect) and the progress the child is making (psychologically, emotionally and practically).



Grounding

1. The child is invited to participate in simple embodied exercises – stamping, clapping, soothing, saying one’s own name, thinking about what is going to happen later/tonight/ the week ahead.
2. Attention is given to returning to class, to what happens next in the school day.

Rationale: This promotes bodily and self-awareness, emotional regulation and toleration of endings. Consistency and on-going future sessions are indicated by the therapist, which promotes feelings of security and constancy. Full conscious awareness of endings are also pointed towards, so the ending of the therapy is worked through in a ‘good enough’ inclusive and safe way.

Week 8: Evaluation, reports and recommendations

After the fourth week of therapy, a decision needs to be taken regarding whether the therapy comes to a close after the sixth week or whether it will continue.

This provides two weeks for the ending to be worked through and for the child to be fully aware of what is happening, consequently, telephone conversations are likely to be required between the therapist and the school/home.

After the sixth week a report will be written by the therapist and shared with both home and school as part of a child focussed consultation, the report and consultation will cover:

- Degree of participation/engagement by the pupil.
- Themes of the work
- The types of activities engaged in by the child (i.e. improv, dance, artwork)
- Reflections on the child’s process in relation to the referring reasons
- Recommendations for future work/signposting

For more information about this programme please contact Andrew Royle via phone [020 7284 0555](tel:02072840555) email andrewr@pac-uk.org or visit www.pac-uk.org/education

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About PAC-UK

PAC-UK is the country’s largest independent Adoption Support Agency. PAC-UK's **specialist Education Service** offers a range of services to enable schools, parents and guardians and education and social care professionals to meet the needs of children who have experienced difficulty starts in life.

PAC-UK was **rated Outstanding by Ofsted** in 2017, and was selected **as overall winner in the King’s Fund/GSK Impact Awards 2017**, for ‘Supporting Excellence in Community Health Care’.

