

Cognitive Behaviour Drama: A Research-Based Intervention Model to Improve Social Thinking in High-Functioning Children with Autism

Authors : Haris Karnezi, Kevin Tierney

Abstract : Cognitive Behaviour Drama is a research-based intervention model that brought together the science of psychology with the art form of drama to create an unobtrusive and exciting approach that would provide children on the higher end of the autism spectrum the motivation to explore the rules of social interaction and develop competencies associated with communicative success. The method involves engaging the participants in exciting fictional scenarios and encouraging them to seek various solutions on a number of problems that will lead them to an understanding of causal relationships and how a different course of action may lead to a different outcome. The sessions are structured to offer opportunities to the participants to practice target behaviours and understand the functions they serve. The study involved six separate interventions and employed both single case and group designs. Overall 8 children aged between 6 to 13 years, diagnosed with ASD participated in the study. Outcomes were measured using theory of mind tests, executive functioning tests, behavioural observations, pre and post intervention standardised social competence questionnaires for parents and teachers. Collectively, the results indicated positive changes in the self esteem and behaviour of all eight participants. In particular, improvements in the ability to solve theory of mind tasks were noted in the younger group; and qualitative improvements in social communication, in terms of verbal (content) and non verbal expression (body posture, vocal expression, fluency, eye contact, reduction of ritualistic mannerisms) were noted in the older group. The need for reliable impact measures to assess the effectiveness of the model in generating global changes in the participants' behaviour outside the therapeutic context was identified.

Keywords : autism, drama, intervention, social skills

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