

Cognitive Behaviour Drama: Playful Method to Address Fears in Children on the Higher-End of the Autism Spectrum

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Abstract : Childhood fears that persist over time and interfere with the children's normal functioning may have detrimental effects on their social and emotional development. Cognitive behavior therapy is considered highly effective in treating fears and anxieties. However, given that many childhood fears are based on fantasy, the applicability of CBT may be hindered by cognitive immaturity. Furthermore, a lack of motivation to engage in therapy is another commonly encountered obstacle. The purpose of this study was to introduce and evaluate a more developmentally appropriate intervention model, specifically designed to provide phobic children with the motivation to overcome their fears. To this end, principles and techniques from cognitive and behavior therapies are incorporated into the 'Drama in Education' model. The Cognitive Behaviour Drama (CBD) method involves using the phobic children's creativity to involve them in the therapeutic process. The children are invited to engage in exciting fictional scenarios tailored around their strengths and special interests. Once their commitment to the drama is established, a problem that they will feel motivated to solve is introduced. To resolve it, the children will have to overcome a number of obstacles culminating in an in vivo confrontation with the fear stimulus. The study examined the application of the CBD model in three single cases. Results in all three cases shown complete elimination of all fear-related symptoms. Preliminary results justify further evaluation of the Cognitive Behaviour Drama model. It is time and cost-effective, ensuring the clients' immediate engagement in the therapeutic process.

Keywords : phobias, autism, intervention, drama

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