

Summary of Psychodrama Techniques We Use

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This is for the benefit of beginners in psychodrama. After having seen psychodrama and having read the verbatim above, this list should prove a convenient reference for you. It may not lend itself to your reading it straight through, other than to get a general notion of what's here, so that you'll know where to look when you need technical clarifications. If you are already a psychodramatist it should prove easy going, but names of our techniques fall short of universal standardization. You may already know a particular technique under another name. Now you have discovered ours. Moreover, I offer an abbreviation system to facilitate marking the supervision psychodramas my trainees have written for me. If nothing else, it shows I've read their work, and have recognized they used the techniques appropriately, when they have. And when they don't, I can show what they should've done. The list is from *Directing Psychodramas*.

1. **FROM and FOR (=FF)** *What do you want.... her (or him)?*
2. **DROP CURTAIN (=DC)** *So you can ask P without dismissing the auxiliary (=AUX).*
3. **INTENSIFY OPPOSITE FEELINGS (=IOF)** *Lest they cancel out.*
4. **WHERE ELSE? (=WE)** *Have you seen that before? When? In whom?*
5. *If I'd only known back then what I know now, I'd have done it differently. Had I only known (=HK), therefore in surplus reality (=SR) Do it now. Or if only I'd been there, Be there now.* In dealing with regrets, we welcome undoing the past. (See No. 22 below).
6. **ICP (=inner child of the past)** Use two chairs. In one of these you'll be yourself, here and now. In the other,

yourself then and there. This is an IPY (=intrapyschic) dialogue in SR (=surplus reality). I prefer to use CLM (=child in living memory) to avoid misleading time and space metaphors.

7. **HEDGE against suicide (=HS)** When P (=protagonist) longs for reunion with any deceased love, D (=director) says, *Look forward to that reunion, after you've lived a rich, full life, and will bring with you something that will make your departed love proud of you.* Better, program so that the AUX says those words to P, ideally after P has said them while occupying the RR (=role reversed) position.

8. **My SECRET from you (=MS)** Now that you know the worst thing about me, how do you feel about me now? Appeal to persons present in audience in reality OR in SR, Now that P has heard the worst, RR and react. Then RB (=reverse back, hear and respond). This answers the questions: how did P respond when you actually told? Or how do you imagine they'd react if you told them now? Especially useful for disclosure of past sexual abuse---often to an intimate (parent, spouse or peer) whose response you've feared. (BF=boy friend. GF=girl friend).

9. **Your SECRET from yourself (=YS)** This involves confronting others with something they hadn't known about themselves, esp. terminally ill persons. Or being the messenger bringing bad news.

10. **JUST DESERTS (=JD)** What should be done to him, her, them? Who should do it? What next? If you do it in SR maybe you won't have to in life, particularly if it's against the law!

11. **CONFRONTING sexual perpetrators 'perps' (=PP)** is to be done in SR, preferably without RR. Begin with an empty chair, then have P choose someone she trusts to put in the chair, after the confrontation has begun. If feeling comes freely, D won't need to take that step. When D takes P to SR, for the purpose of showing the response feared, supply

P with a double when she returns to her own role. Don't have P linger in the RR position. We must guard against increasing guilt through understanding the perpetrator's point-of-view. We do RR with perpetrators only for the sake of information, not to experience the PP feelings. We may gain information into the PP character and how he justifies himself, or maintains cover-up. If ever we dare do this with actual perps, the psychodrama becomes an encounter. When working in a correctional setting the perp is the P, and the victim the AUX. When you do have P RR with perps, (a) with the best you can hope for from P, esp when you suspect the relationship will continue (as with a sibling, or extended family where avoidance may or may not be an option). (b) with the response which would give you the most satisfaction. Then RB to open the door to what you want to do next. You may or may not want to follow up with 'just deserts.' OVERHEAR (=OH) is often an effective follow up. Let's imagine that someone important to you overheard CP confirm your accusation against him, RR with that person and react. D may stage a scene on the assumption that an important person in P's life has seen this psychodrama so far. Often we conclude a psychodrama with P's telling someone later what happened in his psychodrama, or writing (aloud) a letter home about it.

12. DELAY STAGING (=DS) Especially when P has come into PD with the agenda of doing that SR. D asks, *What was your warm up to our staging this? Let's back up and show that.* Often this takes place in conversation or soliloquy on the way to where one encounters the other.

13. SUBSTITUTE SCENE (=SS) follows 'delay staging' when doing the actual scene involves R rated production, or obvious staging difficulties.

14. LIFE SAVING toward preventing suicide (=LS) Minimize the warm up to suicide and move to actually having done it. Then put an AUX in the dead P role, and leave him there,

while P shows us the discovery of the body and its impact on the discoverer. Delay RB until we've seen the impact on all the significant others.

a. BUT YOU DIDN'T DO IT (=NOT) Take P back to himself as he contemplated doing it. D asks, What do you do next? This could lead to a soliloquy or to an IPY consisting of *Do it vs Don't do it.* Be sure to investigate what P fears will take place if he doesn't suicide.

b. HOW WOULD YOU HAVE DONE IT? (=SP, or suicide plan) Just ask, don't stage. We don't want to role train (=RT) anyone into committing suicide. OR tell us what happened to save your life (preventing the suicide). D: You've another chance, what do you do with it next? (=NXT)

15. POSITIVE FUTURE (=PF) D looks for a foundation which will make it plausible, as in presuming a favorable treatment outcome, and with P having made proper preparation, including working toward favorable breaks. How far into future to take the TIME MACHINE? (=TM) Or imagine the passing of the seasons, or falling leaves of calander, as one may do in hypnosis. D would use NEGATIVE FUTURE (=NF) only as the worst that can happen, in order to discover what P is afraid will happen. Follow this with LIKELY FUTURE (=LF), to see where the P's balance at the moment is. D: *Given that this is your foreseeable future for you, how would you like to change it?*

16. LOSE YOU (=LY) At the strategic moment, D supplies the double with the line, *I was afraid I'd lose you too.*

17. MINIMIZE GUILT (=MG) If P shows possible guilt at SR negative expression toward significant figures, D says *But you never actually did that, did you --- even though it would've been their 'just deserts.'* If P says, *Well, not quite so forcefully,* D says, *Too bad you didn't. They deserve it. And it might've helped your relationship in the long run. You*

saved them pain at your expense. You should get a medal (said with an obvious 'tongue in cheek,' but avoid sarcasm itself). One may also feel guilt over failing to express positive feeling. Not having been near when beloved persons die is a common experience, leading to anguish over not having said how much love they had, and how they wished they could have told them in time. We provide in psychodrama through surplus reality what life hasn't provided. We bring the dead temporarily back to life to give protagonists a chance to do what they wish they'd done. Remember that what one fails to do may be just as guilt producing as what one does wrong.

We invoke the same process when the words protagonists wish they had heard from dying or dead significant persons. Suppose the beloved is in a coma, and children require added reassurance that the words of love would've been forthcoming, we move forward in time to when the beloved comes out of the coma and says what they need to here. We have the protagonist RR with the beloved, supply the language, then RB so that the AUX representing the beloved may deliver the message, and offer the open arms. The fact that the return from the dead calls for a miracle is no obstacle in psychodrama. We represent whatever can be imagined. At some level of conscious we do not distinguish between a "dry run" and the real thing. Let that work for us. We minimize guilt, but also anger (=MA).

Directors should remember that the direct route to MG and MA both may be through first maximizing, if P can stand it. P can stand it when we provide support through doubles, creative settings and group feedback.

18. STRATEGIC STAGING (=SS): The best example is the ACTION SOCIOGRAM, detailed above. Some use the word SCULPTING, but I'm not quite sure what that refers to. Our usual staging I call REALISTIC (=RS), even when it's based on SR, where we freely imagine tables...etc. or

represent them by whatever props are available. When we use props, such as chairs, in strategic staging, it is the specific arrangement of persons and things which matters. If it doesn't matter, I call that 'realistic.' The SPECTOGRAM, or self-placing on an imagined continuum between on-stage polarities, is a good example of strategic staging.

19. PHYSICAL PRESSURE (=PP): This is a form of CONCRETIZATION (=C), that is, putting the symbolic into physical form. Pushes and pulls serve usually. Ambivalence or conflict are often represented with an AUX pulling each arm. Watch that your AUX doesn't go overboard, however. When there are no risks, we've even allowed wrestling. Usually it's a good idea to have AUXs flanking the participants on stage. Doubles can take that role, or even substitute for the P and the significant other. Physical ploys get emotions to surface. TOUCHING (=T) is especially helpful. D usually gets doubles P has previously chosen to do it. Sometimes D may hold a frightened P's hand after asking.

20. AGE MANAGEMENT (=AM). In SR take P to an age when dialogue with the other would be more plausible. We keep P at the present age while we manipulate the other, unless the drama requires otherwise. A quasi-encounter with the psychodramatic baby (=PB) becomes possible when we imagine the baby at a specific age, child, teen, or adult. The choice is often symbolic, such as the age P was when PB was lost, or as if the PB had attained the age of one's child. We often ask teens to do that, or give or take advice from a PB or a peer of one's own age.

21. SOUND EFFECTS (=SE) D may orchestrate the group to produce needed sounds to heighten P's experience. Once in a while I come to P's defense, with an arm around the shoulder, and scold the other in his behalf, especially

when P blocks on showing anger himself. An experienced double can do this maybe once in a session, but he'd better be sure this would be acceptable to P. One may ask, *You need someone by your side, may I put an arm around you, so that other person over there can see that I'm here with you?* That may cut effectiveness, so only ask if you're in doubt. If P shows discomfort nonverbally, withdraw immediately and say to the AUX playing the other, *Now you know who P has in his (or her) corner.* When P is reviewing childhood beatings, which often comes up in correctional settings, I may remove my belt to strike the seat of a straight back chair. But if I am about to do this, I always tell P what I am doing so that P doesn't jump to the conclusion I'm about to hit him. If P says he can't handle that, I don't insist. Hearing the striking sound the D produces, while the AUX provides the angry words, may bring P to react as he did back then, sometimes more freely than he was allowed--or allowed himself to show at the time.

22. UNDOING (=UD) Parents fail to realize how important it is to give a child a chance to make up for his wrongs. Often they are so angry they want to 'rub it in,' increasing feelings of guilt and hopelessness. The child may've been told *It's too late. The damage has been done. I'll never forget it.* Nor will he, and it's so much the worse for everyone.

D asks, *Is there nothing you can do which will change his heart?* (We get more mileage out of the word 'heart' rather than the word 'mind') If there is something to do, we set that up, of course, as warm up to the restaging. We give P the opportunity to do it another way this time rather than the way he'd actually done it before. We follow up with an improvisation from AUX what would happen next.

23. SUPPORTIVE PLOYS (=SY). EGO-BUILDING (=EB) is a standard ploy for building self-esteem. We go round the

group, or ask for spontaneous responses, to D's request for something both good and true to say to the P about himself or herself. I don't often have occasion to use straight feedback with a P as I would with a student. When the student has been a P, with beginning groups I may prefer to supervise the director after P has given input and departed. But P may have had a very satisfying session, only to have it undermined by eager beavers intent to demonstrate their brilliant alternatives to what was done. P's feeling criticized is a side effect, though 'in psychodrama we know there are no bad protagonists, only bad directors.' This has to be balanced against the paranoia P's absence invites. D may supervise directors in training one-to-one or with a group of trainee's peers, but not with patients.

Directory of Common Supervisory Abbreviations

AM. age management	HK. had I but known	PF. positive future
AUX. auxiliaries	IPY. intrapsychic scene	PP. physical pressure
BF. boy friend	JD. just deserts	RB. reverse back
C. concretization	LF. likely future	RR. reverse roles
CP. confrontation	LS. life saving	RS. realistic staging
D. director	LY. lose you	SE. sound effects
DB. double	M. mother figure	SP. P's suicide plan
DC. drop curtain	MA. minimize anger	SR. surplus reality
DS. delay staging	MG. minimize guilt	SS. strategic staging
EB. ego building	MS. my secret from you	SS. substitute scene
F. father figure	NF. negative future	SY. supportive ploys
FF. from and for	NOT. but you didn't do it	T. touching
GF. girl friend	NXT. where does your plan lead?	TM. time machine
HS. hedge against suicide	OH. overheard	TN. teen
ICP. inner child of past	P. protagonist (s)	UD. undoing
IOF. intensify opposites	PB. psychodramatic baby	WE. where else?
		YS. your secret from you

The above doesn't begin to cover the possibilities. You'll want to add to the list, and some techniques I overlooked in the listing will come up in the discussion of specific psychodramas. In using the abbreviations to mark a student's journal or report lets students know I've seen what they did, and this motivates further effort.