

IO4 PEDAGOGICAL MODEL



Project information

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Objective of the Pedagogical Manual

Introduction: Against Bubble Project

The project Against Bubble, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, aims at fighting and preventing the phenomenon of Bullying against students with high functioning autistic spectrum disorder (and the Asperger Syndrome), but not only, involving all the figures that are part of the student's life context and that they play the role of main actors in this phenomenon.

Our goal is to create a good practice that can then be adopted by other European countries not participating in the project and that can be adapted and revised also to combat different types of discrimination, which are victims of the most varied subjects.

After having conducted a needs analysis based on desk survey and in field questionnaires involving teachers and Administrative, Technical and Auxiliary staff, parents of guys with high functioning autistic spectrum disorder (and the Asperger Syndrome) and students between 10 and 14 years old from partner countries' schools (Intellectual Output 1), the partners of the project structured training courses aimed at teachers, parents and Administrative, Technical and Auxiliary staff (Intellectual Output 2), being conducted by qualified personnel who were trained during the Training Course, as well as a Toolkit (Intellectual Output 3) in three different customized versions for the different profiles involved (teachers, parents and Administrative, Technical and Auxiliary staff).

The Pedagogical Model: Content

This Pedagogical Manual is the first step of the Intellectual Output 4, which aims to explore the relationships between the “blue pupils” and the other students in his/her school, the “innocent” dynamics that can result in bullying situations, the consequences at emotional level for the bullied pupil, the recognition of the signs that can lead to such discriminatory behaviour and to propose alternatives we may have in order to cope with it and transform it into a more healthy relationship between pupils.

Therefore, this model will include the learning goals, methodology framework, possible flow of activities, description of Gestalt Therapy Theatre (GTT) and its origin and target group beneficiaries. In addition to that, it includes a set of Gestalt Therapy Theatre activities described step by step in a brief manual as well as tips for the facilitators of Gestalt therapy theatre.

These GTT's activities will help participants to learn a methodology to deal with problems regarding bullying situations, telling stories through a safe environment,

using emotional intelligence and symbol language as a way to talk about difficult issues, and encouraging them to cooperate and work with each other. The activities can be adapted according to the needs and background of the participants. This way, and through role playing, students will strengthen their empathy. Being themselves for a while the bully or the victim, they will achieve to understand the emotions and sensations of the classmates who are living similar experiences.

There is a Webinar planned with staff trainers from partners for training them about how to proceed with the general implementation of this tool in the schools. In order to help with that, the guidelines presented here include not only how to facilitate these activities but also how to design the program flow. For instance, how to design properly the activity flow, how to make the facilitation more effective, how to prepare a nice atmosphere in the classroom that inspires learning, but also personal perspective in case of personal issues when facilitating the activities, such as managing conflicts raised during the sessions, difficulty to deal with certain emotions from the participants in the gestalt theatre, or difficulty to deal with their own emotions during the workshops.

After the Webinar, each partner will design their own Gestalt Theatre workshops preparing the program flow. There will be 1 workshop per week during the duration of this IO (minimum 3 months implementation).

To disseminate this experience to schools or countries that have not directly participated in the project, guidelines will be published with step by step descriptions on how to develop such activities. Furthermore, the activities carried out by the participating schools will be documented and then made public, also by creating a YouTube channel of the project.

Learning Goals

The development of self-awareness as well as the creative possibilities that this can bring is very important for human health. Moving through conflict and interpersonal problems in a Gestaltic therapeutic framework opens up a wide and varied range of means of creative expression placed at the service of emotional and physical health. The integration of awareness, movement and emotion in “the here and now” requires the use of all our senses. The Gestalt Therapy Theatre contributes to this.

One of the ideas behind Gestalt Theatre Therapy is that performing from the fictional and from the theatrical we can re-connect through improvisation with our emotional memory, allowing access to personal experiences that facilitate greater self-awareness and integration of pending needs or personal unfinished situations.

Through the activities, the participants will achieve different learning goals, such as to develop:

- Spontaneity
- Creativity
- Skills for an assertive communication
- Empathy
- Adaptation to an unexpected situation
- Awareness of their own behaviours
- Trust and group cohesion
- Skills for cooperation
- Their conflict management skills
- To generate:
 - A relaxed atmosphere in the group
 - Reflection and constructive criticism on personal change
- To improve:
 - Their non-verbal communication skills
 - Their ability to make decisions in important situations
 - Their coordination
- Or to understand:
 - The concept of conflict in the field of GTT

Gestalt Therapy Theatre

Concept

Gestalt means “an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts” in psychology and the way humans perceive “figure and ground” as a world configuration. This last part understands the way the individual interacts with their context as the same form as the figure cannot live without its own background and how that belongs to a broader context. Being someone a relational being that exists in a context, they exist based on both assumptions. Therefore, there is no other way of understanding them than considering different aspects of their own lives, instead of explaining behaviours based on only one aspect. Those different elements are their context and the individual only exist in the interaction with them that are complex, varied and connected differently every time.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) is a therapeutical approach composed by Stanislavsky’s Living Theatre/Theatre of Experience and Gestalt Therapy. Its basis was created by a Spanish Gestalt therapist, Claudia Fres. GTT uses creative expressions and possibilities to improve the emotional health and self-awareness of the individual taking part in it. This therapeutic framework moves through interpersonal conflict, integrating movement, emotion and being aware of oneself and one’s all senses in the here and now. It differs itself from Gestalt Therapy because the expressive work comes before and creates the ground before any verbal processing with a therapist.

GTT is a methodology that allows the deconstruction of what is to be human using the individual as part of the theatre scene, especially its emotions. By using human processes as essential parts it gives legitimacy and credibility to the action that takes place in the scenery. At the same time, the participant is doing theatre, but the main goal is to use this method to get to know themselves better, their needs, usual behaviours and reactions and triggers by using their emotional memories. Consequently, emotions are authentic.

The advantages of using fiction is the absence of responsibility about what comes out in the scene and with what emotions the individual connects, carrying a sense that there will not be a punishment independently of one chooses to do. On one hand, this allows the individual to explore emotions avoided throughout their lives or in specific moments and to connect with them even if in their daily basis they would be judged or punished. On other hand, nothing of what the “actor” will say will change their personal biography because they are not acting as themselves. There is not good and

bad, censorship and judgement. Thus, fiction relates to the chosen circumstances, but not to what the individual feels when acting under those circumstances.

Gestalt Therapy Theatre uses fictional situations, that can be improvised, by using theatre essentials: a conflict, characters and what roles, terms of bonding and the urgency of resolution. Theatre also helps to feel comfortable with feeling ridicule and using their own bodies. This way, another technique that can be used is improvisation which enhances the probability for free associations, spontaneity and creativity and bringing up unconscious aspects of someone's personality.

Therefore, the person does not act as themselves in the scene – can be another person, animal, object or abstract phenomenon -, but assumes the circumstances given to them in relation to their character and acts freely according with that, giving themselves permission to react the manner they choose to. Thus, participants express themselves as it is not allowed to them or there is not the time to put the effort in acting in a different way. By doing so, they connect with their past, truths and emotions and can relive them, become aware and integrate, leading to new possibilities.

Individuals' subconscious will come to the surface, letting visible psychological and emotional material that not comes up on a daily basis and that they already know about themselves. This is only possible by creating a safe distance to the known self. Using GTT is believing that there is an underlying understanding of the individual as possible to be transformed even if the circumstances are severe because there is always creative potential, as well possibilities to regenerate the shape and the background in a healthier way.

Objectives

Gestalt Theatre Therapy has as main goals:

- - To question different aspects of someone's personality through the use of fiction: construction of characters and the adoption of roles;
- - To reconnect with emotional memory and past personal experiences in order to get to know one's better and their needs;
- - To improve one's spontaneity and ability to express artistic and emotionally;
- - To develop mechanisms to deal with non-closed personal situations and approach conflicts constructively;
- - To facilitate the experience of being in the present and to be able to take responsibility in the here and now based on tools of GTT and personal resources of each one that are not usually used;

- - To have a place to share strengths, weaknesses, achievements and dreams based on one's identity and their place in society;
- - To be able to have a holistic approach with themselves: to be in contact with one's thoughts, body and emotions and to exist in harmony.

Principles

Gestalt Theatre Therapy combines objectives and principles.

Its three principles are all connected and they are:

1. To live in the Here and Now – It has a space and time dimension. A space dimension because thoughts must be related to where the body is, so it does not get distracted and needs of the individual continue being satisfied; and a time dimension since theatre happens in the present moment when it is being acted and, therefore, the future still has not arrived and the past is no longer available. The physical and emotional experience of the individual is in service of the role given to the participant;
2. To take responsibility for one's own actions, thoughts and emotions, as the individual is responsible for the circumstances of its character when acting. The way an individual answer to something is not only responsibility of the stimulus, but also of themselves;
3. To realize what is happening and to learn to be more aware of oneself and what it is needed in one's life, accepting the experience as a whole: with their self, the others and the context.

Group

Working in a group improves the experience of GTT. The process is supported by what happens in the group and it increases the opportunities of connecting and relating at an interpersonal level. At the same time, the dialogue and reflection process are accompanied by several people and the group is the context and background where it is happening.

Conflict

Conflict is used in Gestalt Therapy Theatre to create the conditions to start a scene between two individuals that have opposite wishes and needs in the same time and space. It is a form of connection of opposite forces and a resource to solve and move forward. Although, as today, it is also something people are quite afraid to step into.

Note

Gestalt Therapy Theatre is used in the context of psychotherapy, but also in the context of education, personal development and emotional intelligence courses, among others. Therefore, this manual has no therapeutical purposes, but educational. This means that the facilitator cannot enter in real situations, where students represent themselves and/or the situation is real because it is not a therapeutic intervention.

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Links <http://www.teatrogestalt.com/>

<https://escuelateatroterapiagestalt.es/>

Methodology Framework

A learning environment is made up of the learner and the 'place' where he or she acts, uses tools, collects and interprets information, interacts with other people; a place where people can work together and support each other while using a variety of tools and information resources in their task of achieving learning goals and solving problems". (Wilson, 1996).

It is important that in a school, where the concept of inclusion is truly shared, feeling part of a group is not just something to talk about, but a 'special normal'. Feeling welcomed, recognised, respected, esteemed is an intrinsic need of everyone, no one excluded, and specialness is confused with normality and vice versa.

(The special normality. Strategies of integration and inclusion for disabilities and Special Educational Needs. DARIO IANES, Erikson, 2006).

An environment capable of enhancing the specificity of each person.

The question we can ask ourselves could be: what are the educational aspects to be safeguarded if there is, for example, an Asperger's pupil in the class?

To answer this question, let us quote Hans Asperger's words of 1938: "Not everything that is misaligned, and therefore 'abnormal', must necessarily be 'inferior', because on this assumption, the learner in an authentic 'learning environment' engages in a multiplicity of different activities in pursuit of a multiplicity of learning objectives, and it is the trainer who plays the role of coach and facilitator" (Perkins, 1991).

Asperger's syndrome¹ is defined as a developmental disorder characterised by the presence of significant difficulties in social interaction, unusual patterns of behaviour and limited interests. Thinking about emphasising the diversity and not the pathology of Asperger's subjects, we point out that these people have significantly more developed resources than their so-called 'neurotypical' peers in specific areas, alongside equally specific difficulties. But thinking more broadly, let's consider a dyslexic person, for example, we highlight that he or she certainly has difficulties in

¹ Now, with the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM – 5), Asperger's Syndrome no longer exists. There is only one single large category, defined as "Autism Spectrum Disorders", which encompasses and includes all the previously distinct forms of autism. The principle is that autism consists of characteristics that are distributed in the population with different degrees of intensity, so much so that the severity levels are defined in the manual (1, 2, 3). For this reason the construct of "Autistic Spectrum" was coined and is used today, precisely to designate and explain this dimensional continuity rather than a subdivision between categories. the expression "Asperger's syndrome" remains in use in clinical practice and in common language, with DSM 5, this definition is replaced with the new category: level 1 autism spectrum disorder, without intellectual and associated language impairment."

reading, but may have a very 'brilliant' mind in terms of intellectual capacity. Neurodiversity should not be confused with an intellectual deficit, which in itself is a different matter and has a different diagnostic framework, although it can, of course, be present at the same time in some cases.

Some characteristics of Asperger's are shared, albeit to a lesser degree of severity, with autism. At school, there is a particular deficit in social communication and social interaction, because this is an aspect that involves the class group and, more generally, the peer group.

Many of the experiences the children have are related to the affective-relational sphere and are systematically confronted on this level. The need for a relational confrontation between peers should not be underestimated, nor should the possibility of a clash when the neurotypical characteristics of the other are not revealed; there is therefore a risk of improper and socially incorrect actions being triggered: distancing, derision, lack of friendship. If we do not read and teach Asperger's as a person who often has a high intellectual functioning and a different sensoriality, we will not be able to collaborate with the family so that there is a significant growth and the difficulties will remain centred precisely in the deficient and ineffective social functioning.

The bizarre and clumsy behaviour may lead the child to become a victim of bullying and cyberbullying, but living and suffering such conditions will inevitably trigger social situations experienced with increasing anxiety, potentially developing depressive mood disorders, or obsessive-compulsive symptoms, which serve to manage anxiety, or comorbidity (coexisting psychic pathologies, which most often arise as a result of the difficulty of adaptation).

So when can we say that activities are inclusive?

When we are able to be very careful with regard to aggressive behaviour of classmates; it is very useful to have at least one reference companion who is able to better understand the difficulties of the Asperger's pupil/pupil, to whom, possibly, depending on the age, we can also explain something about the type of discomfort the person may be experiencing. A 'travelling companion' capable of mediating social situations and conveying positive actions. A companion capable of not leaving him in a corner or sitting at his desk during playtime.

By contradiction, from the point of view of the student with Asperger's syndrome, the condition of distance learning represented the ideal condition for social distance, for the autonomy to participate in lessons without being under pressure, and to return,

as soon as possible, to their own interests. Even in this case, however, it would be important to mediate the relationship with a peer, provide continuous and reassuring contact; carry out work in small groups, where involvement in a contained social condition is possible.

Face-to-face teaching is a different matter, because it implies interpreting social reality. Creating a learning environment can help deal with students' difficulties in 'following' lessons in the traditional way, but also with the commitment to sustained attention. The metaphor of 'environment' designates a context in which learning is activated, supported and constructed, and in which each individual is able to give his or her own personal, but socially and culturally mediated, meaning to his or her knowledge process.

It can happen that the Asperger's pupil obsessively concentrates on one situation, neglecting everything else; it is therefore useful to provide attractive alternatives or to mark out all the times for activities, both scholastic and of personal attention; to look for a link between his/her interest and the study subjects; to hypothesise a communication through evocative images, closer to his/her way of thinking.

As far as concentration and attention are concerned, it is important to ask for continuous feedback on the subject being dealt with, taking care not to expose the Asperger's pupil to situations of confrontation with others or, worse still, embarrassment.

So what are the guidelines for classes with certified pupils?

We must bear in mind that there is a great variety of nuances within which each person can be placed, and we must also consider that teachers too may have, perhaps without knowing it, traits of neurodiversity, which affect their behaviour, their classroom management and the way they organise their work. This opens up an extraordinary scenario of professional awareness and social inclusion in which we have to move, in which we have to experiment with acceptance, educational strategies, co-planning, awareness-raising, be able to reassure and rethink case by case strategies adapted to the different subjects, with a job that is by no means easy and inexpensive in terms of time and effort, but nothing is lost, also thinking back to some famous people, with their problems, but decidedly "brilliant": Leonardo da Vinci, Mozart, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Napoleon, Pablo Picasso, Steve Jobs...

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Gestalt Theatre Activities

Flow of each session

A) A moment of mindfulness. As an introduction before the activities start, it is advisable to tell the participants to focus for a while on their breath, to feel their body, and to get in contact with their motions and mind, in order to forget for a moment from their daily issues (withdrawal). This way, they acquire awareness about how they feel at that moment and where and when they are. Then, they can share among everyone how they feel and what they have been aware of.

This is the first step of a group activity, which tell us what is present at that moment, and what is emerging. Participants could also share in the group their experience from previous activities, or what they have on their mind.

B) Warm-up. This is an interactive section, where participants barely speak, involving however their body and senses, in order to increase their awareness and to to prepare their energy for the main activity. Therefore, this section could have the format such as a dance, improvisation, or drama exercises which require interaction, among others.

This activity prepares the path for the next section, being in part related. For instance, if the subject is going to be about polarity, participants could take part in a mirror warm-up activity, working in pairs, reflecting one participant the movements of the other person in a particular mirror, like anger's mirror, or sensuality's mirror.

When the warm-up activity has finished, normally there is a group reflection about it, or if preferable, different reflections in small groups.

C) Theatrical Activities. This is the main activity of the process, involving drama through improvisation, activating therefore implicit memories regarding where and when. The facilitator introduces the task, and the group has to proceed with it, through improvisation, creating the experience with the other participants.

D) Integration. After the activity, in Gestalt Theatre it is essential to assimilate the exercise. This way, participants stop their fiction roles, relax their body, their emotions and their mind. Normally there is a final activity such as a diary, a drawing, or a massage. This helps to assimilate the previous part and to end the activity. There can be some sort of activities to finish the whole process (withdrawal).

Warm-Up Activities

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES

Topic: Theatrical warm-up

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: None

Learning Objectives

- To train different ways of emotional expression through the body
- To explore different experience when working with different emotional registers
- To train one's own ability to be spontaneous, as well as creativity
- To prepare body and expression for theatre work

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES

Preparation

The facilitator will let the group know that they are going to explore different ways of expressing themselves through their bodies, without thinking about what they are going to do, by trying to be as spontaneous as possible. They will walk around the space and follow the instructions given by the facilitator. Everyone will work at the same time.

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES

Step by step description

STEP 1

Participants begin to walk through space freely. They move spontaneously. It is preferable that they do not move in a circle, but that each one lets themselves be carried by their feet. At the facilitator's signal, they make an emotional impulse, the first one that comes to them. They can express it in many ways: make a scream, stay quiet, jump, make a gesture, say a word, etc.

STEP 2

When the group has done the first round of emotional prompting, the facilitator invites them to continue doing emotional prompts. They will do at least four. They do it in the same way as the first one: they walk, the facilitator gives the signal, they do the impulse, they keep walking, next signal, and so on. At the fourth impulse, the facilitator is going to ask you to stop, close your eyes and try to notice what is the repeating pattern in the different emotional impulses they have done. Maybe they have been standing up all the time, maybe they were always shouting, maybe they were always quiet, maybe they were lying on the floor, maybe they were

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES

Step by step description

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| STEP 3 | <p>wordless sounds, etc. In other words, let them observe what the different impulses they made have in common. Next, the facilitator will tell them that they are going to continue making emotional impulses but trying to make sure that none of them resembles the previous one.</p> <p>Little by little the facilitator invites them to make new emotional impulses, always different from each other. In this step the facilitator can point out if participants notice any similar patterns in the group (for example, that everyone tends to shout, or to throw themselves on the floor, that no one interacts with anyone, etc.) and invite them to introduce more changes so that each round is different from the previous one.</p> <p>In this case the facilitator makes small groups of about 4 people. Within each group they are numbered from 1 to 4. Firstly, number one is asked to stand in the middle of the group and to make an emotional impulse. He will do the first impulse that comes to him. As soon as they do it, numbers 2, 3 and 4 imitate him exactly in what they do. The round continues with number 2 standing in the middle and the same dynamic is repeated: number 2 makes an emotional impulse and the others imitate this participant. This is repeated until all the members of the subgroup do it.</p> |
| STEP 4 | <p>Once this generic small group round is done, the facilitator gives the groups a topic on which they should do the emotional prompt. Examples of topics:</p> <p><i>Emotional impulses related to anger or rage,</i> <i>Emotional impulses related to sadness,</i> <i>Emotional impulses related to joy,</i> <i>Emotional impulses that are related to disgust,</i> (in this sense it must be specified that the idea is that the emotional impulse that make the partners disgusted is a disgusting thing not that they simply express the emotion of disgust).</p> |

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES

Debate and Reflection



The facilitator makes a round of reflection, in the small or large group. The facilitator reminds them of the emotional impulses that have been coming out in the group work: anger, happiness, sadness, and disgust. After, they ask them which one has been the least and the most difficult for them to represent and to see what this difficulty has to do with them, what information it gives them about themselves.

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

What is designed as an activity (experiential, theatrical, ...) cannot help but consider the "contextual" conditions that are unavoidable for the real participation of highly functioning autistic people. Just as it is necessary to adapt the training-experiential curriculum, it also becomes necessary to adapt the organization, the resources and the various activities in order to promote the effective participation of autistic people who usually have difficulties in social orientation, social cognition, communication (verbal and non-verbal) and may also show abnormalities in understanding and response to sensory stimuli. To make an activity truly inclusive (didactic, experiential, theatrical, ...) we can refer to the concept of "reasonable accommodation" (UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES - 2006, Art. 2). Based on this, adaptations of the activities have to be devised and implemented, with the aim, on the one hand, of supporting the child with autism to learn, and on the other hand, of not imposing a disproportionate or excessive burden in being used. In this direction, educational strategies promoting the participation of the Asperger person can be used, such as, for example, a clear and predictable scanning of the structure of the activity (in which to insert the elements of novelty), respecting self-determination and the power to choose whether or not to participate in the proposed activities (perhaps offer the Asperger person the opportunity to observe, in an initial phase), being flexible in choosing references or materials that are interesting for the pupil. The last element that could be implemented is peer-mediated teaching, a strategy that could be used to promote better knowledge and understanding of the communicative and social situations proposed in the theatre workshops.

Asperger's people can show difficulty in sensory processing (hypo - hypersensoriality in sensory experiences, sensory distortions, unusual sensory processing, ...), and many adults report in their autobiographical writings that they experience a condition, in the normal flow of the day, which is dangerously close to a sensory overload. The perception of space, smells / perfumes, brightness present in a place and the perception of sounds / noises can be distorted and therefore it may be appropriate to support the person with Asperger's in choosing to move close to the "boundaries" of the group and / or leave them move close to the walls. Defensive gestures arising from a too noisy environment should be tolerated (e.g. putting hands to ears) sharing the diversity of this perception with the group.

Warm-Up Activity 1: EMOTIONAL IMPULSES**Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism**

A person with Asperger's may show difficulty in executive functioning and therefore in organization and planning (of movements and actions) and / or have difficulties in inhibiting and controlling impulses. In these cases it could be fruitful to carry out activities that first exploit imitative and observational skills and only later propose self-reflexive and self-control actions.

Warm-Up Activity 2: THE MIRRORS

Topic: Theatrical warm-up

Duration: 40 minutes

Materials: Music that connects with each of the mirrors they are going to work with.

Learning Objectives

To train different ways of emotional expression through the body

To explore different experience when working with different emotional registers

To train one's own ability to be spontaneous, as well as creativity

To prepare body and expression for theatre work

Warm-Up Activity 2: THE MIRRORS

Preparation

They are informed that they are going to do an activity for theatrical warm-up where they work with body expression and with the sense of judgement and shame.

Warm-Up Activity 2: THE MIRRORS

Step by step description

STEP 1

Divide into pairs and decide who is person A and B.

STEP 2

Person A is going to be a mirror and person B is the one who looks in the mirror. B does a very specific action, so that the mirror can easily follow him. They will avoid doing a sequence of actions. For example: brushing teeth, whistling, making an insult with voice or hand, sitting on the floor. The person acting as a mirror adapts the reflection of the action depending on the type of mirror. Some examples of mirrors that can be proposed: mirror of narcissism: whatever partner B does, the mirror (A) returns it exaggerated, intensified, big, expanded. The mirror of the opposite: B does one action and A does what they consider to be the opposite action. The mirror of masculinity/femininity: B performs an action and A returns it feminized or masculinized, depending on the mirror in question. Other examples: of old age, of childhood, vulnerability, anger, joy, sensuality, etc.

Warm-Up Activity 2: THE MIRRORS

Debate and Reflection

The facilitator does a round of reflection on *how they have felt, which one cost them the most, which one cost them the least and what they realize.*

Warm-Up Activity 2: THE MIRRORS

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

"Asperger's people undoubtedly have problems in understanding emotions, their own and others, and in their expression with a level (of activation) appropriate to the situation" (p. 212 T. Atwood "Complete Guide to Asperger Syndrome" Edra Ed . 2019, "The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome", Tony Attwood, 2007, 2015 Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd. UK). Furthermore, an emotional immaturity was observed that places the boys at an age below their peers (about three years). The problem is embodied in the need for these young people to be accompanied in learning to identify the different levels of expression (of emotions) in their own words and actions, and in those of others. For people with Asperger it is particularly difficult to understand that the same emotion can present itself with different intensity - eg. with respect to fear they may not have the sensitivity / awareness to distinguish between "I am terrified" and "I am afraid" and "I am doubtful" and not even have the words to define these same emotions. Furthermore, there is an association between Asperger's syndrome and secondary mood disorders and anger and anxiety management problems. In this direction, it might be appropriate to start from positive emotions, even in their gradualness (euphoric, cheerful, happy / satisfied), which induce states of well-being and promote greater listening and learning and then move on to processing emotions that are more difficult to control (eg . anger - furious, irritated, annoyed).

Warm-Up Activity 3: AVATAR DANCE

Topic: Body work and group cohesion

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials: Fun music to dance to

Learning Objectives

To learn to let go, letting go of control

To generate a relaxed atmosphere in the group

To develop trust and group cohesion

Warm-Up Activity 3: AVATAR DANCE

Preparation

The facilitator tells the group that they need to be divided in pairs. In pairs they decide who is A and who is B.

Warm-Up Activity 3: AVATAR DANCE

Step by step description

STEP 1

Person A stands in front of B with their back to B, B stands behind. Person B will grab person A's wrists and from that part of the body, person B will move, shape, and walk around the space, as if B was a puppet. It is important that A lets himself go. (See note 1)

Note 1: When the facilitator invites them to mould the partner, it is important that the word "manipulate" is not used under any circumstances, as this could lead to resistance.

STEP 2

Turn on the music and allow approximately 4-5 minutes for the pairs to move around the space. The facilitator can invite them to play, interact, explore, have fun to the rhythm of the music or as they wish.

STEP 3

Repeat the process but switch roles: B is the puppet and A is the puppeteer.

STEP 4

Have them talk with each other about how they have felt in both roles.

Warm-Up Activity 3: AVATAR DANCE

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel in the role of puppet? and as a puppeteer? What was the most fun and what was the least fun? What do you realize about yourself?

Warm-Up Activity 3: AVATAR DANCE

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Asperger's people may have sensory disturbances affecting the sense of balance, movement and tactile level. Movement inevitably causes a reorganization of balance and for people who suffer from such hypersensitivity there may be a feeling of dizziness, imbalance and nausea. Likewise, a light touch or feeling a hand grasped can represent a painful sensation for the person with Asperger's. In this direction it could be useful to agree with the person with Asperger's which modality can be more functional to be the "puppet", eg. it may be useful to use a small wand grasped by both participants, or the "puppeteer" can grab the clothes or, again, stand facing each other (rather than turning away) and move the partner as if he had a magnet in his hands moving each other's limbs and body.

Warm-Up Activity 4: WARMING UP THE VOICE

Topic: Theatrical warm-up

Duration: Approximately 10 minutes

Materials: None

Learning Objectives

To warm up the voice before theatrical work
To develop creativity and spontaneity through voice work
To create a relaxed play environment

Warm-Up Activity 4: WARMING UP THE VOICE

Preparation

The group is invited to stand in a circle. They are told that they are going to do an exercise to warm up their voices and prepare for the theatrical work that will follow.

Warm-Up Activity 4: WARMING UP THE VOICE

Step by step description

STEP 1

The facilitator says a two-syllable word, and the person on the right has to repeat it, but changing the intonation, so that the next person has to say it again with a different intonation. The same intonation cannot be repeated.

STEP 2

After the first round, do another round, but try not to have any silence between each person moment.

STEP 3

The facilitator asks a participant to come up with a syllable of two words, and we do another full round. The facilitator can invite more people to continue proposing more two-syllable words. This will depend on whether they want to extend the duration of the activity or if they need more training time to achieve the objective of the exercise.

Warm-Up Activity 4: WARMING UP THE VOICE

Debate and Reflection

It is a preparatory exercise. The facilitator can decide if they want to open a space to reflect on this dynamic if they see it necessary.

Warm-Up Activity 4: WARMING UP THE VOICE**Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism**

Some Asperger's people may have difficulty processing what they hear and / or show latency in response caused by slow language processing. In compliance with the deadlines, it could be useful to have more relaxed and less pressing times and, in the initial phase, also to give suggestions regarding the pragmatics of communication.

Warm-Up Activity 5: THE DRUMSTICK

Topic: Cooperation and group cohesion

Duration: 10 minutes

Materials: Wooden drumsticks (or other material). Varied music (classical, techno, pop, relaxing, etc.)

Learning Objectives

To develop skills for cooperation
To encourage motor coordination skills
To activate attention and active listening when carrying out tasks

Warm-Up Activity 5: THE DRUMSTICK

Preparation

The group is divided into pairs and each pair is given a drumstick. They are told that they are going to work in pairs with the task of holding the drumstick with one finger at each end, so that it never falls to the ground. They should listen and feel the movement that arises between them, being the drumstick the point of connection between both people.

If the drumstick falls, everyone will have to change partners immediately, and start all over again.

Warm-Up Activity 5: THE DRUMSTICK

Step by step description

| | |
|---------------|---|
| STEP 1 | This is done silently without music. When a drumstick falls on the floor, new pairs are made (If the facilitator deems it convenient, the pairs could remain the same). |
| STEP 2 | As new pairs are made, in each round the facilitator can play new music, or the same music, as preferred. |
| NOTES | The idea is for the pairs to hold on as long as possible without the drumstick falling to the ground. |

Warm-Up Activity 5: THE DRUMSTICK**Debate and Reflection**

How did you feel about this task? Are you satisfied with the work you have done? What made the task more difficult? or easier? What does it take to be able to successfully collaborate with someone in real life?

Warm-Up Activity 5: THE DRUMSTICK**Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism**

People with Asperger's have difficulty in maintaining and regulating relationships with others by exploiting non-verbal communication skills (eye contact, facial expression, joint attention,...). Facilitation in this direction can be the use of other "tools" of contact with the other, such as a tape, for example, or an object that the person with Asperger's likes.

Warm-Up Activity 6: THE CLAY STATUE

Topic: Sensory development

Duration: Approximately 20-25 minutes

Materials: Fun music in the background

Learning Objectives

To encourage the development of a climate of trust in the group

To generate a feeling of closeness and security among the members of the group

To facilitate body relaxation and emotional and sensory openness of participants

Warm-Up Activity 6: THE CLAY STATUE

Preparation

Divide the group into pairs and ask them to decide who is person A and who is person B.

Warm-Up Activity 6: THE CLAY STATUE

Step by step description

STEP 1

A will start by opening a space, which will be closed (leaning for example their arms on the wall, so that the person's body together with the wall and the floor make a closed space). The partner will have to cross that space while looking at each other.

STEP 2

Once A has created the space and B has passed through it, B creates another enclosed space that A must pass through while maintaining eye contact. This is repeated alternating one and the other, continuously. Each time a space is created it must be different from the previous ones.

Warm-Up Activity 6: THE CLAY STATUE

Debate and Reflection

How did it feel to go through the spaces created by your partner?

Have you noticed any differences in yourself? Has there been competition, enjoyment...?

What do you think this exercise is for? (See note 1)

Note 1: The facilitator will explain that it represents a metaphor for life, in that sometimes we must go through conflicts that are not easy. It is a metaphor that serves as a prelude to the explanation that will be given later that conflict is necessary in theatre therapy to be able to enter into improvisation.

Warm-Up Activity 6: THE CLAY STATUE**Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism**

Some Asperger's people may have difficulty maintaining eye contact as a relationship regulator. In respecting the deadlines, one can be tolerant and understanding in accepting this problem. In addition, body contact can also represent a source of profound discomfort on the part of the Asperger's person and it may be advisable before starting the activity, to agree on the methods of creating the space to be crossed and the methods of "crossing" the enclosed space.

Warm-Up Activity 7: OPEN SPACES

Topic: Body work

Duration: Approximately 20 minutes

Materials: Relaxing background music, soft volume

Learning Objectives

To awaken spontaneity and bodily creativity
To generate a relaxed atmosphere in the group of participants that invites them to play
To use the dynamic itself as a metaphor for working with conflict, as a situation people can go through in order to learn and grow as people

Warm-Up Activity 7: OPEN SPACES

Preparation

The group is divided into pairs and asked to decide who is Person A and who is Person B. They are told that they will work in turns. A will close their eyes and B will become the sculptor of A, who will have to follow the steps indicated by the facilitator.

Warm-Up Activity 7: OPEN SPACES

Step by step description

STEP 1

Person A closes their eyes and allows himself to be shaped by their partner. B starts to do as if applying clay on the body of A. They will put their hand in a hollow, concave form and will press it on the partner's body as if it were clay. (2-3 min)

STEP 2

After two or three minutes of making the shape with the hollow hand, they are asked to define the figure of their partner with their fingertips, so that they press with their fingers as if trying to define the clay that surrounds the figure. (2-3 min)

STEP 3

The participant has to polish the clay with their open hand. They will have to make circular movements so that the figure is as shiny as possible. Continue doing it all over the body. (2-3 min)

STEP 4

They do as if they were giving a water bath from above, which removes the clay shavings, so that it is as clean as possible. (2-3 min)

STEP 5

B imagines that they become a hot towel to dry, so they will have to squeeze their partner as if they can dry them with their body. (2-3 min)

Warm-Up Activity 7: OPEN SPACES

Step by step description

STEP 6

The sculptor (B), stands in front of A and waits for the facilitator's signal. Then when A opens their eyes, B will greet them with a smile and a hug if desired.

STEP 7

Once they finish, they switch roles and start over.

Warm-Up Activity 7: OPEN SPACES

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel about the contact? What did you like the most? Is there anything you didn't like? What was it? How do you feel before and after working with sculpture? What has it been like for the sculptor? Which role has been more comfortable?

Warm-Up Activity 7: OPEN SPACES

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

People with Asperger's can show a very particular tactile sensoriality (T. Grandin in her publications tells of her difficulty in being hugged and her need to feel pressure on her body, which reassures her a lot). In this perspective, it might be appropriate to consider choosing an object that the Asperger person likes, such as a soft or hard ball, or a small tablet that distributes pressure in a more uniform and harmonious way.

Theatrical Activities

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Topic: Conflicts

Duration: 20-30 minutes

Materials: background music, cushions (at least one per person)

Learning Objectives

To become aware of the person's perception of the notion of conflict.

To illustrate what we understand by conflict in the field of Gestalt Theatre Therapy (hereafter GTT), understood as two desires that oppose each other in opposite directions.

To learn that conflict is an essential element in GTT and without it is not possible to have scenes neither in Gestalt Therapy Theatre nor in regular theatre.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).

2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.

3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Preparation

The participants will be told that they will do a guided visualization in which they walk through a city. They will have to be still and preferably with their eyes closed to imagine what the facilitator is telling them. During the first part of the visualization, should be emphasized that the idea is to imagine the action, and that they will not have to do it.

The facilitator will say, "*Now, we call the elevator, the door opens, and you get in the elevator*". The participants will stand up and get on the cushion, which will be in front of each one of them. This is the only moment when the participants will make use of physical movement. The same will happen when the facilitator says "*get out of the elevator onto the terrace*". Normally they will step down forwards, not backwards.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Preparation

After, it will be told to participants to open their eyes (second part of the dynamic) and start to represent now, with their body movement, what the facilitator tells them.

It should be pointed out to them that it is the second part. That is to say, the dynamic has two times: an initial one in which the visualization is presented and they do it preferably with their eyes closed and only use the movement to go up and down the cushion and a second part in which they open their eyes and represent with their body the crossing of the cable.

The group has to be divided into two subgroups, each subgroup in front of the other and in line, so that each person in each group has a partner in front of them, with whom they will work later.

You can also prepare background music: for example, music for when the elevator is going up, the sound of doors opening or music to make it more suggestive when they are crossing the steel cable.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Step by step description: STEP 1

Tell the group that they are going to do a guided visualization. They must be divided into two groups and line up each of the subgroups, so that each student is facing a person from the other group with a distance of approximately 5 to 6 meters if space permits. If it is possible to have more, it is even better.

Each person should place a cushion in front of them, symbolizing an elevator, which they should get on when the facilitator says "*get on the elevator*", when the facilitator says "*get off the elevator*" they should get off the cushion.

Step by step description: STEP 2

Begin with ambient music that symbolizes the environment that the person begins to walk through in their imagination. Here begins the guided visualization that goes like this:

"You are walking through a city, you are walking through New York City. Observe how are the buildings around you, what is the atmosphere in the city, what time of day it is, if there are people or if there are no people, what is the smell, what are the colors, what do you observe ... and in general how is the atmosphere of this city of Manhattan where you're walking.

You keep walking and little by little you will be looking for the tallest building in the city. Once you have located it you will go directing your steps towards this building, until you arrive at the front door.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

You enter the entrance hall, observe the atmosphere in this building: there are people around, there are no people, what are people doing there, how many people in the building, what is the atmosphere, what feeling it gives you ... then I'm going to ask you to locate the elevator. Once you locate the elevator, you direct your steps towards it, you stand in front of it, you call it, the door opens, and you get into the elevator."

The participants at that point must get on the cushion. *"Mark the last floor of the building: floor number 100."* At that moment you can connect sound that symbolizes an elevator going up and you start counting the floors. *"5 floors, 10 floors, the elevator keeps going up and doesn't stop. 20 floors, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 floor... The elevator keeps going up, 60 floors, 70, 80, 90 and 100 floor. The elevator door opens, and you get down of the elevator".*

At this point the participants have to get off the cushion. *"You get to the terrace of the building and, from there, (still with your eyes closed you keep imagining) observe the city, what you can see from above, how far your view reaches, what buildings you see, how you feel at that height...At that moment you will realize that from the terrace of the building, a steel cable starts and, that steel cable connects the roof you are standing in with the roof of the building in front of you. Open your eyes.*

At this point the facilitator asks the participants to open their eyes. *"You notice that in front of you there is another person looking at you, who is also on the roof of another building. From this moment on you have a task, a mission that you have to accomplish. Your mission is, using the steel cable, to cross over to the other rooftop. That is your mission."*

When you are ready we will count 3,2,1 and you will cross to the other side, using the cable. The facilitator can play some music to create a tense atmosphere for this delicate moment of crossing the cable. *"Three, two, one. Start the cable crossing.*

Step by step description: STEP 3

The guided visualisation is finished, and the participants are crossing the wire with open eyes. The facilitator pays attention, without intervening, to what happens during the crossing moments of the different pairs.

Step by step description: STEP 4

"Once you reach the other side of the terrace you get a new mission. The mission is as follows: you must return to the terrace of origin, but on your way back you will have to prevent the person on the opposite terrace from reaching their destination. So, you have two tasks in this new mission: on the one hand, to get to your home terrace and

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

on the other hand, to prevent the person going to their home terrace from reaching their destination."

People are going to cross the cable for the second time. Here the observer must pay close attention to what is the reaction of the people when they are given the second task, what happens in that crossing, what are the different strategies that the participants use.

Step by step description: STEP 5

Once the crossing is finished by all the participants, the facilitator asks the group *"how was the crossing on the first occasion? and how was the crossing for you on the second occasion? how did you manage it? what strategy did you have on the first crossing? what strategy did you have on the second crossing?"* This fifth step will be a reflection where the participants sit together, and the facilitator gives these questions for them to reflect on:

1. *What was it like for you the first time you had to cross, what strategy did you follow when you crossed the person on the cable?*
2. *At the second crossing, what was your first impression when you received the instruction that the other person was not to arrive at their destination?*
3. *What relationship do you observe between what happened in the activity and your own perception of the conflict?*
4. *Did anyone remember that it is only theatre? Did anyone enjoy this game?*

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Note to facilitator

After this discussion it is a good idea to invite the group to re-do the second crossing of the wire so that they can experience the exercise with a greater awareness of the fact that it is theatre and that they can do things they would not do in real life in such a situation. Once they have done this part of the activity the facilitator can ask again how the exercise went for them this time and how they felt.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Debate and Reflection

Group discussion in which we talk about how we manage conflicts in life, how we perceive them and how many people remembered that they were doing theatre, that they were acting.

Note: in GTT we always try to do something different from what we would do in real life. The goal is to give yourself permission to do something new, different, that you wouldn't do in real life in order to experience the consequences of it.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

At the same time the aim of the activity is for the participants to explore to what extent they are able to give themselves permission to do something that is not within the logic of real life but of fiction and theatre. There is a discussion about it, they express their opinions and observe what they realise by participating in it. The last question would be what they notice about themselves and about the conflict itself, as an element that is present in the dynamics with other people.

Theatrical Activity 1: THE ROOFTOP

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

People with Asperger's may also have a vivid imagination but their thoughts can be absorbed in situations that are hard to understand, or not known, by their own absorbing interests. In situations where they are asked to imagine something, it may be useful to start by facilitating situations (perhaps experiences made or topics of particular interest).

The request expressed in Step 5 of "Once you reach the other side of the terrace you get a new mission. The mission is as follows: you must return to the terrace of origin, but on the way back you will have to prevent the person on the opposite terrace from reaching his destination. So, you have two tasks in this new mission: on the one hand, to reach your terrace of origin and on the other hand, to prevent the person who goes to his terrace of origin from reaching his destination" could be calibrated on skills sensory of the Asperger person and accompanied by the accurate explanation that the activity "does not fall within the logic of real life but of fiction and theatre". This becomes necessary as Asperger's people may not have sufficient social cognition to understand the distinction between reality and fantasy or be very busy with their emotions.

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Topic: Gestalt therapy theatre

Duration: Approximately 7-8 minutes per couple. Depending on the number of participants the time of the activity varies. It is recommended that no more than 16 people do it, as the activity would take too long.

Materials: Nothing is required. Optional: stage lighting to create a greater sense of stage space. If it is a new group that has not done theatre-related activities, it is not recommended to use this type of lighting as it can be somewhat intimidating, in any case it is advisable for the facilitator to assess whether it is appropriate or not.

Learning Objectives

To develop the spontaneity and creativity of the participant through spontaneous improvisations.

To develop the participant's ability to resolve a conflict empathically.

To develop communication skills, verbal and non-verbal, necessary for conflict management by the participant.

To develop skills for assertive communication.

To develop active listening skills.

To develop awareness of oneself and one's own psychological functioning mechanisms and behavioural patterns.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).

2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.

3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Preparation

It should be explained to the group that they are going to carry out a theatrical improvisation that is characterized by its spontaneity, meaning the people who go on stage, invent a conflict proposal, in a spontaneous, unplanned way: totally improvised. The work is always based on this spontaneity.

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Step by step description: STEP 1

The group is told to number themselves from 1 to 10, for example, in the case of 10 people. Once they know their numbers, explain that person number 1 will come on stage and take a *neutral role*. (see note 1)

Note 1: *neutral role* means that the person at the beginning of the scene has no role assigned to them, no link with any other person and remains *neutral* until person number 2 enters the scene and brings them a conflict proposal, which will give them the necessary information to enter the improvisation and develop the relationship with the person proposing the conflict. Therefore, the person who is *neutral* initially has no role, no identity, doesn't know who they are until the second person enters the scene. When the second person enters the scene, it will help the *neutral* person not to be so neutral and to get situated and enter the conflict proposal that the second person brings.

Step by step description: STEP 2

Once person one (neutral role) is on stage wait for person two to enter. The second to enter arrives with a conflict proposal (see note 2).

Note 2: When the second person enters with the proposal, an improvisation takes place between them where there must be always 3 elements:

- 1) the link they have between them, what is the role that each one has;
 - 2) what is the conflict between them;
 - 3) the urgency to solve the conflict in question that requires an immediate solution.
- If not for that, the scene could drag on and go nowhere, and become boring for the audience. These elements should be given by the one who enters the scene with the conflict proposal, e.g.: "Hi honey, why have you left the house keys to your mother again?". From this sentence it can be intuited that both are a couple or have an affective bond, as well as that the conflict can reside in the fact that the one who enters the scene does not want the other character's mother to have the house keys.

Step by step description: STEP 3

Once the dynamic has been explained, it begins in such a way that the first person *is hooked* – it is named a hooked improvisation because the first person (the one in neutral) receives a proposal from the second person. Then the improvisation takes place until the facilitator considers that it is enough. Then, the first person leaves the stage to rest and the second person who entered stays and prepares as *neutral*. Person number 3 enters the scene with a new conflict proposal. Again, the improvisation takes place until the facilitator marks it, number two leaves and person number three takes the neutral role. And so on until number 10 adopts the

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

neutral role and the group closes with number 1 (in this example there were 10 people) being the last one to bring a conflict to the stage, since at the beginning they didn't (see note 3).

Note 3: This exercise could be done in two complete rounds where the first round is a warm-up and each scene runs for no more than three minutes, as a quick way to see what conflicts the group participants are proposing. Then a second, more in-depth round can be done where, having become more familiar with the methodology, they can be ready to develop their creativity further.

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Note to facilitator

While the improvisations are taking place, the facilitator can interrupt the process by approaching the protagonists and asking them how they feel in the situation they are improvising. The aim of this is to help them become aware of and connect with the body and the emotion the characters are in.

You can also ask them what they are thinking, if they realise what their strategy is for dealing with the conflict, if they are familiar with what they are doing and finally you could also suggest that they try a different strategy by doing something they wouldn't do in real life. On stage they can give themselves that permission that in real life they can't afford, because it doesn't change our biography and it doesn't do them any harm.

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Debate and Reflection

Once everyone has finished, the facilitator can ask the group "*how did everyone feel during the exercise; what did they realise about themselves; what did they discover; what did they think about the conflict proposal that the partner brought them; did the scene, the character, the role of the conflict that they played, help them to realise something? what do they think about their own style and strategy for dealing with conflict, did that strategy work, or not?*"

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Asperger's people may have difficulties in understanding and moving naturally in the social sphere: difficulties in understanding social situations, understanding ambiguous situations, understanding pragmatics (intonation, for example, which defines the sentence they are hearing as sarcastic or metaphorical). In developing, maintaining and understanding relationships, they have difficulty in understanding non-verbal communicative behaviors (gestures, facial expressions, posture etc).

Theatrical Activity 2: HOOKED SCENES

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Unfortunately, this heavily affects their ability to participate in the usual contexts and to respond adequately to the solicitations and activities proposed, especially when these solicit an understanding of the interlocutor's "mind". Also, they may have a literal understanding of the language, e.g. to the question "how do you feel inside when you are afraid?" a child replied "when I'm at home I'm never afraid!" understanding the word „inside” as „at home” (taken from „The autistic mind” G. Vivanti, Hogrefe Ed, 2021). When unexpected behavior is observed, it becomes essential to reformulate the instructions, perhaps by making the conditions that generate the conflict more explicit or to carry out preventive work on participation in activities that helps the Asperger person to decode the messages (focused on non-verbal communication and pragmatics of communication).

Theatrical Activity 3: COUPLE TO COUPLE SCENES

Topic: Gestalt therapy theatre

Duration: 40-50 minutes (can last longer for groups of more than 10 people)

Materials: None. Optional: costumes or make-up if the facilitator or group wishes. Stage lighting.

Learning Objectives

To facilitate the participant's contact with their own spontaneity.

To encourage the participant's creative spirit and their ability to improvise and adapt to an unexpected situation.

To develop the ability to make decisions and create awareness about the values that lie behind decisions.

To generate an improvement in the participant's verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

To develop awareness of oneself and one's own psychological functioning mechanisms and behavioural patterns.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).

2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.

3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 3: COUPLE TO COUPLE SCENES

Preparation

The facilitator divides the group into pairs. Each of these pairs are distributed forming a unit each pair, in a big circle.

Theatrical Activity 3: COUPLE TO COUPLE SCENES

Step by step description: STEP 1

Once all the pairs are seated in the circle, each pair will think of a scene proposal to give to the pair on their right. All the pairs will simultaneously prepare the conflict for the pair sitting to their right. They should think about these three elements: 1) role or link of the protagonists, 2) what is the conflict, 3) what is the urgency of the conflict (see note 1).

Note 1: The couple preparing the scene should not add any additional information to what is specified, such as: how the characters feel, how they are to behave, etc. It is very important that the participants, on the other hand, make sure that the scene they receive is not a scene that corresponds to the reality of their life, if that is the case it is necessary to change it to be fictional for them.

Step by step description: STEP 2

When they have finished preparing, each pair should give the scene to the next pair and they themselves will assign the role to each member of the other pair. That is, who plays which role depends on the pair that proposes the conflict. (see note 1)

Step by step description: STEP 3

Start working with the scenes. The scenes can be played simultaneously, the group can also be divided in two and while half of the group works, the others observe, or you can even do it one by one while the rest of the pairs observe. It is up to the facilitator to decide. The fastest option is that all the pairs do it simultaneously: it can be more chaotic, there can be more noise in the room and logically the facilitator will not be able to give all their attention equally to all the pairs. An intermediate formula is to have a few couples on stage, separated in the distance while the rest of the pairs rest.

Theatrical Activity 3: COUPLE TO COUPLE SCENES

Note to facilitator

The role of the facilitator in this dynamic requires that they intervene helping the characters to become aware of how they feel, what are their strategies used in the conflict and to encourage the participants to ask themselves if they want to use a different strategy to the one they are using. This allows them to experience how they feel when they express themselves in a different way to the one they do in real life, taking advantage of the permission that theatre gives to be as one wants to be.

The facilitator can make small interruptions making it easier for the person working to go deeper into what is happening to them. The work of the facilitator is oriented

so that the person acting has the time and the opportunity to realise *what is happening to them, how they feel, what direction they would like to give to the staging of the conflict.*

It is important to first allow enough time for the pairs to enter the scene and for the facilitator, listening to their intuition, to pause and suggest to the participants, without disconnecting from the state in which they are in the scene, to *close their eyes, take a deep breath and receive the facilitator's instructions.* These can be done, for example: *how do you feel, do you feel tension in any part of your body? Take the palm of your hand to that area of tension, now that you feel it, give it voice: what would that part of your body say, what would that tension mean, what is the strategy of the conflict you are using, is it familiar to you, would you be willing to do something different?*

If the facilitator detect that the strategy consists of being a conciliatory person, who seeks to resolve the conflict, so that the other person doesn't get angry, etc., the character they may experience can be provocative, selfish, defiant, ignoring the person in front of you as if they were passive, etc. Sometimes a good question to ask when you pause is: *think of a way to continue this conflict that you would never have done in real life. And give yourself permission to try it out, experiment with it and see what happens.* Another hint for the facilitator could be to invite the group, when the action is suspended, to *think of a superhero* from their childhood. Then have everyone become the superhero and once the facilitator say to continue the scene, everyone jumps in and act out how they would do it if they were that superhero. It is not necessary to ask all the questions in all the interventions, but the facilitator should listen to their own intuition or to the previous knowledge that has from each participant, make use of some of it and take advantage of it to go deeper into the dynamics.

Theatrical Activity 3: COUPLE TO COUPLE SCENES

Debate and Reflection

The facilitator once everyone has finished can ask the group "*how did everyone feel during the exercise; what did you notice about yourselves; what did you discover; what did you think about the conflict proposal that the pair brought to you what did the scene; what the conflict, the character and the role you played contributed to yourself; what do you think about your own style and strategy to deal with a conflict, did that strategy work, or not?*"

Theatrical Activity 3: COUPLE TO COUPLE SCENES

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism



Asperger's people may show a delay in the development of skills to manage persuasion, compromise and conflict resolution as they experience, or rather live a different condition of introspection and self-awareness. Also, to try to make the world less confusing, people with Asperger's syndrome may have rules and habits, which are persistent but necessary for them to bring order to the experiential chaos of each day. In this direction it might be useful to offer additional information in the initial phase of the activity (see note 1) to make the contents of the activity more accessible.



Theatrical Activity 4: SCENES WITH OBJECTS

Topic: Gestalt therapy theatre

Duration: Approximately 90 minutes

Materials: Quiet background music. Personal notebook. Optional: Scene light.

Learning Objectives

To open a space for the participant's creativity and fantasy.
To create a space for work with the projection that each participant makes of their own qualities (positive and / or negative).
To improve the participant's ability to make decisions in situations that are important to them.
To develop skills such as empathy, active listening, assertiveness or conflict resolution in the participant.
To develop awareness of oneself and one's own psychological functioning mechanisms and behavioural patterns.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

- 1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).
- 2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.
- 3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 4: SCENES WITH OBJECTS

Preparation

The facilitator should explain to the group that they are going to perform a type of improvisation where they are going to become objects, inanimate beings. They are objects that could have a conflict if they were alive. Examples: a glass jar and strawberry jam. The jam does not want to rot inside the jar and wants to go out to explore the world, and the jar does not want to be left by the jam because it does not want to be left alone and be thrown into the bin. A candle and a lighter: where the candle does not want to be lit by the lighter because it has little left to run out and disappear and the lighter wants to light it because if he does not, the owner of the house will replace them with electric light.
The participants will work in pairs.

Theatrical Activity 4: SCENES WITH OBJECTS



Step by step description: STEP 1

Each pair thinks of two objects for another pair (see note 1) and about what conflict there might be between the objects and how urgently the conflict needs to be resolved. The object will be embodied by the other pair. Once everyone has the objects thought of, the pair should tell them in front of the group so that everyone can hear which object they have assigned to each one. The couple that chooses the two objects is also responsible for assigning the concrete object to each of the members of the other couple (for example: Mary will be the spoon and Mark the glass). The facilitator has to supervise that the conflicts have the following characteristics: link, conflict and urgency.

Note 1: the assignment of the couple to whom they are going to think the objects can be done as in the previous dynamic, arranged in a circle, or in any other way that guarantees that all the couples have another couple assigned to think about their objects.

Step by step description: STEP 2

Each person writes in their notebook the characteristics of the object they were given. For example: I am a colourful teapot, I am soft, made of porcelain, etc.

Step by step description: STEP 3

The person who has written their qualities as an object has to choose three of them that could have to do with themselves as a person and at the same time have to do with the object. Once they have chosen them, they have to read them out loud.

Step by step description: STEP 4

Next, each person has to humanize these objects little by little: walking, giving voice, etc. with the characteristics they gave to the object. This means they have to rely on the qualities that the object has that they have described before and use them in their body movement, their voice, etc. They do a work of individual character that they should enjoy and that contributes something to them.

For example, in this case, the facilitator can ask them *what is the emotion that predominates in the object*. They then can look for a more human and more comfortable way to hold and maintain the quality of the object, since it is not comfortable to maintain a position that they are not used to. The facilitator can ask

the participants to make a gesture, even a small one, that helps them to get into the object and that still reminds them of what they are representing in order to integrate some quality of the object.

It is an individual process in which they give life to the object, so it is recommended that they do not interact with each other and focus on their own process of creation.

Step by step description: STEP 5

The last step would be to visualize the scenes one at a time or, depending on the time the facilitator has, they can have everyone work at the same time. In that case you can stop a little bit in each scene so that when they see it appropriate they can say *STOP: we are going to see a little of this scene* (of a particular pair), let's *continue...* and everyone goes back to their scenes.

However, the facilitator should keep in mind that this is not recommended if there are more than 5 pairings. Another option for working in a large group is for the facilitator to pass by the pairs while the others continue working.

Theatrical Activity 4: SCENES WITH OBJECTS

Debate and Reflection

The facilitator can ask about how the scene went. Possible questions are: *how did you feel; what did you discover when you got into that character/object; what did it bring to you and if you realized anything.*

As the dynamics are going to take place in an educational environment, the facilitator should not open up too much and lead the person to relate the situation to their life and find a connection with it - their biography. The context is not a therapeutic framework, and the facilitator may be or not a therapist, and not be able to accompany the participant if they touch any deep topic.

Theatrical Activity 4: SCENES WITH OBJECTS

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Some Asperger's people may show on the one hand specific attention to detail (difficulty in shifting attention and / or difficulty in concentrating on salient information, meaning by this the information useful for the task) and on the other hand have a rigid logical competence that facilitates and guides them in understanding the world (thus making experiences more predictable and understandable). These aspects can affect the description of the objects and the following "animation" of their characteristics.

Asperger's people may need to reflect on the characteristics of objects and their transformation from inanimate to animate. It might be useful for some to have pairs of real objects to understand their interdependence and give "voice" to their state.

Theatrical Activity 5: PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

Topic: Gestalt therapy theatre

Duration: Approximately 60 minutes.

Materials: Blank A4 sheets of paper, thick felt-tip pen, background music.

Learning Objectives

To explore the emotional, cognitive, and bodily reactions of the participant to improvising various roles and/or performing certain tasks in an improvised way.

To facilitate the participant's awareness of the effects of improvisation on characters different from themselves.

To learn to put themselves in the shoes of a theatrical character in order to become aware of their own psycho-emotional aspects.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).

2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.

3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 5: PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

Preparation

On sheets of paper, the facilitator will write a circumstance, an emotion, a role or a personal quality. Examples: mother, politician, homeless, murderer, pregnant woman, broken, shameless, extrovert, introvert, etc. Each of these should be written on a separate sheet of paper.

Cushions are distributed around the room or classroom. The paper sheets are placed on each cushion, so that each cushion has its own paper and there are as many cushions as there are participants.

Theatrical Activity 5: PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

Step by step description

STEP 1

Participants are asked to enter the room and take some time to look at the cushions and what is on them.

STEP 2

They are asked to walk to a cushion that has caught their attention and stand in front of it. If several people choose the same cushion, they can share it.

Theatrical Activity 5: PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

STEP 3

Once everyone is in front of a cushion, they are asked to observe it, close their eyes, and let themselves be filled by the quality written on the cushion. When the music starts to play, they will have already put themselves into that character and they will be asked to start walking through the space with that quality already integrated.

The objective is for them to explore, move, interact with their eyes, talk to others, etc. but always from that quality, role or link they have.

STEP 4

During the walk and the interaction, the facilitator will turn up the music a few times. This means each person should take their character to the limit of their desire, that is, to intensify what their character wants to do (see note 1).

STEP 5

They are told to return again to the cushion from which they came out. Once they return there, they are invited to close their eyes, to let themselves feel, what is moving them and what is happening to them. They should also observe what it has to do with them the fact of having taken that cushion, why that one and not another.

NOTES

It is important for the facilitator to warn that at some point in the exercise the volume intensity will be turned up and that this will mean that they should push the role to the limit. A good time for this is right at the beginning of step 3, when the participants start walking around the room.

Theatrical Activity 5: PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel; why that cushion; what does your choice have to do with you; what did you discover about that character; how did you feel in the interaction with others; what was the cushion you liked the least and why?

Theatrical Activity 5: PAPERS ON THE FLOOR

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

The Asperger person may have difficulty grasping the deep meaning of qualities (such as "introvert") and it may be useful to direct the student or use "characters", such as for example. "Homeless" or "pregnant woman" which can be understood and better imagined in their essential characteristics.

Theatrical Activity 6: MY ANIMAL SELF

Topic: Gestalt therapy theatre

Duration: More than 60 minutes.

Materials: Forest or jungle music to play in the background. Ambient lights with green, red or blue filters to create more atmosphere. Flipchart. Cushions, sheets, blankets, mats.

Learning Objectives

To develop the spontaneity and creativity of the participant through theatrical play with animals.

To explore the characteristics of the participant at a psychological level through their projection in the creation and improvisation of the chosen animal.

To promote awareness of the participant's own behaviour patterns and values.

To work on the creativity and emotional literacy of the participant.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).

2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.

3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 6: MY ANIMAL SELF

Preparation

The room should be clear and open. Cushions can be scattered around the room and a bed sheet or tarp is also useful for the activity. In the corners you can put lights with coloured filters, and in the centre, if possible, it should be darker, creating an atmosphere of mystery and not too much light.

Theatrical Activity 6: MY ANIMAL SELF

Step by step description: STEP 1

Warm up. A dynamic of body movement that helps the group to activate and connect with their bodies. Any dance or body movement activity is appropriate. It simply has to be something that helps them to activate and expend energy in such a way that, aided by physical fatigue, they can lower their defences and give themselves permission to get into the guided visualization that follows.

Step by step description: STEP 2

Relaxation. First, they are given a relaxation and breathing exercise. They are asked to find a space in the room where they can lie down, if possible, with enough space for themselves, and without being in contact with another partner, and that they make themselves comfortable with the mats, blankets, etc. They are asked to relax their body from the lower part of the body upwards. First the feet, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, abdomen, chest, shoulders, neck, chin, arms, hands, cheeks, eyes. Always calmly, slowly and saying that these parts are getting more relaxed, are getting heavier, are noticing how they are merging with the ground, etc. in a way that facilitates relaxation.

Step by step description: STEP 3

Visualization. Once the relaxation is more or less achieved, then the following visualization begins:

We are going to invite you to take a trip with your imagination to a forest (put jungle sounds). The forest is lush and there is a lot of vegetation. Observe the vegetation and see some bushes that move. You keep watching them, you get closer and... (see note 1) an animal appears. What animal is it? The first animal you see is the animal you are going to become. Don't change it. Trust, because the animal you have seen, however strange it may be, is the animal you must work with today. Little by little imagine that your body becomes the body of that animal and that is taking shape, body, muscle, skeleton, with its skin, hair, feathers ... The animal begins to move a little bit in your own site. You are no longer human; you are that animal. You can no longer speak with words, but you can communicate. You can start thinking what is the sound your animal makes. How it communicates, how it moves.

From this moment a group improvisation begins in which everyone is an animal and each one will act from their animal and the title of this improvisation is: a day in nature. The improvisation will last until the facilitator makes a signal to indicate clearly that it is over.

Note 1: The surprise of the animal's appearance should be accompanied by the intonation of the facilitator's voice, to encourage them to continue and be in the visualization.

Tips for the facilitator: Look closely at the different roles the characters take on: what kind of animal they choose and how that animal behaves, how it interacts with the others. The facilitator can take notes of their observations, so that when the improvisation is over they have material to help them work on. The approximate length of the improvisation should be at least 25-30 minutes. The improvisation takes place over the course of a day. The facilitator gives the context and explains that the improvisation starts early in the morning and as time goes by they give some indication of the passing of the hours, until the arrival of sunset, deep night, etc.

Step by step description: STEP 4

Indicate that the dynamic is over (with a bell or with the code you set to end the improvisation).

Step by step description: STEP 5

Interview. They are invited to form groups of three in which each of them, still in the animal role, will number themselves from one to three. Once numbers 2 and 3 in each group have been numbered, they will drop their animal roles and interview number 1, who is still in the animal role. *How is your life, how do you feel in your life as an animal, who do you live with, how do you feed yourself, what do you need in your life, what makes you happy, what are you afraid of, what are you worried about?* The three people in the trio go through this role of animal interviewee. Each time the interviewee changes, they are encouraged to reconnect with their animal and the other two ask them the same questions (see note 2).

Note 2: The questions are pre-prepared on the flipchart but are not visible until you get to step five.

Step by step description: STEP 6

Collection. A de-rolling is done, which consists of slowly taking off the animal in a symbolic way. The participants pretend to take off their skin and become human again. There is a time for individual reflection so that they realize the animal it appeared in the visualization and what has happened in the improvisation, in the interview, or in any part of the dynamic.

Theatrical Activity 6: MY ANIMAL SELF

Debate and Reflection

Share in the large group: *how did you feel, was there anything that stood out to you, what was the hardest, what was the easiest, and anything else you noticed and want to share.*

Theatrical Activity 6: MY ANIMAL SELF

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

As explained in the previous activities, the sensory and perceptive abilities of Asperger's people must be kept in mind. It is therefore renewed to pay particular attention to the sensory elements (sounds, noises, lighting, ...) by the facilitators.

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

Topic: Gestalt therapy theatre

Duration: 60 minutes.

Materials: Labels, markers, paper (one letter); Background music to set the mood; Chairs, some tables and kitchen utensils' props.

Learning Objectives

To become aware of the perception that the person has of their own role in their family of origin.

To reflect on what aspects of the participant's role in their own family enhance or inhibit the assumption of their own or other people's responsibilities in their family nucleus.

To help the participant to become aware of their responsibility as a member of their family tree.

To analyse what role the participant has in their family and if they need or would like to make any changes in this regard.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).

2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.

3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

Preparation

All these materials are placed in a place in the room so that they are available to the participants when the improvisation begins.

Labels with different roles of a family written (father, mother, mother's brother, mother's older sister, grandmother, dog, canary, etc.)

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

Step by step description: STEP 1

The facilitator asks a question for the group to reflect on: *what your role in your family of origin is* (for example: the one who is always in charge of the celebrations, the passive one who is never available to do anything with them, the one who pacifies the conflicts, etc.).

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

Then participants are told that they are going to do a group improvisation in which a maximum of 10 people is going to work. They are going to choose the role they are going to play (father, mother, son, brother-in-law, etc.). Each person says the character they have chosen and puts on a label with the role. From the moment they put the label on, they go on stage to play the role, start to move and act as the character would. Once they are all on stage, they have to organise the family tree in such a way that the links between them are clearly visible and it is clear how the family is constituted at a hierarchical level. They are invited to walk around the space just feeling, without having to show how they feel the links they have with each of these people: who they feel closer to, who they trust more, who they distrust, who they feel at ease with, etc. As in any family, not everyone has the same relationship with everyone. Allow time for them to continue to walk and incarnate themselves in those roles.

Step by step description: STEP 2

The conflict is that the family house that belongs to the great-grandmother has received an expropriation order because a highway is going to pass where the house is. The family has difficulties in agreeing on how they are going to divide the money, what account number or accounts they will provide, as some will want to sell the house, others will not, others will think it is fairer to receive more, and so on. And all this must be done with great haste, as the application for compensation expires in 10 minutes or else they will lose the right to receive the aid, as well as the house. In this scene they must be in conflict, they cannot agree.

"You are the López-Gómez family, your late great-grandmother has passed away and has left you a family home in the French Pyrenees. Unfortunately, the State is planning to build a motorway that will pass through this area, for which it is offering you a compensation of one million euros. You have to get organised quickly, as there are only 10 minutes left before the deadline and you will have to decide on an account number to pay into, after which time you will lose all right to the compensation and you will lose your property".

Each character who receives their label with their identity, automatically enters the scene being the character in question and starts to elaborate it and feel it in their body, walking like the character, talking like it, looking at the world from their needs' point of view, longings and/or fears, etc.

Once all the characters are on stage, the facilitator says "action" and lets the improvisation run for 20-30 minutes or so and if you want, you can add tension to the scene by whispering things in the characters' ears. This will help make it more dynamic and active. For example, you can tell the grandmother to fake a heart attack, you can tell the father of the family to make a solemn declaration to the

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

family that he is coming out of the closet because he has a lover, the mother can say that she is going to live in Mexico because she has discovered that her vocation is to become a bullfighter, etc. These are indications that will help to reactivate interest in the conflict, but only if the facilitator senses that the dynamic is waning and there is no spark in the scene.

The objective is to observe the strategies and behaviours that each character has as a different way to facilitate awareness of how people move in life, what marks their behaviour, how we express what we need and what we should (or should not) change in ourselves.

Step by step description: STEP 3

When the improvisation stops, tell them: *observe and realise what you have avoided with the character you have taken*. For example: responsibility, being able to have more fun if you have overworked yourself with the character you chose, and so on. Then the facilitator says: we're going to do the improvisation again, but you'll have to change character with another person and choose another character that allows you to go through or experience what you've avoided. The readjustment and the exchange of character roles is done in such a way that now each person has a character that, at least in a certain way, allows them to go through what they avoided (see note 1).

Note 1: The facilitator should choose the new role based on the information they have about the participant and what they have observed in the dynamic. It should allow the participant to continue working in the line of facing what is not so known to him.

Step by step description: STEP 4

The improvisation is done again. This time it is shorter (about 15 minutes at most). The improvisation is stopped to move on to reflection.

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel in the second character; what happened when you got into that character; what difference did you notice in relation to the previous one; what does this have to do with your life and with you.

Theatrical Activity 7: THE FAMILY

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Asperger's people may not understand clearly the meaning of "sense of responsibility" within the family context and what this entails as actions, that is, the sense of interdependence may escape them. It might be useful to support the Asperger's person with a peer tutor to help them understand (and act accordingly) the different points of view of all the participants involved in the activity.

Theatrical Activity 8: POSSIBLE ACTIONS AGAINST BULLYING

Topic: Bullying

Duration: Approximately 60 minutes.

Materials: None.

Learning Objectives

To promote awareness of the phenomenon of bullying.
 To develop young people's empathy with the protagonists of a bullying situation.
 To develop young people's ability to identify when a bullying situation occurs and what needs to be done in that case.
 To understand what might lead one person to bully another in the school context.
 To raise awareness among the public as a whole, as well as to give a voice to those students who may feel bullied in the school environment or who may be exposed to bullying.
 To promote a greater consolidation of dramatic expression through this type of theatrical improvisation.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

- 1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).
- 2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.
- 3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 8: POSSIBLE ACTIONS AGAINST BULLYING

Preparation

Instruct those who are going to perform bullying scenes so that they have it clear about what kind of situation they are going to improvise. It is necessary that they prepare themselves before the activity with the necessary elements and costumes to give the feeling of the school context and the situation of violence they are going to reproduce.

Theatrical Activity 8: POSSIBLE ACTIONS AGAINST BULLYING

Step by step description

| | |
|---------------|---|
| STEP 1 | <p>Theatrical representation of approximately 5 minutes in which a story of bullying is told. The scene should be frozen at the moment of maximum violence (bully raises his hand to the bullied). See note 1.</p> |
| STEP 2 | <p><u>Note 1:</u> this activity does not have a described scene as the realities between centres in different countries can be very variable and the facilitator who develops the activity will have the necessary tools to generate a story that adjusts to the reality of the centre.</p> <p>The facilitator intervenes to ask the audience at what point in the story something different could happen to steer the story towards a more positive ending. It is then that the audience begins to feel part of the story. The suggestions are improvised on the spot by those who propose them.</p> <p><u>Example:</u> someone proposes that the victim rebels in some way, and in that case, the person who was playing the victim leaves the scene and the person who proposes enters, to reactivate the scene and see what would happen if what they propose happened.</p> |
| STEP 3 | <p>The audience is divided into small groups to discuss some of the situations of violence or bullying they are aware of or may be facing in their schools.</p> |
| STEP 4 | <p>The final part of the activity includes the development of a coexistence contract for schools, drawn up with the help of information from teachers and students. This agreement must be approved and signed by each one of the students.</p> |
| NOTES | <p>NOTE: it is advisable to do this activity before the one called: "Bullying at school" that goes deeper into the life of the characters.</p> <p>The objective is for them to explore, move, interact with their eyes, talk to others, etc. but always from that quality, role or link they have.</p> |

Theatrical Activity 8: POSSIBLE ACTIONS AGAINST BULLYING

Debate and Reflection

To the students: *how did you feel, is there anything that stood out to you, what was the hardest, what was the easiest, and anything else you noticed and would like to share.*

To the public: *What do you feel when you see these scenes? What do you think about what you have witnessed? Do you think that this is a one-off event or that this is*

something common? What can someone who finds themselves in this situation of harassment do? Where can they turn for help? What would you do if you were the victim?

Theatrical Activity 8: POSSIBLE ACTIONS AGAINST BULLYING

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

An Asperger's person is often socially naive, confident and anxious to belong to the "group". Moreover, it seems that they are also deficient in the ability to identify the type of personality, characteristics and abilities of their peers and therefore do not understand or misunderstand the expressions of their peers. In this activity, more than in others, it may become necessary to explain in advance that it is fiction and not reality and, moreover, to support the person with a peer tutor.

Theatrical Activity 9: BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Topic: Bullying

Duration: 60 minutes (or more depending on how long you want to extend the discussion).

Materials: Props of a school scene (backpacks, ball, snacks, etc). Other elements that the characters in a bullying scene may have with them.

Learning Objectives

To promote awareness of the phenomenon of bullying.
To develop young people's empathy with the protagonists of a bullying situation.
To learn to recognize bullying as well as the measures that can be taken when it is detected at school, in families, and with victims and aggressors.
To help young bullies see their actions in a theatrical mirror.
To encourage young people who are victims of bullying to connect with greater self-confidence and that they can generate changes and materialize them.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

- 1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).
- 2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.
- 3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 9: BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Preparation

This activity will require prior preparation with two volunteers from the group.

PREPARATION OF THE VOLUNTEERS: Talk to the two volunteers from the group of participants who are willing to play the role of actors or actresses in the exercise. Explain that one will play the role of the bully and the other the victim. They will have to do a short improvisation in which they will recreate a situation of bullying, for example, a situation where the bully stops the victim in the school corridor and starts to scold the person being bullied to give the bully their snack or to give them their notes, to take their mobile phone, etc. The victim starts to resist (the facilitator gives some guidelines according to the experience with bullying in the school where the facilitator is working, so that the students can get into the dynamics and it is reliable with the school reality).

They are instructed and told that this aggressiveness has to turn little by little into something more violent until there will come a moment in which the harasser reaches the most violent action, which is to raise his hand as if to attack the victim, but just at that moment they have to freeze.

The next part of the preparation is to tell actors that there is going to be a moment when they are going to be asked to sit in a chair facing the audience, a part that can be named "the hot seat". At that moment there's a theatrical license in that they, even though are sitting together, imagine that they don't hear what each other is saying about the other. In this hot seat phase, the actors will have to answer the questions asked by the people in the audience. These questions have to be based on three different levels: social level, friendship level and intimacy level.

First level: social. The facilitator filters out irrelevant questions that do not fit the objectives of the activity, preventing them from being answered if they do not think it is appropriate. These are questions aimed at understanding why some actions in these bullying situations happen: why one is a victim, why the other is a bully and why they do what they do. The other students ask questions as if they were people in the street, who are not their friends, who don't know each other. Observe what happens, how they respond in a level of such low intimacy.

The facilitator has to tell the actors that when they move to the friendship level, they will have to remove something (an accessory, for example, a scarf, a pair of glasses, a cap...) Removing an element helps to identify that they are in the next level. The symbolism of the action is done through removing, not adding, as the idea is to go deeper into each of the levels of interaction between the audience and the characters.

Second level: friendship. It is assumed at this stage that the questioners might be friends with these characters and know them a little, so the actors can become more engaged in their answers and the audience can find out slightly more important or intimate information.

Third level: intimacy. It is as if the questioner were the character's partner, a close friend or someone very close to the character. The actor/actress can open up completely and can really tell what their truth is, about the situation they were portraying on stage. At this point, the questions can somehow even elicit information about what their childhood was like, if there were family difficulties, etc. The facilitator can get possibly clearer answers to questions that from the social level could not be asked or may not even be answered.

PREPARATION OF THE GROUP: they are going to visualize a scene that could happen in any school or institute and they are simply asked to observe carefully and to be attentive to how they feel because they will then have the opportunity to participate in what is happening.

Theatrical Activity 9: BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Step by step description

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| STEP 1 | <p>The scene of improvisation of the harassment situation is performed and it is paralyzed when the harasser raises his hand to attack the other – the moment of greater violence.</p> |
| STEP 2 | <p>Before entering the hot seat, the "forum theatre" is opened. At this moment the participants can approach each of the characters, who are frozen in movement. They are invited to put their hand on the character's shoulder and say what they think the character is feeling (first level). They can be asked what they think the character is thinking (second level), for example: I'm scared, I feel powerful, I'm going to punish this fool (this must be said in the first person, as if it were the character's own experience in the present moment).</p> <p>Hot seat: once the characters are seated, the facilitator explains that these characters are actually in different rooms, even though they are sitting next to each other, and that they cannot hear each other. Now the audience can ask any questions they need to ask, warning them that there are the three levels of interaction that the actors have been previously informed about. From the social level it would be very risky to ask some questions, for example: Does your father hit you? because the people who are acting are not going to answer because, if there is no link, and they do not know each other, it is not a question that fits the social level. The character could even say: if I don't know you at all, who are you to ask me that (see note 1).</p> |
| STEP 3 | <p><u>Note 1:</u> As the dynamics have been explained to the volunteers beforehand, they should already know when to answer questions or not. However, the facilitator has to be attentive to help the actors or cut off inappropriate questions asked by the audience.</p> |

Theatrical Activity 9: BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel about the improvisation? How did you feel about the response given by the protagonists? Would you have done it differently? What do you think about this situation? Do you think it's common? Is it exceptional? Do you know of any cases in your centre? Have you ever played either of these two roles? Have you been an observer? What do you think can be done in case this happens or what will happen to you?

In the role of the victim: what can a person who is being bullied do?

In the role of the bully: What's the point of picking on someone or making their life miserable?

Theatrical Activity 9: BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

The social situation proposed in the activity is particularly complex for the Asperger's person both because of the delay in social maturity and in social thinking, and because of the difficulty in controlling and communicating emotions. It might be helpful to leave more time to "listen" to the comments of the companions and to support him with a partner who can support them in controlling their emotions and in the eventual exposure of their own thoughts.

Theatrical Activity 10: THE SCULPTORS

Topic: Gestalt Theatre Therapy

Duration: 60 minutes.

Materials: Instrumental background music that is as neutral as possible. Camera or mobile phone with camera.

Learning Objectives

To facilitate awareness of those patterns of behaviour that we have in our daily lives as a way to generate changes that we feel necessary in our way of being.

Generate reflection and constructive criticism on personal change.

To develop creativity and spontaneity.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

- 1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).
- 2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.
- 3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 10: THE SCULPTORS

Preparation

The facilitator informs the group that they have to divide themselves into pairs. Once in the pair one is "person A" and the other "person B". Then the facilitator explains the participants must think about what character they are, what character they will show to the world, if they were a character in the theatre of life. It does not refer to what others see in them, but to what they show to others. For example, they can show that they are intelligent, capable, resolute, or perhaps that they are a person who has bad luck, that everything goes wrong for them, that complains, that is a victim, and so on.

Theatrical Activity 10: THE SCULPTORS

Step by step description

STEP 1

In each of the pairs, person A tells person B what the character they are showing to the world looks like, and then the other way around. First, person B will model A as if their body were clay. Person A keeps a neutral body while B modifies it, creating the character they told him about: moving their joints, the sculptor is the one who moves the body of their partner, the sculpted one (in this case A) relaxes and lets their partner do it. Once B has managed to create the figure, they will call the facilitator to take a photograph of that character that the person shows to the world.

Then person B is modelled, and the process is repeated.

STEP 2

The participants are going to take that figure to an animated, exaggerated character. The idea is to create an exaggerated version of the self that each one shows to the world. They are asked to find a space in the room and to reproduce the figure, statue, character that their partner had created as the person that they show to the world. Instrumental music is played, and they are told that when the music starts they will begin to move the figure, turning it little by little into a figure that has life, that has a voice, that has movement, that has a specific way of walking, etc. They should always start from the basis that was the figure that they have been given and that is the character that they themselves told that they show to the world. Little by little they are invited to add more and more exaggeration. Then the group is invited to interact with each other and do an improvisation as a way of presenting themselves.

This phase serves to consolidate the character created, which is an exaggerated version of the character that the person shows to the world.

STEP 3

They are asked to stand in a circle and one by one, come to the centre and introduce themselves from the character they have created.

STEP 4

Individually they are asked to find a place in the room and take the initial sculpture of the character they are showing to the world. Once they have the figure, they have to think about what the opposite character would be to the one they are showing. Individually they are going to adopt the position of the antagonist character.

STEP 5

Once participants have the figure created, they have to bring it to life. Repeat step two again but with the antagonist step.



Theatrical Activity 10: THE SCULPTORS

Debate and Reflection

A circle is made to reflect a little on how the dynamic has been: *How have they felt? what do they think about their antagonist figure? what do they realise about them?*

Theatrical Activity 10: THE SCULPTORS

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Asperger people have difficulty in maintaining and regulating relationships with others by exploiting non-verbal communication skills (eye contact, facial expression, joint attention, proxemics, mimicry, ...). The peer tutoring strategy can also be used in this activity.

Body contact can represent a source of profound discomfort on the part of the Asperger's person and it may be advisable before starting the activity, to agree on the modalities of "modeling".

Theatrical Activity 11: IMPROVISATION FROM THE ANTAGONIST CHARACTER (before this exercise it is necessary to carry out the exercise *The Sculptors*).

Topic: Gestalt Theatre Therapy

Duration: 60 minutes.

Materials: Quick Impro Phrases ²

Learning Objectives

- To develop creativity and spontaneity.
- To develop the ability to make decisions in a conflictive situation.
- To develop the participant's conflict management skills.
- To develop empathy in assertive communication.
- To develop active listening skills.
- To develop awareness of oneself and one's own psychological functioning mechanisms and behavioural patterns.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

- 1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).
- 2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.
- 3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 11: IMPROVISATION FROM THE ANTAGONIST CHARACTER (before this exercise it is necessary to carry out the exercise *The Sculptors*).

Preparation

As they should have already done the activity of the sculptors, start from the fact that the participants already know which is the meaning of the figure that they show to the world and which is the antagonist. They will have to recover what these two figures were like as they are going to use them in the activity. It is necessary to make it clear to recover and remember the two figures as they are going to have to use them in this activity.

² These are short, provocative sentences that contain the minimum information necessary to create an improvised GTT scene. For example: *Mum says it's my turn to take the car today; I'm not going to leave my clothes with you anymore, you've torn them*, etc. These can be developed by the participants themselves for each other, or by the facilitator.

It is necessary that the "Quick impro" phrases are ready because they will have to use them to do the improvisation exercise. They can be warned that this is an exercise in which they are going to practise improvisation in pairs.

As was done in a previous activity, the facilitator can choose to have the pairs working all at the same time, pair by pair or dividing the group in half.

Theatrical Activity 11: IMPROVISATION FROM THE ANTAGONIST CHARACTER (before this exercise it is necessary to carry out the exercise *The Sculptors*).

Step by step description

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|---------------|---|
| STEP 1 | The group is asked to get into pairs. Each member of the pair is assigned either number 1 or 2. The facilitator tells the number 2's that they will be neutral waiting for the work proposal that number 1 brings them. The facilitator calls all the number 1's together and, being careful not to let the others hear, will tell them in their ear which phrase they will have to say: that is the phrase with which they will start the conflict. Once everyone has their phrase, they return to their partner. At the facilitator's signal, everyone will start the improvisation by saying the phrase they have received that starts the conflict. |
| STEP 2 | Let the couples improvise this new conflict situation. The facilitator can approach them and ask: How do you feel, what is your strategy? |
| STEP 3 | The facilitator allows time for them to get into and develop the conflict of the character they show to the world, and then at a certain point stops, leaves the scene in suspense and asks them to get back into the antagonist character. To do this, the dynamic is stopped for a second, they are given the instruction to get into the antagonist character, relying on the body sculpture to feel what they explored before, but they will not have to keep it when the scene resumes, but they will take the attitude from an energetic level. The conflict continues from that new attitude, that is, from the opposite character. |
| STEP 4 | Go back to the participants and ask them to reflect on: <i>what has changed? how do you feel now? how did the strategy change?</i> |
| STEP 5 | The facilitator will say: <i>continue from the opposite character and seek to take it to the limit of your desire- as exaggerated as possible. After you have reached that limit, look for the end of the scene.</i> |

Theatrical Activity 11: IMPROVISATION FROM THE ANTAGONIST CHARACTER (before this exercise it is necessary to carry out the exercise *The Sculptors*).

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel? What strategies did you use? What do you think you can learn from the antagonist character? And the most important question: What from the antagonist character could be useful to you in your daily life?

Theatrical Activity 11: IMPROVISATION FROM THE ANTAGONIST CHARACTER (before this exercise it is necessary to carry out the exercise *The Sculptors*).

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

Asperger people may have unusual language skills that include a large vocabulary and elaborate syntax but in conjunction with immature conversation skills (pragmatic understanding is lacking), unusual prosody, and a tendency to be insistent and repetitive. These characteristics emerge more easily when the thoughts, contents and emotions to be understood and expressed are particularly complex for the student. It may also be useful in carrying out this theatrical activity to offer a peer tutor.

Theatrical Activity 12: SUPERHEROES

Topic: Gestalt Theatre Therapy

Duration: 60 minutes.

Materials: Superhero letters/photos. Neutral music. Personal notebook.

Learning Objectives

- To develop creativity and spontaneity.
- To develop the ability to make decisions in a conflictive situation.
- To develop the participant's conflict management skills.
- To develop empathy in assertive communication.
- To develop active listening skills.
- To develop awareness of oneself and one's own psychological functioning mechanisms and behavioural patterns.

Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) rules for every activity

- 1) There can be no physical harm of any kind to the person you are working with. This also includes that you cannot use real life arguments in the scenes that could harm your partner (for example, if one of the characters, in real life, has a physical disability, it would be totally forbidden to use that disability as an argument in the scenes).
- 2) We cannot hurt ourselves either.
- 3) We cannot break or destroy anything in the space (curtains, windows ...). The rule who broke, pays is applied.

Theatrical Activity 12: SUPERHEROES

Preparation

The facilitator looks for and prepares cards with a fictional character, hero/heroine, as many as there are people in the group at least. These cards must consist of the name of the superhero/heroine and the image of the heroic character.

The cards are spread out in the space, on the floor.

Participants are warned that this is a job in which they are going to create a character.

Theatrical Activity 12: SUPERHEROES

Step by step description

STEP 1

Group members are invited to look at the cards while neutral music plays in the background and to choose one. They sit down with the card – wherever they want - and their notebook. When everyone has a card and is seated, they are asked to write down what powers the character will have. The questions the facilitator asks them are:

Theatrical Activity 12: SUPERHEROES

| | |
|---------------|--|
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>What powers does the character have?</i> 2. <i>What is the dream/desire that you have inside you, that which inspires you?</i> 3. <i>What is the character's vulnerable point?</i> 4. <i>Is there anything that scares you?</i> |
| STEP 2 | <p>Now it's time to start bringing the character to life. Again, you can play neutral (or heroic) music that invites movement and interaction, so that they get into the role. You can tell them to imagine how they walk, how they look at others, how they feel. Participants can include a phrase that this character might say.</p> |
| STEP 3 | <p>Now you must forget about the character for a moment. Get into pairs and each pair will think of a Quick-Impro phrase to give to another pair. They will also say which member of the pair is the one who says the phrase (see note 1). Again, all pairs can work again simultaneously or as the facilitator wishes. The facilitator helps them to connect with their emotions: <i>how do you feel, do you notice tension in any area, take your hand there, let the area speak</i>, etc. The questions refer to the person, not to the superhero character.</p> <p><u>Note 1:</u> The facilitator should remind participants that the sentences must contain three elements: conflict, link and urgency.</p> |
| STEP 4 | <p>Ask them to stop the scene: <i>Close your eyes and integrate the superhero you were</i>. They go back into it by making a statue that represents it and at the facilitator's signal students continue the conflict they were having. They should solve and end the conflict as the superhero/heroine.</p> |

Theatrical Activity 12: SUPERHEROES

Debate and Reflection

How did you feel? What struck them about the character they created?

Questions about the improvisation: *what happened before you became the superhero/heroine? what happened when you solved it as the hero/heroine? what did you realise?*

Theatrical Activity 12: SUPERHEROES

Adaptation tips for working with young people with autism

The social situation proposed in the activity is particularly complex for the Asperger person both for the delay in social maturity and in social thinking, and for the difficulty in controlling and communicating emotions. In addition, there may be difficulty in integrating information. It might be helpful to leave more time to "listen" to the comments of the companions and to support him with a partner who

can support him in controlling his emotions and in the eventual exposure of his own thoughts.

Guidelines

Important aspects for the facilitator before working with Gestalt Theatre Therapy³

1. Conflicts that may arise during the sessions

In Gestalt Theatre Therapy, conflict is always present because it is an element within the theatrical scene. There are three basic elements: the bond of the characters, the conflict, and the urgency of the conflict. For the scene to develop, the conflict must be active, and the participants must get into it, otherwise it would not be possible to work with the scene.

The facilitator stands to the side at a safe distance, leaving space for the working participants to develop the conflict. The facilitator allows the conflict to take place in the scene, since the conflict is the seed for them to learn how they behave, their habits, their styles of communication and conflict resolution and management, how they feel, etc, so the conflict is essential for therapeutic work and awareness.

Conflict can occur by its very presence or even in its absence. Sometimes it happens between the participants, that once the scene is over, they remain at odds with each other, with a feeling of conflict. In this case it is necessary for the facilitator to remember that we are working from a fictional context, they should not be conflicts of the real life of the people but imagined conflicts, which are used in the work with scenes.

This is not contradictory to touching emotions that are real, but the conflicts should not touch real circumstances of their lives. As for the emotions that the participants experience in the scenes, the facilitator must give space for those emotions to be expressed freely by the participants, not to run away from them, but to motivate the participants to be able to name their emotions, and feel them in the scene, giving more consistency and authenticity to the characters they are embodying.

In case the participants get stuck in the conflict, the facilitator should bring them back to the scene, put them in a theatrical context to resolve and explore what has happened to them and why they are still at odds with each other. People may not have been able to get enough distance between the character they played and real life, which may be due to the fact that the character they played shares certain real circumstances of the participant. For example, it may be that the conflict was not so fictitious and that it touched them a lot at the level of their own life story. The person can get hooked with their partner and feel in conflict with them because of what they

³ The word *they* is used to describe an individual throughout the text.

have lived, but in that case, it is necessary that they talk and express what happens to them and clarify what has happened to each one and if necessary, return to the scene so that from the scene they can finish releasing what they could have been hooked on. In Asperger's people, this is an element to keep in mind as many of them have slow processing of experiences and therefore "pause" in the conflict for a longer time than their peers.

As conflict is a group process, if there are conflicts in the group, whatever they are, but they have arisen in the group, the recommendation is that conflicts are always brought to the group and the parties are allowed to express their feelings about the conflict and needs they have about the other person or about themselves.

As a last step, the facilitator asks what the parties propose to resolve the conflict, feelings, needs and proposals for resolution.

It is also important that the facilitator himself is aware of his own attitude towards conflicts, how he manages them on an emotional level when they occur in a group or what is his perception, his reaction to them and how he deals with them. This is necessary so that they are very aware of the type of work they are going to face and assess if they have their own emotional, professional, personal resources, etc. to carry out this work in which they are going to face people who may come into conflict.

2. Emotion management

It is very important that the facilitator is very clear that it is a job in which it is impossible not to feel anything emotionally since the raw material with which professionals work are the emotions of people. That is why it is very important that the facilitator has a minimum of self-knowledge of themselves and how they manage their emotions (sadness, anger, joy... both his own and those of others). Knowing how to deal with the different emotions necessarily requires having done their own personal process, or at least having considerable maturity and experience in the field of personal work. If the facilitator has not worked on their own emotionality previously, they may find it difficult to support or accompany situations or may not even help the participants to go through the scenes and get to a healthier place, in case they need some additional support. Asperger's people can be very honest and respond and / or comment with phrases that can "offend" the facilitator, teacher or educator. In reality, these young people need specific teaching on the conventionality of what can be expressed; in this direction the trainer must be aware of the problem and support the Asperger's person in becoming assertive without offending (an essential element also in adult life).

It is important that they do not open conflicts or scenes that they think may result in a release of emotions that they cannot sustain. Being an educational context, it is advisable to focus on emotional literacy, that people learn to put a name to what they are feeling, to develop communication skills, their expressive and corporal capacity, their creativity, their spontaneity, etc.

As the facilitator goes deeper into the emotional aspects of the participants or into biographical emotions, they must be prudent, because if the professional does not have a good emotional work done within themselves, the objectives of the workshop may not be achieved so easily. In short, it is necessary for the facilitator to be very careful and to work based on their own internal resources and theoretical knowledge in order to be able to support the group, the person and the emotions that are put into play during the improvisations.

3. Difficulty coping with one's emotions

Once the Gestalt therapy facilitator begins to facilitate the activities, they will gradually become aware of which emotions affect them the most and which are the most difficult to sustain. They will also observe which are the circumstances that are more difficult for them, such as personal losses (grief), abusive situations, conflict with parental figures, etc.

It is necessary to pay attention to which are those circumstances that are more difficult for themselves to be able to work on it personally and be able to support the group when it is related with that circumstance. In this sense and in virtue of favouring the group, we recommend the professional to be responsible and coherent with its work and to look for any tool for their own personal work, that adjusts to their character and needs either from the Gestalt therapy, cognitive psychotherapy, meditation, supervision, etc.

In any case, and as has been said previously, the work to be done is within the educational context. Therefore, even though it is required that the facilitator has enough management over their own emotionality, they should not deal with issues that fall within the scope of psychotherapy as it would be unorthodox to open something that will not be able to close. At an educational environment, there is no option to work at a therapeutic level since it is not the setting or a context of therapy.

A) Framing and commitment to confidentiality with the group

The framing should be done at the beginning because it sets up the guidelines that will keep the group to carry out an effective and respectful work. The framing is a way of taking care of the group and it is also a guarantee that there will be no misunderstandings. It also helps to avoid confusions (you can leave some time at the

end to solve any doubts that may have arisen). It is about establishing a clear basis for everyone, and this helps to create security and transparency in the work that will be done. As a result, the work can be more effective and useful.

Punctuality in attending work is always essential, but especially if it is going to be a long-term work with several sessions, care should be taken that people are punctual. Not only at the start time but also if there are breaks in the middle of the session. You should always ask them to please keep that discipline of being punctual, because if someone is absent you can't start explaining the dynamics because you would have to repeat it again when they join the group.

Another point to keep in mind is that interruptions that can be avoided are not allowed (for example: going to the bathroom, taking the mobile phone, making a comment on another topic, etc).

The group must be respectful with the process of their peers, in terms of the emotional expression that may occur at a given moment as a result of an activity, in the judgment that may arise, etc. And responsibility is also asked with oneself, not making comparisons with other companions, understanding that each experience is unique and each one develops with the emotional, psychological resources, etc., of which they are in disposition to make use at each moment. Each person must also be responsible for their own needs. For example, if someone feels unwell, has a lot of physical pain in some area, something is too much of an emotional burden, etc., they should tell the facilitator as it is the responsibility of the participant to take care of their own wellbeing. Particular attention should be given to Asperger's people, as very often they can feel bad or uncomfortable but do not know how to express this state.

The facilitator is not in charge of interpreting the scene. Since the work proposals have been made from a gestalt point of view, the work to be done depends on the person and not so much on the facilitator. It is important that no one makes interpretations of other people's scenes. It is a process-oriented approach, this means that what interests is what happens in the scene and not so much the result of it. What is important is what happens to the participant (emotional states, blockages, sensations...) The facilitator will help these sensations to come to light and have permission to be part of the scene.

It is an educational therapeutical context but not therapy unless the facilitator is qualified as a Gestalt therapist or Gestalt theatre therapist.

Therefore, professionals work in an educational context with material and methodology that is therapeutic. We differentiate GTT in an educational context from GTT in a therapy context. In the field of education, with this methodology

professionals can raise awareness on students about what they are feeling, naming it, and promoting emotional literacy. One of the objectives of GTT in education is to facilitate the person's awareness of his or her own style of conflict management. We understand conflict management styles to be accommodative, confrontational, negotiating, etc.

Thanks to the educational aspect of GTT you can develop social skills, life skills, empathic communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, spontaneity, creativity, as well as developing greater sensory and body awareness. All this is part of what is sought with GTT, but in the therapeutic setting it opens up to the biographical, connecting the experience they have in the scenes with their own history. This is something that has to do with the role of the facilitator, who, unless they are a therapist or Gestalt therapist, should not open these biographical spaces since they do not have the necessary competencies to collect the young person's emotional wounds or past traumas. Moreover, in the field of therapy, GTT will help with pending issues of the patient, neurotic mechanisms are explored (retroflexion, deflexion, projection, etc.), support and confrontation are worked on. That belongs to the field of Gestalt therapy and this manual has an educational objective, something that should not be forgotten.

B) The role of the facilitator in GTT and aspects to take into account:

The facilitator who is going to implement these activities in educational contexts is in principle not a therapist. This means that the use of these activities should be limited to the educational approach. They will take into account the differences between the educational context in GTT and the therapeutic context in GTT.

It should also be considered that the dynamics and techniques in the manual are not adapted to the context and characteristics of the groups that will benefit from them, therefore, the facilitator should observe and adapt the activities to the context, circumstances and idiosyncrasies of the participants they work with. This is especially important with people with special needs or mental illness, especially with Asperger's people considering, in particular, their perceptive propensities (e.g. attention to detail rather than the whole, or their visual, auditory, tactile, vestibular balance, etc.), their specific ways of thinking (rigidity of thought, difficulty in coping with changes, propensity for visual thinking, need for longer processing times, etc.) and, finally, their particular difficulties in social relationships, especially in understanding the other's point of view.

C) Appropriate order and sequence of the dynamics for the realization of an effective GTT workshop.

A basic structure of a Gestalt theatre therapy workshop would have the following structure:

1. First, a meditation that usually lasts no more than 10 minutes. It is an active meditation where participants are not usually seated but remain standing. In this case the facilitator can choose the technique that they consider appropriate to facilitate the group to place themselves in the present, in the moment in which they are and to become aware of how they arrive at the workshop. It is a space of introspection, of silence in which the participant can look inwards to observe how they arrive at the workshop and become aware and name that feeling and how they are.
2. A second phase would be to work through different dynamics awakening the senses and exercising and warming up the body. This phase is very important not only to facilitate the body expression of the participants during the theatrical work, but also to generate a greater awareness of the body and the senses, which has a positive impact on the subsequent theatrical work.
3. Thirdly, there would be theatrical warm-up exercises, which help to relax, to disinhibit, to gain more confidence and group cohesion and that, in a way, predispose to a greater openness and a greater permission. There is also less internal judgment that facilitates to enter in improvisation of Gestalt theatre therapy.
4. Fourthly, it would be in the actual improvisation of GTT, which is the central pillar of the activity.
5. Finally, getting back to the group and reflection that is essential to collect the learning and facilitate the awareness of those issues that the participant had been able to touch. In this sense, the facilitator will first attend to the emotions and feelings experienced during the activity, helping the participant to be able to name said emotions and to analyse their personal strategies as well as their values and ideas that may have been part of their work during the activity of theatre work.

D) Rules for safe and respectful improvisation:

- a. Do not harm yourself;
- b. Do not harm your partner;
- c. Do not damage the space;
- d. Do not work under the influence of any substance or drug.

E) Technical tips for a better and more effective theatrical improvisation

The theatrical activity represents a field of work of enormous wealth for people with Asperger's. Asperger's people can access most of the learning (social understanding, social communication, expression, play, self-knowledge, ...) if they are presented with motivating and engaging activities for them and, above all, if they are presented gradually ("Laboratorio teatro per bambini con Disturbi dello Spettro Autistico. Giochi e attività per favorire le abilità sociali e l'autostima" C. Coon, Ed. Erickson, 2010. "Using drama with Children on the Autistic Spectrum" C. Coon, Speechmark Publishing Ltd, 2007). It is hoped that participation in this GTT path for Asperger's people will be preceded by theatrical activities referring to:

Work on the sensory environment

Observe yourself and others

Listen to others

Using the body / starting to pretend / miming

Use and stimulate language

Using props (clothes, puppets, for example)

Reflect on yourself and understand your preferences

Understanding the stories and events

Understanding the link between experience and emotion

Following this first theatrical experience, the children will have greater awareness of their resources and preferences (but also of their limits). The goals of theatrical literacy are represented by

Greater self-awareness (bodily and emotional)

Knowing how to recognize your own feelings / emotions by giving them a (conventional) name and knowing how to communicate them verbally to others

Knowing how to connect emotions to real-life events and identify simple self-control strategies

Recognize the other, their preferences and their way of communicating

Cooperate with each other

It could be useful for the facilitators to dedicate time to getting to know the participants in the GTT Workshop, paying particular attention to Asperger's people trying to understand which skills are present and how many are emerging so as to be

able to calibrate the different activities to the unavoidable needs of the Asperger's boys/girls.

In order for improvisations to be as fluid as possible and for the work to be more effective and cleaner, there are a series of tips which have to do with improvisation itself on a technical level, which will help participants to go deeper and work more effectively.

a. Accept the conflict proposal. When the partner brings a conflict proposal that initiates an improvisation, if it is denied by the person who is in neutral, or if they question it, it leaves the partner of the proposal in a situation of emptiness, where the scene would be finished before starting. Therefore, it is important that the person receiving the scene, when faced with the conflict proposal, always accepts it. Either by means of a "yes, so what happens?" or "yes, it was me" affirming and taking for granted that the situation is true in the context of the scene.

b. Laughter. We have all experienced situations before where something new makes us tense and this can make us laugh uncontrollably. This is a symptom of excitement, nervousness, insecurity, etc. So, as it is something that can occur naturally, we invite the facilitator to let the participants know that they can include it in the scene. The one who is laughing, for example, can say "*I'm laughing at you*" or "*I'm laughing so I don't cry*". The partner who observes that the other is laughing can also include them in the scene, saying for example "*wow, you are laughing a lot, that's because you don't care about what I'm telling you*".

c. Speak loud and clear. Keep in mind that you have to modulate your voice to be well heard and that you should not turn your back to the audience while you are on stage.

d. Do not invent magical objects or solutions. Even if it is a fictitious framework in which nothing of what they are doing really has to do with them, at the same time they are asked to trust and enter into the emotions that the scene produces in them. The combination of fictitious elements such as objects that do not exist, unexisting papers they have in their hands, doors that do not exist, etc. only contribute to generate a greater climate of unreality making them escape the scene and not really believe the scene they are working on. Therefore, the proposal is always to work from a relational dimension. In the scene, the only elements that are available are themselves, *you and me*. There are no other objects unless the facilitator proposes to use a specific object because it is interesting for the action or for the scene itself.

e. Inform the partner of their role. Finally, the person who proposes the conflict must always remember that when they enter the scene, they must give their partner, in the first sentences, the minimum necessary information as soon as possible, so that the

partner can find themselves in the scene and work knowing: who they are, what relationship they have and what is the conflict that confronts them.

F) On the collection and reflection after improvisations:

a. Essential aspect without which there is no work of conscience.

First of all, it must be said that reflection is the first thing that one wants to promote through GTT. Without this element of introspection, there is no realisation, no awareness, but merely an action that does not change anything in the person taking part, so it is important for the facilitator to ensure that sufficient time is allocated to this phase of the exercise. In fact, the most important thing about the activity is to have enough time for the participants to explore what has happened to them, how they felt, and what they are aware of.

b. Structure.

A possible structure that the facilitator can follow when doing the reflection is to start by asking how they have felt. Keep in mind that the natural tendency of people who are not used to this type of dynamic is to narrate what happened. In this case, the facilitator can again ask the person to talk about their feelings and not to go into the description of the events experienced. In a second phase you can ask them what has happened, what they have observed, etc.

Participants can also point out what strategies they have observed in themselves and what has struck them about their behaviour, reactions, if anything has surprised them and also what their character contributed to their own growth. Finally, it is always good to ask what you notice about yourself after this work.

Conclusion

Through this pedagogical model it has been explained the concept and methodology of Gestalt Therapy Theatre, including a set list of warm up and theatre activities to be used at schools, as well as a guideline to facilitate the implantation for educators.

We hope it will be a useful tool for teachers and trainers when addressing bullying problem at school and when working with students with high functioning autistic spectrum disorder (and the Asperger Syndrome).