



# Presenting Psychodrama

THE PSYCHODRAMA COMPANION

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**These notes were written to help you promote Psychodrama in a volunteer capacity.** The following are words, interventions, and actions that I use. Not all will fit you. Please creatively modify anything.

## Contact

You can usually search online for psychology-related and social work college classes being taught that semester or the next. The days and times are also shown. (My preference is for group counseling classes.) Look for classes that meet in excess of 50 minutes, but be willing to do shorter ones. For greater flexibility, try to find 90 minute or longer classes. If you can do a follow-up class, it's really great.

Use your networks to find growth-oriented collectives. In the following, the terms "professor" and "class" also include the growth-oriented collective's leader and meeting.

Volunteer to present at therapists' organizations or for an in-service. Recently I did a presentation for a 90 minute EMDR meeting. Not every group will be interested in having you present. Try again in a few months or talk to a different person.

Other presentation possibilities include: thematic conferences such as alcohol and drug, domestic abuse, group counseling, and PTSD. Trading favors with another therapist can work: A therapist took my calls while I was on vacation and later I did a psychodrama for her group.

Any presentation you do only strengthens your skills.

Sometimes I'm asked to do a presentation, but if not asked, here is my approach to the professor of a class or organization person:

1. Try to find someone to tell the professor (or organization person) about you and call the professor a few days later. This is best.
2. Otherwise you have to cold call and offer to do a presentation.
3. Follow up with an email of your credentials.

**Don't send advertising materials.**

My statements to the professor are on the order of:

"Many people have heard or read about Psychodrama, but very few have seen it and there are misconceptions that I would like to prove are not true." The professor can guess you are also trying to get business.

I ask the professor to announce in class for ten [or whatever number] interested people to do a Four-Hour Training Group with me and give a date and time. This is usually Saturday or Sunday afternoon a week or two before the class presentation. The purpose is to have a few somewhat-trained auxiliaries in the audience.

This margin space is for your notes. Please send them to me.



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## Commonalities

Many steps are similar in the following sections: The Four-Hour Training Group, 50 Minute Class or Meeting and 90 Minute (or Longer) Class or Meeting. The similarities will be presented in this section. The format is generally the same in each.

1. Conduct training and presentations like any group: warm-up, action, and sharing. As time permits do processing (usually Q & A) and/or teaching in the training group.
2. Get confidentiality and no-physical-violence agreements.
3. Be aware of the clock and finish the presentation on time. A kitchen timer is handy for pacing.
4. Therefore, you must be structured to get the job done.
5. It's very important to have an experienced double with you. My wife usually goes with me and acts as double and occasionally as an auxiliary ego. At presentations I will only use her or someone trained as a double and not one of the Four-Hour Training Group trainees. They will not have had adequate training as double.
6. If possible arrange the room seating in a horseshoe, rather than having people sitting behind tables or seated in rows and columns.
7. Bring markers, tape, and big sheets of paper to use for the didactic portion of your presentation if these items are not provided.
  - a. Take an outline printed in large letters with you or arrive a few minutes early to print an outline on the classroom board. These are my preferred methods; speaking and printing slows things.
8. After being introduced, I continue with an introduction of self and tell the group about my credentials and how I came to Psychodrama. Next I turn it over to my wife (or whoever came with me to be a double) and she speaks about herself and says good things about the method. This is done to help the group warm-up towards us and lessen their anxiety about the forthcoming action.
9. A short didactic talk is given that includes:
  - a. Psychodrama history, the “five instruments” including the double and the three phases of the psychodramatic process.
  - b. As time allows expand this and include, “*Who Shall Survive?*”, Group Psychotherapy, Sociometry, Sociodrama, Spontaneity Theory, Role Playing, Here-and Now, etc.
  - c. To reduce didactic time, you can email or send handouts for each student to a preceding class explaining these items.



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- d. Make sure to say something like, “Psychodrama is done with individuals, couples, families, and groups,” (This may get you some business.) and that:
  - e. “Psychodrama is the oldest form of group psychotherapy, a term coined by Moreno, where group members interact. Before Moreno, people just sat in rows and listened to a lecture without a defined purpose to interact.”
  - f. Ask for questions. Most questions will be about something best demonstrated in action. Say, “Let me defer that. It is best explained when we get into the action phase.”
10. Get everyone off of their seats and move them into a clear space. Do an all-group warm-up with movement, then have them take a seat.
  11. State, “Any issue can be worked with in psychodrama such as death of a loved one or abuse, but for demonstration purposes we will limit the issues to communication problems.”
  12. This is followed with an exercise to select a protagonist and move into action. I use the empty (auxiliary) chair and encourage people to “give it a try.” This method is a very fast way to get into action.
    - a. After a self presentation of the problem person, have the protagonist select someone to play the role.
    - b. Always use an auxiliary ego with the volunteers. **Do not have them just talk to an empty chair; that looks too weird to people new to psychodrama and negatively affects them.**
    - c. With the first volunteer, use only an auxiliary and empty chair. Generally I utilize a double with the following volunteers.
    - d. Have the **group select** one of the volunteers as protagonist. This causes the group to have an investment in the psychodrama. The protagonist expands what was presented with the empty chair.

The action is always **situational**, never classical.

13. The action is taken to some reasonable conclusion.
  - a. If you have the time, more than one short psychodrama can be done. Doing more than one action piece shows psychodrama as having greater flexibility and depth.

I used to tell the group that I would do more than one psychodrama and sometimes was unable to do that when the action exploded. I don't say that anymore. Avoid making a contract like that.



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14. Share. Have protagonist sit next to you; usually in the front of the room, the stage area.
  - a. Explain sharing and that the protagonist needs to know the group identifies with him/her.
  - b. Be very clear that their issues do not have to be exactly the same. Just tell about something that was triggered.
  - c. State that any emotion felt should be expressed rather than suppressed.
  - d. Have the auxiliaries share from their roles.
  - e. Tell the group that this is not a time to critique or offer advice or “suggestions” but to speak from their personal experience. Say that you will protect the protagonist if you think advice giving is going to happen. One example of subtle advice giving is, “That same thing happened to me and here’s what I did...”
  - f. Tell the protagonist not to speak but just listen. “You have given a lot of yourself to us and now we want to give something to you.” Keep the protagonist quiet to prevent him/her from becoming engaged in a conversation thereby preventing sharing.
  - g. Ask people to share when ready without asking permission.
  - h. Direct them to speak to the protagonist rather than to you.
  - i. Thank the protagonist(s) and auxiliaries for their willingness to participate.
15. Tell the group that people are affected in many different ways, and if they have something that bothers them to call you.
16. Processing can be used if desired. Usually this amounts to a Q & A session at the presentations. True processing and practice will occur at The Four-Hour Training Group.
17. Have handouts about Psychodrama and advertising materials. Distribute them at the end of the class. This avoids the group getting involved in reading rather than action.
18. For speed use several sign-up sheets instead of one, because people will have to quickly leave for other obligations.
  - a. My sign-up sheet title is, “Psychodrama/Counseling Workshops.” (“Sociometry” and “Group Psychotherapy” are also used.) Following that is “PLEASE PRINT. YOUR INFORMATION WILL NOT BE GIVEN TO OTHERS” then headings of: “NAME” and “EMAIL ADDRESS”. Mailing addresses are not needed if you don’t use postal mail. People who do not have email can add their name and address on the back of the form. I also use a “CONTACT PHONE” heading.



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## The Four-Hour Training Group

Elements of the “Commonalities” section apply here.

After answering questions I do a warm-up and then direct about a 10-20 minute empty chair with each person. This is a great way of teaching the psychodramatic process.

To alleviate anxiety, say they can work on any issue “even if it’s an inability to balance a checkbook. I just want it to be a real issue.”

The issues always turn out to be much deeper than checkbook balancing. Remember that these people have been working on a warm-up since they volunteered.

Then say, “The purpose is to teach the rhythm of the action.”

Role reversals are explained in action.

Each of the group will also play one or more auxiliary roles.

If the issue is heavy, sharing occurs after the person has worked. With lighter issues sharing can be done after more than one have worked; you have to determine this.

Processing and training occur after a break when sharing is complete.

You can do some training after each protagonist has worked, if you think it beneficial.

Tighten their role reversals and verbal interactions. Explain when to expand, exacerbate, and reduce the intensity of their roles.

Tell trainees they can volunteer as protagonist at the class presentation. They are part of the class.

Getting growth-oriented collective members for training is difficult but can be rewarding when presenting to their meeting.

Ask trainees to tell others about your willingness to do presentations for other classes or collectives. **Spread the word about Psychodrama.**

## The 50 Minute Class or Meeting

Elements of the “Commonalities” section apply here.

Realistically, you will be faced with a lot of problems and won’t have all of the 50 minutes. Usually the professor has several announcements; some students arrive late, you have to be introduced.

1. Introduce yourself, your double helper, and the students who trained with you. “These people did a training session with us and



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if you have need of an auxiliary ego, they can help a lot.”

2. Do a short didactic presentation explaining the “five instruments” and the three phases of a Psychodrama. To reduce didactic time, you can send handouts for each student to a preceding class explaining these items.
3. There is a tendency to rush the warm-up because of time; don’t under do or overdo. Take about 10 minutes of the class. Again: get them out of their chairs, up and moving.
4. Each person that wants to try psychodrama states the situation with their problem person. A class of this length usually will not allow more than one or two empty chair enactments. Have the class select one person by hand vote and move that person into action. If time allows, do an empty chair with the next most selected person.
5. Interview to determine the person with whom the protagonist wants to interact and **determine the issue**.
6. **Do not set a scene.**
7. Instead say, “I want to bring that person into this room.” Explain a **self-presentation** and have the protagonist do it.
8. After the auxiliary ego has been selected, explain to that person (and the group) what an auxiliary ego does and how to play the part. “The tendency is to be nervous and smile, please keep a serious face.” “If you are portraying a nasty person, be very nasty.”
9. “You’ve brought that person here, what would you like to say to him/her?”
10. Explain the auxiliary’s task in a role reversal when it first happens.
11. When a double is brought in, tell about the double’s purpose and how the protagonist can relate to the double.  

If you want to get anything done in this 50 minute (or usually less) class, you must use the double. Philosophically I do not believe the director should double.
12. Use the mirror intervention; it can be quite powerful.
13. Bring the action phase to a conclusion. A simple way of stopping is by saying “I want you to finish with three sentences.”
14. Share. Allow about 10 minutes. After a few people share, say, “We are out of time, but please share with them outside of class.”

You can readily calculate that your time for action is very limited. Do what you can and make the most of it. Offer to come back and do more in another class or meeting.

For a 50 minute session:

5 min. Intro  
10 min. Warm-Up  
25 min. Action  
10 min. Sharing  
That’s fast.



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## The 90 Minute (or Longer) Class or Meeting

Elements of the “Commonalities”, “The Four-Hour Training Group”, and “The 50 Minute Class or Meeting” sections apply here.

It’s amazing how much more you can get done with 90 minutes or longer. Compared to a 50 minute class, you can also increase the number of empty chair enactments and length of each. To show the depth of Psychodrama, work with one person, **but the intensity can scare people.**

To show the breadth of Psychodrama, do a small number of short enactments. **This is what I prefer.** As more people experience Psychodrama, the better the publicizing and the likelihood of getting trainees.

You can do several time-limited action pieces of a few role reversals and then ask, “Who would like to go further?” Of those that want to go further, have a hands-on sociometric selection for the protagonist.

**Once more: Only do situational, not classic, psychodramas.**

As time permits, a scene can be set and additional auxiliaries can be used. Besides the mirror, the soliloquy, an aside, high chair/low chair, a sculpture, and multiple double interventions are very helpful. Try to involve the audience in some form of a chorus.

Deeper psychodramas require more time for sharing. If there is more than one protagonist, you may choose to share after each has worked or just do one sharing for all of the protagonists to save time. When there is only one sharing with several protagonists I will personally share—as soon as possible—with, and direct sharing to, the first person who worked. That first person has been “on hold” waiting for others to say how they identify. I always share from my experiences and feelings.

## Pieces

Doing the four-hour training groups and class presentations takes time. I do community presentations rather than doing volunteer work or belonging to service clubs.

**Think of any presentation as promoting Psychodrama and not as soliciting business, but if business happens, that’s good.**

Occasionally I have gotten money as an honorarium from colleges.

A few people—not a lot—who see the presentations will want to get training. That’s got to be good for you. But don’t expect a horde of



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trainees from classes; they are in the process of getting a degree and want to finish their education and get a job. Many have just enough money to finish and do not have money for psychodrama training. Besides, they have received a fine education and believe they know all about being a therapist, especially as a therapist in group work. They have never heard of sociometry and, to them, doing psychodrama is a piece of pie.

All is not lost. In the future people who have experienced psychodrama may want training or could hire you to do workshops.

Can you do a presentation without a double? Of course. However the double speeds the action, gives the best impression in the shortest time, and shows the group a broader range of psychodrama. A good double will get a lot of attention after the psychodrama and will also make the director look good.

Many people in a class or meeting don't know each other to any depth, even though the professor may state otherwise. Interactive warm-ups will help build group cohesion. That's a plus for the professor.

As stressed before, classical psychodrama requires too much time and scares the hell out of some group members as a first experience; stay situational. To avoid negative publicity, we must stress safety and provide an exciting and coherent experience in our presentations.

You may have noticed that I've used the word "intervention" instead of "technique." Since others look at Psychodrama as a bunch of techniques, I believe we should downplay that word and call attention to the unity of the psychodramatic process. Successful presentations will help.

Other classes where you could demonstrate Psychodrama are: marriage and family, individual therapy, couples therapy, theories of personality.

Some will say what is written here is too structured, but it works for me and helps me finish on time. I tend to do the same warm-up(s) and follow with the empty chair. Because of a structured warm-up and protagonist selection, I can be more spontaneous in the enactment. I just try not to "bite off more than I can chew." You will find your own structure.

**A few hours of your time will help spread the word.  
We must do what we can to promote Psychodrama;  
if we don't, it will continue to just fade away.**

Bill is available to conduct workshops about psychodrama, sociometry, and group process anywhere on the planet.



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