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**Title**

From Creative Expression to Existential Reflection: Emotional Support Groups for Parents of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders

**Abstract for**

Long Presentation

## **Abstract**

Parental stress in raising children, particularly those with neurodevelopmental disorders, is significantly higher than in families without such challenges (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; Baker et al., 2002). This emotional distress among parents and the impact on their self-perception regarding parenthood has broader implications, affecting the overall functioning of the family and the relationships between its members (Bonifacci, Storti, Tobia & Suardi, 2016). Consequently, emotional support for parents is recommended, among other interventions (Operto et.al., 2011).

This presentation explores how the use of person-centred creative arts and child-centred play therapy in a therapeutic group of parents with children with neurodevelopmental disorders can affect their self-perception and way of being in their relationship with them-selves and their children. These groups were conducted at the University Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the University General Hospital of Alexandroupoli in Greece, within the clinic of Early Intervention for Children (0-6 years old) with Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

Grounded in the principles of person-centred creative arts and child-centered play therapy these groups provided a safe space where parents could process their experiences through creative expression and play. Creative arts therapy facilitated the symbolic articulation of emotions and life events, while play therapy reconnected parents to their capacity for spontaneity and relational attunement (Silverstone, 1993; Landreth, 2012). So far what was reported is that parents experienced significant shifts in self-perception, reporting moments of reconnection with their core aspects of themselves and newfound relational depth through insights of freedom responsibility and authenticity.

What was highlighted from this project and could potentially initiate further reflection are the importance of addressing to the needs of parents in child & adolescent psychiatry, how two tribes of the Person-Centered Approach could be introduced in a medical context and how they could be integrated in existential practice when working with children and their families and the depth we can reach when working with creative modalities.

### **Bio:**

Kyriaki Kentigkeleni MD, MSc, PhDc is Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, PCA and Person-Centred Creative Arts Counsellor & Psychotherapist, Child-Centred Play Therapist, trainee in Existential Psychotherapy, group facilitator and supervisor, assistant director and tutor of the Association for Person-Centred Creative Arts (APCCA) and Board member of APCCA. She is a PhD candidate at the Medical Faculty of Democritus University of Thrace in Greece and external associate of University Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Department of University General Hospital of Alexandroupoli in Greece.

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