

Anxious teens gain confidence through improvisational theater training

14 December 2018



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Improvisational theater training can reduce fearfulness and anxiety among teens struggling with social interactions, a new University of Michigan study suggests.

School-based improv theater—performing without a script or preparation—may be effective for social phobias and [anxiety disorders](#) because it offers a low stigma, low cost and more accessible context for help in reducing these symptoms, say U-M researchers.

Participating in improv can enhance a student's well-being and reduce their anxiety, says lead author Peter Felsman, a [graduate student](#) in social work and psychology.

"In addition, the mutual support that improvisation rewards builds trust, helping group members feel safer taking risks and more willing to make mistakes," he said.

Felsman and colleagues say this is the first study to examine whether improvisational training can be linked to reduced social anxiety in a school setting.

For the study, nearly 270 Detroit [high school](#) and [middle school students](#) participated in a 10-week school improvisational theater program offered by The Detroit Creativity Project. The students completed questionnaires before and after the program, allowing them to assess statements such as, "I am comfortable performing for others" and "I am willing to make mistakes."

"These findings show that reductions in social anxiety were related to increased confidence in social skills, ability to figure out how to achieve goals and take action to do so (hope), creative ability and greater willingness to make mistakes," said co-author Colleen Seifert, professor of psychology.

While the findings contribute to research on therapies for [mental health](#), the study's authors note that the study sample focuses on participants from poorer, lower-performing schools where barriers to accessing standard treatments for social anxiety are greater than in better-resourced contexts.

"For adolescents at wealthier, higher-performing schools with access to more traditional treatments, participating in improvisational theater training may predict different outcomes," said co-author Joseph Himle, professor of social work and psychiatry. "Future research can examine this further."

The findings appear in the current issue of *The Arts in Psychotherapy*.

More information: Peter Felsman et al. The use of improvisational theater training to reduce social anxiety in adolescents, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.aip.2018.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2018.12.001)

Provided by University of Michigan

APA citation: Anxious teens gain confidence through improvisational theater training (2018, December 14) retrieved 6 December 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-anxious-teens-gain-confidence-theater.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.