

# Cinema Therapy with Children and Adolescents

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Films can not replace professional therapy, but they can be helpful in educating children and encouraging discussion.

A young grieving child who is struggling with loss may benefit from watching **The Lion King**, as it may help him or her gain hope and understand the importance of relying on supportive friends and adults. Suggest films like **Bend It Like Beckham**, **Whale Rider** or **Free Willy**, to a child struggling with anxiety or low self-esteem as such films may help the child develop self-compassion and hope. Invite bored and lost adolescents to watch any of the **Star Wars** movies to help them gain hope and to help them see that even the most difficult situations can be salvageable. Let a child whose parents have recently separated or divorced watch **Mrs. Doubtfire**, **Stepmom**, or **The Parent Trap** and learn that families can transform in positive ways as they move through crisis.

## Facilitating Communication

Whereas adults more easily find the words to talk about problems, thoughts, or emotions in psychotherapy, most children and adolescents find it **difficult to adequately express themselves**. By referencing movie characters and familiar dramatic vignettes, children and adolescents may **reflect on their own internal process** while maintaining a necessary emotional distance from stressful or frightening topics. Films often provide a **common ground for discussions about problems** related to family, friends, school, anxiety, love and more. **Rapport can develop faster** with Cinema Therapy, as movies speak a familiar language which is less intimidating than psychological jargon. Children often become curious when parents suggest that they watch a movie together.

## Learning by Example

Movies present young viewers with best and worst case scenarios as characters **get in and out of various predicaments**. Antagonists, enemies and villains usually offer **cautionary examples** of how not to behave. They may help young children and their families **learn by proxy** why not to behave a certain way.

## Finding Hope and Possibility

Many movies may enable children and adolescents to envision how their own problems might be solved. Watching movie characters and situations may give young clients **ideas of how to deal with problems in their own lives**.

## **IDEAS FOR CINEMA THERAPY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

**The Lion King** may help a child cope with the loss of a family member and learn about responsibility.

**Bridge to Terabithia** may complement the treatment of depression resulting from grief.

**Bend It Like Beckham** may be recommended when a child struggles with anxiety and self-esteem issues.

**Ever After** or **The Never-Ending Story** may help children learn how to cope with bullies.

**Whale Rider** and **Free Willy** may help teens develop self-esteem.

**Mrs. Doubtfire**, **Stepmom** or **The Parent Trap** may be helpful for children struggling with divorce and stepfamily issues.

## **EXAMPLES OF THERAPEUTIC THEMES & MOVIES**

### **FOR 7 TO 12 YEAR OLDS (and older)**

**Abuse and Molestation:** Do You Know the Muffin Man?, Matilda, Radio Flyer

**Adoption:** Harry Potter Series, Losing Isaiah

**Conflict with Parents:** Drop Dead Fred, Pieces of April

**Coping with Fear:** Antz, August Rush, Bambi, The Golden Compass, Miracle on 34th Street, Yentl

**Ethical Decisions:** Beauty and the Beast, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

**Peer and Sibling Relationships:** ET: The Extra-Terrestrial, Harriet the Spy, The Little Rascals, My Girl, Stand By Me, Mr. Mom

**Grief and Death:** Finding Nemo, The Boy with the Green Hair, Charlotte's Web, Fly Away Home, Heidi, Ponette, The Secret Garden

**Illness and Disability:** The Cure, David and Lisa, The Horse Whisperer, Lorenzo's Oil, Simon Birch

**Romance and Sexuality:** Antz, Big, The Little Rascals, Milk Money

**Lying:** An American Tail, Hook

**Moving:** Alaska, A Home of Our Own, The Sandlot

**Prejudice:** Babe, The Diary of Anne Frank, Dumbo, Pocahontas, Sounder, The Great Debaters

**School:** Dead Poets' Society, A Little Princess, School of Rock

**Self-Esteem:** A Bug's Life, The Bad News Bears, Chicken Run, The Incredibles, Pollyanna, Rudy, Searching for Bobby Fischer, October Sky

**Single Parents / Divorce:** Author! Author!, Corrina Corrina, Finding Nemo, Mrs. Doubtfire, Kramer vs. Kramer