

Dance and Somatics for Mental Health

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Movement and the Brain

“The mind is like the wind and the body like the sand: if you want to know how the wind is blowing , you can look at the sand.” Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to adapt and reorganize itself in response to experience, including movement.

Somatic and dance therapies that address neuroplasticity deficits

- Relax rigid patterns of processing and cognitive inflexibility
- Facilitate adaptive learning
- Promote acquisition of effective emotional regulation skills

Non- Verbal Processing

Benefits to the Individual:

- Relationship between the conscious and unconscious.
- Neurodiversity
- Building confidence

Benefits to the Collective:

- Being seen and accepted.
- The importance of the witness
- Learning from one another

Benefits for the Provider:

- Being aware of our own nonverbal behavior and how it may impact interactions with patients is central to improving our ability to establish rapport and maintain a strong therapeutic alliance.

Unconscious and Consciousness

“The unconscious mind is an incredibly powerful force, influencing our thoughts, behavior, and reactions in ways that often go unnoticed.” Dr. Albert Wong

Movement and somatics bring our attention to sensory experience that has often been neglected when we reside in our thoughts.

What is Dance Therapy

The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines dance/movement therapy as **the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration** of the individual.

- Focused on **movement behavior as it emerges** in the therapeutic relationship. Expressive, communicative, and adaptive behaviors are all considered for group and individual treatment. Body movement, as the core component of dance, simultaneously provides the means of assessment and the mode of intervention for dance/movement therapy.
- Dance therapy aims to strengthen the connection between the brain and the body by allowing for authentic, non-verbal expression of emotions in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

What is Somatics

Somatics is a field of movement studies and bodywork that foregrounds the body's internal physical sensations, perceptions, and experiences.

Somatic dance is a type of dance that involves moving the body to sense and respond to internal cues, and to express emotions. It's also known as conscious or embodied dance

Examples

- Body Mind Centering
- Feldenkrais
- Alexander Technique
- Authentic Movement
- Somatics and IFS
- Dance Therapy
- Ecstatic Dance
- Improvisation

Indications

Movement/Somatic therapy can be helpful for people who are dealing with a variety of issues, including:

- Stress, anxiety, or depression
- Anger management
- Trauma or abuse
- PTSD
- Relationship or sexuality issues
- Grief
- Addictions
- Pain, fatigue, or headaches

Outcomes:

- Release stored tension
- Process unresolved emotions
- Deeper connections
- Authenticity
- Restore balance to their nervous system
- More resourced
- Greater compassion

Group work

Importance of connection:

- Witness
- Mirroring
- Safety

Kinesthetic Empathy

- Compassion
- Learning from others

Authentic Expression

Real Life!

Solo work

- In collaboration with psychotherapist
- More diagnosis specific
- Slower
- Engaging with the somatics of story
- Developing Resources

Trauma

Neuroscience validates that somatic therapies can do the following:

- *Draw out the sensory information that is blocked and frozen by trauma*
- *Help patients befriend (rather than suppress) the energies released by that inner experience*
- *Complete the self-preserving physical actions that were thwarted when they were trapped, restrained, or immobilized by terror.”*

The Body Keeps the Score- Bessel Van der Kolk

Sample Session

- Grounding
- Coming into the “animal body”
- Breath
- Listening/Noticing
- IFS/Parts work
- Integration

Practice

Don't practice to fix yourself, to improve yourself, to redeem yourself; rather, do it as an act of love, of deep warm friendship to yourself. In this way there is no longer any need for the subtle aggression of self-improvement, for the endless guilt of not doing enough. It offers the possibility of an end to the ceaseless round of trying so hard that wraps so many people's lives in a knot. Instead there is now meditation as an act of love. How endlessly delightful and encouraging.



Questions



Resources

Epigenetic Control of Experience-dependent Neural Plasticity-Zhaolan (Joe) Zhou, Ph.D. ,Department of Genetics,University of Pennsylvania

The Dynamic Brain: Neuroplasticity and Mental Health-Jill L. Kays, Psy.D., Robin A. Hurley, M.D., and Katherine H. Taber, Ph.D.

Leveraging Neuroplasticity to Enhance Adaptive Learning: The Potential for Synergistic Somatic-Behavioral Treatment Combinations to Improve Clinical Outcomes in Depression

<https://www.adta.org/faq>

<https://reliefmh.com/blog/dance-therapy-depression-anxiety/>

<https://www.besselvanderkolk.com/resources/the-body-keeps-the-score>

<https://bonniebainbridgecohen.com/>