Social Dance and Trauma Healing

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“We should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once.”

“I would believe only in a God who knows how to dance.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche
Session objectives

• Note general connection between dance and health/well-being
• Review key principles of “movement therapy”
• Identify favorable features of social dance as a treatment modality
• Consider common obstacles to incorporating dance in treatment
• Get an experiential “taste” of dance (time and participant willingness permitting!)
Specific health benefits of dance

Improving physical functioning and mobility

- Cardiac and respiratory endurance
- Lower limb stamina
- Balance
- Coordination
- Posture
Specific health benefits of dance

Developing cognitive functioning

- Working memory
- Sensorimotor functioning
- Attention span
- Concentration
- Tactile performance
- Reaction times
Specific health benefits of dance

Reducing mental stress

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Self-image
- Self-rated life satisfaction
- Sense of belonging
- Sense of purpose
Specific health benefits of dance

Lowering risk of chronic disease and related disabilities

- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Dementia
- Breast cancer
- Parkinson’s
Specific health benefits of dance

Actively participating in life

- Increase social interaction
- Expand social support system
- Deepen communication skills
- Broaden community and civic opportunities
- Stimulate senses
- Encourage reminiscence
- Motivate additional positive life changes
Clinical research findings

According to the American Dance Therapy Association (www.adta.org), clinical research establishes the effectiveness of dance to improve therapeutic outcomes in at least the following areas:

• Mood (depression, anxiety, vitality)
• Self-concept/esteem, body-image (cancer, children)
• Social/relationship skills (anti-violence/bullying)
• Capacity for empathy (e.g., staff caregivers)
• Stress management, self-regulation (trauma)
• Academic performance (e.g., reading fluency)
• Readiness for parenting (e.g., pregnancy support)
• Medical, psychomotor, neuro-functioning (PD, fibromyalgia)
Some studies


Focus on trauma...

More...

Principles of movement therapy (why it works)

• Mind and body interact continuously
• Mind, body, and spirit form a unity (“self”)
• Conscious and unconscious movement affects holistic functioning
• Movement is communication
• Therapeutic movement can address self-understanding and promote integration, affecting all dimensions of the self simultaneously
Favorable features of social dance

• Communication
• Cooperation
• Structure
• Mind-body exercise
• Community
• Touch and healthy sexuality
• Self and interpersonal awareness
Social dance treatment issues

• Touch tolerance (the “Tango test”)
• Structure tolerance
• Error tolerance
• Social interaction/group tolerance
• Presumption of adequate (if not “healthy”) levels of self-esteem, social competence, and mind-body integration
Practitioner challenges

• “But I can’t dance!”
  • “Stretch,” modeling, rapport-building
  • Good news: You really need not know very much

• Instructional resources/cost
  • USA Dance, local studios, itinerant instructors; video; rates are negotiable

• Facilities/equipment
  • Gymnasiums, community centers; in fact, any flat surface without a shag carpet!
  • iPod, speaker, playlists; any clothes that don’t bind, any shoes that don’t stick (or no shoes at all!)
Shall we dance?

• Waltz/rumba
  • Box, turning box, underarm turn, side breaks
• Cha-cha
  • Basic step, open break/underarm turn, crossover break
• Swing (East Coast)
  • Basic step (closed and open), underarm turn, she goes/he goes
• Line dance (Mambo)
• By the way…. It’s National Ballroom Dance Week!