

Dance/Movement Therapy: A healing modality for women who have been subjected to violence



“Dance/movement therapy affords women with the experience that their body is nothing to be ashamed of and invites them to access their power, sense of agency, and wisdom.”

Rooted in the mind-body connection, dance/movement therapy serves as a beneficial therapeutic approach when working with women who have experienced violence and oppression. Violence against women takes many forms: sexual violence, domestic violence, sex trafficking. This violence can occur in war torn countries, in dark allies, while women are at parties, on dates or in the privacy of their own homes. Violence against women often occurs in secrecy, which increases the victim's sense of helplessness. These attacks on women's bodies can leave women with physical scars, but most often with psychological scars that increase a sense of fear, hyperarousal, hyper-vigilance, shame, and self-blame. They can diminish one's sense of trust and wisdom in one's own body.

Dance/movement therapy is a therapeutic intervention that provides an opportunity for survivors to process their trauma memories cognitively and physically. Working with the neurobiological principles of trauma and of memory making, dance/movement therapists guide their clients in experiences with movement, breath, relaxation and creating a trauma narrative. This provides an opportunity for survivors to make meaning of their memories and their sensations as they relate to the traumatic memories, their sense of self and their bodies. When a survivor is able to make meaning of the trauma and regulate her sympathetic nervous system she will then have the capacity to address behaviors or relationship patterns that may have resulted from the violence.

Violence against women is an effort to disempower women. Dance/movement therapy affords women with the experience that their body is nothing to be ashamed of and invites them to access their power, sense of agency, and wisdom. See www.adta.org for more information about dance/movement therapy.

Selected publications on dance/movement therapy for women who have experienced trauma or violence

“Dance/movement therapy is the psychotherapeutic use of movement which furthers the emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration of the individual.”

- American Dance Therapy Association

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