

Dance/Movement Therapy & Alzheimer's Disease



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Dance/movement therapy (DMT) uniquely addresses the needs of adults with Alzheimer's disease and dementia by relying on movement and other nonverbal behavior as the primary means of communicating and connecting. Interacting in this manner de-emphasizes verbal language skills and cognitive deficits and allows persons with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to participate in the group from a place of ability, rather than disability.

Group movement, no matter how limited, releases a feeling of energetic activity and a pleasurable sense of the here-and-now. The rhythmic, repetitive movement facilitated by a dance/movement therapist helps foster perceptual and cognitive organization, providing a structure in time and space for the safe expression of feelings. The motor action often sparks memories from the past, which in turn helps confused individuals become more alert and organized. The therapist encourages this ongoing reminiscing process and the expression of accompanying feelings, verbally and non-verbally.

Disease that impairs memory also affects self-image and esteem; persons with dementia often become depressed and frustrated by their decreased abilities. Ritualized group movements expressing mourning, frustration, and anger, in addition to joy and laughter, allow for the release of these emotions and group bonding, fostering an atmosphere in which the elderly can regain a sense of self-worth and revitalization.

DMT groups with adults with Alzheimer's disease and dementia are facilitated in skilled nursing facilities, adult day care programs, assisted living residences and psychiatric hospitals.

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

-American Dance Therapy Association

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