

Dance and Mental Health

Dance and Creative Movement have been proven to:

- Improve blood flow to the brain
- Reduce inflammation
- Lower stress hormones
- Promote brain health
- Foster creativity
- Foster adaptability
- Build a child's sense of self-worth
- Develop greater cognitive flexibility and self-direction
- Improve a child's ability to regulate their emotions and reactions
- Empower children to overcome obstacles

Dance as Mindful Movement & Guided Creative Movement:

- When coupled with focus on breath and the present moment, dance as mindful movement activates the vagus nerve, which brings the human body to a more restful and less reactive state.
- Research shows that most of our daily communication is nonverbal. Traumatic memories are encoded in the nonverbal parts of the brain. Stress and trauma live in the body. Guided creative movement and mindful movement help us release pain and emotion and encourage us to “move” forward.
- Guided creative movement provides a safe environment for healthy brain development in young children.

What are the main physiological benefits of mindfulness for a child?:

1. Positively effects mental well-being
2. Reduces stress and anxiety
3. Boosts focus and attention
4. Helps children deal with difficult emotions
5. Mindfulness helps us turn up the volume on our own intuition and turn down the volume on negative thoughts about ourselves.

According to the Child Mind Institute Children's Mental Health Report, 80% of children with anxiety disorders are not receiving the treatment they require. Barriers to help include clinician availability, cultural literacy, cost, accessibility, and stigma surrounding mental health conditions and treatment.

Dance and movement can help fill important gaps.

Dance as mindful movement strategies can be used in combination with services people are already receiving. And they can provide an accessible and affordable option in school and community settings.

INTERESTING READ ON DANCE TO TREAT ANXIETY & DEPRESSION:

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/dance-and-movement-therapy-holds-promise-for-treating-anxiety-depression-306630>

PRACTICAL WAYS TO FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1 - Opening and closing circles are restorative practices that build social emotional learning. You can ask students to respond openly to a prompt, share one word, or have them reflect privately in combination with a movement activity.

2 – Take time to focus on the breath in some capacity each time you have students move.

3 - Have students take deep breaths facing inward to the circle, placing hands on their head, chest, bellies, etc. Have them inhale and reach their arms up and exhale drop them to sides. Have everyone place their hands on each other's shoulder blades and breathe deeply into their backs and their peers' hands. This helps us to connect as a group and self-regulate as a community.

4 – Adapt Freeze Dance to be mindful movement by asking purposeful questions before they start to move. IE: Moving in a way that reflects how the day is going for them, Dancing out emotions, etc.