Expressive Arts as Mindful & Healing Engagement

Coming to Our Senses through Embodied Awareness

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If you have felt marking pens and white paper...get them ready

“Neuroscience research shows that the only way we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our inner experience.”

— Bessel van der Kolk

Trauma Recovery: Coming to Our Senses

• “Neurobiology has taught us that we need to “come to our senses” in developing effective components for addressing trauma...”

• “It is essential to “tell the story” of traumatic experiences via nonverbal, implicit forms of communication.”

—Trauma and Expressive Arts Therapy: Brain, Body, and Imagination in the Healing Process

Expressive Arts Are Often Implicit, Non-Linguistic Processes—a “Feeling of What Happens”

Storytelling is a non-linguistic process...Telling stories precedes language.

—Antonio Damasio “The Feeling of What Happens”

...traumatic experiences may not always be encoded as explicit memory and may be stored as nonverbal, sensory fragments.

—Bessel van der Kolk (1994; 2014)
The Role of “Embodied Awareness” in Trauma Reparation

The often gut wrenching experiences of trauma rob us of pleasure and aliveness. Aliveness is not something we can be “talked into.” Instead, it is experienced in both mind and body and particularly on a somatosensory level.

Neuroscience tells us plenty about why Expressive Arts are reparative.

But we know something else...

These practices emerged as rituals, spiritual traditions, procedures, and ceremonies, often in direct response to trauma and loss.

Overall purpose: A return to psychological, physical and social equilibrium.

Movement—The Foundation

~ DANCING
~ YOGA
~ BILATERAL MOVEMENT
~ SENSORY INTEGRATION
~ ENERGY ARTS [TAI CHI, DISOHN, AIKIDO, ETC]
~ HULA, SUNDANCE, CORROBOREE, ETC
~ LABYRINTH [WALKING]
~ PLAY

The Three Feedback Systems

The Foundation of Mindfulness in Expressive Arts Therapy

Exteroception refers to the sensory experience of the external environment facilitated by the body (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin) to the brain.

Proprioception refers to the sensory feedback about the position of the body as related to gravity. This awareness includes knowing if you are sitting upright, leaning to the side, or maintaining balance while standing or walking.

Interoception involves the sensory experience of the internal body.

These three sensory feedback systems create a felt sense of self and the foundations of body awareness.

Expressive Arts Therapy: A Body-Based Psychotherapy With Bottom Up & Top Down Trauma Processing Frameworks

Bottom Up Processing:

Address trauma by bringing awareness to sensations and implicit, non-verbal memories in the body.

“Body-based” Movement, Dance, Sound, Music, Gesture, Mark Making

Top Down Processing:

Addresses trauma by bringing awareness through language with an emphasis on explicit and cognitive experiences.

“Brain-Wise” Storytelling/Narrative, Creative Writing, Enactment

Healing Practices Across Cultures—Universal Phenomena We Can Apply to Clinical Practice

Four-Part Model for Trauma (Malchiodi, 2019; 2020)

MOVEMENT
SOUND
STORYTELLING
SILENCE
The Many Forms of Silence
[including Self-Regulatory Experiences] in Expressive Arts

- MINDFULNESS/MEDITATION
- CONTEMPLATION
- ART MAKING
- YOGA
- LABYRINTH [SILENT WALKING]
- FEEL SENSE/LOOKING INSIDE/INTEROCEPTION
- WITNESSING THE ARTS [THEATER, PERFORMANCE, MUSEUM, ETC]

Expressive Arts Help Us to Focus, Find the Felt Sense, & Flow = Mindfulness-Based Experiences

- Focus on the here-and-now while engaged in the process of expression or creation;
- Find the Felt Sense of how we feel in the here-and-now;
- Flow or the timeless sensation experienced in the process of satisfying expression or creation.

Let's Work with Some Very Simple Expressive Arts Mindfulness...An Experience You Can Apply in Your Telehealth Work

Working with Ventral Vagal Network—“The Sigh”
If you have felt markers and paper—grab your drawing materials!
Community and Connection: Mediating the Healing Practices And the Challenge During the Time of the Pandemic

Thank You!

Google Me, You'll Find Me!

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