

Dance for Connection

to self, others, and the world around
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Come Join the Dance: Bringing Dance Programs to Older Adults & People with Dementia

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This workshop presents a model for a dance/expressive movement program which is fun, engaging and esteem-building for older adults and people living with dementia. The structure is designed to incorporate the movements and offerings of all participants, regardless of physical or cognitive abilities. Research has found that dance has many benefits which range from a greater feeling of vitality, improved mood and reduced agitation to more coherent speech, increased neuronal pathways and possible protection against dementia.

Two ways of relating: Tom Kitwood citing Martin Buber

1. I-It implies using other as object... a way of maintaining a safe distance, of avoiding risks; no danger of vulnerabilities being exposed.
2. I-Thou implies feeling towards the other; self-disclosure, spontaneity...

“Daring to relate to another as Thou may involve anxiety or even suffering, but Buber sees it also as the path to fulfillment and joy.”

Transforming the culture of care from:
medical model ➔ person-centered ➔ relationship-centered ➔ “human flourishing”. (McCormack)

My goals and objectives

My intention in leading groups for people with dementia is: to create healing relationships through dance, music, props, caring, humor and joy to transform the space into a dance of interaction where people can be, and know they are seen, heard, and valued; to provide an experience in which each person feels an essential part of a group, a larger whole, one that is vibrant and alive with possibility and which they can then internalize.

My larger intention is to publicize that while dementia is difficult, it is not the disaster which people picture. There is also the possibility for genuine, heartfelt exchanges which are intimate, joyful, and uplifting.

My goal is for people to feel an increased sense of connection to self ~ body, heart, mind and spirit.

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Practical details

- Duration: 30 - 60 minutes
- Number of participants. 8 to 10 is a good size, no more than 16 optimal
- Space
- **Minimize distractions**

Encourage people to move joyfully through the use of:

- props
- familiar and fun music
- encouragement of movements they can easily do, i.e., breathing, tapping
- singing or humming
- humor
- imagery

Structuring a Typical Dance Group

- Create a safe, compassionate & playful space:
 - focus on relationship
 - intention
 - emotional tone
 - sensitivity to culture
 - opportunities for release
 - address most needy of attention first
 - focus on every person/member of the group
- Ritual beginnings and endings
- Loose, open structure that allows for contributions of every person
- Lead by following
- Model
- Demonstrate
- Adapt for physical and cognitive levels and socio-cultural backgrounds
- Engage and include staff to model new ways of interacting

Maximize client responses by:

- being playful
- naming the person and the movement s/he is doing
- praising the movement they are doing
- asking others to move like (name of person)
- using props
- contrasting qualities of movement (i.e., if movement is high, ask for low, if slow, ask for fast)

The greater the dementia, the more:

- love
- structure

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- singing
- marching
- focus
- stimulation
- modeling
- individual attention
- alternating focus between group & individual
- group leader holds image of group

Repeatable structure:

- Familiar Beginnings
 - Recognize each person individually
 - Shake hands and make eye contact
 - Say hello as a group
 - Play the same beginning song
- Warm-up
 - Start slowly
 - Move the parts of the body
- Middles
 - Play with props and/or themes.
- Endings - Time to say good-bye.
 - Use the same ending song.
 - Create a simple ritual.
- Throughout
 - Make space for their contributions or ideas.

Sample Movement Words

- stretch
- bend
- twist
- shake
- wiggle
- swing

Movement is Force in Time and Space

Force

Strong - Light
Heavy - Weak

Time

Quick - Slow

Space

Direct - Multifocus

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Encourage them to:

- use non-dominant hand
- alternate arms and legs
- use parts of the body that are limited
- **use the torso**
- stand
- **surprise themselves**

Sequence Music on Playlist

- Love/Social Awareness
- Names
- Warm-up
- Irresistible Rhythms
- Recuperation
- Group Focus/ Cohesion
- Good-bye

Why dance with older adults and people with dementia?

Dance

- stimulates social interaction, alleviates loneliness and isolation
- to be aware that we are communicating nonverbally
- enhances mood
- slows the progression of cognitive symptoms
- reduces agitation
- increases alertness through kinesthetic modes of knowing
- awakens memories and associations
- helps maintain range of movement
- flexibility
- strength
- provides opportunities for self expression
- encourages people to be in their bodies while they still have bodies
- offers opportunities to be playful
- to make choices
- and for success, enhancing self-esteem
- demonstrably improves quality of life
- a sense of vitality
- creativity
- and most importantly, to have fun

Props to use

- Musical playlist customized for the people in the group
- 24" latex balloons
- **Octaband®**, www.octaband.com
- Ribbon wands
- Colorful chiffon scarves

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- Colorful plastic shakers

Music to use

Start with irresistible familiar music, later including unfamiliar music.

- Music about Love
- Music for Warming Up
- Music for Names
- Music for Imagery
- Music for Marching
- Music for Rhythm (Caribbean, Latin)
- Music for Flowing Movement (waltzes)
- Music for Call and Response (Sh Boom: Life Could Be A Dream) Music for Shaking
- Music for Humor
- Music for Party Dances (Macarena)
- Music from Other Cultures Music for Singing Along

Tom Kitwood:

“Contact with dementia ... can - and ... should - take us out of our customary patterns of over-busyness, hypercognitivism and extreme talkativity, into a way of being in which emotion and feeling are given a much larger place.

People who have dementia, for whom the life of the emotions is often intense, and without the ordinary forms of inhibition, may have something important to teach the rest of humankind.

They are asking us, so to speak, to heal the rift in experience that western culture has engendered, and inviting us to return to aspects of our being that are much older in evolutionary terms: more in tune with the body and its functions, closer to the life of instinct.”

Additional Resources

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- Kitwood, T. (1997). *Dementia reconsidered: The person comes first*. Oxford: Oxford.
- Newman-Bluestein, D. (June 2017). Improving Quality of Life for People with Dementia through Dance/Movement Therapy. *Creativity & Human Development*. Issue 5.
- Newman-Bluestein, D. & Hill, H. (Autumn 2010). Movement as the medium for connection, empathy, playfulness. *Journal for Dementia Care*. 24-28.
- Verghese, J., Lipton, R. B., Katz, M. J., Hall, C. B., Derby, C. A., Kuslansky, G., ... & Buschke, H. (2003). Leisure activities and the risk of dementia in the elderly. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 348(25), 2508-2516.