

## *Dance for Connection*

to self, others, and the world around

### **Dance/Movement Therapy**

137 Wiswall Road, Newton, MA 02459

617-969-2436

dbluebirds@rcn.com

### **Dance/ Expressive Movement to Engage, Inspire and Uplift People with Dementia**

While dementia negatively affects the cognitive faculties of people living with dementia, their social and emotional capacities may actually improve. Surprisingly, given their often inert or lethargic state, especially when living in an institution, people with significant dementia are often still quite capable of moving energetically. However, unable to initiate, they often move little as they may be dependent on caregivers to provide sufficient sensory stimulation to engage their intrinsic motivation.

This workshop will present ways to structure groups which are sensitive to the needs and abilities of those present and which elicit self-expression, liveliness, and increased socialization. Focusing on movement built on strengths and abilities and interactions in the present moment, the therapist creates a safe, compassionate and playful space where everyone can engage in a way that is enjoyable and esteem-building. Because memories are stored in the bodies' cells, movement often triggers reminiscence. The therapist affirms each person's contributions.

Recent studies have found that dance has many benefits ranging from a greater feeling of vitality, improved mood, and reduced agitation to more coherent speech, increased neuronal pathways and possible protection against dementia. "Dance is at root an affirmation of the vital body. . . . The lived body is a body of feeling, an interrelated system of life . . . . [I]t is life engendering." (Fraleigh, 1996, p. 55-56).

As the therapist fosters experiences which are novel, psychosocially enriching, and meaningful, they provide the opportunity for the formation of new neurons and synapses, which may well delay the onset of dementia (Lora Wilson Mau, 2010).

#### **Encourage people to move joyfully through the use of:**

- props
- familiar and fun music
- encouragement of movements they can easily do, such as tapping, breathing
- singing or humming
- imagery

#### **Structuring a Typical DMT Group**

- Create a safe, compassionate & playful space:
  - focus on relationship
  - intention

- emotional tone
- sensitivity to culture
- address most needy of attention first
- focus on every person/member of the group
- Ritual beginnings and endings
- Loose, open structure
- 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:**

- naming the resident and the movement s/he is doing
- praising the movement they are doing
- asking others to move like (name of resident)
- 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
- singing
- marching
- focus
- stimulation
- modeling
- individual attention
- alternating focus between group & individual
- group leader holds image of group

**Basic elements of movement along a continuum:**

Force/ Weight - light - strong

Time - slowly to quickly

Space - indirect/multi-focused - direct

Flow - free - bound

## PROPS TO USE

iPod player or CD tape player & cd's

Colorful chiffon scarves

**Octaband®**, [www.octaband.com](http://www.octaband.com)

Rhythm instruments

24" latex balloons, [www.bulkballoons.com](http://www.bulkballoons.com)

your imagination/ paper bags

Ribbon wands

## MUSIC

Use music with an irresistible beat. Start with familiar music, later including unfamiliar music.

- about love
- for names
- for warming up
- for rhythm (Caribbean)
- for flowing movement (waltzes)
- for Call and Response (Sh Boom: Life Could Be A Dream)
- for shaking
- for humor
- party dances (Macarena)
- from other cultures
- with imagery
- for singing along (especially for people with advanced dementia)
- for marching (especially for people with advanced dementia)

### **Why dance with older adults and people with dementia? The benefits:**

#### **Increased**

- connection to themselves, their rhythm, their bodies, their feelings, memories, and thoughts
- connections to others, if only group leader
- alertness
- focus
- spontaneity
- liveliness, joy
- flexibility
- circulation
- verbalization
- vitality
- mood

**Decreased**

- tension
- agitation
- anxiety
- lethargy
- isolation

**Additional Resources**

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