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By Jamie Marich



As a professional with many years of service in the recovery field, I have observed that one of the most significant causes of relapse is the inability to address body-level distress caused by unresolved traumas.

When I was getting sober, the initial treatment interventions I received did an excellent job of helping me address my mind and my spirit. However, little was done to address the changing needs of my body. In many treatment and recovery cultures, people are not taught to recognize the powerful messages their bodies give them. This omission is a major educational gap.

Dancing Mindfulness is a creation that flows from my own experience with simultaneous addiction and trauma recovery. It provides a meditative experience that can be practiced alone or with others. Dancing Mindfulness can be taught in community settings, such as yoga studios or churches, or within clinical treatment settings. Participants are not required to have any experience in yoga, meditation or dance. Rather, students are simply asked to come as they are with an open mind.

A facilitator leads participants into discovering the power of their breath and their own natural movements. Following a gentle stretch series, participants are brought to their feet and encouraged to “let it loose” and dance. When supported by the energy of others taking the same risk, many find this practice an incredibly cathartic experience. Others may find themselves overwhelmed and intimidated. Those who are hesitant to dance are encouraged to acknowledge their experience without judgment. They may instead use their breath and movement to move through their fear, or they may opt out of the dancing. Personal safety is stressed by Dancing Mindfulness facilitators. No one should ever feel forced to participate in any component of the practice.

Mindfulness is the practice of being in the present moment and paying attention to one’s feelings, thoughts and sensations without judgment. Although this approach originated as a Buddhist meditation practice, there is

nothing inherently Buddhist about the practice of returning to the present moment. There are many ways to practice mindfulness, including traditional seated meditation or breath work, or through more physical channels such as walking, dancing or creating something. The original Sanskrit word from which our modern term mindfulness is derived simply means to “come back to awareness.” Some people are discouraged because they have difficulty staying in the moment; however, the intent of the practice is to bring your awareness back to the moment, even when you find your thoughts drifting.

When Dancing Mindfulness participants allow themselves to be mindful and practice this attitude of non-judgment, they are usually amazed at how easily they can move. Some are initially hesitant to try Dancing Mindfulness because they have a preconceived notion that they can’t dance. Unfortunately, many people judge their ability to “dance well” by what is portrayed in the media. When allowed to come into a mindful place, many people will realize that they can dance.



Any type of exercise can be productive to recovery; however, dance is particularly powerful, especially when it is of the non-technical “just go with it” variety. Dance allows me to access my own creativity in a very powerful way by increasing my resilience, which then allows me to solve problems more effectively. With twelve years of recovery, these skills are vital in preventing stagnation in my personal program.

Some may struggle with the improvisation and creativity of Dancing Mindfulness because they are accustomed to being told what to do with their bodies. In Dancing Mindfulness, personal creativity is an integral part of the healing.

The community Dancing Mindfulness classes I facilitate have always attracted many participants who identify as being in recovery. Mindi B., a woman with seven years of sobriety, shared:

“As a recovering woman, Dancing Mindfulness has been a true gift for practicing self-care. I am a recovering alcoholic and a survivor with PTSD. Learning Dancing Mindfulness has reintroduced me to beautiful music, nonjudgmental movement and dance, as well as a gentle, fun way to relax. I continue to heal each time. Dancing mindfully promotes self-care, a sense of belonging with others and taking myself less seriously. Dancing Mindfulness is the piece of my recovery puzzle I needed.”

This practice continues to grow as it heals and transforms people throughout the world. Since its beginning over two years ago, more than 100 Dancing Mindfulness facilitators have been certified in the US, Puerto Rico and abroad. It has been implemented in many venues: treatment centers, adolescent residential programs, domestic violence shelters, recovery retreats and community settings, such as yoga schools and churches.

A major educational gap occurs when people are not taught to recognize the powerful messages their bodies give them. An even wider gap exists when recovering people are not taught to use their bodies in the service of their recovery.

Embodied dance continues to play a major role in my own recovery and overall wellness. It warms my heart to share the practice with so many other people and to see it branch out into so many different settings. My book, *Dancing Mindfulness: A Creative Path to Healing and Transformation*, will be published by Skylight Paths Press in the fall of 2015.

Jamie Marich, PhD, LPCC-S, LICDC-CS, is the creator of the Dancing Mindfulness practice. She has a private practice and an educational initiative called Mindful Ohio in her home state. She travels internationally training on topics related to trauma-informed education. She is the author of EMDR Made Simple, Trauma and the Twelve Steps and Trauma Made Simple. You may contact her at her website dancingmindfulness.com.

