

# **Movement based Self-care techniques for Therapists & Trainers**

**By Tripura Kashyap**

**Movement Therapist/Choreographer/Dance Educator**

**&**

**Co-Founder, Creative Movement Therapy Association of India (CMTAI)**

“It is vital for helping professionals, to recognize the symptoms of secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. If you experience any of those signs or symptoms, realize that you are not alone and that secondary trauma and compassion fatigue are treatable. Work to establish and maintain a healthy balance between your professional work and personal life. Make a concerted effort to keep your body, mind, and health in good shape by eating well and getting plenty of sleep.

Exercise also helps, so taking a walk with a friend, riding your bike around the park, joining a gym or exercise group are some examples of simple steps you can take toward self-care and personal well-being. In addition, ensue or strengthen creative outlets such as drawing, painting, photography, dance, acting, writing, crafting, and other similar stimulating activities.” (Self-Care for Therapists, n.d.)

Yes, we all need self-care! We are caregivers in one form or the other – we could be Creative Arts Therapists, Teachers, Facilitators, or Trainers working with groups of children or adults (with or without special needs), We could be facilitating individual sessions too or working with couples, We might be working in a de-addiction center or moving with the elderly in a senior citizens' facility - In all these instances (considering that we are empathetic beings) we absorb and carry home some of that psychic material - physically, mentally and emotionally.

The mind might get sucked into a spiral of thoughts about something a client or student might have shared or the therapist might blame him/herself for offering a movement experience that completely disturbs a client in the initial sessions or he/she might feel inadequate and frustrated about not being able to answer a teenager's query

in the right spirit and at times may not be able to partner the client in resolving his/her issues.

These challenging experiences (apart from the positive contributions we make) in therapeutic work leave many traces on our mind-body continuum. Each of us want these residual feelings and thoughts to be released and cleansed out of our system, so we have the mind space to think more clearly and be more effective in creating safe spaces for groups or individuals we work with.

Apart from being mostly involved with training people in movement therapy, I also work with individual clients and mixed gender groups on personal growth using dance and movement. I occasionally work with children, women, and adolescents exploring the three facets of movement with them – the Expressive, the Therapeutic and the Creative.

Personally, I have found that since movement is the medium that I primarily utilize in my work, I too need dance and movement to rejuvenate myself, to nourish my body and nurture my spirit – this might also stem from the fact that I have been a dancer & choreographer all my life.

Therefore I have done movement meditation practices to 'let go' my unexpressed emotional toxins, to 'search within' for patience and calmness and to 'reach out' for love and care. Half an hour of this free movement experience (in silence or with instrumental music) has the power to alter my state of being and give me the natural 'high' that keeps me optimistic, resilient and emotionally alive.

One more movement experience that I found did all this for me was dancing to the 'Five Rhythms' created by Gabriella Roth (Vozdra. 2013). As I explored different movement patterns, energies and rhythms based on 'flow', 'Staccato' 'Chaos', 'Lyrical' and 'Stillness' that Roth speaks about, I emerged each time out of this experience a new person filled with a sense of positive mental and emotional well-being. Interestingly I also felt I could stand up to and deal more effectively with any personal or professional crisis that came up.

I also realised that however powerful this kind of movement practice was, I could not go through the same structure daily and had to change the framework of

movement experiences each time. On one day if I had gone through the ‘Five Rhythms’ practice on another day it would be a completely a different experience.

I would choreograph simple, repetitive movement patterns gliding or sliding through different directions in space to Buddhist chants and practice them with complete precision, focus and energy for an hour or so. This experience helped me gain a sense of purpose and motivation to go through my therapeutic work and life as well in an organized manner without being distracted.

As part of other self-care movement rituals I constructed for myself, I used the idea of ‘The floor as my friend’ to express pent-up emotions - Moving only on the lower levels of space, using the earth to support different parts of my body. This movement ritual was inspired by David Zambrano’s modern dance technique titled Flying low (Flying-Low Dance Technique, 2015)

Another activity was that of moving my body slowly, the way it felt like, in a small spatial zone with half-closed eyes in silence. I paid attention to my breathing, made vocal sounds and was completely aware of various sensations in my body. I also made sure I was one with my body, being conscious of what each part of my body was doing throughout the activity. (Kashyap, T. 2005)

Lastly I have gone into a movement trance (a truly immersive experience) by imagining a ‘fantasy space’ – it may be inside a self-lit cave or on a beach (between the sand and sea) or being in a forest full of natural sounds or standing on top of a mountain. I have moved freely visualizing these spaces in my mind’s eye and have responded with movements and breath to the imagined sounds and ambience of these spaces.

All these above mentioned self-care practices have continuously enhanced my self-awareness, helped me connect to, acknowledge and express my emotions, reduce tension in different parts of my body, increase my physical stamina, deepen my intuition, sharpen my mental alertness and physical reflexes. As I underwent these self-care movement practices, I was curious to know how other Creative Arts Therapists used movement practices in their own lives to rejuvenate themselves. Here is what some of them had to say-

Katia Verreault (Dance therapist / Director of the Moving Foundation, The Netherlands) says she dances the Tango and Salsa. She also practices Yoga and Yoga nidra every day which refuels her and grounds her. She participates in experiential workshops and training programs in Dance Movement Therapy or other body-based approaches - These practices have moulded her into being a compassionate guide not just to others but also towards herself. They have inspired her to adopt a non-judgemental approach in her therapy practice and her life.

Reetu Jain, (Therapeutic movement facilitator / Co-founder, CMTAI, (Delhi) has undergone personal movement sessions with a colleague whenever she felt she was dealing with something that might get in the way of her movement sessions with children or just life in general. She has also participated in workshops whenever available - One such workshop was of Bettina Wenzel (a dance therapist) in which the use of voice and movement were extremely beneficial and critical for her in coping with recent additions to her family and her child's illness. So much emerged from her in that workshop that was unknown to her! It is these experiences that reiterated the power of movement-based practice for her.

Vonita Singh (Kathak Dance practitioner / Director of Movement Mantra (Dubai) does 'Mindful movement' with people with Parkinsons. As part of her self-care practices, she integrates Yogasanas and different stretches using various breath patterns as accompaniment. She also puts on her favorite music (which she wants to use for her clients) and moves to it, evolving the kind of movement language that she likes while improvising and exploring patterns from Kathak.

Avantika Malhautra (Expressive Arts Therapist / Director, Soul Canvas (Mumbai) does Yoga regularly and walks by the Sea or in nature. She believes in walking meditation as a self-care practice and does free movement to music whenever time and space permits. Apart from these she says meditation, art journaling and listening to music offer much support to her.

Purvaa Sampath, (Music Therapist / Founder, Mayahs Universe (Bengaluru) does different kinds of body parts stretches - especially for her neck, shoulders and arms. She tends to hold a lot of tension in those parts and doing slow neck rotations and stretching her arms sideways and upwards from time to time helps release the tension. She also enjoys walking in rhythm to music that she listens to on her

earphones - this is not only enjoyable but also puts her in a meditative state especially when she has had a long or stressful day.

Neha Christopher (Dance Therapist (Delhi) has some really specific movement care practices to share! Before a difficult session, she usually takes off her shoes and lets different parts of her feet touch the ground (for example, one toe or heel at a time). This helps her feel grounded, connected and sometimes wakes her up! A Self-stimulating massage on her face and neck helps her relax and she also listens to her favourite music playlist while laying down in feotal position.

On the other hand, when she feels like she is merging with a client and/or begins to pick up on their low mood or feels overwhelmed, she finds rolling on the floor very effective in helping her realign with herself. It gives different parts of her body a chance to feel the ground and come back to itself one roll at a time. Punching helps too! She returns home and usually punches a bean bag to get in touch with her own strength.

At other times, when she feels intense compassion fatigue, making spiral-like moves with different body parts helps her to process the compassion fatigue and take care of herself. Massaging her fingers and toes increases her blood circulation and makes her feel warm. This also helps in slowing her down and re-centering herself. She says “50 small jumps on the spot helps me alleviate stress, pumps my blood and makes me feel energized. I might even add sounds to develop this movement further which also helps me with self-regulation. When one begins to burn out, Stretching with the help of a gym ball is especially helpful in releasing the different psychical and physical blocks in the body”

Bhakti Veda (Expressive Arts Therapist / Founder, Praanah (Mumbai) does a meditative body scan daily to give attention to her entire body and all its parts - muscles, bones, blood, heartbeats etc. She sends these parts a new energy, a kind of flush to keep going. She also practices being mindful in everything she does and listens to music and dances whenever she gets a chance - Having a child has just made that so much easier! She and her son dance together whenever music is played. She also ends her yoga sessions with a movement improvisation or moves the way she wants to between the Asanas.

Sukriti Dua (Movement therapy practitioner / CMTAI (Delhi) uses ‘Authentic Movement’ whilst responding to different kinds of music. She usually chooses music that may be in tandem with what she really wants to express and lets her body take the lead to move. Sometimes if she needs to express a specific feeling or an idea she may use lyric-based songs that help bring that out. She has also found benefit in freestyle movement stretches after an exhausting day to clear her head.

Devika Mehta (Dance Therapist & co-founder, Synchrony (Mumbai) says for her it's more about learning new movement practices – it could be a dance form, a body conditioning technique, or Tai chi. She also maintains her own reflective practice of moving every day consciously for 5 minutes in the morning and at night. She manages to take free-style movement breaks during the day when she feels overwhelmed by her sessions with children or adults.

There is no doubt that movement makes us feel grounded, strengthens us from within and creates a centering experience. We also feel in the ‘here and now’ and are more attuned for sessions with our clients or students. When we access our kinaesthetic intelligence through movement, we adapt to different situations with ease, we are spontaneous and connect better with people’s needs and issues. Self-care practices help us maintain patience and calmness which enable us to contribute more positively to our clients’ growth and well-being.

So don’t forget to put on your oxygen mask before helping others to put on theirs!

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