

# What is dance movement psychotherapy?

August 16 2017, by Vicky Karkou

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) uses the body, movement and dance as a way of expressing oneself and findings ways of exploring and addressing psychological problems or difficulties. It is an approach to psychological treatment that does not rely on talking about problems as the only way of finding solutions.

According to the [Association of Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK](#):

"DMP recognises [body movement](#) as an implicit and expressive instrument of communication and expression. DMP is a relational process in which client and therapist engage in an empathic creative process using body movement and dance to assist integration of emotional, cognitive, physical, social and spiritual aspects of self."

It is often regarded as one of the arts therapies, which also includes [music therapy](#) and [dramatherapy](#), and a type of [embodied psychotherapy](#), and also a relatively new profession, founded in the 1940s in the US and only in the 1980s in Britain. It is also practised in Australia and Germany. In all cases, therapists receive specific training and licence to practise in the discipline and offer their services to a wide range of vulnerable people, working in private practice, hospitals, schools, social services, charities, care homes or prisons offering one-to-one or group work.

In these different settings, practitioners may follow different approaches but they all adopt a specific direction based on the needs of the clients. [Our early research](#) outlined some of the common features of this therapy across settings and client populations.

- **Dance:** a range of different practices including breath, posture, gesture, pedestrian movement, rhythmical movement and – less often – a more technical or style-specific form of dancing. Skill is not a requirement for people to begin this therapy and learning steps isn't what takes place within sessions.
- **Embodiment:** the connection one may have with your own physical self is of high value because it can support a "body-mind" integration.
- **Creativity:** the process that enables patients to find new solutions to problems.
- **Imagery, symbolism and metaphor:** important tools used to access unconscious or difficult feelings such as anger, shame or

fear. Using these tools allows the patient to work through problematic issues indirectly.

- Non-verbal communication: people don't always have the words to express what they are feeling. Sometimes it is easier to reach and communicate emotions to other people non-verbally.

## Does it work?

[Our research](#) suggests that DMP can contribute to a person's overall well-being. But, to confidently answer the question of whether it is effective as a treatment, there is a need to improve the number, size and quality of the studies in this area. Both practitioners and researchers are still exploring what are the important components of this psychological intervention that contribute towards positive change.

[Results](#) from systematic reviews of studies with all client groups suggest that DMP can have a relatively large impact on a wide range of symptoms. The authors conclude that the degree to which DMP can achieve therapeutic change can be compared to other forms of psychotherapy. A more [recent study](#) also suggested that this form of therapy can increase quality of life, well-being, mood, body-image and can offer substantial decrease in levels of depression.

Other reviews look at work with different client populations. For example, [we found](#) that DMP is a promising intervention in the treatment of depression when compared to standard care, especially with adults.

Studies on effectiveness of DMP on [people with schizophrenia](#) suggest that it can reduce symptoms such as apathy, lethargy, blunted emotional responses and social withdrawal. Improved quality of life was the [main finding](#) from the review of studies on DMP in cancer care. A [review](#) on the treatment of dementia and a study on [autism](#) suggest that further

research is needed. But in all cases the results seem positive, making this form of therapy a very attractive alternative to conventional psychotherapies.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: What is dance movement psychotherapy? (2017, August 16) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-08-movement-psychotherapy.html>

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