

# Making the Connection with Body-mind Therapy

*"The body is merely the visibility of the soul, the psyche; and the soul is the psychological experience of the body. So it is one and the same thing." -C. G. Jung*

## Re-connecting Body, Mind, & Heart

I cried during my first yoga class. I was reclining in a pose that stretched the top of my thigh; the instructor spoke of how much the quadriceps muscles do for us—they climb stairs, walk on concrete, and power the legs. Mine were doing much more than this since they pounded 20 miles of pavement each week and compulsively lifted weights in the gym, feeding my obsession with exercise and staying thin. My legs revealed all of this to me as I attempted to surrender to the discomfort of the yoga pose. While the instructor spoke of compassion and gratitude for legs and muscles and body, I became painfully aware of how I was at war with my body...how I used exercise to disconnect from myself. This was the beginning of a lifelong journey of reconnecting my body, mind, and heart.

During movement, such as yoga, dance, or martial arts, people often express an experience of "presence," explained by psychologist D. W. Krueger as the connection of the left and right brain hemispheres. Talk therapy is useful for a client to "understand" his/herself, but not always the key for a person to make a deep internal connection between mind and body as well as hemispheres of the brain. Where talk therapy is limited, body-mind therapy offers an alternative to enable a deep internal connection, which can ignite lasting transformation. Body-mind therapy comes in many forms—the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Body-Mind Centering, Hakomi, Psychodrama, Core Energetics, Psychomotor Therapy and Gestalt Therapy to name a few.

## Mind-Body Unity

"Our most refined thoughts and best actions, our greatest joys and deepest sorrows use the body as a yardstick. The mind had to be first about the body or it could not have been." -Antonio Damasio (Descartes' Error)

The intellect can be deceiving. We can trick ourselves into thinking that everything is okay when that is not true beyond the surface. But the body never lies. Beliefs, memories, and emotions are stored in the very cells and tissues of the body. As we look to the body's wisdom for healing, we access deeper truths.

The brain and body can work together to accentuate or reduce any state of the body-mind. It is believed that if we focus on changing a cognitive thought pattern, then the state of the body will change. For example, if a person has anxiety, he/she might begin to recognize and restructure thought processes through the common "self talk" technique. Repeatedly changing a message that anxiety is bad to "it's okay; I'm just overstressed. I don't have to get anxious" will eventually shift all the components of the feedback loop.

The body-mind unity suggests that focusing on the bodily sensations with equal integrity as thought can also help a client shift. When we bring awareness to the bodily sensations of anxiety, we allow them to complete their necessary physiological cycle, causing an internal change. According to Susan Aposhyan, Psychotherapist and author of Body-Mind Psychotherapy, "The mutual interaction of feedback between brain centers and body systems can begin anywhere." Transformation can begin in the brain or in the body. Using simple physical movement, or breath as a therapeutic tool can actually facilitate significant change in one's state of body-mind.

## Body-Mind Therapy

During a session of body-mind therapy, I invite my clients to pay attention to their breath, or how they are feeling, or even to become aware of their posture. As we become mindful of our physical experiences, just as I did during my first yoga class, we can often access deeper issues that are beyond the realm of "talk." This deeper accessing has the ability to offer lasting changes. If I had not been able to connect to the lesson my legs had to teach me, I might still be "running" from my own body, and unaware of the tears that were underneath my obsession.

Body-mind therapy can offer skillful ways for a person to experience integration of body and mind, which can be helpful in managing issues that arise from addiction, anxiety, illness, acute physical pain, depression, family of origin, eating disorders, relationships, and life transitions. Body-mind therapy can be beneficial for anyone who is seeking more balance and inner peace on one's journey.

## Anne Ethier

*Currently employed by Pathways Counseling, Anne Ethier, MA Psychology is a yoga instructor, dancer, and practitioner who embraces the wisdom of the body. She helps her clients expand their awareness to integrate body and mind. The methods Anne uses are gentle, experiential, often playful, and always revealing. Nothing is imposed.*

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