

Mental Health and Well-Being Q and A

What are the warning signs for mental health distress?

This is a difficult question to answer because many times it is so subjective and situational. Big warning signs are hopelessness, inconsolable sadness, unreasonable fear, isolation, a significant temperament change, self-injury behavior (cutting, eating disorders, substance abuse, risky behavior) and the inability to “hold a positive” (this will be evident in their conversation).

Important – if you feel something is wrong, you should say something. An individual’s ability to sense the emotional and mental state of another is good –honor that sense.

How to approach dancers, parents, and teachers when there is an issue?

Often people feel it is not their place to say something because they are not trained in psychotherapy, however, I feel it is it is always better to be proactive when someone is suffering. Approaching with genuine concern of the welfare of this person is the best approach. Parents will frequently not want to hear that their child is having trouble, so an empathetic approach is very important. Listen to intuition regarding whom to talk to about the concerning issues. Use analogies that help normalize emotional and mental health issues – *“Sometimes we have a physical injury that we cannot heal on our own; we need someone to help us through the process. This is true for our mind from time to time as well as our body.”*

Listening is your best resource for “What do I do next?”

Who and how to make referrals?

Federal law mandates mental health counseling to be covered by all insurance companies. If the person you are concerned about has insurance, they can call their company to find out who is in network and in their area. There are also good websites that have therapist profiles and can be found by zip code. Here are recommendations:

<https://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

<http://www.networktherapy.com/>

Having professionals you already know make referrals is another way to find a therapist. Generally therapists can be referred by Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC), Licensed Psychologist (LP), Licensed Independent Clinical

Social worker (LICSW). Psychiatrists are generally not involved in clinical therapy as they are medical doctors more focused on addressing use of medication and alternative treatments or management.

How much does psychotherapy cost?

The session cost and payment options for a person seeking psychotherapy can range from a sliding fee scale, insurance co-pay, out of pocket deductible, and private pay. Most therapists' fees range from \$100-\$160.00 per hour. Sliding fee scales can make it possible to see a therapist for as low as \$25.00 per hour. The benefit to using one's insurance is after the deductible has been met, the cost is usually minimal. There are reasons people prefer to pay out of pocket, confidentiality being the primary one.

What are some stress management techniques?

The easiest stress management techniques are the use of breathing. When someone is experiencing anxiety, his or her autonomic nervous system is in the "sympathetic response" mode - meaning the brain and body are responding to anxious thinking by igniting the Fight, Flight and Freeze response – rapid shallow breathing, rapid heart rate, blood pulled from the digestive track and an inability to use logical thought. Breathing deeply with the abdomen with a 5 slow count inhale, 5 slow count exhale, repeating 10 times will usually transition the brain and body into the para-sympathetic response. This begins breathing to trigger the body to slow the heartbeat, relax tension, and, most importantly, allow the brain to work fully, using logical thinking. A more extreme breathing method is the "square", to inhale for 4 slow counts, hold your breath for 4 slow counts, exhale for 4 slow counts and hold breath for 4 slow counts, repeating 10 times. It is virtually impossible for someone to track anxious thinking and consciously hold their breath.

When is help needed?

Managing and coping with anxiety can be exhausting for people, and instead of diffusing the negative feelings, it can cause more negative personal thinking and perfectionism. Use of breathing is a great quick intervention, however, helping the person understand that relief from the source of anxiety is the best way to feel better and that may best be achieved with the help of a therapist. Self-medicating, self-injury, rigid control behavior, impulse behavior are all maladaptive ways that people find to relieve the negative feelings anxiety produces. Depression is generally the outcome of the inability to find relief from anxiety.

How to handle the fear of re-injury.

If a dancer is working with a physical therapist, performing the prescribed exercises and being conscious of their bodies needs of nutrition, sleep, and physical rest, they will be less likely to be injured again. If one does get reinjured, staying involved in class and rehearsal will make the time advantageous. There is much to be learned from observation and that will be very helpful when back dancing.

How to handle the fear of returning to dance after an injury?

Having a dancer continue to be engaged in the class or rehearsal, even though they cannot participate in the usual way will help them make a more seamless return. Isolation can make the return very difficult.

Issues with dance teachers who may be emotionally abusive, how to step in?

Dance teachers do not have to go through any psychological assessments, so it is always possible that there will be a teacher who may be negatively acting against students. This maladaptive behavior can go unchecked because of the position they possess in the classroom and stage. Dancers will not generally come forward to their parents or dance company administration to complain. In their mind, what they stand to lose makes it too risky. Dancers can be sensitive individuals and these situations can be devastating. With student dancers, it is the parent who should step in, however this can be difficult. The parent may find him or herself battling their child as well as the teacher. You, being a health care provider, can give parents reassurance that it is necessary. Here are some pearls to pass along:

- The adolescent and early adult brain is not fully developed, the prefrontal cortex, the area that adults use to access logical thought during emotional events, is not completely developed into the late 20's. Because of this, the student dancer may be unable to advocate for him or herself.
- The social aspect of dance for the student dancer, especially girls, is extremely important to them. This is developmentally appropriate. For parents to understand that the loss of status or friendships feels very significant to this age group will help them navigate with understanding and insight.
- Finally, parents understanding that each child needs to confront emotional challenges to some extent to create resilience should best be done in an incremental way. Supporting the student dancer to make difficult choices at the onset of their schooling and continuing to be available for the support and conversation they need is the best way to create a

resilient person. In this way, when the very difficult situations arise they will be far better prepared to manage them.

This resource paper was written by Meggan McQuillan MA, LMFT for Minnesota Dance Medicine Foundation

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