

The Mind-Body Connection

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More and more nowadays, health practitioners are paying attention to the mind and body connection. Doctors are recognizing the psychological base of many illnesses and of the importance of attitudes and ideas of the patient in preventing illness and facilitating cure. Many psychotherapists note how physical changes in the body and general appearance accompany psychological growth and also how participation in athletics and body therapy can enhance emotional growth.

After all, the feelings that psychotherapists help people understand and deal with are felt in the body. Anger, joy, sadness, contentment show up in the way we hold and move ourselves in our "body language." And all of our feelings are experienced inside our body through such processes as a racing heart, knots in the stomach, perspiration, feelings of lightness, highs, lows, etc. which affect our health as well as indicate our state of mind. Obviously, then, our emotional and physical states are related, and change in one area affects the other.

The impact of physical exercise on our mental and physical well-being is well known. When we are in good shape, we feel good, our bodies look good and our self-image improves. Depression and anxiety often decrease when we engage in vigorous physical activity. Furthermore, many body therapists notice important psychological gains as people's bodies become freer. Practitioners of the Alexander Method, a body therapy that brings the head and spine into proper alignment and enables the person to move freely and efficiently, note that the freeing of a joint or the release of muscle tension often leads to the release of feelings or insights that were locked into the body by tight muscles. In other words, as the body loosens up, so does the state of mind. New feelings can emerge that can be used for psychological growth. Alexander teachers say that people who combine both body therapy and psychotherapy move especially quickly in both areas.

Athletes often notice a similar thing. Running a marathon, perfecting a karate kick, improving your tennis swing not only give you a sense of physical well-being and accomplishment, but the impetus to take new psychological steps. After all, if you can develop strength, stamina, coordination and grace as you move your body, you can learn how to use that accomplishment in psychological areas. For many people, physical change can be a symbol of what they can do in a very concrete way, and they go on to develop new relationships, make job changes, confront bullies and take other risks, often with the help of a psychotherapist to assist them in those changes.

When you think about it, our bodies can help us or impede us in leading a full life, both on an emotional and physical level, a strong reason for striving for a healthy mind in a healthy body.

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