



*Moving Bodies. Moving Minds*

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## **LonePack Conversations- The Alternative Therapy Series: Dance Therapy ft. Tarana Khatri**

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### **Transcript:**

*Valerie-* Welcome to LonePack Conversations! I'm Valerie.

Today let's talk about dance therapy with Tarana Khatri, a Dance Movement Psychotherapist. She is the co-founder of Synchrony, a founding member of the Indian Association of Dance Movement Therapy, and part of the Cambridge Medical Centre, Dubai. She encourages exploration and learning about the self through creative and reflective interactions.

Hey, Tarana!

*Tarana-* Hello! Hi, Valerie.

*Valerie-* How are you today?

*Tarana-* I'm doing good, how are you doing?

*Valerie-* I'm great as well.

*Tarana-* Great.

*Valerie-* Tarana, why don't you start by telling us how dance and movement relate to our mental health?

*Tarana-* I think it's important to note that in Dance and Movement Psychotherapy, movement is the medium but the instrument that we're working on is the body. So, if you were to ask me how the body plays a role in mental health, that's something that I can clarify for you. We believe that the body and mind are interconnected and our bodies collect, process and store information just

like our minds. **If we had an experience, just the way your mind collects it, processes it and stores it as a memory, your body does that as well. So if at a later stage you're trying to understand that experience or the pattern it creates, it's important to understand it both, from the experience of the body as well as the experience of the mind. That's where Dance Movement Psychotherapy plays a role** in allowing us to explore that experience of the body and relate it to the experience of the mind, which eventually helps us understand our mental health and how we can make it more efficient.

*Valerie-* Can you explain to us what Dance Therapy is and how it compares to conventional Psychotherapy?

*Tarana-* Yes, ofcourse. Dance Movement Psychotherapy is the therapeutic role of movement to work towards cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing, The role of movement can vary. For example, it could be really working with engagement of the body in lots of dance-like movement patterns. It could be working with breath. **So it's this idea that the level of body engagement can vary but it uses the body in different capacities to understand our personal behavior patterns and emotional patterns and how we can develop coping patterns that work for our environment.**

I think the most important thing to note is that this word "dance" comes everywhere. Most often, there is a misconception of what Dance Movement Psychotherapy is in terms of quoting dance to feel better or "I don't dance so this is not for me". I think it's very important to note the difference between dance and Dance Movement Psychotherapy. Dance is where you basically learn steps of any cultural style or to a particular kind of music, where your intent is either to learn a skill to perform, or fitness or because it's something you enjoy. But in Dance Movement Psychotherapy, it's a very intentional, explorative process wherein you get into it in order to understand yourself better, to understand your patterns better and to learn your emotional behavior response patterns.

*Valerie-* Okay. While you were giving us this answer and talked about Dance Therapy, you said that movement is the medium and your body is the instrument. Now when you talk about movement and using movement to express yourself, Drama Therapy does that as well. Drama Therapy is also about expressing with your body movements. So how does one understand what kind of therapy they should try? I mean, how does dance differ from drama therapy and stuff like that?

*Tarana-* There are a lot of overlapping patterns amongst all the creative arts therapists. I think within each therapy also, each therapist as their own personal approach. But drama extends to include a very theatrical perspective, bringing in the narrative or the story, bringing in roles. Whereas in Dance Movement Psychotherapy, engagement of the body is one element. Movement expression can be spontaneous, it doesn't always have to be continued into dialogue or voice being engaged as well. So, it depends- you have role theory, you have adaptation of narratives. In both cases, the body can be an instrument but the medium of drama and movement is what would differentiate it. I'll give you an example- in movement therapy, we believe that when you grow up, you have different patterns of development. You have your cognitive development, you

have your physical development which is your motor movement, and you have emotional development, amongst many other forms of development that happens. There are some theorists that say that along with all of this, there's a movement development that happens wherein a combination of cognitive skills, emotional capacity and physical ability integrate to allow you to perform certain movement rhythms- how slow your body moves, how fast your body moves, how you switch between different phases. All of that is a combination of these capacities and that's the realm that movement therapists work with.

**Valerie-** Alright. Thank you for spreading light on that for us.

Tarana – Yeah.

**Valerie-** Tarana, when did you realise that you wanted to become a Dance Movement Therapist?

**Tarana-** That's an interesting question! It was 2008, I was doing my undergrad in Psychology when I came across an article in the paper that spoke about Dance Movement Psychotherapy. I was like I love to dance, I'm really passionate about Psychology. If I had the opportunity to put it together, why not? So I set on my course to be a Dance Movement Psychotherapist, not realizing that I didn't quite understand what that really was. I think it was a very intense and beautiful journey of me not only learning about the field in itself but learning about how I wanted to adapt to being a Dance Movement Psychotherapist and understanding what it meant in the larger world but also more importantly, what it meant for me.

**Valerie-** Right. So what did it mean for you?

**Tarana-** So there are certain things. While growing up, my exposure to dance had been very structured. It was always a particular style with a teacher teaching you steps. It was expressive in terms of I enjoyed it. **I loved the experience of learning to dance, I loved the experience of performing but when I explored Dance Movement Psychotherapy, I really understood how to reflect on the sensation of the body and how to really look on the inside and know what story your body has to say from the life that it has lived, what you've held onto in your body without really being aware of it, in your entire life's experience.**

I think that insight is what I carried out in my work. *Even if I have a session where I'm primarily doing verbal conversation, I always find a way to bring that body experience into that conversation because it's important to know that Dance Movement Therapy isn't just to come, move and finish the session. It always culminates into a verbal reflection and a discussion and kind of integrating that to say this is what we've learnt, how do we take that forward?*

**Valerie-** I love that you said that it's a reflection into what you've been holding onto without being aware, in terms of an experience or anything else, and you help release that and understand that through movement therapy.

**Tarana-** Yes, ofcourse. I think "release" is a very strong word there because it's important to become aware of it and then process it and of that process involves releasing it, then that's something that you do. I think that's why **it's so important for this process to be facilitated by a trained professional because if the release happens before you or your body is ready for it, it can be a very overwhelming experience that might do more harm than be helpful.**

*Valerie-* You've been talking about dance therapy sessions. Could you tell us what goes on in one of your dance therapy sessions? Also how do you analyse someone's emotional state through their movements and help bring them to a state of well-being through dance movement therapy?

*Tarana-* **We don't interpret the movements to say oh, you're moving fast so it means this, or your body is small so it means this. But it's important to say okay, if this is what we're observing as a movement pattern, where could it be coming from? Why is that pattern comfortable for you? I think that's where the analysis happens. To bring awareness to the existing pattern and identify why it's working for you and if there's an efficient way to carry that pattern forward wherein it helps cope with challenges and helps you move forward if there's anything in particular that you're choosing to process or move away from.** So that would be the role of how one would look at the movement element.

There are different tools of movement, observation and analysis that we use- some are more systematic and rigid, some are more flexible and observational but it depends on each individual therapist and their training to know how much of these analysis tools they use and how they integrate it into their work. For example, I work very developmentally- I apply an understanding of how the body grows from childhood to adulthood and how we can look to learn from that process of growing, adapt to what we really need and apply that in our daily life. Looking at the session in itself, it's very different for each therapist but I can tell you how my sessions usually are.

It's a three part session- you start with an opening ritual, which is usually a transition into a therapeutic space. It could be just a verbal check-in, a body check-in or maybe some breathwork. Then there's an exploratory part of a session where you really go into what it is that we want to look at in that particular session. With children or even with adults, it could be just playing. It could be pure spontaneous playing, it could be in-depth processing of trauma, it could be identifying a person's response to stress or identifying triggers of one's worry and concern.

So the exploratory part of that session is about really exploring and expanding the experience that the person is in therapy for. The level of movement engagement in that section can vary depending on the comfort of the person that you're working with, how open they are to movement engagement, and what their range of mobility is. It kind of translates into a verbal discussion, acknowledging the realizations and insight that may have come in during the exploration and how that can be integrated into their learnings about themselves and how that could be integrated into their behavioral responses from then onwards.

*Valerie-* So it's basically you looking at their movements or something that they've initiated and then asking them questions that would help them gauge a deeper meaning to what's happening in their life and how they deal with it?

*Tarana-* Yes, it's a very similar pattern to that. Sometimes, it comes out of spontaneous play, sometimes it comes out of a movement initiated by them, sometimes a more directive activity that may have been introduced during that session. It could be purely spontaneous, it could be initiated by the client saying what they want to do. Although for some people that can be very

scary so some people prefer to have some direction or intentionality and ask for a boundary to work with, to explore within.

The last part of the session is usually a closing. I think if you talk to any creative arts therapist, for most of us, rituals are so important. So is the closing and winding down of that shared space because in the exploration session, it is a shared, co-created space. It's not me saying let's do this and it's not the client telling me to listen to all their troubles. **It's a very co-creative space. It's this dialogue. Even if it's in the body, there's the concept of a dialogue. There's a concept of give and take. So it's important to finish that integration and prepare them to carry that forward into their lives.**

*Valerie-* Right. So Tarana, working as a psychotherapist, you told us what happens in a dance therapy session and you did say that it is a co-creative space but it is also true that working as a psychotherapist, you probably do carry the burden of the problems your clients share with you. How do you care for your mental health?

*Tarana-* – For me, I wouldn't necessarily call it a burden but **sometimes you do absorb some of their emotions and some of the experiences and that's so vital for the efficiency of the process in itself, which is why I think there are three parts that I have followed and I think is important for any professional. One- your training. Your training equips you to create boundaries and awareness of how much you're absorbing and how much that's influencing the process that you're facilitating for the client.**

The second- supervision, wherein you go to a senior therapist, no matter how senior a therapist you may be. You always go to a supervisor who kind of offers you a space to reflect on your personal work, see how much of your personal self is coming into your professional world and how much of your professional self may be affecting your personal world. Third- personal territory. I believe every therapist should have a therapist. **I think there's a misconception that if you're a therapist, you're very calm, you don't argue, you're always able to have a very mediative conversation but in reality, we're all humans. We get angry and upset and so I think it's important to have our own space, being held by somebody else that allows us to explore all of that.** That's basically what I do.

I was blessed to have a sufficient amount of training which I continue to pursue to keep up to date, I am in supervision, and there were periods of time when I was also in long-term personal therapy and now I access my personal therapist as and when I need it. It's also two-fold, right? It's not only protecting myself but it's maintaining a safe space for my client because if I don't feel regulated in my own body, in that shared space, a lot of it could come out in the work that I'm doing and it would be unfair to the person who's coming to me if a lot of my work was more about me than them.

*Valerie-* True.

*Tarana-* Especially with the Pandemic, I think it's really proven and re-humanized therapists in a way to say that we feel it too. We feel the fear, we feel the anxiousness, we feel the stress.

*Valerie-* So true. Tarana, thank you so much for talking to us today, for spreading so much light on what Dance Therapy is, how it works and for telling us that Dance Therapy is something that helps us understand our experiences from the body and relate it to the experiences of the mind, and to tap into those emotions through dance and movement. I think it's really helped us gain a greater understanding of what Dance Movement Therapy is, and also your final bit telling us how you unwind and how you keep yourself fit in order to ensure your clients are given due justice as well. Thank you so much.

*Tarana-* Thank you so much for inviting me and having me on this series, Valerie.

*Valerie-* Thank you.