

# Alternative Therapeutic Approaches to Refugee Mental Health

## What is Alternative?

What may be considered an alternative approach to western behavioral health practices like acupuncture, expressive arts, movement therapy, or meditation, may be known as traditional healing measures to refugee clients.

This Information Guide provides **tools, tips, and approaches** to infuse mental health into your work with clients as a therapist, case worker, medical practitioner, or program manager.

### Acknowledge

#### Continued Development

- General approaches to screening and treatment of mental health conditions for refugees are still being developed

#### Diversity and Range of Needs

- The varying experiences, cultures, languages, and individual needs comprising each refugee's constellation may limit the types of effective western modalities

### Consider

#### Similar Modality Goals

- Alternative approaches to mental health do not need to contrast with western approaches as the goals remain the same: to build clients'
  - Resiliency
  - Social Integration
  - Capacity to Face Hardship
- Tailoring current modalities and approaches may be necessary to address the new experience of receiving support for mental health needs

#### Inherent Strengths

- While addressing mental health in general may be an alternative approach to responding to trauma, many people already carry tools and approaches to push through challenges and trauma. ***It is important to learn from and with your clients about approaches they currently use.***

### Implementation Benefits of Alternative Approaches

Exploring modalities that are outside the contemporary western context of mental health treatment which often maintain a strong foundation in psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy, can benefit clients by:

- Mitigating symptoms of common diagnoses (anxiety, depression, PTSD)
- Increasing focus on somatic work with community integration
- Allowing for a holistic approach to address multiple facets of a person's life
- Offering a strong option and/or complement to common western approaches

## WELLNESS

### WEDNESDAYS

Introduce wellness practices into your office culture one day a week to decrease stress, increase positive thinking, and improve self-reflection habits.



### Music

Play music in the background while clients are reviewing and signing paperwork; or play music in the waiting area.



### Journaling

Provide clients with a notebook to document new experiences. During your visits with clients ask them to share something they've written.

### Email

Send an all staff email with an inspirational poem.

### Breathing

Invite staff to gather for a collective breathing exercise



## Types of Alternative Therapy Modalities

### SOMATIC THERAPY

Represents a variety of approaches to the process of awakening awareness of the human body in movement. It develops sensori-motor awareness and skills, and reconnects the developmental progression of physical and human expression. It can include:

- Sound • Breath • Touch
- Imagery • Movement

### DANCE THERAPY (DMT)

Based on the interconnection between body, mind, and spirit, this therapy encourages self-exploration through expressive movement. Studies have found that dance therapy can improve symptoms of depression and promote health and wellbeing.

Professionalized at the master's level of training in the 1960s and 1970s via standards of the American Dance Therapy Association, DMT uses the established interdependence of body and mind as a primary mechanism for treatment combined with the function of dance and movement as expressive communication.

### EXPRESSIVE ARTS THERAPY

Incorporates and combines components of Creative Arts Therapies such as

- Visual Arts • Movement
  - Drama • Music • Writing
- and other creative processes to foster deep personal growth and community development (IEATA 2014).

### MIND BODY PRACTICES

Mind and body practices include a large and diverse group of procedures or techniques administered by a trained practitioner or teacher. In 2012 a National Health Interview Survey showed that

- Yoga
  - Chiropractic and Osteopathic Manipulation
  - Meditation
  - Massage Therapy
- are among the most popular mind and body practices used by adults. The popularity of yoga has attracted almost twice as many U.S. adults practicing yoga in 2012 as in 2002.

### MUSIC THERAPY

Credentialed therapists use interventions like

- Listening to music
- Creating music
- Writing lyrics

to help clients access their creativity and emotions. The music targets individualized goals of managing stress, alleviating pain, expressing emotions, improving memory, and promoting overall mental and physical wellness.

### ART THERAPY

Art therapy is a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight. (American Art Therapy Association 2009 )

- Drawing • Painting
- Sculpture

### OTHERS

Other mind and body practices include relaxation techniques (such as breathing exercises, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation), qi gong, healing touch, hypnotherapy and movement therapies (such as Feldenkrais method, Alexander technique, Rolfing Structural Integration, and Trager Psychophysical Integration). Additional techniques include:

- Deep breathing • Cupping • Vitamins • Coining • Minerals
- Massage • Acupuncture • Tai Chi • Pilates

## Benefits of Alternative Approaches to Mental Health

- 1) Increase options for clients to engage with behavioral health interventions and concepts that may feel foreign or uncomfortable initially
- 2) Develop healthy coping tools and responses to stress, anxiety, trauma, and depression
- 3) Offer more universal language for providers to introduce mental health into refugees' healthcare
- 4) Increase social engagement, self-awareness and resiliency
- 5) Encourage growth and expansion of client interactions; moving away from fight or flight (see box below) response

*Alternative therapies can be considered a general intervention, which can include screening for the need for a more specialized intervention, such as mental health concerns.* Receiving services to increase mental wellness can feel intimidating to many. When referred to a therapist or psychologist, clients may avoid attending appointments due to an internalized stigma of those who have mental health needs. Referring a client to a yoga class or group art class can decrease the stigma while increasing habits of mental wellness. During classes discussing the need for mental health practices can be more easily integrated.

## Fight or Flight



Reaction to stress can take many different forms. A stressful experience can cause a person to release stress hormones that trigger physiological changes such as:

- Sweating
- Shortness of Breath
- Pounding Heart

When a life threatening situation is perceived an individual can go into survival mode or a “fight or flight” response, which addresses a perceived threat or seeks safety. **Remaining in a constant state of fight or flight (sometimes caused by traumatic experiences) can result in chronic stress, irritability, and distrust.** Developing stress reduction techniques can mitigate intense reactions to daily stressors and increase capacity to face challenges and engage in social environments.

## Methods & Outcomes

Alternative therapies can result in

- Artwork, Poetry, and/or Performance that
  - Explores feelings
  - Reconciles emotional conflicts
  - Fosters self-awareness
  - Manages behavior and addictions
  - Develops social skills
  - Improves reality orientation
  - Reduces anxiety
  - Increases self-esteem

“Creativity is the fundamental sense of aliveness”

- Julie Kluck, PhD

As with any form of therapy the goals include improvement or restoration of a client's functioning, sense of personal well-being and integration of self from behavior, culture, history, and body.

# Best Practice Spotlight

## Metta Health Center at Lowell Community Health Center

<http://www.lchealth.org/patients/connect-services/metta-health-center>

One of the nation's first fully integrated East Meets West health care facilities, Metta Health Center focuses on Lowell's Southeast Asian and other refugee populations. "Metta" means loving kindness in the Buddhist Pali language. Services include:

- Primary medical care for all ages using a family medicine model
- Chronic disease management
- Nutrition counseling
- Mental health services
- Traditional healing advice
- Acupuncture
- Massage therapy
- Social services
- Meditation
- Health education

"Alternative treatment modalities aid in the process of **gaining trust** and buy-in regarding how United States healthcare system can provide **prevention, intervention, education, and support** while continuing to **honor the beliefs and traditions of the client**"

- Jennifer Stuart, LICSW, RN



Behavioral Health Services are available to all patients at Metta Health Center, including an innovative model for providing behavioral health to Lowell's Southeast Asian community. This model acknowledges the importance of cultural beliefs and pairs a bicultural mental health specialist with a licensed mental health clinician and, if needed, a psychiatrist or a psychiatric nurse practitioner. The mental health specialist not only interprets, but also serves as a bridge between cultures in the treatment.

## Restorative Resources Training and Consulting

[www.restorativeresources.net](http://www.restorativeresources.net)

The mission of Restorative Resources Training & Consulting ("RRT&C") is to collaborate with existing individual and communal resources to support systems of healing and well-being that promote resiliency, are culturally congruent and respectful. From individual psychotherapy to organizational development, a strength-based, systemic approach is utilized. The spirit of all RRT&C's work is reciprocity.

"Body work is universal as we all exist in our bodies and our experiences settle in our bodies" -

- Amber Gray, MA, MPH, LPCC, BC-DMT, NCC

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# References and Resources

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## Resources

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [Health and Wellness Page](http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/health-wellness), <http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/health-wellness>, includes a Meditation video sponsored by National Institute's of Health's National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Health.

Certification Program: <http://kintinstitute.org> The Arts have been the voice of healing, celebration, grieving, ritual, restoration, and community since long before medicine and psychology. Increasingly, psychotherapists are utilizing the curative properties of the arts to revitalize, support, and strengthen their practices.

Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom [www.wisebrain.org](http://www.wisebrain.org) The mission of the Wellspring Institute is to help people learn new ways to change the brain for the better, for more happiness, love, and wisdom, and for making this world a better place.

Workshop: <http://2katstudios.com/workshops> Expressive art therapy workshops available in Prescott, AZ; Albuquerque, NM, and other sites.

Capacitar International provides trainings and workshops that embrace a holistic perspective on health and well-being. <http://www.capacitar.org/>