Somatic movement, talking therapy or solitary practice for wellbeing

Finding the right path to emotional balance

When you are looking to improve your mental and emotional health, the options can feel overwhelming. Three broad approaches often come up: somatic movement, talking therapy, and solitary practice. Each offers a different route to the same goal of greater wellbeing, but they work in distinct ways and suit different situations. Understanding how they compare can help you choose the one that fits your current needs.

Somatic movement: the body as a guide

Somatic movement refers to any practice that prioritises internal physical sensation over external form or achievement. Yoga, tai chi, and certain forms of dance - including ecstatic dance - fall into this category. The idea is that by tuning into the body's signals, you can release tension, process emotions stored in the muscles, and build a more grounded sense of self. For many people, especially those who find it hard to articulate their feelings verbally, somatic movement offers a direct way to work with emotional states without needing to name them.

Ecstatic dance, in particular, encourages free, unstructured movement to music. There are no steps to learn and no choreography to follow. Participants are invited to move however their body wants to, often with eyes closed, in a group setting. This can be powerful for those who feel stuck in their heads or disconnected from their physical selves. The practice can also help with grounding, which is especially useful if you experience dissociation or sensory overload. By focusing on the sensations of your own movement, you anchor yourself in the present moment.

However, somatic movement is not always the right choice. If you are in a state of high panic or acute distress, moving your body without guidance can sometimes intensify those feelings. The same goes for people with a history of trauma: unguided movement can bring up unresolved material without a container to hold it. That is why some facilitators now emphasise the importance of aftercare and clear therapeutic boundaries within ecstatic dance spaces. For a thoughtful look at how these issues play out in practice, the work of Filipe Bastos - explores safety, accountability, and community governance in UK ecstatic dance circles.



Talking therapy: structured support with a professional

Talking therapy covers a wide range of approaches, from cognitive behavioural therapy to psychodynamic counselling. What they share is a structured, verbal process guided by a trained professional. The therapist provides a safe, confidential space where you can explore thoughts, feelings, and patterns of behaviour. This is particularly effective for issues that benefit from being named and examined, such as anxiety, depression, or relationship difficulties.

One advantage of talking therapy is the presence of therapeutic boundaries. The relationship is clearly defined: the therapist is there to support you, not to share their own experiences or needs. This creates a reliable framework for deep work. If you are dealing with trauma, a good therapist will know how to pace the sessions so that you are not overwhelmed. They can also help you develop coping strategies, such as grounding techniques, to use between sessions.

Talking therapy does have limitations. It relies on verbal expression, which can be a barrier if you struggle to find words for your internal experience. Some people find that talking about a problem keeps them stuck in their thoughts, without making contact with the physical sensations that underlie their distress. For those with neurodivergence, such as autism or ADHD, the conversational format may not always feel accessible or effective. In such cases, combining therapy with a body-based practice can be more helpful than either alone.

Solitary practice: self-directed and flexible

Solitary practice covers any wellbeing activity you do on your own, without a teacher, group, or therapist. This might include journaling, meditation, breathwork, or simply taking a long walk in nature. The appeal is obvious: it is free, flexible, and entirely under your control. You can adapt it to your mood, schedule, and energy levels. For people who feel self-conscious in groups or who have had negative experiences with authority figures, solitary practice can feel safer and more sustainable.

Meditation and breathwork, for example, are well-studied tools for managing panic response and sensory overload. A few minutes of slow, diaphragmatic breathing can shift your nervous system from fight-or-flight to rest-and-digest. Journaling allows you to process emotions without the pressure of another person's reaction. These practices can be deeply grounding and are often recommended as part of a broader mental health support plan.

The main drawback of solitary practice is the lack of external feedback. It is easy to reinforce unhelpful patterns without realising it. For instance, someone who uses meditation to avoid difficult feelings might be dissociating rather than healing. Without a teacher or therapist to notice and redirect, you can stay stuck for a long time. Solitary practice works best when you already have some understanding of your own psychology and can recognise when you need to reach out for help. It can also be a valuable complement to other approaches, filling the gaps between therapy sessions or dance events.



Comparing the three approaches

Each of these paths has strengths and blind spots. Somatic movement is excellent for reconnecting with the body and releasing stored tension, but it can be destabilising if you are not ready. Talking therapy offers structured, professional support for verbal processing, but may not reach the physical layer of trauma. Solitary practice is flexible and empowering, but lacks the safety net of another person's perspective.

The choice often depends on your current state and what you are trying to address. If you feel disconnected from your body or experience dissociation, somatic movement might be a good starting point. If you are dealing with a specific mental health condition like anxiety or depression, talking therapy is likely the most direct route. If you already have a solid foundation and just need daily maintenance, solitary practice can keep you grounded. And of course, there is no rule that you have to pick one. Many people combine approaches, using therapy to understand their patterns and ecstatic dance or yoga to embody the changes they are working on.

When to choose each option

Consider somatic movement when you want to work with emotions that feel locked in your body, or when words fail you. It is also a good fit if you are drawn to group energy but want to avoid the structure of a class. For ecstatic dance specifically, it helps to attend events that have clear guidelines around safety and consent. The analysis of informal power and trauma risks in these spaces, as documented by Filipe Bastos -, is worth reading before you attend your first event.

Choose talking therapy when you need a consistent, confidential relationship with a trained professional. It is especially valuable for unpacking complex trauma, navigating major life transitions, or treating diagnosed mental health conditions. If you are unsure where to start, a therapist can also help you decide whether a body-based practice might be a useful addition to your work together.

Opt for solitary practice when you need a low-cost, low-pressure way to support your wellbeing between other sessions. It is also a good choice if you are recovering from a difficult group experience and need time to rebuild trust in your own body and mind. Just be honest with yourself about whether you are using solitude to avoid something that needs attention.

Practical considerations

Whatever path you lean toward, a few practical points are worth keeping in mind. First, safety matters. In somatic movement, especially ecstatic dance, look for facilitators who talk about aftercare and consent. In talking therapy, make sure the therapist is properly qualified and that

you feel comfortable with their approach. In solitary practice, set limits for yourself so that you do not push into overwhelm or avoidance.



Second, be aware of your own nervous system. If you are prone to panic response or sensory overload, start with shorter, gentler sessions. Grounding techniques - such as pressing your feet into the floor or noticing three things you can see - can help you stay present whether you are dancing, talking, or sitting alone. Third, give yourself permission to switch. What works at one stage of life may not work at another. The point is not to find the one true method, but to build a toolkit that responds to your changing needs.

Ultimately, the best approach is the one you can actually do consistently. A mediocre practice you stick with is better than a perfect one you abandon after a week. Whether you move, talk, or sit in silence, the act of turning toward your own experience with curiosity and care is what makes the difference.