



Tattoo therapy

Taboo or just what the therapist ordered?

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ÖTZI, THE TYROLEAN ICEMAN WHO died around 3250 B.C., is known as having the world's oldest tattoos, with 61 across his left wrist, lower legs, lower back and torso. Researchers believe his tattoos were done as a form of therapy, leading to a desire to not only adorn the body, but also heal the body as a form of acupuncture. This leads to the idea that tattooing is a very ancient part of our human past and culture for a variety of reasons.

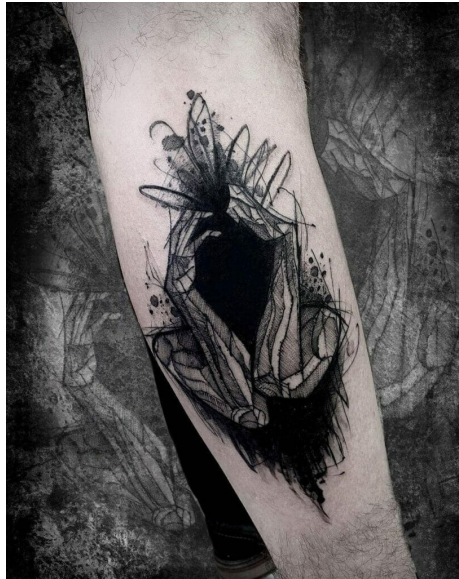
Those who know me personally know I am in favor of tattoos. While I believe there should be some thought put into placement and style, I also firmly believe tattoos can have a profound effect on those who receive them, for many reasons. I understand tattoos have become more acceptable within our culture, but how many of you have stopped to think about the mental health benefits that can come from them?

If you have any tattoos, I want you to take a second and ask yourself these questions:

1. Why did you get this tattoo?
2. What does it represent or mean?
3. What was the process like in getting this tattoo?
4. What did you feel after you received your tattoo?

My guess is there is some symbolic meaning behind the tattoo and/or the process of getting it. While some people will spend months creating their perfect tattoo and others will impulsively pick one on a whim, there still holds meaning as to the actual design or what you were experiencing in your life at the time. I understand this may not be the case for every single tattoo you have, but I can almost guarantee it is for quite a few of them.

Were you experiencing hard times? Going through a challenge in your life or a recent accomplishment? Were you looking for a way to "feel your pain" or "release your pain" without resorting to other unhealthy coping mechanisms? Were you looking for a permanent reminder of just how strong and amazing you are in life? Did you want to remember someone special to you that you lost?



In speaking with Morgan Bennington, tattoo artist at Double Down Tattoo in Glendale, he shared his perspective on tattoos and mental health: "As far as the guy in the seat doing the tattoos, the space is very intimate. There isn't much running away while you're locked in a piece so people can get to talking about their personal lives. I basically become a person to talk to which can help them through various life experiences."

He went on to add, "I have numerous clients who enjoy the pain of the process. The getting tattooed part because it helps them mentally. They love the work, the long hours, the commitment, and they get to leave with a gorgeous piece of artwork on their body."


Morgan shared how much he loves getting to be a part of the client's journey, whatever that journey may be — in a way, it's therapeutic for him, too, as the giver.

Tattoos have grown in popularity ever since Ötzi's time, more than five millennia ago. The benefits surrounding mental health and tattoos are starting to be recognized more and more — however, many still struggle to understand how this can be. Some of the main examples we see tattoos and mental health working together include:



- Used to commemorate experiences, struggles and victories.
- Function as physical manifestations of mental and physical scars.
- Help survivors take back control of their body.
- Remember a lost loved one.
- Raise awareness.
- Improve self-esteem.

Think about the time, energy and pain that goes into receiving a tattoo. It isn't something for the faint of heart and not everyone has the mindset or pain tolerance to be able to do this. Those who get them are often going through things that no one would ever know, but this is their way of healing and earning a permanent reminder of just how strong and capable they are.

They can look at their tattoo and hopefully smile as they remember overcoming that obstacle, or the loved one they lost, or just feeling better about themselves. Tattoos can be a powerful tool for the mind. 



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