

Pathways to Wellness

Module 2: In The Moment and Somatic Practices

Purpose:

- To cultivate present-moment awareness and embodied self-regulation through somatic practices.

Benefit:

- Enhancing mindfulness, reducing stress, and promoting overall well-being.

Responsibility:

- Taking an active role in nurturing your mind-body connection.

Process:

- Engage in guided practices like body scans, breath work, and gentle movements.

Inspiring Quote or Book Excerpt:

- "The body is a sacred garment. It's your first and last garment; it is what you enter life in and what you depart life with, and it should be treated with honor." - Martha Graham

Part 1 - Preparing for In The Moment Responses (Healthy Interactions)

“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” - Viktor Frankl

In this module, we'll start off by exploring practices that help us to be more grounded in the moment when faced with a challenging situation. The more we build that healthy response muscle by learning and practicing simple practices that help to ground us and regulate the nervous system, the easier it is to access these tools in any given stressful interaction.

Preparation:

You'll need to keep a glass of water next to you.

We'll work through the P.A.C.E practice from the Brain Gym® methodology together, to help prepare for a difficult interaction.

What is the P.A.C.E Practice?

P.A.C.E is an acronym for Positive, Active, Clear and Energize. The model is part of the Brain Gym® methodology which falls under the broader discipline of Educational Kinesiology. It was developed by learning specialists Paul E. Dennison, Ph.D., and Gail E. Dennison. Brain Gym® is recognized internationally as a holistic system based on the principles of learning theory and kinesiology. At the core of Brain Gym® is the [Five Step Balance Process](#) which initiates and guides the sequence of neural changes within the brain that result in new thinking, new behaviors, and increased abilities. The practice has also been shown to reduce stress and anxiety.

This practice integrates elements of physical therapy, acupressure, and the Chinese meridian system by activating the two brain hemispheres and increasing the flow of blood to the brain. This helps to increase focus, calms the nervous system, and improves one's mood.

You only need about 5 minutes for the full PACE sequence. I'd invite you to stand for this, but it can also be done seated in a chair or on the ground. Most of the techniques except the first one can also be done lying down.

Experiencing P.A.C.E

Think of a conversation that may have the potential for conflict with anyone in your life that you'd like to prepare for. I'd also invite you to set an intention for the interaction. So for example, in the video, I used PACE to prepare for a difficult conversation with someone who had been verbally abusive towards me. My intention was to have a healthy conversation where both individuals could find a way to navigate the way forward without conflict and serve the highest good of both.

Let's start by tuning into ourselves.

- Close your eyes and notice how you're feeling in your body right now.
- Where do you notice any tension?
- Notice your breath. Is it fast or slow?
- What are your thoughts?
- What emotions are you feeling?

Now let's experience PACE, starting from the bottom with the 'E' to build the foundation.

E is for ENERGIZE: Begin by simply taking a sip of water.

When we're under stress, the body, including the brain can lose water which causes our neural activity to become a lot slower. Since the body is made up of 60 – 70 % water and the brain between 70 -75%, keeping hydrated is crucial. The chemical and electrical functions of the central nervous system and brain rely on water for the flow of electrical currents between the brain and sensory organs. Drinking water helps balance emotions and mood, improve focus and cognition, as well as maintain memory. Drinking water before or at the moment during a difficult conversation, can make a huge difference in regulating the nervous system.

C is for CLEAR: Brain Buttons

We'll activate the 'brain buttons' which are certain points on the body, which when pressed, stimulate the flow of oxygen through the blood to our brains. We'll also bring awareness to our balance and gravitational center.

The brain buttons lie on the carotid arteries that supply oxygenated blood to the brain. Rubbing these buttons increases blood flow to the brain and activates the Reticular Activating System, our internal clock that alerts the brain to pay attention and wake up!

Placing one hand on the navel brings attention to the vestibular system, our balance mechanism, and our gravitational center. The vestibular system senses information about equilibrium, motion, and spatial location to orient us in space.

Instructions:

1. Place one hand on your navel.
2. With the other hand spread the thumb and index finger about 90 degrees.
3. Place the thumb and index finger directly under your collarbone, in that indentation, on either side of the sternum.
4. Gently rub these points for about 20 to 60 seconds until you feel relaxed. It might feel a bit tender. Soften the pressure if it is too tender. You might also feel energized as you're doing this.

A is for ACTIVE: Cross Crawl

This activity crosses the central mid-line and activates the brain to become alert. It also increases the heart rate. This activity stimulates the higher centers of the brain to regulate adrenaline production, which helps to release stress both mentally and physically, which is why it is so helpful in grounding oneself in preparation for a potentially conflicted situation.

Connecting the left and right sides of the body and brain causes neural information and electrical impulses to pass seamlessly between both brain hemispheres. This is critical for coordination and mental activities required in communication, learning language, math, and reading.

Instructions:

1. Stand with your feet apart, shoulders relaxed
2. Lift your right knee and place your left hand on your right knee.
3. Then alternate: lift your left knee and place your right hand on your left knee.
4. Continue doing this for about 30 to 60 seconds (or more, for an extra workout).
5. For an additional stretch you can place your left elbow on your right knee and vice versa.
6. Do this activity slowly and with intention.

P is for POSITIVE: Hook-ups

This movement directs energy towards your core to calm the brain and body. It helps us move out of survival mode and into a more rational and logical frame of mind to help us make better decisions and decide what is the best action to take.

By placing the tongue firmly against the roof of the mouth, we connect the left and right sides of the body. This stimulates the higher brain centers and the limbic system (emotional brain) which help shift us from the survival center of the brain into the more intellectual and rational centers of the higher brain. Regulating the system in this way prevents us from reacting in a way we might regret later when in a conflicted situation.

Instructions:

1. Cross the right foot over the left foot
2. Stretch your arms out in front of you.
3. Cross the right arm over the left.
4. Face the palms towards each other with the thumbs pointing down.
5. Interlace the fingers.
6. Rotate your hands down and towards the body.
7. Continue to rotate the hands until you're able to rest them on the chest. If this is challenging, cross the hands and arms across the chest and relax.
8. Place the tongue on the roof of the mouth. This will increase the calming effect of the activity.
9. Hold this position for about 20 to 60 seconds.
10. Unravel the arms and legs.
11. Repeat the above sequence starting with the left foot and crossing over your right foot.
12. After completing the left side, unravel the arms and legs and stand or sit with the feet apart.

Tune in:

- Close your eyes or keep a gentle gaze. Notice how you're feeling in your body. Notice your thoughts and emotions. Notice what's different from when you started. Take a deep breath in and with a gentle smile exhale.
- You may open your eyes.
- This is a great way to prepare for a potentially challenging situation or conversation.

Part 2 - Somatic Practices

What are Somatic Practices?

- The term "somatic" comes from the Greek word "soma," which means "living body." Somatic practices are based on the idea that the body is the foundation of our lived experience and that by paying attention to our bodily sensations, we can gain insights into our emotional and mental states.
- Somatic practices refer to a holistic approach to health and well-being that focuses on the body's internal experience and sensations. These practices emphasize the connection between the mind and body, recognizing that physical, emotional, and mental states are interconnected. Somatic practices aim to increase body awareness, promote relaxation, and enhance overall well-being through various techniques such as movement, touch, and breath work.
- Somatic practices refer to a group of body-centered activities that help individuals reconnect with their bodies to promote health, well-being, and body awareness. The core idea behind somatic practices is that the mind and body are not separate, but rather a unified system. These practices encourage individuals to explore their internal physical sensations and movement patterns.
- Somatic practices involve techniques and exercises that focus on internal physical perception and experience, rather than treating the body as an object to be trained or fixed. The goal is to cultivate "somatic awareness" - a heightened consciousness of the physical body and its relationship with the mind, space, and environment.
- 4 Main Types of Somatic Practices
 - Somatic-based Therapy: Integrates bodily and psychological processes, using the body to uncover emotions, attitudes, and thoughts. Examples include bioenergetics and Hakomi.
 - Somatic Bodywork: Uses hands-on techniques like massage and manipulation to improve bodily function and promote balance. Examples include Rolfing and craniosacral therapy.
 - Somatic Movement: Practices that use movement and bodily sensation to foster awareness, improve physical capacity, and release tension. Examples include the Feldenkrais method and Alexander technique.
 - Somatic Breathwork: Practices that use conscious, intentional control of breathing to induce relaxation, manage stress, and improve mental/physical health.

Why are Somatic Practices important?

- Somatic practices are important because they provide a means for individuals to connect with their bodies, reduce stress, and improve overall health and well-being. By increasing body awareness and promoting relaxation, somatic practices can help alleviate physical and emotional discomfort, improve sleep quality, and enhance overall quality of life. Additionally, somatic practices can be beneficial for individuals dealing with chronic pain, trauma, or other health conditions, as they offer a holistic approach to healing and self-care.
- Somatic practices are important because they offer a holistic, embodied approach to wellness that can have profound physical, psychological, and existential benefits for individuals. They empower people to reconnect with their bodies and access their own inner resources for healing and growth.
- Some key takeaways:
 - They promote mind-body integration and holistic well-being. Somatic practices recognize that the mind and body are interconnected, and by focusing on bodily sensations and experiences, individuals can gain insights into their emotional and mental states.
 - They enhance body awareness and self-regulation. Somatic practices teach individuals to pay attention to their internal physical experiences, which can help them better understand and manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
 - They can alleviate physical and psychological issues. Practices like somatic movement, breathwork, and bodywork have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, chronic pain, and other health concerns by releasing muscular tension and activating the body's relaxation response.
 - They empower individuals and promote self-authority. Somatic practices encourage people to take an active role in their own well-being by tuning into their subjective bodily experiences, rather than relying solely on external authorities. This can foster a greater sense of self-awareness and personal agency.
 - They offer a creative, experiential approach to health and healing. In contrast to more conventional medical models, somatic practices value subjective experience and provide alternative ways of working with issues like chronic pain that go beyond just treating symptoms.

Increasing Somatic Practices:

5 Daily Somatic Practices you can do with no training:

Butterfly Tapping

- **Benefit:** Butterfly tapping is a simple yet effective self-soothing technique that can help reduce stress, anxiety, and negative emotions. It involves gently tapping on specific points on the upper body in a butterfly-like motion, which can activate the body's natural relaxation response.
- **Details:**
 - Place your hands on your upper chest, with your fingertips just below your collarbones.
 - Gently tap your fingertips up and down, creating a butterfly-like motion.
 - Breathe deeply and focus on the sensations in your body as you tap.
 - Continue tapping for 1-2 minutes or until you feel a sense of calm and relaxation.
 - The gentle tapping motion is believed to stimulate the body's meridian points, which are thought to be connected to the body's energy flow. This, in turn, can help to reduce stress and promote a sense of well-being.
- **Additional Information:** Butterfly tapping can be done anytime, anywhere, and it can be particularly helpful when you're feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or in need of a quick stress-relief tool.

Grounding and Centering

- **Benefit:** Helps individuals feel more grounded, safe, and centered, which can improve balance and inner strength.
- **Details:**
 - Find a comfortable and quiet space, and consider removing your shoes.
 - Stand up and feel your feet connected to the ground.
 - Bring your attention to the sensations in your legs, imagining yourself as a tree rooted in the earth.
 - Shift your weight from side to side, and from front to back, like a tree swaying in the breeze.
 - Bring your hands to your lower belly and feel your center of gravity.
 - Continue swaying while keeping your hands on your lower belly.
- **Additional Information:** Grounding exercises can help individuals who have experienced a loss of balance or stability.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Benefit: Reduces muscle tension and promotes overall relaxation.
- Details:
 - Systematically tense and then relax each muscle group in your body, starting with your toes and working your way up to your head.
 - Explore tensing parts of your body together, certain limbs, or your whole body
 - Inhale and begin to tense the muscles, then pause and hold the tension
 - Exhale and release all of the tension from your body
- Additional Information: This exercise can be particularly helpful for individuals who experience physical symptoms of stress, such as muscle tension or headaches.

Processing Body Triggers

- Benefit: This exercise helps individuals become more aware of their physical and emotional states, which can aid in managing stress and anxiety.
- Details:
 - Notice your current posture, heart rate, and areas of tension in the body.
 - Think back to a recent moment when you felt calm, safe, and most like your "self".
 - Identify the point in time or the part of your body that began experiencing disturbance or stress.
 - Replay the scenario from your calm state to your stressed state, in slow motion, and identify any people, conversations, objects, or behaviors that may have contributed to your stress.
 - Tune in to your body sensations as you recall the event, noticing any shifts, such as tingling, tensing, warming, numbing, or cooling in specific areas.
 - Place your hand on the area that experienced a shift or change, and breathe deeply. This can help your body process the somatic experience and release the tension.
- Additional Information: This exercise can be repeated as needed, and even if no specific insights arise, the act of slowing down, pacing your breath, and increasing awareness can be helpful in itself.

Shake and Tap

- Benefit: Helps discharge "fight, flight and freeze" impulses in the body to bring completion to the stress cycle, while also releasing tension and promoting a sense of grounding.
- Details:
 - Shake each limb one by one.

- Shake your whole body.
 - Use your fingertips to tap on different parts of your body, such as your chest, arms, or legs. Change the intensity of your tapping.
 - Put on a song and have a good whole-body dance, or use your breath as a guide and rhythm.
- Additional Information: This exercise can be helpful after a stressful day or situation, coming down from an anxiety attack, or after taking in stressful information like watching the news or social media. It can be done in conjunction with other somatic practices, like breath work or body scans.

Part 3 – In-the-moment Practices

The S.T.O.P Model

In a different stress management series we've presented, we shared the **S.T.O.P** model, which is a simple yet powerful tool to help you in the moment and which we've described briefly below.

British Columbia's Northern Health Authority, their Indigenous Health department and the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, created a video resource titled, "[Preparing for Respectful Conversations](#)", which explores the STOP model in an actual scenario.

This can take anywhere from a few seconds to minutes, depending on what you decide to do in the moment.

- S - Stop:** Pause what you're doing.
- T – Take a breath:** Here, you can simply take a deep breath in and out of the nose. You can also notice the temperature of the breath as it flows in and out of the nostrils.
- O – Observe:** Without judgment, begin to observe the sensations in the body. Notice where the tension resides. Notice how you're feeling. This helps regulate the nervous system.
- P- Proceed:** Proceed with the next wise decision. Now that you're more centred, the brain is able to think rationally and logically. In this moment you can decide what you need to do to take care of yourself. You may need to excuse yourself from the situation and take a walk outside. You might suggest that you reconvene later.

2. Humming

Another way to prepare for potentially difficult interactions is to hum. Or, in the moment you can make a quiet short humming sound that isn't audible for anyone else, except yourself. Research has shown the benefits of humming to include:

- Increases Nasal Nitric Oxide which helps reduce blood pressure

- Vagus nerve stimulation which brings it into the ‘rest and digest’ mode, and in so doing counters the ‘fight or flight’ stress state.
- Induces the release of melatonin
- Releases endorphins and can produce oxytocin
- Boosts immunity
- Enhances heart rate variability

This [article](#) explains the benefits further.

3. Symbolic object

Finding a small object that you can carry in your pocket or palm of your hand that represents serenity or reminds you to breathe, can be helpful. I sometimes carry a small smooth pebble that I found near the lake where I live. It reminds me of the still calmness of the lake and my breath slowly inhaling and exhaling to the rhythm of the small waves lapping against the pebbles along the shoreline.

Additional Resources, Assessments, etc:

- Brain Gym International: <http://www.braingym.org>
- PACE Yourself to Improve Mood, Concentration, and Focus: <https://www.highpointaz.com/christinas-blog/brain-gym-pace-sequence>
- Preparing for Respectful Conversations video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jZMRE_dKgU
- The Mindful STOP Tool https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262061409_Mindful-STOP_Mindfulness_Made_Easy_for_Stress_Reduction_in_Medical_Students
- The Humming Awakening: Unlocking a Daily Melodious Path to Self-Care <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture-council/articles/humming-for-self-care-tool-for-leaders-toolboxes-1234956725/>

Other somatic practices that can help increase body awareness and promote relaxation:

- **Mindful Movement:** Mindful Movement is a somatic practice that combines gentle movement with mindfulness meditation. It involves paying attention to the body's sensations and movements with a non-judgmental attitude, with the goal of promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and enhancing overall well-being.
- **Body Scan Meditation:** Body Scan Meditation is a form of mindfulness meditation that involves systematically focusing attention on different parts of the body. It can help increase body awareness, promote relaxation, and reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Somatic Experiencing:** Somatic Experiencing is a trauma-focused therapy that uses gentle touch and body awareness to help individuals process and release traumatic experiences. It is based on the idea that trauma is stored in the body and that by addressing the physical sensations associated with trauma, individuals can achieve a greater sense of well-being and resilience.
- **Rolfing:** Rolfing, also known as Structural Integration, is a form of deep tissue massage that aims to realign the body's connective tissue (fascia) and improve overall posture and movement. It involves a series of ten sessions that focus on different areas of the body, with the goal of releasing tension and improving overall body function.
- **Craniosacral Therapy:** Craniosacral Therapy is a gentle, hands-on approach that focuses on the craniosacral system, which includes the membranes and fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. It involves light touch to release restrictions in the craniosacral system and promote relaxation and healing.

- **Yoga:** Yoga is a physical, mental, and spiritual practice that originated in ancient India. It combines physical postures (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama), and meditation to promote physical and mental well-being. Yoga emphasizes the connection between the mind and body and can help increase body awareness and promote relaxation.
 - **Tai Chi:** Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art that has evolved into a graceful form of exercise. It involves a series of slow, flowing movements that are performed in a relaxed manner, with an emphasis on proper body alignment and breath control. Tai Chi can help improve balance, flexibility, and overall physical and mental well-being.
 - **Qigong:** Qigong is a Chinese practice that combines gentle movements, meditation, and breathwork to cultivate and balance the body's vital energy (qi). It involves a series of slow, flowing movements and postures that are designed to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and improve overall health and well-being.
 - **Feldenkrais Method:** The Feldenkrais Method is a somatic practice that uses gentle movements and directed attention to improve movement and enhance self-awareness. It is based on the principle that by increasing body awareness and improving movement patterns, individuals can reduce pain, improve function, and enhance overall well-being.
 - **Alexander Technique:** The Alexander Technique is a somatic practice that focuses on improving posture and reducing muscle tension. It involves learning to recognize and release unnecessary muscle tension and to move with greater ease and efficiency. The Alexander Technique can help alleviate pain, improve breathing, and enhance overall physical and mental well-being.
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