

DEVELOPING PRESENCE

Information sheet

“The ancient texts teach us that it is by being present that we can receive the gifts intended for us and participate in our lives in a way which feels good.”

~ from Adriene of yogawithadriene.com

Presence is about being in the now. Developing presence is learning to bring our attention to what is happening in the moment. We are thinking ‘about’ what is happening, we are being with what is happening, our experience of it. To be truly present is to learn to be with ourselves *and* with what is happening around us, and with others.

This can be profoundly nourishing. We can take in the good that is right here in this moment, the pleasure of just being alive and in our body as we move through our lives. Our minds naturally become more quiet and we can have a sense of being whole and integrated; we can appreciate the simple pleasures of each moment of our lives.

And, of course, sometimes being present is painful – we’re experiencing something tough, we have a bunch of yucky sensations moving through our body, a chaos of emotions or thoughts or sensations that we don’t really want or know how to safely get close to. At these moments we may find that we check out and distract ourselves in some way: retreat into thinking; get busy; use alcohol, drugs, food to numb us out; fall asleep, etc....

Over time, as we learn to find places of aliveness and pleasure in being in our bodies, we also learn to be with more difficult sensations with more ease. We might find that we don’t have to think so much about life and living, we can just respond and trust our own selves and inhabit our bodies and lives in ways that feel good. At the very least we find we can allow sensations and thoughts and emotions, we can better ride them through.



Image: Lin Onus, *Michael and I Are Just Slipping Down to the Pub for a Moment*

The practices described below are designed to help you connect more deeply with pleasure, joy, and wholeness in the better times and to stabilise you in times of stress and chaos.

There are a few keys to developing presence:

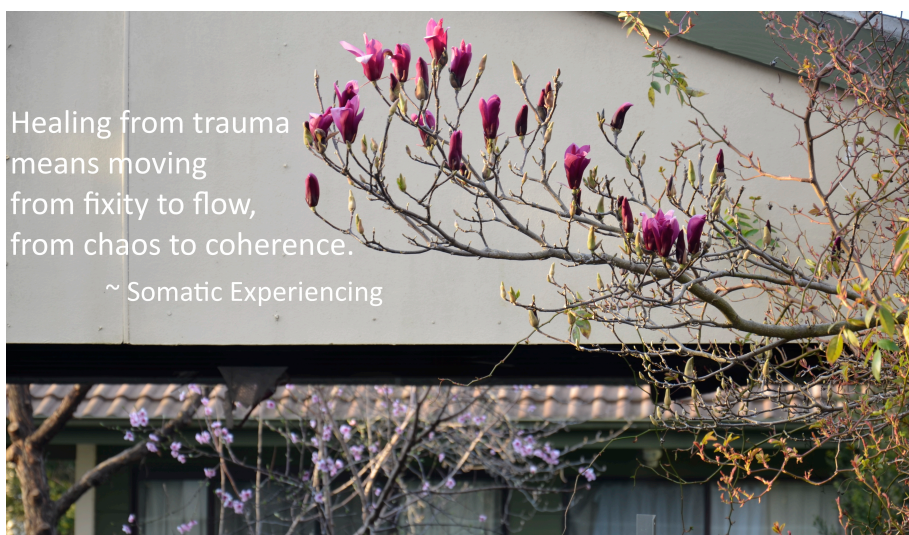
The first is to notice the sensations of your body. I encourage people to **start with noticing the sensations of their moving limbs** (arms or legs, maybe just hands/fingers and feet) **as they do a daily task: making tea, brushing hair, cooking something on the stove, washing dishes.**

Starting with your limbs is usually a safe entry into the felt sense; it often creates a lot of relaxed aliveness, even a connection to our strength. Most of our unpleasant body sensations (the ones that we know as emotions and thoughts) are found in the torso. Taking our attention to our limbs helps us to not get overwhelmed or swept up by 'the stuff inside'. It also supports distress and chaos to have a way out of our bodies: it can be like pulling the plug in a bath.

The second is to **do this in small bits**. If you are new to this you want to just touch in on it. It's not an endurance race; it's not helpful to be 'present' but locked into your sensations while grinning and bearing it. **To begin with we are really looking for what feels pleasurable. If it does not feel good STOP.**

Similarly, let your attention roam until you find what feels best. It may be the legs or arms, it may be your feet and toes or your fingers. In Somatic Experiencing this is called **titration** and is a key element to nervous system regulation and renegotiating trauma. Since trauma is the overwhelm of your system then we want to explore being in the sensations of your body in ways that keep it within the range of what is manageable. This helps your nervous system integrate any experience.

The third is to **move between noticing what is happening within and turning your attention externally** (eg. pay attention to what you are seeing or hearing). In Somatic Experiencing this is called **pendulation**. Like a pendulum it is helpful to allow your attention to move between the sensations of your limbs and the external world. As you play with this you may notice that there is a feeling of settling, of feeling more relaxed and alive, of spacious awareness. This is a way that our nervous system rediscovers its natural rhythm and helps soothe your system and integrate experience.



We all deserve to feel at home in ourselves and our own lives; to live with a full range of choice about how we respond to situations that arise; to feel like our true selves.

If you have ongoing concerns about presence or trying these practices please don't hesitate to contact me (see below for contact details). **It is vital that you feel safe.** We may want to practice presence together. This gives you the opportunity of having someone else tracking with you what is happening, remembering to pendulate and titrate your experience. And just be there to help negotiate anything that comes up.

You can also try these practices when someone else is around. A safe environment is a great resource. Being with another person helps our nervous systems regulate. We can ride on their calm, or how we feel safe with them.

Please do not try to go straight into the sensations of your torso or your head!

That is where we hold a lot of our 'yucky' feelings and it can open something of a pandora's box. Use your own judgement, but I would advise against this. At least until you have a good working practice with your limbs and extremities.

Most of all play with this! Try it out. See what it's like. Do little bits. There's nothing that is right or wrong, find what feels good.

***Our mind, our awareness, is always resting and meditating on something.
In choosing what it rests on we make choices about how we experience life.***

We make choices about the life we live.

~ Sakyong Mipham (paraphrased)



This information sheet was prepared by Chantal Jackson, February 2018.
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