



ROST – Presence-skills

The following are extracts from Merete Holm Brantbjerg (2017):

ROST Exercise Manual .

The full manual is written for Relational Trauma Therapy training.

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Guidance in relation to doing the exercises

All exercises are guided by some overall principles:

Listen for your optimal dosing when doing an exercise. How much power should you use? How big or small, slow or fast do you want to do the movement? And how long does it feel good to continue? If you find a dosing that feels optimum to you, it is often perceived as inner satisfaction. Something feels right, something falls into place. Go for inner success.

Difference in dosing can open up different reactions and resources. Maybe you experience an inner satisfaction with both a fast/bigger and a slow/smaller version of an exercise. Or maybe one of the versions, is the most precise for you.

If you are unsure, if it feels hard to do an exercise - then try a lower dosing. Learning works best when you are curious and not pressured. A lower dosing can diminish or eliminate internal pressure and thus support presence, exploration and curiosity.

If an exercise, by the mere listening to or reading the instruction, causes discomfort, anxiety or the like, the optimal dosing may be to not do the exercise. Opting for not doing an exercise can be a way of going for inner success.

The dosing principle makes it possible to achieve "inner success" no matter if you are working with hyporesponsive (given up, low energized) areas in your body needing low dosage - or with hyper-responsive (controlled, tense) areas needing a higher dosage, using and releasing energy. For elaboration of the concepts hypo-, hyper-response and dosing, please read the articles "*Resource Oriented Skill Training as a Psychotherapeutic Method*" 2007 and "*Hyporesponse - the Hidden Challenge in Coping with Stress*" 2009.

Pay attention to your breathing while you do the exercises. Breathing impacts the energy level in the body and it impacts the flow of emotions. These exercises rarely include instruction on how to breathe. The intention is to let people find their own rhythm between breathing and movement.

After each exercise name for yourself the specific sensations the exercises evoked in you. Put words to your sensations in concrete language.

You can also name the experiential qualities the exercise evokes including moods, feelings and emotions. Verbalize your experiences.

Finding facts based language to name both sensations and emotions is an important aspect of the method. In daily language we often mix sensations, emotions and thoughts into so-called body experiences or categorizations/fusions. We say for ex: "I feel vulnerable" – instead of naming factual reality which could for ex be: "I feel a lack of filling out in the muscles on the front side of my body, I am scared and sad, and I have negative predictions about what is going to happen".

A language based in factual reality supports presence in the here and now and ownership of what is without judgement. Read more in Orientation-exercises in Presence-skills.

(The conceptual difference between specific body sensation and emotionally loaded body experience containing a mix of sensations, emotions and thought-patterns is elaborated in the article: *"Resource Oriented Skill Training as a Psychotherapeutic Method"* 2007).

Neutrality, acceptance and curiosity are key when observing sensations and experiences released by the exercises. Observe what happens to you bodily and emotionally, name it and explore simultaneously how you find a neutral, accepting, curious attitude to observe yourself with.

If you are aware of sensations or experiences that feel difficult to accept, then name the defensive reaction you find in yourself - and meet it with neutrality and acceptance.

Some exercises will be followed by naming the potential the exercise might activate. This is NOT a definition of what you are "supposed" to feel. It is naming a potential. Any reaction to an exercise holds authentic and interesting information.

All couple exercises involving direct physical collaboration or exchange at a distance with another person challenge the ability to resonate simultaneously with yourself and the other.

Focusing on centering and grounding while doing couple exercises is a way of supporting inner presence in contact; of sensing your internal base while in contact with the other. At the same time inner presence enhances the ability to resonate with the other, and in the collaboration to tune into rhythm, energy level, etc.

Roles in the collaboration: Most couple exercises are based in an exchange where one person is supporting another person's exploration. This means that the exercises speak to basic care-seeking and care-giving roles – with the risk of going into dominant or submissive behavior.

The description of the exercises focus primarily on the exploration of the person who is receiving support to explore. It is just as important that the person in the supporting role explores.

How can you keep your centering while you support another person's exploration?

Which of the presence skills help you in sensing yourself, your dosage, your timing etc in the care giving role?

Awareness of sensations and experiences in both roles support an equal collaboration, and can make it easier to discover when one of the roles invite you into exchange impacted by dominance or submission.

Notice which exercises offer you something you perceive as a resource. Name this resource. Remember these exercises. Those are the ones you will be able to use for immediate support in your everyday life.

To support integration of the skills into your daily life you may choose 3 exercises that all provide you with something you experience as a resource - preferably 3 different resources. Experiment with how to bring these exercises into your daily life. It may be through a routine, doing the exercises sequentially at specific times of the day - or in other, more flexible ways suitable for your daily situation and your temperament.

About breathing

In the description of the exercises in this manual you will find very few instructions to how to breathe. This style relates to the tradition taught in the psychomotor training at Skolen for Kropsdynamik in Copenhagen. We learned to respect the strategies imprinted in our breathing patterns and not teach people to 'breathe right'. Encourage to pay attention to breath, stimulate awareness of what you are doing with your breath, and encourage breathing while doing body exercises. Sometimes with instructions to imagine breathing into your legs, your back or other parts of the body.

The style in the exercises in this manual is based on this tradition.

At the same time breath IS important. If you do exercises with a controlled or low breath, your benefit from the exercises diminishes. To breathe while doing body exercises increases access to both sensation and experience.

Dosing once more is key. Find a way to pay attention to your breath and to breathing that best supports you in doing the exercises and provides a level of contact with your sensations and emotional experiences that you can feel is successful.

If exercises that deliberately regulate breathing feel good to you, use them, and find your way of combining them with the body exercises described here.

2 Training principles

In all exercises where you activate singular muscles or muscle groups, you can use 2 overall principles:

1. Hold the muscle activation while you breathe in and out 2-3 times and then slowly let go of the activation. This way of working speaks to hyporesponsive, (flacid, given up) muscles. You build up energy when you work muscularly that way, which is key if you want to impact or change hyporesponsive patterns.

2. Find a rhythm between muscle activation and letting go. You can explore speed and time frame in the movements and shifts that feel most functional for you. This way of working with the muscles speaks to hyperresponsive (controlled, tense) muscles and gives them a chance to become more alive, less contracted. To build up awareness and letting go/releasing energy is key, if you want to impact or change hyperresponsive patterns.

Orientation

When you have done a psychomotor-exercise, pay attention to your orientation in the outer context, you are in. Did your eye-sight, your hearing, your kinesthetic perception of the outer world get impacted by doing the exercise? (smell and taste can be added to the list).

We gather information about the reality we are in here and now, when we orient. There is always data both from within and from outside – from the inner and the outer part of the reality.

Presence Skills

The focus of presence skills is to build personal presence and integrity. These skills support the individual in sensing an internal reference point and an anchor to be used as a base from which to move into contact with others (regulating contact).

Presence skills are the first category of skills trained in ROST. Inner presence and integrity forms a starting point for proceeding into contact with the outside world and for coping with emotions and states of high arousal.

The skills are named:

- Presence skills sitting on a chair
- Flexibility
- Centering
- Grounding
- Boundaries/containment
- Regulating contact - arms and eyes
- Orientation

The order of which presence skills to train first is personal.

However, to many it is easier to work on regulating contact through arms and eyes if a reasonable level of contact to flexibility, centering, grounding and boundaries/containment is established first.

Orienting is an important component in presence.

Factual training of presence skills includes orienting in the outer context, the training happens in - see the room, see the other people, hear the sounds, etc. Presence becomes anchored in the here-and now context. If orienting in the outer context doesn't happen sufficiently, there is a risk that some people will slip into an inner world of experiences without taking in factual information from the here-and now outer context. This may invite consciousness to visit old, locked perceptions of reality and reactions connected to them.

Data-based orienting in the here-and-now context supports the formation of new reality based patterns. A key principle in Relational Trauma Therapy is focus on the here-and-now. Presence here-and-now is seen as the state of consciousness where change of patterns can happen. (For elaboration of this read the article: "*Resource Oriented Skill Training as a Psychotherapeutic Method*" 2007)

Flow of Emotions is also a key component in presence.

When training *Presence Skills* attention to and naming of emotional states is included through verbalizing after the exercises. A typical instruction after an exercise is: "Name what you are sensing in your body (concrete body sensations), and what you are feeling." Through this invitation the ability is trained to differentiate between concrete body sensing, which supports containment of inner states, and the emotional states, needing a bodily presence to be contained in.

Training in differentiating between feeling-words (frames), impacted by locked cognition and words naming basic emotions is trained when a certain level of mastery of presence skills has been reached.

Presence skills sitting on a chair:

Workshops and trainings pretty much always start sitting on chairs – and an element in getting started is to build self-regulatory skills sitting – building a capacity for regulating both hyper- and hypo-response in the muscles, so more fullness, free life-energy and coping becomes available.

The sitting exercises are developed to support the integration of psychomotor skills in every day life. Most people spend part of a day sitting – whereas movement standing and movement with music are more rare contexts.

Learning is statebound. Learning psychomotor skills are thus connected to the context, you were in, when you trained the skills.

Presence skills are therefore being trained both sitting and in standing movement sometimes accompanied by music.

The following sitting exercises all activate more muscle-groups at once – the whole backside of the body, the front side of the torso + the arms etc. They have been simplified as part of developing this approach – with the goal of passing on a series of exercises, that easily and fast opens access to regulating bodily presence through both letting go of tension (hyperresponse) and building up energy (hyporesponse) in key muscle-groups.

The exercises can be used to support presence in all contexts – if you dose low, when you use them, the exercises are discrete. You can do an exercise without anybody noticing it.

All exercises that will be described under the headlines: Flexibility, Grounding, Centering, Boundaries/containment and Regulating contact can be transferred to sitting position.

The headlines are put in parenthesis after each of the sitting exercises, to clarify which of the presence skills the exercise supports.

0. Notice how the relationship between your body and the chair works. You can get pillows, blankets, foot-support etc, to adapt the chair to your body instead of vice versa.

1. Sit with both feet on the ground and your sit-bones in contact with the seat. Choose an “appropriate” distance between your legs, neither big nor small. Let your weight sink into the sit-bones and soles of your feet. Sense how ground and chair come up to meet your feet and butt and stimulate the upward part of grounding. Notice what happens to your breathing, when you invite this letting go. For some people an automatic exhale will be stimulated – a letting go in the breathing as well.

Notice what happens to your orientation in the outer context, you are sitting in. Does the outer context step into the background? Do you let go of staying focused outwards and become more present in yourself? Are you slipping away? Does your body say no thank you to letting go? Etc etc

Sense your version of what happens to you, when you follow the invitation to let go downwards – and with that letting go in tense muscles different places in your body. Do you become more or less present – and in what way?

(Grounding)

Comment: Letting go of tension can start a process of sensing the body here and now. Superficial tension can let go – you can enter a state of being instead of being ready to take action. For some people this invitation to let go of tension opens an experience of more presence. For others it doesn't work that way – the body doesn't join the invitation to letting go – or only joins it partially. For those to whom the invitation to let go doesn't bring more presence, it is likely more functional to start with exercise 3, where energy is being built up instead of letting go.

Both exercises support grounding – exercise 1 does it through regulation of hyperresponse (tension) – exercise 3 does it through regulation of hyporesponse (giving up, low energy). When you know both options, it becomes possible for each of us to find a way into regulating presence in a way that works. Optimizing presence bodily includes regulation of both hyper- and hypo-response – sequence and dosing is individual.

2. Do spontaneous movement-impulses emerge, when you sense your body? An impulse to stretch – move your ankles – arms – move on the sitting bones etc. Follow the impulses and find your dosing in them.

Movements can be tiny small, middle size or big.

(Flexibility)

3. Make a little push with both feet into the floor and notice the movement all the way up through the body.

Experiment with pushing with the middle of the feet, with the inside of the feet or the outside of the feet. Do you feel a difference in your body?

Experiment with dosing and allow yourself to select what works best for you – the version where you don't work hard and where you access something that feels resourcing.

Pushing with the inside of the feet activates muscle groups on the inside of the legs and pelvic floor.

Activation travels up the front of the spine thus supporting an “internal” carriage of the body.

Pushing with the outside of your feet will activate muscle groups on the outside of the legs, hips and upwards along the back of the spine. Boundaries and a more active extrovert carrying capacity are thus supported.

Pushing with the middle foot will potentially support both kinds of carrying capacity and will to some feel more balanced or centered than the other two.

Do you have a preference between the 3 ways of pushing your feet into the ground?

Which resources awaken in you? Name them (f.ex. *strength, boundaries, centering, presence in me etc*)

(Grounding)

4. Push your palms together in front of the sternum. Be aware of letting your shoulders relax while you do it. You can choose a lower dosage by only letting your fingertips meet instead of your palms. This muscle-activation brings energy into the muscles on the front-side of your body – the front gathers, which means that boundaries in contact with the outer world is supported.

Remember to experiment with dosing. The amount of power you invest in the muscle-activation can impact if an exercise works for you, feels meaningless, feels like hard work – or provides you with a resource.

(Boundaries/containment)

5. Move your elbows backwards. If your elbows can reach the back of the chair, let them push up to the back of the chair. This movement activates the support muscles in your back. The activation can also happen through letting your fingers on each hand give resistance to pulling outwards. You can add awareness of your breast-bone moving forward, when the muscles in the surface of the back are activated.

(Boundaries/containment)

Exercise 4 and 5 support building of energy and containment in the upper body.

Do you have a preference between them?

6. Feel the contact between your sit-bones and the seat of the chair. Make circular movements on your sit-bones. Feel how these circular movements also circle around your centre. Move back and forth on your sit-bones - notice how different it feels depending on how far forward or backwards your weight shifts. Find a middle position, not too far forward and not too far backwards. Rest into your sit-bones and feel your centering.

(Centering)

7. Do a cross movement bringing the right knee and left shoulder towards each other - followed by left knee and right shoulder. This is the same action as the standing cross-crawl movement. Find a suitable dosing - the cross movement can be bigger or smaller.

Lift one hip at a time and feel the activation in the deep lumbar muscle (Quadratus lumborum). Or breathe out and contact the possibility of letting go in depth of your lumbar region (or maybe also in depth on the front-side).

The cross-movement and the lifting one the hip activate the muscles Psoas Major and Quadratus Lumborum. Both these muscles lie deep and close to the physical balance point in front of 4th and 5th lumbar vertebrae.

(L4/5) Do you have a preference between them?

(Centering – see also exercise 3 and 4 in Centering)

8. Put your right palm on the outside of left knee – let the knee push into the hand – the hand provides resistance to the push – sense rotation in the lumbar vertebrae. Shift to left hand on right knee.

Remember dosing – the activation can be done with more or less power in the push. This is an additional way to activate the cross-movement described in exercise 7.

(Centering)

9. Place your hands on the inside of your knees. Give resistance while you pull your legs together. This movement activates inner thigh muscles and pelvic floor and supports centering from below.

For some people this way of activating the pelvic floor and the carrying capacity on the front side of the spine works better than pushing the inside of the feet into the floor (exercise 3). Find your preference.

(Centering)

10. Place your hands on the outsides of your knees - push your knees into your hands, while hands/arms offer resistance to the movement. This movement activates the outside of your legs and thus supports boundaries. For some people this way of activating the outside and boundaries works better than pushing the outside of the feet into the ground (exercise 3). Find your preference.

(Boundaries/containment)

In exercise 9 and 10 the arms are also activated together with the activation of inside or outside of legs. For some people this provides an experience of more wholeness in the body. The same goes for the cross-movement in exercise 8.

11. Make eye contact with one or more persons around you, and notice how you can regulate the intensity emerging through eye contact by looking away - and by choosing to start the eye contact again. Also look at the context you are in - the room, surroundings - and notice how the same regulation can be done here: You can shift between focusing on taking in information through the eyes and letting your eyes look downwards as you sense your body.
(Regulating contact and Orientation)

12. Transition from sitting to standing position:
Lean into your sit-bones and the soles of your feet. Tuck your feet a little bit under the chair - you can choose to place one foot a little in front of the other. Move back and forth in the hip joint, shifting the weight onto the soles of the feet when moving forward. Imagine how the floor comes up to meet you through both feet and sit-bones stimulating an upward movement. Let this upward momentum help you "stand up" by continuing one forward movement up into a standing position. Once you are standing, notice how it feels. What is different?
This way of shifting from sitting to standing hardly demands any energy. It builds on the cooperation between gravity and the upward reflex movement - and thereby reduces the need for pure muscle power.

NB Whether this exercise works as intended is somewhat dependent on the chair you are sitting on, whether the chair fits your body proportions. If it doesn't work for you, try a different chair or optimize how you are sitting with pillows under your feet or under your butt.

Flexibility

Flexibility is basically about owning your ability to move and feeling the cooperation in your body's moving apparatus. Flexibility is based on suppleness, on well oiled and supple joints.

Flexibility is a foundation for other skills such as the ability to move and position yourself by choosing where in a room or a contact situation you want to stand. The ability to dose contact is in choosing the amount of distance or closeness you want. Flexibility is also being flexible emotionally and cognitively. All these adjustment skills depend on flexibility being available in the body.

Functional flexibility builds on cooperation between stabilization and movement. Too much movement with too little stabilizing brings over-flexibility, hyper-mobile joints.

stagnation or paralysis.

Working with flexibility holds the potential to initiate new imprints with regards to patterns of either stagnation/paralysis or over-flexibility.

Exercises

1. Move all your joints. Start with toes and ankles - then move knees and hip joints - sense how all the joints in the legs cooperate in movement. Go for movements without strain - imagine that you pour oil into the joints and move them like you would move a mechanical joint to loosen it up, to make it move more freely. Let the movement move up into the spine, from the tailbone up through the lumbar vertebrae - keep the movement in the legs at the same time, maintaining movement into the hips and the pelvis. Let the movement continue into the thoracic area of the spine - sense how the ribcage is joining in with the movement - the breastbone and the joints between breastbone and collarbone - let the movement go out into the shoulder girdle also - sense it in collar bones, shoulder blades and shoulder joints. Keep movement in the legs and torso - and let the movement reach your elbows, wrists and finger joints. Finally let the movement spread into the highest part of the spine - all the way up to the top vertebrae, the skull, the jaw. Sense how all the joints can cooperate - let the movement go up and down through them all. Remember dosing. The movements can be big or small, fast or slow, using more or less power.

2. Balance between stability and flexibility

Notice if you are mostly attracted to optimizing your stability or your flexibility right now.

You can increase your stability by pushing both legs outwards (See Boundaries no 2) - or pull both legs inwards (See Centering no 10).

You can stabilize your upper body by pushing your palms together or by moving your elbows backwards in relationship to your body. (See Presence Skills sitting on a chair)

Which of these are most stabilizing for you? Or don't any of them work?

Fall into movement: Sit on the floor, balance on your butt and then let yourself fall backwards or to one of the sides – and feel how the floor is meeting you in the fall. You can dose the falls, so you fall a very short distance and then let the contact between your hands and the floor "catch you". Or you can let yourself fall all the way to the floor, roll around and come up again, like a tumbler. Find the dosage that allows you to feel safe in the fall and in letting the body rebalance.

Standing again. Transfer the exploration of falling and rebalancing to standing position. Move your weight around on your feet, and then move further, so you fall into movement. Notice how your body rebalances. It happens through reflex movements. You cannot direct from your consciousness how you rebalance – it happens automatically.

Experiment with how you combine stabilization and falling into reflex movements. One way of combining them is to shift between moving slowly (See Centering no 6) and falling into reflex movements and letting your body rebalance.

(In Coping with High Arousal states you find ways of working with supporting the personality to let to into reflex movements)

Centering

Centering in this tradition means contacting the body's physical balance point, located right in front of 4th-5th lumbar vertebrae. Contacting this point or area is potentially linked to a feeling of having an inner centre or core.

On a physical level, strength and coordination are increased by presence in your physical balance point. 10)

In the area in front of 4th-5th lumbar vertebrae a fascia centre is located;- a junction between the thin membrane of connective tissue enveloping all units of the body - muscles, bones, organs, nerves, etc. All the body's fasciae are connected into one whole system. It seems a natural assumption that our physical balance point and feeling of an inner core is connected to this fascial junction.

Exercises

1. Move your spine – with awareness of the fact that your spine both has a backside and a front-side. Focus especially on the awareness of the front-side. What does it add to include the front-side of the spine in your awareness?

Focus the sensation especially in the lumbar region - think of the front of the spine there. Ask yourself how big you think these vertebrae are. How far do they reach into the body from where you can touch it on the back?

The factual answer is about 10cm/4 inches. Try to let this anatomical data into your sensory awareness.

Vertebrae are big. They literally reach into the centre axis of your body. Right in front of 4th and 5th lumbar vertebrae lies your physical balance point.

Feel that area and name your sensations and experiences.

2. Work in couples. A puts her hand on B's spine - start where the neck meets the shoulder area and continue downwards till you reach the sacrum. B moves the part of her spine A is touching. Notice variations in sensations and range of movement in different parts of the spine. Explore which dosing of the movements and the firmness from A's hand, that optimizes your contact to different parts of your spine.

Have a brief talk following this exercise: B shares what sensations and experiences the exercise left in her body. Switch places.

Sense your spine again - can you still sense it when the other person is not touching it? How does it feel to stay aware of that sensation and look around in your surrounding context?

3. Standing cross-crawl. Bring your right knee and your left elbow towards each other. Shift to left knee and right elbow. Alternate. Mark each end of movement, perhaps with a sound. Notice how your abdominal muscles are activated by this action - the superficial muscles as well as the deeper layers.

The muscle, Psoas Major, located deep inside your abdominal region is activated. It's origin is in front and on the side of 4th-5th lumbar vertebrae, right behind your physical balance point.

Remember dosing. Also with regards to how long it feels good to do the exercise.

Your movement can be so subtle that you only sense the intention of doing it. Try out different levels of dosing and notice which sensations and experiences emerge. To many people, different resources become available with higher or lower dosage in this exercise.

4. Standing – make one leg at a time shorter – meaning lift one hip at a time upwards with stretched leg. This movement activates another muscle (Quadratus lumborum) close to the physical balancepoint, more to the backside than Psoas Major, the one you trained with the crossmovement. Sense into the depth of the lumbar part of your back between your hipbone and the lowest rib close to the spine. You can put your hands on the sides of your body so your thumbs can press into that area. Lift one hip at a time again. Can you sense that something gets activated in there?

Some people feel supported in their centering when they activate this muscle as described here. For others it is more supportive to let go in the muscle. When breathing out, imagine that you let go in the depth of your lumbar back and in the same time let go into your legs by bending your knees slightly.

Does focusing on this muscle awaken new sensations related to your centering?

5. Slow-flow. Move in slow motion. One long continuous movement engaging all parts of your body and revolving around your balance point. Move in the room. Keep your eyes open.

Dosing slow-flow can be done by making the slow movements bigger or smaller. Find the dosing that helps you maintain balance in the easiest way.

You can do this exercise standing up, sitting or lying down.

Notice that your body is orienting both inwards and outwards at the same time. Your body is registering information about your own movements and in the same time about the context you are in, the room, people you pass etc.

Maintaining a slow pace of movement requires activity of all muscle groups around your center point. Without presence in and around your balance point it is hard to hold your balance. Through the muscle activation this exercise builds up energy and increases presence in your center area.

Do movements that involve all parts of your body. Feel your balance point as a center for the movements. All movements can revolve around this point - can refer to this point.

6. Work in couples. B offers resistance all the way around A's pelvis, using both hands. A is pushing up against B's hands - sideways, diagonally backwards, directly backwards, diagonally backwards, sideways and finally forward (resistance is given to the pelvic bones in front) Push from within. Find a slow push stemming from your center area, that will give you a sense of filling up from the center and out towards the hands.

7. Sit on the floor - balance on your butt - move your arms and legs in different directions. Support yourself with arms/hands against the floor if you get tired - and keep moving. Feel how your abdominal and back muscles cooperate.

Keep moving about on your butt. Feel the contact between your sitting bones and the floor. Let the movements grow smaller and smaller until you are only doing tiny movements on your sitting bones. Stop moving, and feel how your weight is being carried by the floor through your sitting bones, and how the pressure from the floor comes up to meet your sitting bones. Feel the contact from your center down to the floor and back up again.

8. Move involving all parts of your body sensing your balance point as center in all the movements. All movements can turn around the center, can refer to the center.

9. Standing with feet parallel and a not too big and not too small distance between your feet. Pull feet and legs inwards without actually moving your feet. This will activate the adductor muscles in your thighs and your pelvic floor. The activation can be done from the front part of your feet, your heels or the middle part of your feet - leading to activation of front part, back part or the whole of your pelvic floor.

A parallel to this exercise is found in Boundaries/Containment exercise 2, where feet and legs are pushed outwards activating the outside of your legs - which supports the sense of boundaries.

10. Choose a place to stand in the room and focus your attention on sensing the area around the balance point. Close your eyes if that makes it easier to focus your attention on inner sensation that way. Use the methods that work best for you. You can think of the front side of the spine, make small movements with that part of the spine, or breathe into the area. Choose what works for you.

Sense the area, your core and just ask yourself what it feels like for you to be in contact with that area of the body - is it known? Is it distant?

How would you describe it - find a language that works for you. Some people translate the sensation into colours or forms, pictures, sounds, energy movements, words. Find your language. Sense the core area and name it inside of you and feel what it does to you to sense it and name it.

Grounding

Grounding is about our body's connection to the ground we stand, sit or lie on. Grounding is a dynamic phenomenon - with a down-going movement and an up-going movement. Functional grounding requires cooperation and a reasonable balance between the down-going and the up-going flow of energy.

Down-going grounding is handled by gravity. Our weight literally falls to the ground. One part of working with grounding is about supporting your body to surrender to the forces of gravity.

The up-going part of grounding is stimulated by the counter pressure from the ground when meeting the weight of the body. The weight of the body falls towards the ground, pushes into the ground and physically a counter pressure is released. This counter pressure stimulates a stretch reflex, an up-going movement in the body, starting at the heels/the soles of your feet, up through your legs, up along the spine (primarily in the front), up through the neck, to the top of your head, to a point above your head.

The stretch reflex is released for the first time during birth. By using this reflex the foetus pushes itself out through the birth canal. Holding an infant's heels releases the stretch reflex long before the baby has muscle motor function to carry itself into a standing position.

This reflex movement-impulse is potentially present all the way through life, just like gravity is – and access to the 2 powers can be impacted by hyper- and hypo-response in muscle-groups. The muscular patterns can be negotiated/regulated, so natural grounding become fully or partially available. This negotiation can be supported by the following exercises.

Exercises

1. Standing. Feel the contact between your feet and the ground and put words to how this contact feels. Shift your weight around onto different parts of the soles of your feet: front foot, heel, outside, inside. Feel the contact between these different parts of the soles and the ground. Settle into a centre position where your weight is transferred to the ground through an area in the centre of your feet. Notice how this impacts your stance.

2. Work in couples both lying on a mattress on the back, bend your knees, pull the legs up toward the chest so you can put your feet against the other person's feet. In this position start moving your legs together - warm up the joints in the legs, ankles, knees and hip joints. Find possible movements together in this unusual position of contact. After a while start using your strength by pushing up against each other - sense your breathing while you do it. You can either hold your breath or let out sounds, allowing yourself to make noise. You can hold on to the mattress with the hands.

Find the right dose for you, meaning use the amount of strength that empowers you. There is no "right dose" - there is an optimal dose for each of us. Go for success!!

Talk in the couples after having finished the pushing. Describe how it impacted your body sensation and feeling state.

Stand up - sense how the connection to the ground feels now. Name it.

Grounding can improve by actually using your legs and using your strength instead of holding it back or giving it up.

3. Stand on both legs - with a not too big and not too small distance between them - both feet directed forward. Shift your weight so all your weight is carried on one leg - bend a little in the knee and ankle. Stand like that for a while and notice what happens to your breathing. Imagine that you breathe all the way into your leg. You can also repeat slowly stretching your knee and bending it. This makes the muscles in the leg work dynamically instead of statically. Find your dose related to how long it feels functional for you to stand like that.

Stretch the leg again - still carrying all your weight. Allow trembling if it happens and then stand on both legs again. Name how the sensation in the two legs are different.

Do the same exercise with the other leg.

Finish with naming how it feels now to stand on both legs.

This exercise supports the down-going part of grounding.

4. Standing. Rest on both feet. Think about how the ground creates a counter pressure to the pressure your body puts on the ground. The ground is meeting your feet. Let your feet take in the pressure/energy from the ground into the soles of your feet and notice the impact throughout your body.

This is a simple way of stimulating the up-going part of grounding.

Again focus on how the connection between your body and the ground feel now. Name it.

If you focus for a long time on the down-going part of grounding you tend to become too heavy.

Healthy grounding holds a balance between down-going and up-going energy. Between gravity and a reflexive up-going impulse in the body.

5. Make a little stamp with one leg at a time - allow the stamp to start a movement that flows all the way from the foot up through the legs to the sacrum up along the spine, up through the neck to the top of the head and maybe even above the head.

Do it several times with each leg. Notice if one side of your body has a greater talent for allowing the movement to rise all the way through your body. Name it.

Sense how your connection to the ground feels now – when you include both the downgoing and the upgoing part of the connection.

6. Sit on the floor or on a chair and put one leg on the other knee allowing your ankle to move freely. Hold your ankle with both hands close to the ankle joint (so as to offer the joint more safety). Move your ankle with your hands in circular movements, back and forth, etc. After a while move your hands to the midsection of your foot and move that part with your hands. Repeat with toes and toe joints. Notice if your ankle joint will allow the hands to do the movements. When you finish one foot, stretch both legs and notice how feet, legs and the two sides of your body feel. Describe the differences.

Repeat with your other ankle and foot. Again, stretch both legs and notice how your legs and entire body feel.

Holding your ankles with your hands provides a kind of contact often experienced as nurturing or optimizing safety. It can support the possibility of letting go of freeze in the ankles.

If you move the ankle with your hands far away from the joint, you may feel a difference. Explore it by holding your toes and the lower part of your calf instead – and let the hands move the ankle. Does that make a difference for you compared to holding close to the ankle joint? A potential consequence can be that the ankles don't allow the hands to do the movement – they stay in control.

Notice your ankles when standing up. When standing notice your connection to the ground now.

The state of the ankles has a profound impact on your contact to the ground.

7. Move lying on the floor – let your whole body feel the contact with the floor. Include the contact of your hands with the floor. How does this impact your sense of grounding?

Move sitting on the floor – use contact between hands and floor as part of the movements. Feel the palms' contact to the floor – both downgoing and upgoing. Your weight can meet the floor through your palms – and the floor is meeting your palms.

Slowly stand up so you bring sensations and experiences from the movements on the floor with you. When you stand again notice how your grounding feels now. And also notice that your hands are still connected to the floor. You may imagine the your hands are playing ball with the floor.

For some people it is easier to open up to the experience of being grounded through movement lying and sitting on the floor. In psychomotor development we learn grounding first lying and sitting – and then standing. This includes that the hand-floor contact comes before the feet-floor connection developmentally. You can experiment with what works best for you – in what sequence.

8. Make a springing movement in your knees and ankles while standing. Imagine a spring in the back of your knees. Let it be an energetic movement, moving up and down - not collapsed and not controlled.

Feel the movement in knees and ankles. You can do this exercise on one leg or on both legs at once.

Stop moving and check your sensation. How did it impact your connection to the ground? How does it feel now?

Making these springy movements activates both the down-going and the up-going relationship to the ground.

You can do exercises/movements with your lumbar region, spine, shoulders and neck - and following each exercise return to springing. This offers an opportunity to realize how many areas throughout the body impacts grounding and can take part in it.

Do the springy movement again - and feel the springyness up through ankles, knees, lumbar, spine. Let the shoulders get springy too and allow the movement to reach into the arms, feeling that your arms are part of how you relate to the ground.

Up-going and down-going. Allow the springy movement to reach up into your neck and head.

Boundaries and Containment

Boundaries are the ability to feel and demonstrate that something is me and something is the surrounding world.

Boundaries contain 2 important aspects:

- a) Being able to fill up your body and your energy field with your own life energy. Being able to contain and nurture your life energy and keep it together.
- b) Being able to clarify your boundary to your surroundings. Being able to protect your boundary by saying No and Stop and being able to signal this outwards.

Both of these skills are essential to sensing and demonstrating your boundaries.

Containment is the ability to feel your body as an actual physical container around everything that goes on inside of you.

The skills of boundaries and containment overlap. Containment is related to holding a space around what is going on inside. Boundaries face both inwards towards myself (I can keep my boundaries gathered around me) and outwards towards the surrounding context (I can clarify my boundaries to the surroundings).

The skills of containment and centering also overlap. Sensing the muscular container in the torso provides us with a very tangible space around the centre. If muscle groups in your torso are primarily hypo-responsive (given up) you might 'lose' your centering through that area. (A typical situation for instance, with the abdominal muscles and pelvic floor).

If muscle groups in your torso are primarily hyper-responsive (held back, controlled), the space around your center will get narrow, making it difficult to feel centered that way.

Exercises

1. Clap the whole surface of your body with your hands. Clap firmly so as to wake the sensation of the skin. Clap both clothed and non-clothed areas. Also pat head and face. In couples take shifts clapping each other's back, especially the area between the shoulder blades that you can't reach by yourself.

What sensations does this leave in you? Feel yourself and look out into the room. How do you perceive your own contours and the contours of other people and objects in the room?

This exercise stimulates the sensing of your skin boundary and it often impacts visual perception in the direction of more clarity.

2. Stand with your weight equally distributed on both legs and with 'normal' distance between your feet - not too big, not too small. Make a push outwards with the legs from knees and ankles, activating the outsides of your legs without moving your feet.

Also without lifting the insides of your feet off the floor.

Continue the muscular activity for a while. Breathe while maintaining the muscle activation, like breathing into a container.

Then slowly let go of muscle activation.

Name your sensations.

To feel the meaning of being in contact with the outside of your legs more clearly, you can experiment like this:

Let your knees drop slightly inwards by giving up in the muscles on the outside of the thighs. And feel what this does to your body sensations and the feeling of having an energy field or a space around you.

The energy field collapses when the outsides of your thighs give up, and the knees drop inwards.

Do the above exercise again from the collapsed position, slowly. Press your knees and ankles outwards, and feel if the energy field surrounding your body can inflate again.

This exercise carries the potential to build up energy in your personal space - 'fill it up'. It can also support the ability to hold yourself gathered together.

A parallel to this exercise is described under Centering. You pull feet and legs inwards instead of pressing them outwards. That will activate adductor muscles on the inside of your thighs and your pelvic floor, which supports centering.

3. Push outwards with hands and arms on an inhale. Start this movement with your hands placed close to your body. Push outwards in different directions, forward, to the sides, backwards, up. Find the directions that work best for you. "Best" meaning that you get a sensation of filling up your personal space and your upper body.

Remember dosing. How long, how many times, how deep a breath feels right to you.

What did this add to your body sensation and the sensation of space around you, especially in your upper body?

Try the opposite version. Do the same movements on an exhale. Push outwards with hands and arms on an exhale. You can add a sound if you wish.

How does that feel?

Which version works better for you? Or do you like them both each in their own way? Return to the version most functional for you, especially if the first was better, and repeat it.

The 'Inhale' version supports a hypo-responsive muscle pattern by you taking in energy through the inhale while the muscles are activated. This builds up energy and presence in the muscles and supports the capacity to keep the energy, thereby filling up from within and being able to fill out your space with your own energy.

The 'Exhale' version is more meaningful with regards to a hyper-responsive muscle pattern, where impulses and energy are held back in the upper body. It supports you in letting go of something. Energy is released, let go, expressed.

4. Place yourself in the room so you have space around you.

Use your arms and hands to explore the idea and/or sensation of having an energy field around you belonging to you and your body.

Notice after a while what kind of arm movements you are using. Are you pushing outwards with your palms turned away from your body or are you doing gathering/ pulling movements with your palms turned towards your body?

If you mostly did one of them, try the other one also. Which one works best for you in terms of getting a sense of having an energy field around you belonging to you?

Or do both of them work for you but in different ways?

Name your experiences while still standing.

The gathering movements with palms turned towards the body relate to your capacity to keep your space gathered around you, embracing yourself, keeping something for yourself, taking in, so the space gets filled up etc.

The pushing outwards movements with palms turned outwards related to your capacity to make your boundary visible to the outer context, say stop and no, widen your space, getting space for yourself etc

5. Take a piece of string. Sit on the floor and lay out the string around you so your field/your personal space becomes visible. Spend time finding the right size and shape of your space. Feel what happens in your body, when you sit there in your string space. Put your sensations and experiences into words.

What does it feel like to fill out your space? If this instruction awakens an impulse to change the size of the string space, then do it.

Sometimes you may feel like having 2 spaces. One relatively close to your body which is the space you fill out with your energy, and another further out demonstrating a contact boundary to the surrounding world.

(Original version of this exercise is written by Jack Lee Rosenberg).

When you remove the string, sense that the energy field is still there. It is your personal space, it belongs to you and you are the one who is in charge of what happens to it. You are the one who can decide the size of it - you can pull it close, you can make it big, etc.

Walk around in the room with ownership of your personal space and sense how it feels to be in contact with your surroundings, with other people, when you pass them, when you look at them, etc.

6. Training the Stop-reflex.

Individually first - take a step forward with your right leg - and simultaneously say STOP and push forward with your left hand. Make the push stop firmly - and hold that position for a while. (The cross movement activates muscles around the center.)

Do it opposite also - left leg - right arm and hand.

Do it with one of the legs - and both arms/hands.

How do you optimize the impact of the STOP? Experiment with the size of arm movement, leg movement in stepping forward and volume of voice. Many people discover that "less is more". The more concentrated the movements are, the more impact they have.

Let the energy in the stop come out in your eyes also – and experiment with eyecontact while you say stop. Both can take a step forward, push forward with the arms and say stop at the same time – so a meeting is established in the stop.

To raise your hands and push outwards is a reflex directed protection reflex. It can be released if we are about to fall, when something is threatening us or when we feel threatened, and the impulse to protect ourselves awakens. This reflex movement is weakened in some people related to stuck trauma patterns. Training the movement can potentially start building up a new pattern - an alternative to the stuck one. Sometimes the new patterns starts with a tiny lift in the wrist. Dosing can make the difference between a pattern being negotiated or just repeated.

7. Work in couples. COME - STOP exercise

A is standing - being present in your grounding and centering, being aware of your breathing. B is standing as far away from A as the room allows. When A is ready you ask B to come. B is then walking towards A in normal walking speed.

When A becomes aware of changes in body sensations - or emotional reactions - you say STOP and B stops.

Typical body sensations to signal the Stop are: Hands getting warm, breathing stops, stomach reacts, weight shifts to either front foot or back foot, etc.

Stop means: Something happens in me in the contact with you right now. I want to feel that. Stop does not mean: I don't want contact with you. Saying Stop is part of regulating contact.

B keeps walking until A says Stop. Do this - don't protect A by doing the job for her/him.

When you have been standing for a while at the first stop-distance - A can experiment with asking B to take some steps closer - or to take some steps back - looking for the next distance to say stop. Through this experiment you can explore what distance means in relation to being and staying present in contact.

A is supposed to name what body sensations activate the stops.

Do this 2-3 times before shifting roles.

B. Same basic exercise as 7. This time A stands with her body's right side, left side and finally back turned to the direction B is coming from.

That means A meets B with different sides of the body turned into the field of contact.

Notice if your body sensations vary, and if your way of saying Stop varies - depending on which side of your body is facing B. Do you say Stop at the same distance or not?

If the thought of someone coming towards you from behind causes anxiety, discomfort or fear, then leave this version out.

The Come-Stop exercise trains awareness of and respect for body-signals in contact – it trains the capacity to actively participate in regulation contact through saying both *come* and *stop*. It trains inclusion of clear direction and signaling as a functional aspect of contact. Often conscious or unconscious norms, thought-patterns and self-images are brought into consciousness, so it becomes possible to look at and negotiate with the stuck relational patterns these types of thinking are connected to. (*Not allowed to say Stop – dangerous to say Stop or Come – impossible for me to say Stop, I am overwhelmed even before the other person starts moving towards me – it is "best" to let the other come as close as possible, I can take it = contact is something, I am supposed to tolerate etc, etc.*)

This exercise has provided the basis for the development of the entire skill category *Meeting and Confrontation Skills*. You will find exercise 6 and 7 again in that chapter with an extensive addition.

8. Sense your personal space - imagine the "boundary string" - exercise 5 in Boundaries/Containment

A and B face and walk towards each other - Stop when you sense the "boundary strings", where your personal spaces meet. Experiment with and without eye contact. What sensations and experiences are triggered in this kind of contact? How do you "know" at what distance the spaces meet? What are the body sensations that support this non-verbal knowledge?

Again stand facing each other at some distance. Each of you "draw your boundary string" closer to your body - making your personal space more compact.

Keep the same energy level (usually the energy level in the body will rise when the energy is compressed within a smaller space). Once you both have done this walk towards each other again and Stop when the spaces meet.

Go back to the original position and regulate the size of your boundary field to the size that feels natural to you.

Put words to this experience. How was it to let your personal spaces meet in the 1st experiment where they were of "normal" size? How was it to make your personal space more compact? How was it to meet in the 2nd experiment where both of you had compressed your spaces?

This exercise trains many aspects of bounded contact: Sensing the size of your personal space - owning your ability to regulate the size of your space and keeping it in a certain size in a meeting - coping with an increase of intensity internally and when meeting others.

This exercise may trigger many different experiences. Patterns related to the "natural" size of personal space are highly culturally - and sub-culturally - influenced. In some cultures and sub-cultures it is "normal" for personal spaces to be relatively small and condensed, which leads to contact often being very energized and in close proximity with gesturing, loud voices and powerful emotional energy. (I have encountered this in South Europeans, Arabs, South Americans and people that grew up in sub-cultures with strong emotional expressiveness). In North American and Northern European culture the norm is rather for personal spaces to be larger - less compressed - avoiding the powerful accumulation of energy associated with meeting compressed personal spaces. We often enter an "overlapping" contact where clear I-you-boundaries are more blurred.

Stress level is another factor that usually influences the size of personal space. Compressing your personal space can be a mechanism that kicks in when stress is on the rise - when you are forced to handle a meeting with a greater pressure coming from outside. When your personal space is compressed, the energy level in the body increases (that is if you retain the energy available to you and don't let it go - and if there is sufficient muscular presence in the body container). Training this skill will increase your ability to withstand greater pressure and still remain present and gathered.

9. Choose a place in the room where you like to be. A place you can establish as yours right now - and experiment with what actions you want to take to make it visible that this is your space. What things do you want around you? How do you want to sit? etc.

This exercise supports sensing territorial boundaries. (To some people this is the boundary skill awakened by the string exercise described earlier, and to others the string exercise appeals more to making visible the otherwise invisible personal boundary space).

In Safety Skills under Optimizing Safety Territorially you will find a more elaborated version of this exercise.

Exercises to Support Containment

1. Work in couples. B offers resistance all the way around A's pelvis, using both hands. A is pushing up against B's hands - sideways, diagonally backwards, directly backwards, diagonally backwards, sideways and finally forward (resistance is given to the pelvic bones in front) Push from within. Find a slow push stemming from your center area, that will give you a sense of filling up from the center and out towards the hands.

2. Work in couples. A and B are standing in front of each other, both with one foot in front of the other. Let your palms meet in pushing position. Push up against each other's hands slowly. Sense how muscles around your center activate together with the activation in your arms. Sense contact between your feet and the ground, your center-area, firmness in your arms and let firmness come into your eyes in eye-contact. Stay in the meeting for a while and then let go slowly again. Do this a couple of times. This exercise supports filling out the whole body with energy and in the same time containing the energy. The same exercise is done pulling instead of pushing.

3. Feel the entire torso as a container of energy. What parts of this container feel stronger or weaker in you? A lot of muscle groups are part of the bodily container: back, belly, butt, hips, pelvic floor, diaphragm, chest, shoulder girdle. In couples help each other to find ways of strengthening the physical space by pushing up against the other person's hands.

This can be done for instance by offering resistance on different parts of the torso both front and back. Push up against the hands. Find the dosing in pushing that works the best to support the experience of the body being filled up. All the way out to the skin.

Regulating Contact - Contact to Arms, Eyes and Breathing

The motor function of the arms is related to a whole range of contact skills. Arms are involved in actions such as reaching, grabbing, pulling in, keeping at a distance, pushing away, letting go, giving and receiving - all the actions we use for regulating contact. Movements of the arms have the potential for connecting us to the world around us.

Also the eyes are an important part of our contact field with the surrounding context - and regulating eye contact is an important part of regulating contact.

With regards to both arms and eyes you can focus on your own connection to them. How is your relation to, your contact to, and your ownership of your eyes and arms? Do they feel connected to your center or not? You can also focus on how arms and eyes hold the potential for action that reaches out into the contact field with the world around you. How does it feel to have arms and eyes fill out that function?

Our breathing is also an essential part of how we regulate between ourselves and the surrounding context. We are in a constant energy exchange with the outer world through our breathing - we reach out, take in air, let go, breath out, rest. Breathing holds a basic rhythm in our interaction with the outer world, which gets established very early in life - and which can be impacted by interactions and experiences throughout our entire life.

Exercises

See also "Building a body container" and "Containing and releasing energy and sound" in Coping with emotions. There are more exercises involving arms and breathing.

1. Feel your arms - and name your sensations and experiences. How do the arms feel physically; how is it for you to be in contact with them?

2. Move your arms while being in contact with your center. What movement impulses do you feel in your arms? What do your arms feel like doing?

To realize the significance of the connection between arms and center, keep moving the arms for a while, while intentionally NOT feeling your center. While the connection between your center and arms is cut off, name the experiences this evokes in you.

Reestablish the connection between arms and center and move your arms from there, and feel how this impacts your sensation and feeling of your arms and their impulses.

The connection between arms and center is important. It has the ability to support the experience that the arms are mine. It is from inside me I direct my actions into the field of contact. Direction and ownership doesn't belong to the surroundings. They belong to me.

Connection between arms and center also increases access to physical power in the arm movements. You can test out this statement by doing any movement with your arms that needs a certain level of physical power. Do first the movement while sensing connection between arms and center - and then do it while you consciously reduce your contact to your center. How do you register the difference?

3. Notice the impulses you have regarding contact. What do your arms feel like doing regarding contact. How close or far do you feel like being, and which arm movements are linked to this signalling?

4. Grasp, hold and let go. Do these 3 movements with your hands – first grasp – and notice how you sense and experience that movement – then continue to hold. How does that feel? – and finally let go of the grip with your palms turned downwards, so you can feel that you are actually letting go of something. (If you had something in your hand it would fall) How is it to let go?

Notice that you can grasp, hold and let go either from the little finger side or from the thumb side of your hand. How do you experience the 2 ways?

Grasping with the little fingers comes first developmentally – it is a sensing grasp. Grasping with the thumb makes it possible to start handling things, it brings in the potential for action.

In couples – grasp the other, f.eks. a piece of the other person's clothes or arm or shoulder, hold for a while and then let go. Change roles.

Which sensations and experiences awaken in you in this exchange? What is easiest available, most known or unknown to you?

In couples say hello to each other with a handshake. Notice the phases of grasping, holding and letting go of the handshake – and verbalise what you sense and experience in the 3 phases. Try with both hands.

The above sequences can be combined so you shift between grasping, holding and letting go of the other – and then grasp yourself = sense yourself and what is going on in you, hold your awareness there for a while and then let your attention shift to the outer context, maybe the other person again. That rhythm is described in Systems-oriented skills as part of the method "Functional subgrouping", which offers training in resonance with both self and other.

5. In couples – sit in front of each other with an object, that can fall to the ground without breaking and that is easy to grasp, hold and let go of. A holds the object in one hand with the back of the hand turning upwards – and is letting go of the object so it falls into the hand of B, who's palm is turned upwards. B takes hold of the object. Then shift roles. Give and receive in this way until the movements become automatic. And try with both hands.

When giving and receiving in this way we train psychomotor movements originating from approx 1 years old. Children that age can keep playing with letting go of objects, grasping them again, letting them go again etc. Other styles of exchanging objects – f.ex. letting the object lie on your palm and let the other take it – doesn't train letting go. Try that style – and notice how you experience the difference.

6. Work in couples. A and B stand in front of each other - both stand with one leg in front of the other. With one hand at a time - push up against the other person's hand. The movement starts with A's elbow being fully bent. Let the push be connected to your center. As soon as you start pushing up against the resisting hand allow your energy to stabilize in the center and push from there. Find the optimal amount of resistance, so you push in a way that really feels successful. Include eye contact.

Try with both hands.

How does it feel to push from a centered position?

Same exercise - but this time the person pushing diminishes his or her centering and grounding - so the arm is isolated in the push. The other person gives the same amount of resistance.

How does that feel to be not centered when you push?

End the exercise with a successful, centered push before you shift roles.

Same exercise can be done in a way where the energy in the push is released. This means that A is actually moving B away with the push. Important that both stay centered when you do this.

Same exercise with pulling. Start the movement with A's arm being almost fully stretched and start the pull from there. Try with both hands - and both being centered and uncentered. End with a centered, successful pull. Include eye contact.

Also when pulling you can try out a version where energy is released in the pull. A is pulling B all the way to the side of you and letting go of the grip in the end. Again important that both stay centered.

7. Another version of pushing and pulling:

In pairs. A and B stand facing each other, both with one foot in front of the other. Palms meet in a pushing position. Push up to each other's hands slowly. Find a dosage that works for both of you. (If that is not possible, if the difference in functional dosage is big, shift to different partners). Sense activation around your center combined with activation in the arms. Sense contact between the feet and ground, sense your center and sense firmness in the meeting of the arms - and allow firmness to come out into your eyes also in eye contact. Stay in this meeting a while and then let go slowly again. Do this a couple of times.

This exercise stimulates filling out energy into your whole body in a contained form.

The same exercise is done pulling instead of pushing. A pull means that elbows bend. Sense again support from legs, center, firmness in arms - and in eye-contact. Hold the meeting and let it go a couple of times.

Eyes

8. Pay attention to your eyes - let them be open or closed.

There is a connection between the center and the bottom of the eyes. Feel it or imagine it, as you follow a connection of energy from the core up along the front of your spine (or inside the spine) to the bottom of your eyes.

Now open your eyes and look around - still sensing the connection between your eyes and your center - as if you are looking out from your center. Look at your surroundings this way - also look at another person. If it feels difficult to stay connected to the center when opening your eyes and looking, then close them again and reestablish the connection. Your eyes belong to you - they are connected to your center.

9. Regulating contact happens when regulating eye contact. Stand opposite another person. Alternate between making eye contact and looking down or to the side. Experiment with finding a rhythm that fits you. How long does it feel good to maintain eye contact and when does it feel good or natural to break it? Feel your centering as you keep the eye contact as well as when you look in a different direction. Contact is not only maintained through eye contact. The whole body is involved in somatic resonance which is a big part of experiencing contact.

9. Look down. Let it happen through a movement in your eyes, not your neck and throat, and notice what happens with your focus. What is your attention focused on as you look down?

Look up towards the ceiling - again moving the eyes themselves, and notice what your attention then focuses on.

The overall pattern is that you get closer to body sensation and emotions when looking down and closer to mental activity or imagery when looking up. (NLP developed a whole range of eye exercises of this sort).

10. While you move notice other people's movements too. Mirror an element of another person's movement pattern. Be in contact with the other that way for a while and then let go of your focus on the other person and let focus on your own movement impulses come in the foreground again. Experiment with finding a rhythm between mirroring other's movements and following your own movement impulses.

Which of the previously trained skills support you in sensing yourself, for example sensing your center, while mirroring somebody else?

And which skills support you when letting go of the other and finding your focus on your own impulses?

Breathing

12. In couples - B is giving contact with the hands to different parts of A's ribcage. A is moving up to B's hands. Establish contact to the whole ribcage that way. Shift roles. Go for precise dosage.

What does it leave in you after having established contact to your ribcage?

13. Work with the diaphragm - a big dome-shaped muscle inside the ribcage. Pull your solar plexus inwards - and stretch it out again. With this movement you start "massaging" your diaphragm, get movement into the muscle. Remember dosing - the muscle can be impacted by either tension or low energy - so the movements can be small or big depending on what feels functional for you.

14. In pairs - work with the diaphragm. B offers contact and resistance to A's diaphragm by placing the root of the hands just below the lower ribs at the front of the body. A initially follows the push from B's hands, contracting the front of the body - then A pushes up against the hands and pushes the hands out. Respect individual dosing.

If the diaphragm is hyperresponsive (tense), it can be functional with firm resistance from the hands to push up against. Sound can be released, when the hands are pushed all the way out. If the diaphragm is impacted by hyporesponse (low energy), it is functional with a light resistance, enough to provide an experience of success - an experience of being able to push the hands out from inside. For some people the most functional level of dosage is to not get resistance from hands, but do the movement yourself – as described in exercise 13.

15. B is holding the hands and the sides of A's ribcage – under the armpits. Or you can put your hands there yourself. When hands are holding that area, they touch a muscle that is folding itself around a big part of the ribcage. The muscle starts on the inside of the shoulder blades, the side turned towards the ribcage – and from there it folds itself around the back, the sides and all the way to the front side of the ribcage. The name of the muscle is M.Serratus anterior.

Follow your in-breath. And your out-breath. On the inbreath your back can widen – shoulder blades move away from each other and a forward and outward going movement starts. The movement can continue into reaching out your arms. Try the movement and respect your dosage. A tiny little inbreath can be enough to contact the potential in the reaching out impulse – and whatever experiences connect to it.

Feel the rhythm between your in-breath and out-breath. The reaching out movement (energetically or with arms) can be activated when breathing in – energy, attention can move outwards, forwards – and when breathing out, attention moves back again into yourself, you "land" inside of yourself again. Pause. And then a new sequence – out – and in.

What sensations and experiences awaken in you when paying attention to your breathing that way?

Feel your center and your eyes together with the above described rhythm in your breathing. Does that add anything for you?

16. In couples – stand in front of each other – sense your breathing rhythm combined with eye contact. How do you regulate, so you support a rhythm between reaching into the contact field and coming back to yourself?

What sensations and experiences awaken in you when you regulate breathing and eye contact with another human being this way?

The rhythm in the Serratus anterior breathing is a fundamental element in the body. It connects us to ourselves and to the outer world in the same time. It is established in the very beginning of life when we start breathing – and all shifts on the scale of safety/unsafety registers in this breathing.

In Boundaries/Containment exercises no. 6 and 7 the focus is on training the Stop-reflex and on saying Come and Stop in contact. These exercises plus mostly all the exercises in *Meeting and Confrontation Skills* include training in regulating contact. Contact arms-center and eyes-center is a key component in all of the exercises and is often a deciding factor to the experience in an exercise being reactive or proactive.

Orientation:

Orientation is defined as being able to recognize and take in information from the present context whether it is external or internal.

Orientation is also about finding your way - based on internal and external information.

Orientation in the outer reality is supported by rotation-movements in the spine. Visual, auditory and olfactory (smell) information become more available, when we turn the head or the whole spine

Notice how you can turn your head into different positions thus receiving different types of information from the outside world.

The ability to distinguish factual information and emotional interpretation is critical to whether you orient in factual present context, or if you lose contact to the present and drop into either predictions about the future, or interpretations of the present based on input from the past.

Thus orientation is a key factor to our ability to establish a presence here and now. Many orientation skills are cognitive, focusing on training data-based verbal language.

1. Use the rotation muscles in your neck to look around in the context, you are in.

Rotating movement of the spine is not restricted to the neck but is a part of the whole spine.

Start by doing big movements of the spine in all directions. Then gradually decrease the movements until they are very small. Small rotating movements from side to side and back and forth, small adjustments close to the vertebrae. Maintain awareness of these small movements while walking around the room. Notice how you can use small spine movements to change direction as well as to orient in the room. How does your orientation change when you use these small spine movements?

2. Distinguishing body sensation and body experience.

Body sensation is defined as specific factual reality within the body. Body experience is defined as an interwoven complexity of sensations, emotional response and thought patterns. In other traditions concepts like "frames" or categorizations or "fusions" are used to describe the same phenomenon. (For elaboration in the difference between body sensation and body experience, read: *"Resource Oriented Skill Training as a Psychotherapeutic Method"*.)

Distinguishing body sensation and emotional body experience will train the ability to orient in factual here and now reality - as opposed to being pulled into experiences colored by the past - or into predictions about the future.

Training the ability to distinguish body sensation and body experience parallels general training in distinguishing facts and emotions – and distinguishing between emotions impacted by locked cognition and core-emotions. Differentiating these aspects is crucial in anchoring therapeutic processes in the here and now.

Notice how an exercise impacts you and verbalize the specific body sensations and emotions/feelings/experiences it evokes - and perhaps thoughts that are woven into these emotions.

Can you access curiosity – what is what?

In daily verbal language we often mix body-sensation, emotions and thoughts – and it takes some awareness to separate them.

3. Distinguishing the present from the past and predictions about the future

Our interpretations of sensory information are built on past experience. We make a generalization based on our previous experience in contexts similar to the present - thus often acting as if we know what is going to happen - or as if the context we are presently in is governed by information belonging to a past context.

3A: When interpretations from a past reality dominate, they disturb our ability to orient in present context.

This dynamic is addressed by the following exercise:

Describe 10 things in the present context that are different from the past context. Be precise in purely naming something in the present - NOT naming elements of past context. Say for instance: "I see you observing me" instead of saying "you are NOT distant" (Statements describing what is NOT there will describe the past and not the present. Go for describing the present).

Comment: Be prepared for this exercise to be demanding. When a person cannot orient herself in the present and gets caught in a powerful interpretation of reality based on the past, the arousal level is usually high, decreasing the ability to learn new things. Automatic survival strategies tend to dominate.

Work slowly and persistently, and focus on finding 10 elements describing the present. Experience shows that the ability to orient in the present increases with naming the present facts and it is a challenge to let go of the tendency to focus on past reality. The elements can be very earthbound and specific such as: "You are middle aged (older than my mother was at the time)" - "You have brown hair turning grey" - "I am in a group of participants at a therapy workshop".

3B: When arousal increases - especially as anxiety/discomfort - it is wise to examine whether the increase of arousal is associated with something factual in the present, or if it is associated with a prediction about the future. Predictions about the future can have both a negative and a positive charge.

Examine whether your anxiety/discomfort is associated with a thought. What is the thought? Say it out loud. (For instance: "I think it will go terribly wrong" or "I can't do it").

Become aware that it is actually just a thought - not factual reality. It is a thought predicting what is going to happen - and this way of thinking generates anxiety/discomfort.

Normalize this mechanism, as it is very common. We all do it - focus our attention onto what may happen in the future, thereby increasing our anxiety level based on prediction.

Explore whether you can bring back your focus to the here and now. Can you let go of the idea that you can predict what is going to happen? Are you able to take back the energy you invested in prediction and invest it in the present?

Which of the presence skills can support you in sensing yourself right now? Use them.

Often there will still be some discomfort in the body when presence in the present is reestablished. Not knowing what is going to happen - "on the edge of the unknown" as SCT would put it - will naturally generate a certain level of discomfort/anxiety - an energy you could also interpret as curiosity or excitement.

Comment: Physical presence skills support the ability to contain energy and thus are effective in supporting a shift from investing in predictions about the future to containing a natural sense of discomfort associated with the fact that we don't know what is going to happen.

Becoming aware that anxiety can be stirred by my own thoughts is a cognitive process. When we take part in this kind of process we need the arousal level to not be too high. In high arousal we have poor access to the cognitive functions needed in this processing. Strengthening orientation here and now when in high arousal, and initiating regulation of arousal, can be supported effectively with physical skills.

In Relational Trauma Therapy we use both the cognitive and the bodily approach for regulating fear and reestablishing orientation here and now – and we are curious about when each prove to be most functional. They both address vital aspects of arousal management and support presence here and now. They both support transition from, on the one hand, being caught up in old automatic patterns with increased arousal level, and on the other, into landing into orienting in the present.

Check-list

The list of presence skills - with the addition of orienting and contact to basic emotions - can be used as a check list related to presence.

How is my mobility doing?

How do I sense my centering?

My grounding, upwards and downwards?

How do I sense my regulation of contact inwards with myself and outwards to the outer context?

How do I sense my arms and my eyes?

How do I sense my breathing?

How do I orient inwards and outwards?

And how am I doing emotionally? Which basic emotions or feeling states are present in me right now - at which level of intensity? (There may be more than one emotion at the same time)

These questions can, relatively quickly, give you a sense of which presence skills are easily available to support your presence in the here-and now, -and which are more distant.

This self observation can lead to different choices:

- I may choose to stay in the level of presence I am in
- I may choose to strengthen the skills that are easiest available and through that support my presence
- I may choose to look for a functional dose in which I can bring awareness and activity into those skills most distant.

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