



Exercises for Moaiku workshop

The following are extracts from: Merete Holm Brantbjerg (2010):

ROST Exercise Manual.

The full manual is written for Moaiku Trauma Therapy training.

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.

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, undertense) 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. I prefer 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.

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

(For elaboration of the conceptual difference between specific body sensation and emotionally loaded body experience containing a mix of sensations, emotions and thoughtpatterns - read 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 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.

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 I was taught in my psychomotor training (1975-1978 at Skolen for Kropsdynamik in Copenhagen). We learned to respect the strategies imprinted in our breathing patterns and not teach people to 'breathe right'. We were encouraged 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.

My teaching is still 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 to me 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.

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.

The skills are named:

- Flexibility
- Centering
- Grounding
- Boundaries/containment
- Regulating contact - arms and eyes
- Orientation
- Flow of emotions

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.

The opposite of flexibility is stagnation or paralysis.

Working with flexibility holds the potential to initiate new imprints with regards to stagnated or paralysed patterns.

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.

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.

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. 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.
2. 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. The spine has a front side - think of the front side and sense it if you can while moving the spine. This is not mystical - it is anatomy. The front side of the spine is there - but very often we don't think of it or don't sense it. Do it now when you continue to move the spine. What difference does that make?
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.
4. 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.
5. 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?

6. 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 centre 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 centre for the movements. All movements can revolve around this point - can refer to this point.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.

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 realise how many areas throughout the body impacts grounding and can take part in it.

Do the springy movement again - and feel the springiness 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. 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.

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.

6. 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.

Same basic exercise as above. 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.

7. 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 others 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 centerarea, firmness in your arms and let firmness come into your eyes in eyecontact. 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 strengtning 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 energyexchange 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

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 Systemic 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.
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.

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. 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.
8. 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. Breathing
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?

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 shoulderblades, 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 inbreath. And your outbreath. On the inbreath your back can widen – shoulderblades 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 inbreath and outbreath. 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 anything for you?

In couples – stand in front of each other – sense your breathing rhythm combined with eyecontact. How do you regulate, so you support a rhythm between reaching into the contactfield and coming back to yourself?
What sensations and experiences awaken in you when you regulate breathing and eyecontact 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.

Orientation:

Orientation is a key factor to our ability to establish a presence here and now – and therefore an important aspect of presence training.

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.

Factbased orienting in the here-and-now context supports the formation of new reality based patterns. A key principle in ROST 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)

Orientation is included as part of presence training with the following instructions:

1. 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.
Comment: 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.
Body sensation is defined as specific factual reality within the body. Body experience is defined as an interwoven complex of sensations, emotional response and thought patterns. (For elaboration in the difference between body sensation and body experience, read: *"Resource Oriented Skill Training as a Psychotherapeutic Method"*.)
Training the ability to distinguish body sensation and body experience parallels general training in distinguishing facts and emotions – which is crucial in anchoring therapeutic processes in the here and now.
2. Notice how your orientation in your external context is changed, by doing any exercise. How is your vision, your hearing, your kinesthetic perception of the outside world changed? (The sense of smell and taste may be added to the list).
Visual, auditory and olfactory (smell) orientation is supported by turning your head.
Notice how you can turn your head into different positions thus receiving different types of information from the outside world.
Feel your centering, grounding, etc while orienting in the context.

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?

Flow of emotions

For many years I have taught flexibility, centering, grounding, boundaries, containment and regulating contact as important presence and coping skills.

At the same time at specific workshops I have developed a teaching focused on how to cope with emotions - based on a distinction between instincts, basic emotions and the feeling language of everyday life.

This theme is extensively described in the article: *"The Body As Container of Instincts, Emotions and Feelings"* by Merete Holm Brantbjerg and Sally Stepath (2007).

Contact to basic emotions is brought to the fore as an important skill both to support our ability to land after powerful instinctual reactions, and to be authentically in contact with ourselves while our behaviour is regulated by the social context we are in.

How do I feel emotionally? Which basic emotions are present in me right now? Are questions that can be added when checking your own presence. Emotions can be big, small or tiny. Maybe there are more emotions present at once. Maybe there is something that feels more like moods, basic pleasure/discomfort. The question tunes me into noticing my emotional state, naming it and including it in my presence.

This is the intention behind adding this skill to the list of presence skills. Based on an acceptance and appreciation of the fact that there is always an emotional component to our presence and our coping with any given situation.

Exercises

1. Do movements that activate the muscle groups of the torso, making the muscular container present and strengthened. Abdominal muscles and pelvic floor are important. (All exercises listed in Containment can be used here). Also do exercises that strengthen centering and grounding.
2. Feel your breath inside the torso. Feel the rhythm, speed and movement of breathing. Feel how your ribcage, your belly, your back moves or don't move with the breath. Breathe in a way your body likes.
3. Name the emotion(s) present in you based on the list of 9 basic emotions (Curiosity, Anger, Fear/anxiety, Joy, Sorrow, Sexuality, Caring, Shame and Disgust). Or name the mood you are in contact with.
4. Think of the emotion as energy that moves in waves - as water. Let it flow through you, let it move. Breathe while feeling the emotion. Feel what movements in your arms are connected to this emotion. Make these movements. Notice how your muscular container, your center, your grounding and your breath are there, while the emotion flows through you. If the emotion moves on into another emotion, allow it. Emotions are basically in flow. And they often move into each other. We regulate and digest the impact from contact with our surroundings through emotions (among other things), and digesting often include several emotions before we 'finish' something.

(If interested in more exercises related to emotional flow please read the article: "The Body as Container of Instincts, Emotions and Feelings".)

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.

Presence skills used sitting on a chair:

All the above exercises are described based on a learning situation, typically happening standing and sometimes moving to music. Learning is state bound which means that learning the presence skills becomes connected to the context you are in when you trained them. To build a bridge to other contexts and make it easier to access the skills in your daily life it is wise to try out the skills sitting on a chair - or other contexts as well.

Flexibility: Move all your joints while sitting - find a dosing that feels functional to you. Feel how all your joints cooperate.

Grounding: 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.

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?

Comment: 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.

Centering: 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.

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. Regardless of how big the movement is the muscles Psoas Major and Quadratus Lumborum are activated. Both these muscles lie deep and close to the physical balance point in front of 4th and 5th lumbar vertebrae. (L4/5)

Concentrate on the front of your spine at the level of L4/5. Sense how the movement of your breath can "touch" this area.

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.

Boundaries/containment: Feel your skin, perhaps by lightly patting down the skin surface.

Place your feet where the outsides of your heels can push against the inside of the chair's legs. Create a light push outwards with your feet in this position. Feel activation of the outside of your legs. (Corresponds with the standing exercise where you push the legs outwards on parallel feet). Remember to notice your breathing. Holding your breath while activating your muscles will usually signify a sense of "working hard" - and letting go/collapsing, once you let go. Attention to breathing while activating muscles will support you to build up energy in the body as in a container - and ensure the body is a flexible container.

Activation of the outsides of your legs can also be established, by placing your hands on the outsides of your knees and pushing your knees into your hands, while hands/arms offer resistance to the movement.

Use your arms to mark or gather your energy field - your personal space - around you. Your palms can face outwards or inwards - or one hand can face outwards and one inwards. You can breathe in while moving your hands outwards to build up energy in your space, or you can exhale while doing the outward going movement and release energy - let go of something, push something out of your space. Movements can be bigger or smaller - or very small and close to the body. To build energy and containment in the upper body push palms together in front of the sternum and at the same time pull the shoulder blades together.

Regulating contact - arms and eyes: Move your arms and feel their connection to your centre. What do your arms feel like doing in this sitting position? Often the impulse to move is smaller when sitting. It does not change the fact that the impulse is there. Feel how the arms' movements relate to yourself - you can regulate internal states - and to the encounter between you and the outside world. Look around in your present context while moving your arms. Does it impact your impulses?

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.

Push the elbows backwards into the back of the chair allowing the sternum move forward. This will potentially support you in "stepping" more into the contact field.

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 your body proportions fits the chair. If it doesn't work for you, try a different chair.

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