

# BODY FIRST

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*The Complete Somatic Technique Guide for  
Nervous System Regulation and Manifestation*



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[higherselfawakening.org](http://higherselfawakening.org)

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WELCOME

# A Letter to You

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There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes from doing everything right and still feeling stuck.

You have read the books. You have done the breathwork. You have sat in therapy, filled the journals, said the affirmations until the words lost their meaning. And somewhere underneath all of that effort, there is a quiet, persistent frustration because none of it has moved the thing that most needs to move.

That frustration is not a sign that you are broken. It is not a sign that healing is impossible for you. It is a sign that you have been working at the wrong level.

The mind is extraordinary. But it is not where your deepest patterns live. Your deepest patterns, the ones that keep you looping, keep you small, keep you just out of reach of the life you are building toward, live in your body. In your nervous system. In the biological memory your cells have been quietly carrying since long before you had words for any of it.

This book is about going there.

Body First is a practical, honest, science-grounded guide to somatic healing. It is the practice of working with the body directly to release stored stress, regulate the nervous system, and create the internal conditions for genuine change. It is not a spiritual theory. It is not a collection of vague wellness suggestions. It is a complete toolkit of twelve evidence-informed techniques that you can learn, practise, and use independently, at home, in the morning before your coffee, in the car before a difficult meeting, in the quiet after the children are asleep.

You do not need a therapist present to use this book, though if you are working through significant trauma, professional support is always worth seeking. You do not need prior experience with somatic work, meditation, or bodywork of

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any kind. You need only a willingness to slow down, pay attention, and trust that your body has been waiting for exactly this kind of conversation.

Each technique in this book is explained clearly. What it is, why it works at the neurological level, and precisely how to do it. There are no vague instructions here. No instructions to simply feel into your body without telling you how. Real steps, real science, real results.

Read Part One first. It builds the foundation that makes every technique in Part Two significantly more effective. Then move through the techniques at whatever pace feels right. Some will resonate immediately. Others will make more sense after you have been practising for a few days. All of them are yours to return to, as many times as you need.

Your body is not your obstacle. It is your greatest ally in this work. It has been signalling you for years. This book will teach you how to finally listen and respond.

Let us begin.

*With love,*

*Higher Self Awakening*

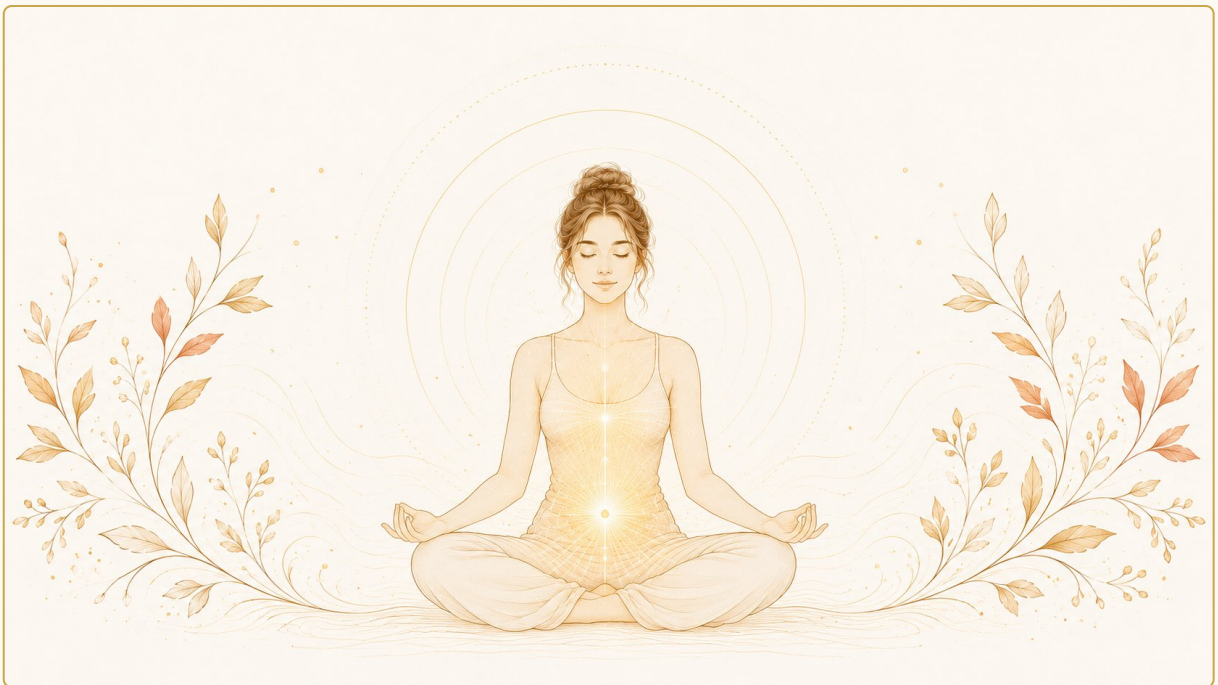
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PART ONE

# The Foundation

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*Understanding the body before working with it*



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## CHAPTER 1

# Why You Are Not Broken

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Let us start with something that might feel uncomfortable to admit. You have probably tried a lot of things.

Therapy, perhaps. Journalling, almost certainly. Meditation apps, self-help books, manifestation practices, gratitude lists, morning routines built with the precision of a military operation. And some of it helped, genuinely. You are not the same person you were five years ago. Growth has happened.

And yet. There is still this thing. This pattern that keeps returning. This ceiling you keep bumping into. This sense that something underneath everything else has not shifted, no matter how much work you do above it.

*You have been doing cognitive work on a somatic problem. That is not a failure. It is just the wrong tool for this particular job.*

Cognitive work, thinking, reflecting, reframing, talking, operates in the upper floors of the nervous system. It is powerful, necessary, and genuinely useful. But it has a limit. That limit is the body. Because the patterns that feel most immovable, the chronic tension, the reflexive shrinking, the way your chest tightens when you imagine being fully seen or fully abundant, those patterns do not live in your thoughts. They live in your tissue. In the firing patterns of your autonomic nervous system. In the cellular memory of every experience your body decided needed to be stored rather than released.

You cannot think your way out of a body-level pattern. Not because you are not smart or self-aware enough. You clearly are, or you would not be here. But because the part of your nervous system that holds these patterns does not speak the language of thought. It speaks the language of sensation. Of movement. Of breath. Of physical safety, registered not as a concept but as a felt experience in the body.

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## The Animal That Shook

This is not a new or fringe idea. It is, increasingly, where the most rigorous trauma and neuroscience research is pointing. Dr. Peter Levine, who spent decades studying how animals in the wild recover from life-threatening stress, made a discovery that changed the field entirely.

Animals do not develop chronic trauma responses because they complete the cycle. After a threat passes, a gazelle will shake, tremble, breathe deeply, and return to grazing. Their nervous system discharges the survival energy that was mobilised and is no longer needed. Humans, somewhere in the process of becoming civilised, learned to stop that discharge. We learned to hold still, hold together, hold it in. And what gets held in does not disappear. It lives on in the body, quietly shaping how we move through the world in ways we often cannot name.

*The body is not storing your past to punish you. It is storing it to protect you. Somatic healing is the process of teaching it that the danger has passed.*

The somatic practices in this book are, at the most fundamental level, an invitation to complete what was interrupted. Not to revisit trauma in painful detail. Not to dig up the past and spread it across the floor. But to allow the body to finish what it started. To discharge what it has been holding, restore what it has been protecting, and return to a state of genuine regulation from which everything else becomes possible.

## What Somatic Healing Actually Is

The word somatic comes from the Greek word soma, meaning body. Somatic healing is any approach to healing that starts with the body rather than the mind. Where cognitive therapy works top-down, from thought to feeling to physical response, somatic therapy works bottom-up. It begins with physical sensation and uses that as the entry point for emotional and psychological change.

This bottom-up approach matters because of how the nervous system is actually structured. Your thinking brain, the prefrontal cortex, the part

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responsible for reason, language, planning, and the insights you have in therapy, is evolutionarily the newest part of your brain. Beneath it sits the limbic system, the emotional brain, responsible for memory, attachment, and threat detection. And beneath that sits the brainstem, the oldest and most fundamental part, which governs survival responses automatically, without consulting your thoughts at all.

When a survival response is activated, when your nervous system decides you are in danger, whether the danger is physical, emotional, or imagined, it is the brainstem and limbic system running the show, not the prefrontal cortex. This is why you can know, intellectually, that you are safe, loved, capable, and worthy of abundance, and still feel, physically, as though none of that is true. The knowing is in the upper brain. The feeling is in the lower brain. And the lower brain is louder.

Somatic practices speak directly to the lower brain. They use physical sensation, movement, breath, sound, and touch to send a different message. Not the thought that you are safe, but safety as a felt, registered, biological experience. And when that message lands at the level where it is actually needed, things shift in a way that thinking alone simply cannot replicate.

## **What This Book Is Not**

This book is an educational resource and a practical guide. It is not a substitute for clinical therapy, and it is not designed to replace professional support for severe or complex trauma. Some of the techniques in Part Two work gently and carefully with difficult material, and the Overwhelm Protocol in Chapter 21 exists precisely because it is important to know when to pause and seek additional support.

If you are currently working with a therapist, this book works beautifully alongside that process. If you are not, the techniques here are genuinely safe and effective for the vast majority of readers practising independently. Trust your body throughout. It will tell you what it needs. With that foundation in place, let us build the map.

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## CHAPTER 2

# Your Nervous System: A Plain-Language Map

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Before you can work with your nervous system, it helps enormously to understand what you are actually working with. Not at a medical school level. You do not need to memorise neuroanatomy. But at the level of a person who wants to understand why they feel what they feel, and what to do about it.

Think of your nervous system as a highly sophisticated security system that has been running in your body since before you were born. Its primary job, above everything else, is to keep you alive. It is constantly scanning your environment, both internal and external, for information about whether you are safe or under threat. And based on what it finds, it adjusts your entire physiology accordingly. Your heart rate, your breathing, your muscle tension, your digestion, your hormone levels, your capacity to think clearly, connect with others, and feel at ease.

Most of the time, this system runs entirely below your conscious awareness. You do not decide to have your heart rate increase when someone raises their voice near you. You do not choose to feel the tension in your shoulders when you open a difficult email. Your nervous system makes those adjustments automatically, in milliseconds, long before your thinking brain has processed what is happening.

*Understanding your nervous system is not just intellectually interesting. It is deeply liberating. Because it means the way you have been feeling is not a character flaw. It is a nervous system doing exactly what it learned to do.*

## The Two Branches

The autonomic nervous system, the part responsible for these automatic adjustments, has two primary branches. Understanding both is essential for

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everything that follows in this book.

The first is the sympathetic nervous system. This is your activation system, the branch responsible for the fight-or-flight response. When the sympathetic system is activated, your body mobilises for action. Heart rate increases, breathing quickens and shifts to the chest, muscles tense, digestion slows, and stress hormones flood the bloodstream. In a genuinely dangerous situation, this is exactly what you want. It is a brilliant, life-saving response. The problem arises when the sympathetic system stays activated long after the threat has passed, or when it begins firing in response to non-threatening situations that the nervous system has learned to treat as dangerous. Difficult conversations. Financial stress. Intimacy. Visibility. Receiving good things. For many people, the sympathetic system has become the default setting, running at a low hum of activation almost continuously.

The second branch is the parasympathetic nervous system. This is your rest-and-regulate system. When the parasympathetic system is engaged, your body returns to baseline. Heart rate slows, breathing deepens and drops into the belly, muscles soften, digestion resumes, and the mind becomes clearer and calmer. This is the state in which genuine healing happens. It is also the state in which you are most able to receive, emotionally, physically, and energetically. Not because of any metaphysical reason, but because a regulated nervous system is a nervous system that is no longer in survival mode. And a body that is not in survival mode is a body that is open.

## **The Window of Tolerance**

Between these two branches lies what trauma therapist Dr. Dan Siegel called the window of tolerance. This is the zone of nervous system activation in which you are neither overwhelmed nor shut down. Inside this window, you can think clearly, feel your emotions without being consumed by them, connect with others authentically, and respond to life rather than simply react to it. This is the target state that every technique in Part Two is designed to help you access and expand.

Above the window is hyperarousal, the territory of anxiety, panic, anger, overwhelm, and fight-or-flight activation. Below the window is hypoarousal, the territory of numbness, disconnection, collapse, exhaustion, and freeze.

Both are survival responses. Both represent the nervous system doing its job. And both can become chronic patterns that narrow your window of tolerance over time, making it increasingly difficult to stay regulated in the face of stress.

The goal of somatic practice is not to eliminate the sympathetic response or to force the body into perpetual calm. It is to widen the window. To build a nervous system that can move fluidly between activation and regulation, that can handle difficulty without flooding, and that can return to ease without effort.



Figure 1: The Window of Tolerance. Your goal is not to live in one zone but to widen the middle.

## Polyvagal Theory: The Third Piece

In the 1990s, neuroscientist Dr. Stephen Porges introduced polyvagal theory, which added a crucial third dimension to our understanding of the nervous system. He proposed that the autonomic nervous system does not simply have two settings, on and off, sympathetic and parasympathetic, but three distinct states, each governed by a different branch of the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve in the body, running from the brainstem all the way down through the heart, lungs, and gut.

The first state is the ventral vagal state, your social engagement system. This is the state of genuine safety, connection, and ease. When you are in ventral

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vagal activation, you feel present, open, curious, and connected. Your face is expressive, your voice has warmth, and you are capable of genuine intimacy and creativity. This is the state most associated with wellbeing and the capacity to receive.

The second state is sympathetic mobilisation, fight or flight. As described above, this is the state of activation, urgency, and defensive action. Energy floods outward to the limbs, the jaw tightens, the eyes narrow, and the body prepares to move.

The third state is the dorsal vagal state, freeze, shutdown, and collapse. This is the most primitive survival response, activated when the nervous system has concluded that neither fighting nor fleeing is possible. It manifests as numbness, disconnection, dissociation, exhaustion, and a sense of flatness or hopelessness. It is the biological equivalent of playing dead. And for many people who have experienced prolonged or early-life stress, it has become a habitual resting place.

*The vagus nerve is your nervous system's main communication highway. Every somatic technique in this book, in some way, sends a message along that highway that says: it is safe to come back now.*

Understanding these three states will be directly relevant when you reach the self-assessment in Chapter 4, and throughout your work with the techniques in Part Two. Different techniques work most effectively in different states. Knowing where you are helps you choose what you need.

## **The Thermostat Analogy**

Here is the simplest way to hold all of this. Imagine your nervous system is a thermostat. It has been calibrated, by your early experiences, your environment, your relationships, and the things that happened to you before you had any say in the matter, to a particular temperature. That temperature is what feels normal to your body, even when it is not comfortable. Even when it is anxious, tense, or numb.

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When life attempts to shift that temperature, when something genuinely good arrives, when safety is offered, when abundance approaches, your thermostat pulls you back to the familiar setting. Not because you are self-sabotaging. Not because you do not deserve better. But because the nervous system values the known above almost everything else, including the good.

Somatic practice is the process of recalibrating that thermostat. Of teaching the nervous system that a new temperature is not just possible. It is safe. And that safety, felt in the body, is what makes lasting change possible.

# The Four Survival Patterns

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Now that you have a working map of your nervous system, here is the part that tends to make things click for people. The nervous system does not respond to stress in one generic way. It responds in patterns. Patterns that were learned early, refined over time, and became so automatic that most of us mistake them for personality.

The four survival patterns are fight, flight, freeze, and fawn. You have probably heard of the first two. The last two are less commonly discussed, and they are often where the most important recognition happens. Most people have a dominant pattern, the one their nervous system reaches for first, and one or two secondary patterns that show up under different conditions.

Reading through these descriptions, notice what lands in your body, not just what makes sense intellectually. That physical recognition, the slight tightening, the exhale of relief, the quiet feeling of being seen, is itself a somatic signal. Pay attention to it.

## **Fight: The Activist**

The fight response mobilises energy outward. When the nervous system senses a threat and concludes that pushing back is the most viable option, it floods the body with adrenaline and redirects blood to the muscles. In the moment, this is courage and action. As a chronic pattern, fight can look like irritability, controlling behaviour, difficulty surrendering, a tendency to create conflict before it can arrive, and a persistent sense that you have to make everything happen through sheer force of will. The body of someone in chronic fight tends to carry tension in the jaw, fists, upper chest, and shoulders. Rest feels unsafe. Stillness feels like giving up.

## **Flight: The Achiever**

The flight response also mobilises energy, but directs it toward escape rather than confrontation. As a chronic pattern, flight can look like perpetual busyness, an inability to stop, anxiety that masquerades as productivity, difficulty finishing things because finishing means staying still long enough to

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feel, and a relationship with achievement that is driven more by running from something than moving toward it. The body of someone in chronic flight tends to carry tension in the legs, feet, and lower back. There is often a sense of restlessness, a low-level urgency that never quite resolves.

### **Freeze: The Disappearer**

The freeze response is a shutdown rather than a mobilisation. When the nervous system determines that neither fighting nor fleeing is viable, it collapses inward. As a chronic pattern, freeze can look like procrastination, dissociation, an inability to make decisions, a kind of foggy blankness that descends in situations that feel overwhelming, and a relationship with the body that is characterised by numbness rather than sensation. People in freeze often describe feeling disconnected from themselves, as though they are watching their life from behind glass. The body of someone in chronic freeze tends to be held in a collapsed posture, with shallow breathing and a general quality of heaviness or immobility.

*Freeze is not weakness. It is the nervous system's most ancient and sophisticated protective strategy. It simply needs a different kind of invitation to release.*

### **Fawn: The Peacekeeper**

The fawn response is the least discussed of the four, and often the one that carries the most shame when people first recognise it. Fawn is the strategy of making yourself agreeable, helpful, and non-threatening as a way of managing perceived threat. It develops most commonly in environments where direct confrontation was not safe, where the threat came from someone the child needed for survival. As a chronic pattern, fawn can look like chronic people-pleasing, difficulty knowing what you actually want, a tendency to lose yourself in relationships, hypervigilance to other people's moods, and a deep unfamiliarity with your own needs. The body of someone in chronic fawn tends to be braced in a state of readiness, always slightly oriented toward the other person, always slightly away from the self.

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Reading these descriptions, you will likely recognise yourself in one or two of them more strongly than the others. That recognition is the beginning of something important. Because once you know your pattern, you can stop judging it as a character flaw and start working with it as nervous system data. And you can begin choosing the techniques in Part Two that are most specifically designed for your pattern. Chapter 4 will help you map that precisely.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Know Your Pattern: The Self-Assessment

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Read each statement below and give it a score from 0 to 3. Zero means this rarely or never applies to you. One means it applies sometimes. Two means it applies often. Three means it applies almost always. Answer from the gut, not the aspirational self.

### SECTION A

1. I feel a persistent sense of urgency, as though I am always behind. 0 1 2 3
2. I find it difficult to ask for help without feeling like I am losing control. 0 1 2 3
3. I get irritated quickly, especially when things do not go as planned. 0 1 2 3
4. I find it hard to truly rest, even when I am exhausted. 0 1 2 3
5. I tend to take charge in situations because it feels safer than trusting others. 0 1 2 3

### SECTION B

1. I stay busy as a way of managing anxiety. 0 1 2 3
2. I have difficulty finishing projects because starting something new feels more comfortable. 0 1 2 3
3. There is a low-level restlessness in my body that rarely fully resolves. 0 1 2 3
4. I tend to plan, organise, or problem-solve as a way of coping with stress. 0 1 2 3
5. I feel most safe when I am moving toward a goal rather than sitting still. 0 1 2 3

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### SECTION C

1. I sometimes go blank or feel foggy when things feel overwhelming. 0 1 2 3
2. I find it difficult to make decisions and often feel paralysed by choices. 0 1 2 3
3. I feel disconnected from my body or from my emotions at times. 0 1 2 3
4. Procrastination is a significant pattern in my life. 0 1 2 3
5. I sometimes feel like I am watching my life from a distance rather than living it. 0 1 2 3

### SECTION D

1. I find it very difficult to say no, even when I want to. 0 1 2 3
2. I am highly attuned to other people's moods and tend to manage them. 0 1 2 3
3. I often do not know what I actually want until I know what everyone else wants. 0 1 2 3
4. I feel responsible for other people's emotional states. 0 1 2 3
5. I find genuine conflict extremely uncomfortable, even healthy disagreement. 0 1 2 3

## Reading Your Results

Add up your scores for each section separately. Section A reflects the fight pattern. Section B reflects the flight pattern. Section C reflects the freeze pattern. Section D reflects the fawn pattern. Your highest-scoring section is your dominant pattern. Your second-highest is your secondary pattern. Both are worth working with.

|               |                                                                        |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Score 0 to 5  | This pattern is present but not dominant for you right now.            |
| Score 6 to 10 | This pattern plays a meaningful role in your nervous system responses. |

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Score 11 to 15

This is a strong and active pattern. The techniques mapped to it are your highest priority.

## Your Pattern to Technique Map

Each pattern has three techniques that are most directly effective for it. These are your starting points. You will learn all twelve techniques in Part Two, but these are the ones to practise first and return to most frequently.

| Pattern | Priority Techniques                                  |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Fight   | Conscious Breathwork, Pendulation, Shaking and TRE   |
| Flight  | Orienting, Grounding, Body Scan                      |
| Freeze  | Shaking and TRE, Humming and Voo Sounding, Titration |
| Fawn    | Somatic Body Dialogue, Resourcing, Butterfly Hug     |

# What a Somatic Release Actually Feels Like

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This chapter exists because of one of the most common reasons people abandon somatic practice before it has had a chance to work. They do not recognise when it is working.

In talk therapy, insight is the currency. You know something has shifted because you understand something differently. Somatic healing does not work that way. The shifts are physical first, intellectual second, if at all. And because we are so thoroughly trained to look for change in our thinking rather than in our bodies, many people have a genuine somatic release and immediately dismiss it, suppress it, or get frightened by it.

So before you practise a single technique in Part Two, you need to know what you are looking for. And more importantly, what to do when you find it.

## The Signs of a Genuine Somatic Release

A somatic release is the nervous system completing an interrupted stress response. It is the body discharging energy that has been held in suspension. It does not always feel comfortable, but it always feels real. Here is what it can look like.

### Trembling or Shaking

This is one of the most common and most misunderstood signs. A spontaneous trembling in the hands, legs, jaw, or torso is not a sign that something is wrong. It is a sign that the nervous system is doing precisely what it is designed to do. Peter Levine's foundational research was built on this observation. When you feel shaking, the instruction is simple: do not stop it. Let it move through. Breathe. It will complete itself.

### Yawning

Deep, involuntary yawning during or after somatic practice is a reliable indicator that the parasympathetic nervous system is activating. The body is literally beginning to downregulate. This is a good sign. Welcome it.

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### Sighing

The long, spontaneous exhale that seems to come from nowhere during somatic work is the nervous system releasing held tension. If you find yourself sighing deeply mid-practice, you are in the right place. Stay with it.

### Warmth or Tingling

A spreading warmth through the chest, hands, or face, or a tingling sensation in the extremities, is often a sign of blood flow returning to areas that have been held in a state of constriction. This is the body beginning to feel safe enough to open.

### Spontaneous Emotion

Tears that arrive without a clear narrative, a wave of grief or relief or tenderness that does not seem attached to a specific memory, laughter that seems to come from nowhere. These are all signs of stored emotion moving through the body. The instruction here is the same as for shaking. Do not rush to explain it. Do not suppress it. Let it move.

### Heaviness Followed by Lightness

Many people describe a sequence in somatic release of first feeling heavier, more tired, more present in the body, and then, a few minutes later, noticeably lighter. The heaviness is not a sign that you are doing it wrong. It is often the first stage of genuine release, the body settling from held tension into gravity. The lightness comes after.

*A release is not always beautiful or comfortable. But it is always the body doing something right. Your only job is to stay present and let it finish.*

### How to Stay With a Release

When you notice any of these signs, the most important thing you can do is resist the urge to manage the experience. The protective nervous system, the one that has been keeping all of this stored, will want to step in and shut it down. It will offer you thoughts to follow, discomfort to focus on, a sudden memory of something you were supposed to do. These are all ways the system tries to return to the familiar.

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Instead, bring your attention to your breath. Make the exhale slightly longer than the inhale. Keep your feet in contact with the floor. Let your eyes be soft or gently closed. And simply witness what is happening in your body without trying to direct it, explain it, or stop it.

You do not need to know what the release is about. The body does not need a narrative in order to complete its work. In fact, reaching for a narrative too quickly is one of the most common ways people interrupt the process. Let the body lead. The understanding, if it comes at all, will arrive in its own time.

## **When to Pause**

There is an important distinction between a release, which feels intense but generally has a quality of movement and completion, and flooding, which feels like being overwhelmed without any sense of direction or resolution. If at any point during somatic practice you feel completely undone, unable to function, or frightened in a way that does not ease with gentle breathing and grounding, that is a signal to stop the practice, use the Orienting technique from Chapter 8 to return to the present, and step away from the work for the day. Chapter 21 covers this in detail. Trust the signal.

With that foundation in place, you are ready to meet the techniques. Part Two is where the real work begins.

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PART TWO

# The Twelve Techniques

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*Your complete somatic toolkit*



# Body Scan

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The body scan is the foundational practice of somatic healing. Before you can shift anything in the body, you need to know where you are. The body scan teaches you interoception, which is the ability to sense your own internal state, the language your body speaks before words.

## Why It Works

Most people spend the majority of their waking lives from the neck up. Thoughts, plans, worries, analysis. The body, meanwhile, is running an entirely parallel process, registering sensations, sending signals, holding patterns that the conscious mind never receives. The body scan is the practice of tuning in to that broadcast. It activates the insula, the part of the brain responsible for interoceptive awareness, which is directly linked to emotional regulation and the capacity for self-compassion. Regular body scanning has been shown to reduce chronic pain, lower baseline anxiety, and increase the accuracy with which people read their own emotional states.

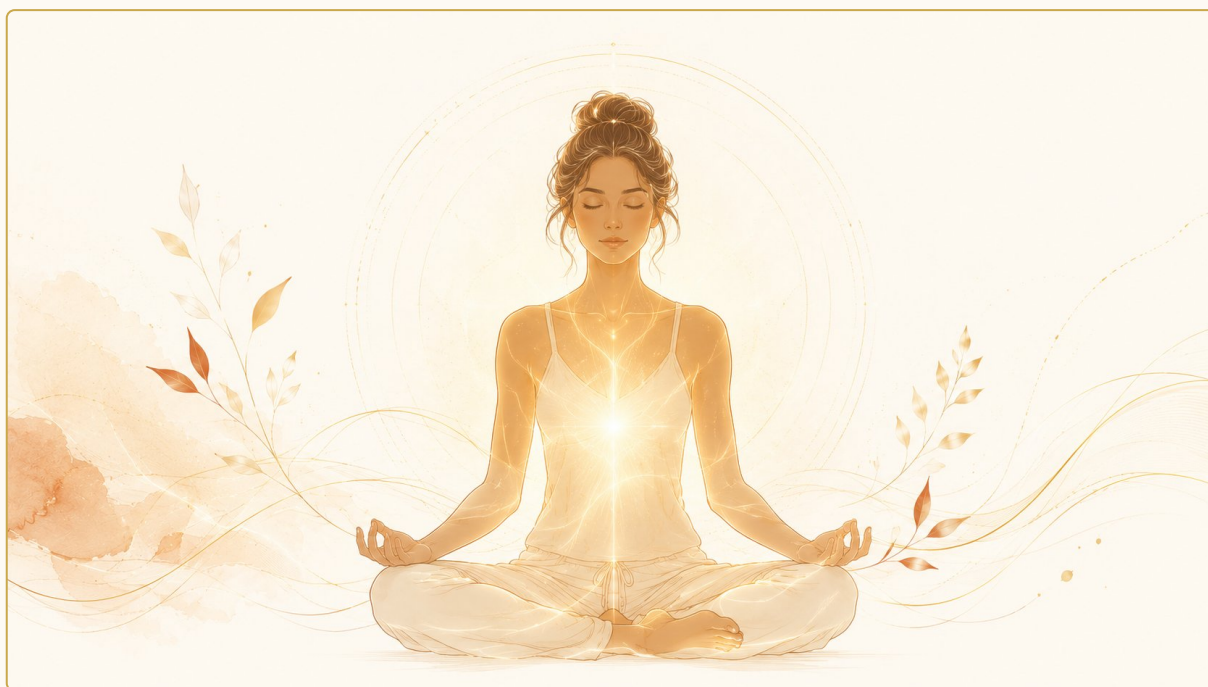
## How to Practise

1. Find a comfortable position, either seated with your feet flat on the floor or lying down. Close your eyes or let your gaze soften toward the floor.
2. Take three slow breaths, making each exhale slightly longer than the inhale.
3. Bring your attention to the very top of your head. Notice any sensation there without trying to change it. Warmth, tingling, pressure, or nothing at all. All of these are valid.
4. Slowly move your attention downward. Forehead, eyes, jaw. Notice the jaw in particular as many people carry significant tension there.
5. Continue down through the throat and neck, the shoulders, the upper chest. Pause at the chest and notice the quality of your breath here. Is it shallow or deep? Held or free?

6. Move through the arms to the hands and fingers. Notice whether the hands are clenched or open.
7. Continue through the belly, the lower back, the hips. The belly and hips often hold more than people expect.
8. Move through the thighs, knees, calves, ankles, and finally the feet and toes. Notice the contact between your feet and the floor or surface beneath you.
9. Take a final full breath and return your attention to the whole body at once. Notice the overall quality of what you find.

## When to Use It

The body scan is the ideal opening practice for any somatic session. It is also useful any time you feel disconnected from yourself, before a difficult conversation, after a stressful event, or simply as a morning check-in to begin the day with awareness. Even two minutes of body scanning changes your relationship with your own internal experience over time.



*Figure 2: The body scan moves attention from head to feet, noticing sensation without judgment.*

**Pattern note:** Priority technique for the flight pattern.

# Conscious Breathwork

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Breathwork is the fastest-acting regulation tool available to you. Unlike every other aspect of autonomic function, the breath is both automatic and voluntary. You can take control of it at any moment, and in doing so, you can directly influence your nervous system state. This is not a metaphor. It is neuroscience.

## Why It Works

The vagus nerve runs alongside the respiratory system, and the rhythm and depth of breathing directly influences vagal tone, which is the baseline activity level of the parasympathetic nervous system. Slow, deep breathing activates the vagus nerve and engages the parasympathetic branch. Shallow, rapid breathing activates the sympathetic branch. This is why you breathe quickly when anxious and why the instruction to take a deep breath actually works, when done correctly. Diaphragmatic breathing, breathing that expands the belly rather than the chest, produces measurable reductions in cortisol within ninety seconds. Box breathing has been shown to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and lower heart rate. The physiological sigh, a double inhale followed by a long exhale, is the fastest known method for reducing acute physiological stress.

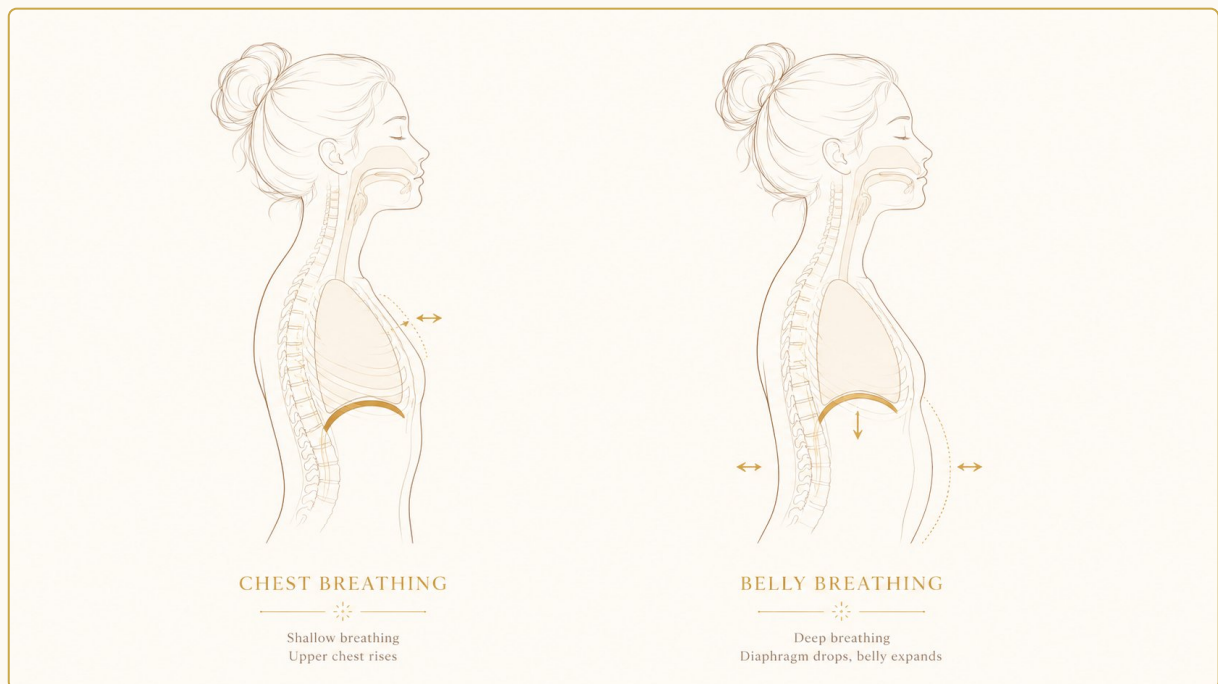
## How to Practise

1. **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly. Breathe in through your nose and direct the breath into your belly so that your lower hand rises while your upper hand remains relatively still. Exhale slowly through slightly parted lips, letting the belly fall. Practise for two to five minutes. This is your baseline regulation breath and the one to reach for first in any moment of stress.
2. **Box Breathing:** Inhale for a count of four. Hold for a count of four. Exhale for a count of four. Hold for a count of four. Repeat for four to eight cycles. This technique is particularly effective for the fight pattern as it gives the activated nervous system a structured container.

3. **Physiological Sigh:** Take a full inhale through the nose. At the top of the inhale, take a second short sniff to fully expand the lungs. Then release a long, slow exhale through the mouth. One or two physiological sighs can produce a noticeable shift in nervous system state within seconds.

## When to Use It

Breathwork is the technique you can use anywhere, at any time, without anyone knowing you are doing it. It is particularly valuable before challenging situations, during moments of acute stress, as an opening for any somatic practice session, and as a tool for returning to regulation after a somatic release.



*Figure 3: Diaphragmatic breathing expands the belly rather than the chest, activating the parasympathetic nervous system.*

**Pattern note: Priority technique for the fight pattern.**

# Orienting

---

Orienting is one of the most underrepresented techniques in popular somatic content, and one of the most immediately effective. It was developed by Peter Levine as part of Somatic Experiencing and is based on the biological reality of how mammals assess their environment for safety. When a deer senses a potential threat, it lifts its head and slowly scans the horizon before deciding whether to run, freeze, or return to grazing. That scanning process, completed, is what tells the nervous system the threat has passed. Orienting does the same thing for humans.

## Why It Works

Hypervigilance, the chronic low-level threat scanning that characterises anxiety and many trauma responses, is essentially an orienting response that never gets to complete itself. The nervous system keeps looking for the threat without ever finding the all-clear. The orienting practice gives it the all-clear deliberately, by engaging the visual system in a slow, conscious scan of the present environment and confirming through sensory experience, not thought, that the immediate environment is safe.

## How to Practise

1. Allow your eyes to open and move naturally around the room or space you are in. Do not force or direct the gaze. Simply let it go where it wants to go.
2. Move slowly. There is no hurry. Let your head turn gently as your eyes move.
3. As your gaze lands on objects, name them quietly in your mind. Lamp. Window. Plant. Chair. This naming engages the prefrontal cortex and helps bring online the part of the brain responsible for rational assessment.
4. If your gaze is drawn back to a particular spot repeatedly, let it rest there for a moment. This is the nervous system checking. Let it check until it is satisfied.

5. Notice any shift in your breathing or in the quality of tension in your body as you do this. Most people feel a slight softening, a small exhale, after one to two minutes of orienting.
6. Complete the practice by letting your gaze settle somewhere neutral and taking a slow breath.

## When to Use It

Orienting is particularly powerful when you are entering a new or unfamiliar environment, when anxiety spikes without a clear cause, when you feel hypervigilant or unable to settle, and as the opening practice before body scan or breathwork. It can also be used invisibly in social situations.



*Figure 4: Orienting uses slow visual scanning to signal present-moment safety to the nervous system.*

**Pattern note: Priority technique for the flight pattern.**

# Grounding

---

Grounding is the practice of bringing attention and awareness back into physical contact with the present moment through sensory experience. When the nervous system is dysregulated, particularly in freeze or dissociative states, there is a loss of connection between the person and their immediate physical reality. Grounding restores that connection using the most basic available resource, the felt sense of the body making contact with surfaces, textures, temperatures, and the pull of gravity.

## Why It Works

Dissociation and freeze are protective responses that involve a degree of disconnection from physical sensation. The nervous system, overwhelmed, retreats from the body. Grounding works by giving the nervous system something immediate and benign to connect to, sensory data from the present moment that is not threat-related. This activates the prefrontal cortex, interrupts the dissociative process, and provides an anchor point from which regulation can begin. Physical grounding through the feet has been shown to directly reduce sympathetic activation and increase parasympathetic tone.

## How to Practise

1. **Standing Grounding:** Stand with feet hip-width apart and feel the full surface of your feet against the floor. Press gently downward and notice the ground pressing back. Slowly shift your weight from one foot to the other and notice the changing sensations. Take three deep breaths.
2. **Seated Grounding:** Sitting upright, place both feet flat on the floor. Feel the contact of your sit bones against the chair. Place both hands flat on your thighs and feel the warmth and weight of your own hands. Press your feet gently into the floor and your hands gently into your thighs. Breathe.

3. **Five Senses Grounding:** Name five things you can see, four things you can physically feel right now, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This is particularly useful during acute anxiety or dissociation as it rapidly activates sensory processing across multiple channels.
4. **Cold Water Grounding:** Run cold water over your hands and wrists and pay close attention to the sensation of temperature, pressure, and movement. This is a rapid sensory anchor useful in moments of acute overwhelm.

## When to Use It

Grounding is your first response to dissociation, freeze, or any moment when you feel disconnected from yourself or your surroundings. It is also valuable as an opening practice before deeper somatic work, and as a closing practice after processing difficult material.



*Figure 5: Grounding uses physical contact with surfaces and sensory awareness to restore presence.*

**Pattern note:** Priority technique for the flight and freeze patterns.

# Pendulation

---

Pendulation was developed by Peter Levine as one of the core principles of Somatic Experiencing. The name comes from the movement of a pendulum, the deliberate oscillation between two points. In somatic practice, those two points are a place of difficulty or activation in the body and a place of ease or neutrality. The practice of moving attention between them, rather than staying fixed in either, is what allows the nervous system to gradually expand its capacity for sensation without flooding.

## Why It Works

One of the primary reasons somatic work feels overwhelming or inaccessible to people who have experienced significant stress is that the nervous system has learned to treat the act of turning inward as dangerous. The body has been holding something difficult, and approaching it directly feels like too much. Pendulation solves this by never asking the nervous system to stay in the difficult place for long. The oscillation itself is regulating. It teaches the body, through repeated experience, that it can visit discomfort and return to ease. And with each repetition, the window of tolerance for that particular sensation widens slightly.

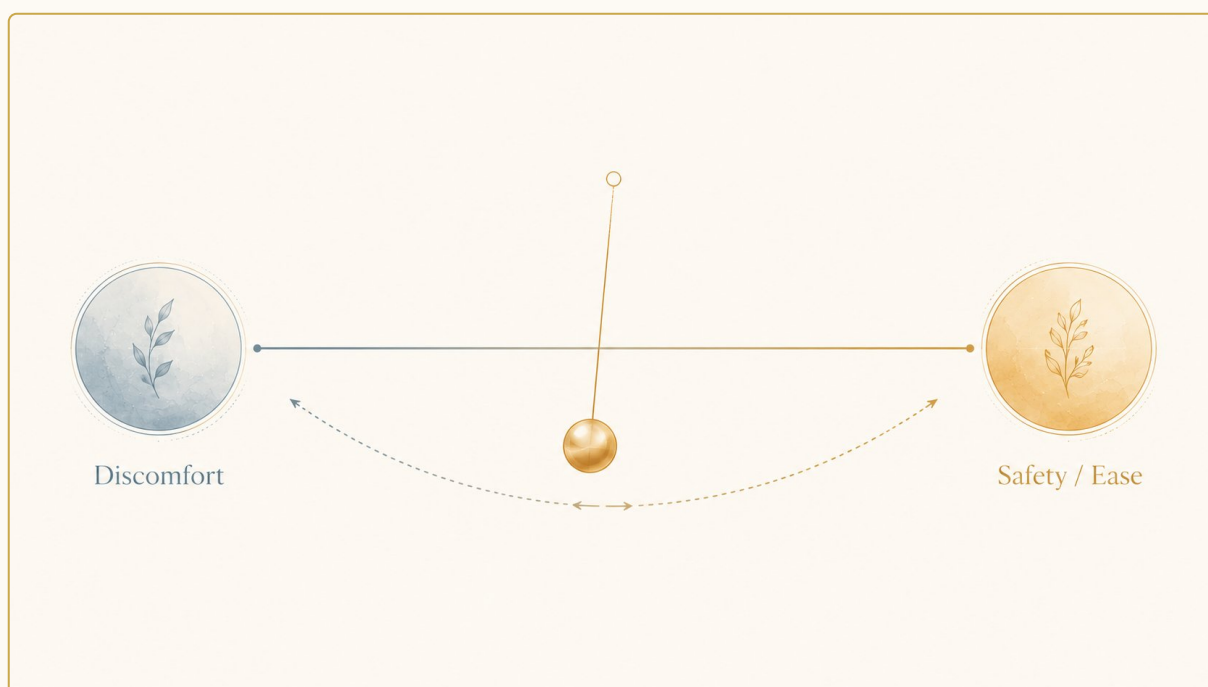
## How to Practise

1. Begin with a body scan to locate two things. First, a place in your body that feels relatively comfortable, neutral, or at ease. This might be the warmth of your hands, the weight of your feet on the floor, or simply a part of the body that does not feel activated right now. Second, a place in your body that holds some tension, discomfort, or activation. Choose something mild to begin with, not the most difficult sensation you can find.
2. Bring your attention to the comfortable place first. Notice the specific qualities of ease there. Temperature, texture, weight, spaciousness. Let yourself rest in this awareness for twenty to thirty seconds.

3. Gently move your attention to the uncomfortable place. Notice without trying to change it. Name the sensation to yourself, tight, heavy, hollow, sharp, and stay for twenty to thirty seconds.
4. Move your attention back to the comfortable place. Let yourself arrive there fully. Notice whether the ease is still there.
5. Continue this oscillation for four to six rounds, gradually increasing the time you spend in the uncomfortable place as it becomes more manageable.

## When to Use It

Pendulation is used when you need to process something emotionally or physically difficult without overwhelming the system. It is your bridge technique, the one that makes deeper work possible. Use it before titration, before any session in which you plan to work with difficult material, and any time you feel the edges of your window of tolerance.



*Figure 6: Pendulation moves attention deliberately between ease and discomfort, widening the nervous system's capacity.*

Pattern note: Priority technique for the fight and freeze patterns.

# Titration

---

Titration is a term borrowed from chemistry, where it refers to the process of adding a substance in small, controlled increments. In somatic practice, it refers to approaching difficult emotional or somatic material in the smallest possible doses, pausing between each to allow integration, rather than diving into the full experience at once.

## Why It Works

The nervous system does not heal through intensity. It heals through completion. And completion requires pace. When people re-engage with difficult material too quickly, the system floods, the window of tolerance is exceeded, and what happens is not processing but retraumatisation. Titration prevents this by honouring the nervous system's actual pace rather than the mind's desire to get through it quickly. Think of titration as the difference between drinking a full glass of cold water in one gulp when you are parched versus sipping it slowly. The second approach actually hydrates you.

The felt sense, a term developed by philosopher and psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin, is the central concept here. It refers to the unclear, difficult-to-articulate bodily awareness that accompanies emotional experience. When you sense something without yet having words for it, that is the felt sense. Titration works with the felt sense directly, approaching it gently until it gradually clarifies, rather than forcing it to resolve through narrative or analysis.

## How to Practise

1. Choose a situation, memory, or pattern that carries some emotional charge. Nothing that feels overwhelming. An eight out of ten is too much. A three or four is ideal.
2. Bring the situation to mind briefly, just enough to feel the edge of the associated sensation in the body. Locate where in the body you feel it. Notice the quality. Do not go further into the content.

- 
3. Pause. Return attention to your breath and to a grounding resource, perhaps the weight of your feet or the sensation of your hands on your thighs.
  4. Wait until the sensation in the body settles slightly, even fractionally. This is integration happening.
  5. Return to the situation for a second approach, slightly closer than the first. Notice what you feel in the body now. Pause again.
  6. Continue this approach, pause, and settle rhythm until either the charge of the material has reduced noticeably, or you have reached your comfortable limit for the session.

### **When to Use It**

Titration is specifically for working with emotionally charged material. It is the technique to use when you want to process something difficult without being overwhelmed by it. It works most effectively in combination with pendulation, and it is the approach to use in any session where you are deliberately engaging with something that has felt too big to touch.



*Figure 7: Titration approaches difficult material in small increments, allowing integration between each approach.*

Pattern note: Priority technique for the freeze pattern.

# Shaking and TRE

---

TRE stands for Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises, developed by Dr. David Berceli. It is a series of exercises designed to activate the body's natural neurogenic tremor mechanism, the same spontaneous shaking that animals use to discharge survival energy after a threat has passed. Peter Levine's research observed this mechanism across numerous species. Berceli developed a practical protocol for humans to access it deliberately.

## Why It Works

When the nervous system mobilises for fight or flight, it floods the muscles with tension and adrenaline in preparation for action. If that action never fully happens, as is often the case in human stress responses, that tension is not automatically discharged. It remains stored in the muscle tissue and fascia, contributing to chronic tightness, pain, anxiety, and a general sense of being unable to fully relax. Neurogenic tremors are the body's natural mechanism for discharging this stored tension. The shaking is not weakness or loss of control. It is the nervous system completing the stress response cycle. Regular TRE practice has been shown to reduce PTSD symptoms, decrease chronic muscle tension, improve sleep, and produce a general quality of greater ease in the body.

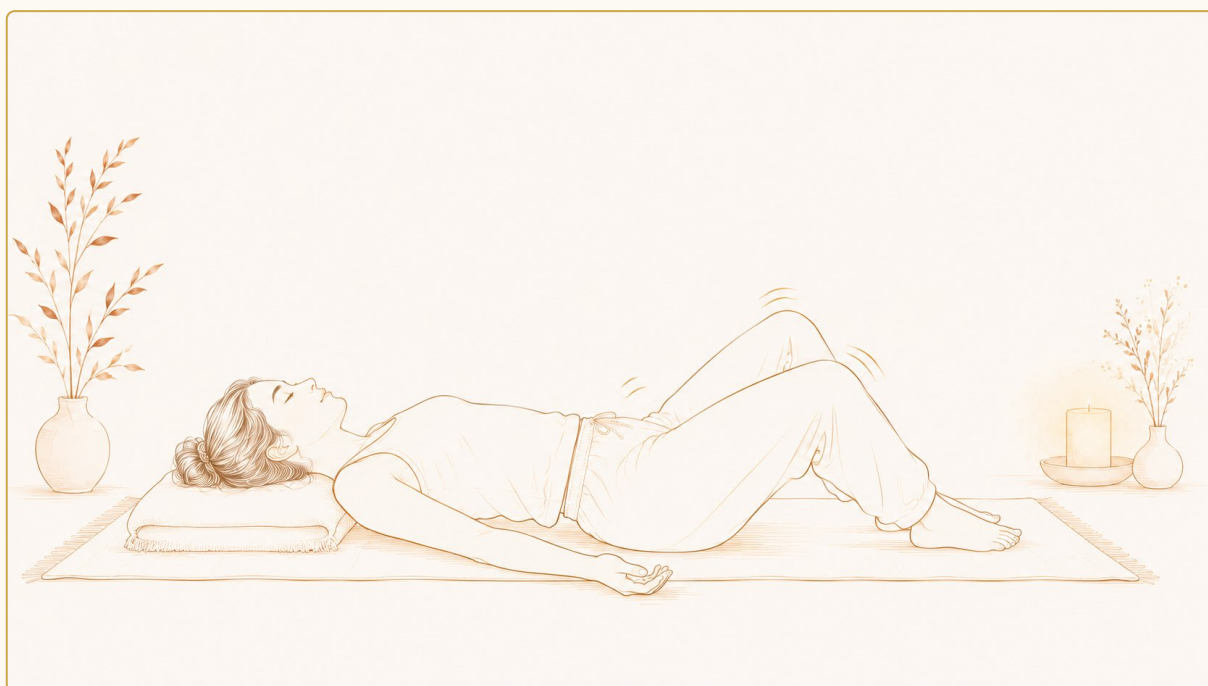
## How to Practise

1. Stand with feet hip-width apart. Rise up onto the balls of your feet and hold for thirty seconds, then lower slowly. Repeat three times. This fatigues the calf muscles and begins activating the tremor mechanism in the legs.
2. Stand with feet slightly wider than hip-width and bend your knees into a half squat position. Hold for thirty to sixty seconds until you begin to feel a slight trembling in the thighs. This is the tremor activating. Welcome it.

3. Slowly lower yourself to the floor and lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Let your knees fall gently inward toward each other until they touch. Hold for one to two minutes. Many people experience spontaneous trembling in this position.
4. Allow the trembling to spread. It may move into the hips, the belly, the chest, and sometimes the arms and jaw. Do not try to direct or amplify it. Simply allow what arises.
5. After five to ten minutes, straighten your legs and rest for a few minutes in stillness. Notice the quality of the body after the practice. Most people describe a feeling of warmth, heaviness, and ease.

## When to Use It

TRE is recommended two to three times per week for people who are actively working with stored stress or trauma. It is not a daily practice, as the body needs time to integrate between sessions. It is particularly valuable for the fight and freeze patterns, and for anyone who carries chronic physical tension, particularly in the hips, lower back, jaw, or shoulders.



*Figure 8: Neurogenic tremors are the body's natural way of discharging stored survival energy.*

**Pattern note: Priority technique for the fight and freeze patterns.**

# Humming and Voo Sounding

---

Humming and Voo sounding are vagal toning practices derived from Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing work and supported by the science of polyvagal theory. They use the vibration produced by vocalisation to directly stimulate the vagus nerve and shift the nervous system toward ventral vagal activation, the state of genuine safety and ease.

## Why It Works

The vagus nerve innervates the muscles of the larynx and pharynx, which means that vocalisation, particularly low, sustained vocalisation, directly activates the vagal pathway. This is why singing, chanting, and certain prayer practices across many cultures produce physiological states of calm and connection. It is not merely psychological. The vibration is doing something measurable to the nervous system. Humming in particular has been shown to increase heart rate variability, a key marker of vagal tone and parasympathetic activity, reduce cortisol, and produce a subjective sense of calm and wellbeing. The Voo sound, specifically, works with the vibration in the chest cavity, which is particularly effective for reaching deeper layers of held tension.

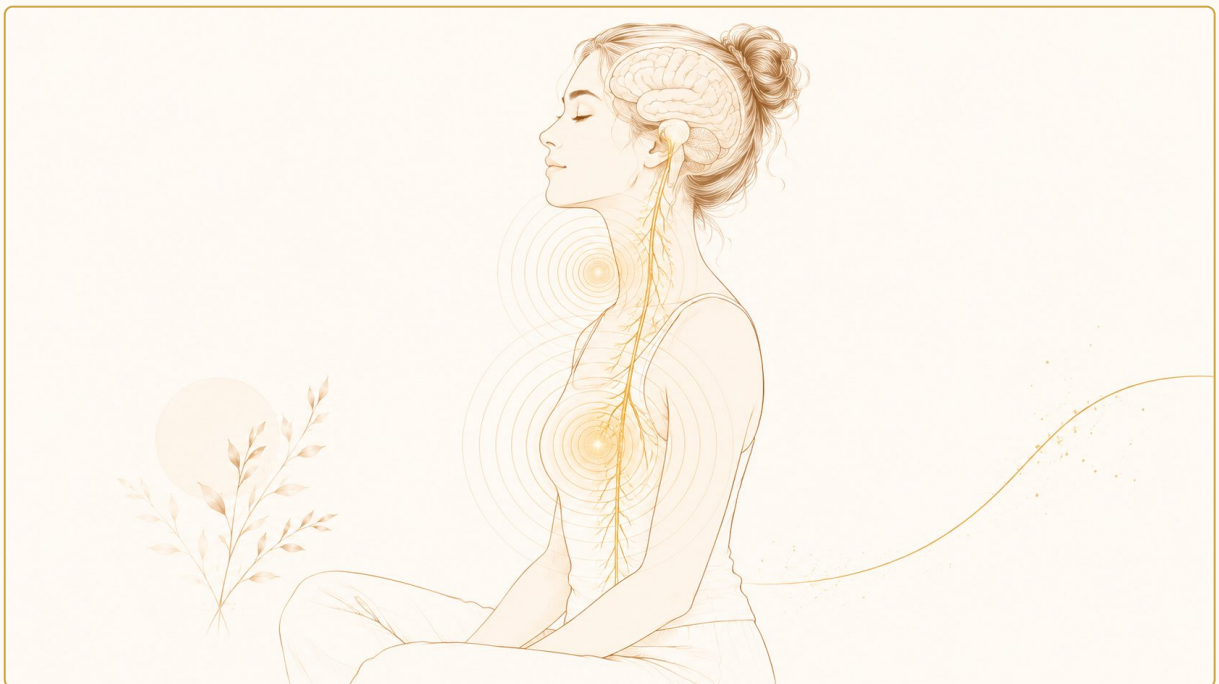
## How to Practise

1. **Extended Hum:** Take a slow breath in through the nose. On the exhale, produce a gentle, sustained hum at whatever pitch feels comfortable. Let the hum be as long as the exhale allows. Feel the vibration in your chest and throat. Repeat for five to eight breaths. Notice the quality of your body at the end.
2. **Voo Sound:** Take a slow breath in through the nose. On the exhale, produce the sound Voo, extending it for as long as the breath allows. The sound should originate deep in the chest and produce a physical vibration you can feel in the torso. It is not a loud sound. It is a resonant one. After the Voo, allow a natural pause before the next inhale. Repeat five to eight times.

3. **Humming Body Scan:** Combine the extended hum with the body scan. As your attention rests in different areas of the body, let the hum resonate there. Notice if the quality of sensation in the body changes as the hum moves through it.

## When to Use It

Humming and Voo sounding are excellent practices for the freeze and shutdown patterns, for moments of emotional flatness or disconnection, before sleep, and as a midday reset during periods of high stress. They can also be used invisibly, humming quietly to yourself, in situations where you need regulation without drawing attention.



*Figure 9: Vocalisation stimulates the vagus nerve directly, shifting the nervous system toward safety and ease.*

**Pattern note:** Priority technique for the freeze pattern.

# EFT Tapping

---

Emotional Freedom Technique, known as EFT or tapping, was developed by Gary Craig in the 1990s, building on earlier work by psychologist Roger Callahan. It involves tapping with the fingertips on specific acupressure points on the face and upper body while focusing on a specific emotional or physical issue. It bridges cognitive processing with somatic regulation in a way that makes it uniquely effective for specific fears, blocks, and patterns.

## Why It Works

EFT works through two primary mechanisms. The first is the stimulation of acupressure points, which research suggests activates the amygdala and hippocampus, the brain structures involved in emotional memory, and reduces their firing rate. Multiple studies have shown that EFT produces measurable reductions in cortisol and significant improvements in anxiety, PTSD, and depression scores. The second mechanism is the simultaneous activation of both the cognitive and somatic systems. By verbalising the issue while tapping, the nervous system is given the experience of holding a difficult thought while simultaneously receiving a calming physical input. Over time, this creates new neural associations between the previously triggering content and a state of calm.

## How to Practise

1. Identify the issue you want to work with. A specific fear, a physical sensation, an emotional pattern. Rate its intensity from zero to ten.
2. Create a setup statement in the format: Even though I have this [issue], I deeply and completely accept myself. For example: Even though I feel this tightness in my chest when I think about money, I deeply and completely accept myself.
3. Tap on the karate chop point, the fleshy outer edge of the hand, while repeating the setup statement three times.

4. Move through the tapping sequence, tapping five to seven times on each point. The sequence is: top of head, inner eyebrow, outer eye, under eye, under nose, chin, collarbone, and under arm.
5. At each point, use a reminder phrase, a short version of the issue. Chest tightness. Money fear. Whatever is relevant.
6. After one full round, take a breath and rate the intensity again. Repeat rounds until the intensity has reduced to two or below.

## When to Use It

EFT is particularly valuable for working with specific fears, blocks, and patterns that have a clear emotional charge. It is one of the most effective techniques for money and abundance blocks, relationship patterns, performance anxiety, and specific somatic symptoms like tension headaches or digestive discomfort that have an emotional component.

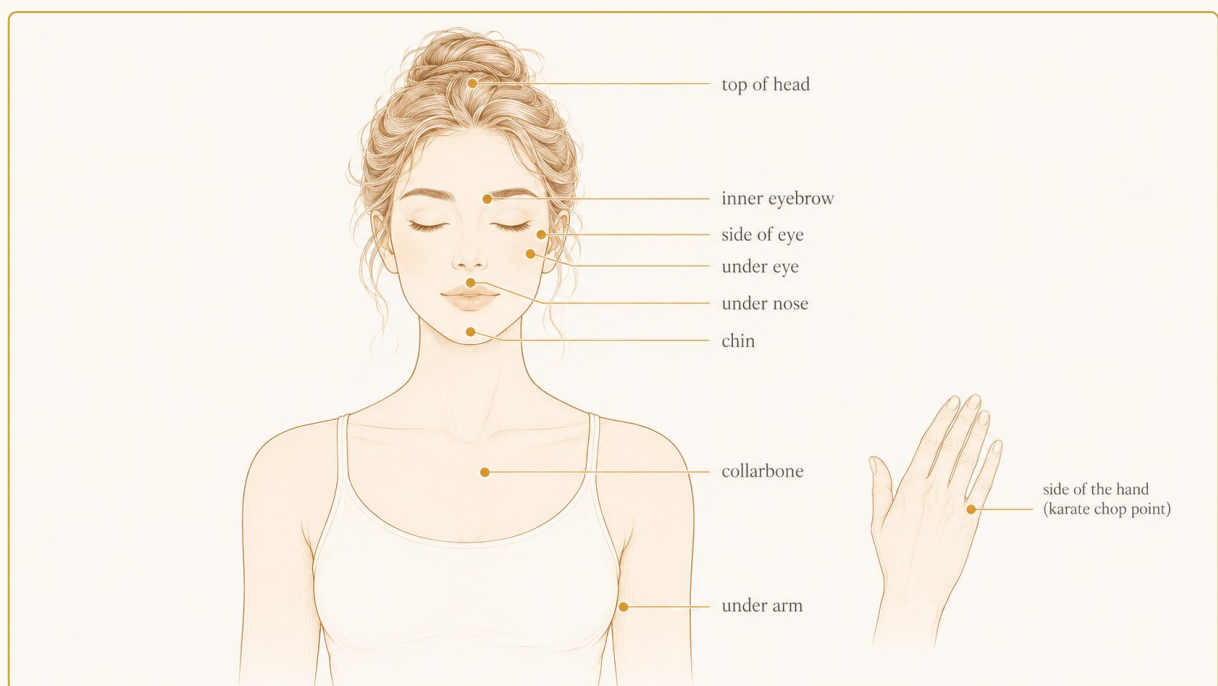


Figure 10: The EFT tapping sequence moves through specific acupressure points on the face, hand, and torso.

Pattern note: Effective across all four patterns.

# Butterfly Hug

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The butterfly hug was developed by EMDR therapist Lucina Artigas and is used widely in trauma-informed care. It is a bilateral stimulation technique, meaning it activates alternating sides of the brain and body, which is one of the mechanisms through which EMDR produces its effects. What makes the butterfly hug remarkable is that it requires nothing except your own arms, and yet it produces a genuine experience of self-soothing and co-regulation that many people describe as profound.

## Why It Works

Bilateral stimulation, alternating activation of the left and right sides of the body and brain, is associated with reduced activity in the amygdala, the brain's threat-detection centre, and increased activity in the prefrontal cortex. It is thought to facilitate the processing of emotional memories by allowing them to be accessed and integrated more fluidly across brain hemispheres. The physical self-holding involved in the butterfly hug also activates the touch receptors in the skin, which stimulate the release of oxytocin, the bonding and safety hormone. For people who have experienced attachment wounds or who have a difficult relationship with being held or comforted, the butterfly hug offers a way to begin re-associating physical comfort with safety.

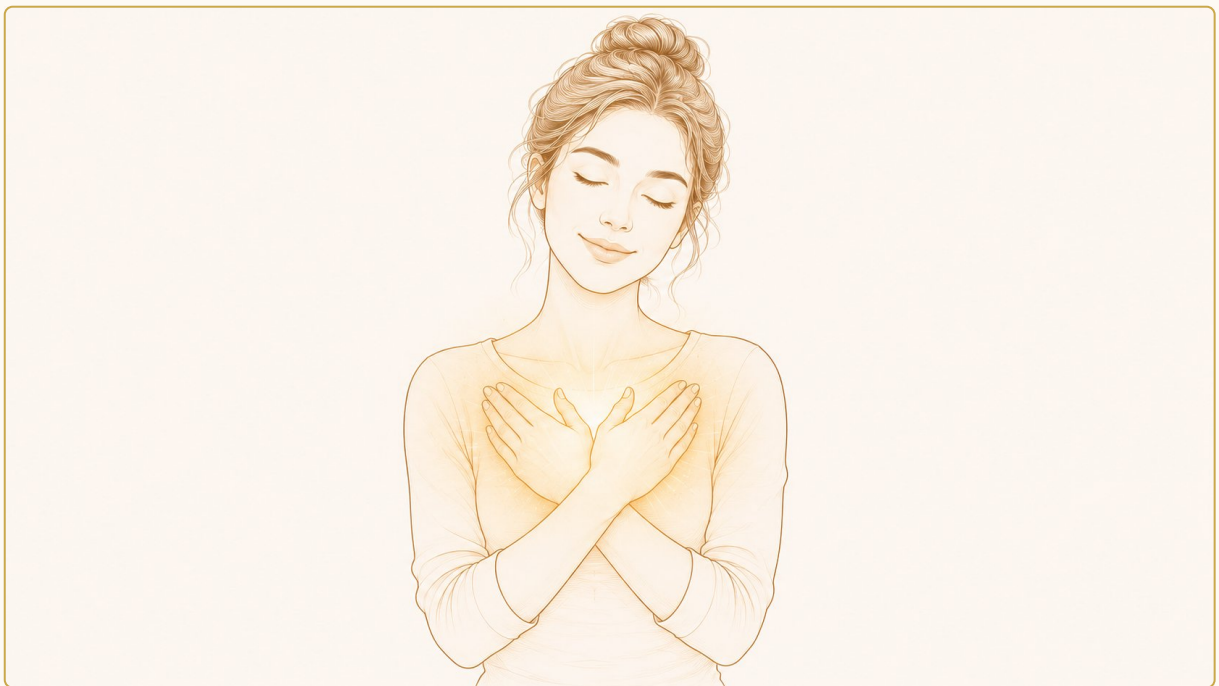
## How to Practise

1. Cross your arms over your chest so that your hands rest near your collarbones or shoulders. Your right hand should be near your left shoulder and your left hand near your right shoulder.
2. Interlace your thumbs to create the shape of a butterfly's body, with your hands as the wings.
3. Close your eyes or soften your gaze downward.
4. Begin to tap alternately with each hand, left then right, left then right, at a gentle and steady rhythm. The tapping should be soft, like a gentle heartbeat.

5. As you tap, you can hold whatever you need to hold. A difficult feeling, a fear, something you are moving through, or simply the intention to offer yourself comfort and safety.
6. Continue for one to three minutes, or as long as feels right. When you finish, rest your hands still on your chest for a moment and take a slow breath.

## When to Use It

The butterfly hug is particularly valuable for the fawn pattern, for moments of acute emotional distress, for grief, for feelings of shame or unworthiness, and for any time you need to offer yourself the experience of being held without having access to another person. It can be done in the middle of the night, in a bathroom stall before a difficult meeting, or in the quiet of your car.



*Figure 11: The butterfly hug uses self-administered bilateral stimulation to activate the body's natural self-soothing response.*

Pattern note: Priority technique for the fawn pattern.

# Resourcing

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Resourcing is the practice of deliberately cultivating and accessing a felt sense of safety, strength, or ease within the body before approaching difficult material. It was developed within Somatic Experiencing as a way of ensuring that the nervous system has sufficient internal capacity before engaging with the healing vortex, the part of the work that involves approaching trauma or difficulty.

## Why It Works

Peter Levine described the therapeutic process as a balance between the healing vortex and the trauma vortex. The trauma vortex has its own gravitational pull toward the difficult material. Without sufficient resourcing, the system gets pulled into the trauma vortex and overwhelmed rather than healed. Resourcing builds what Levine called the counter-vortex, a reservoir of positive somatic experience that the system can draw on to remain regulated while doing deeper work. Neurologically, resourcing activates the same neural pathways involved in positive emotion and safety, which begins to literally build new neural architecture around the experience of feeling safe in the body.

## How to Practise

1. **Memory-Based Resourcing:** Bring to mind a specific memory of a time and place where you felt genuinely safe, at ease, or happy. It does not need to be a significant or dramatic memory. A quiet morning, a walk somewhere beautiful, a moment with an animal or a child, anything that has a quality of genuine ease. Let the memory become vivid. Notice where in your body you feel the quality of that memory. Stay with that felt sense for one to two minutes.

2. **Body-Based Resourcing:** Identify a part of your body that feels relatively comfortable or neutral right now. It might be the warmth of your hands, the feeling of your feet on the floor, or the natural rhythm of your breath. Let your attention rest there and simply notice the qualities of ease present. Stay for one to two minutes.
3. **External Resourcing:** Think of a person, animal, place, or object that reliably produces a sense of safety or warmth in you. Let it be present in your imagination. Notice how the thought of this resource affects your body. Breathe into that feeling.

## When to Use It

Resourcing is the practice that opens and closes all somatic sessions. Always begin with a resource before approaching difficult material, and always return to a resource at the end to close the session safely. It is also valuable at any moment when you feel the edges of your window of tolerance during practice.



*Figure 12: Resourcing establishes a felt sense of safety before and after deeper somatic work.*

**Pattern note:** Priority technique for the fawn pattern.

# Somatic Body Dialogue

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Somatic body dialogue is the practice of turning attention inward and entering into a direct conversation with the body, asking questions and listening to the response through sensation rather than thought. It draws on Eugene Gendlin's focusing practice and on the somatic tradition of treating the body as an intelligent system that communicates through felt sense rather than language.

## Why It Works

The body communicates continuously. Most of us, however, have been trained from early childhood to override those communications in favour of rational analysis, social expectations, or the preferences of others. The result, over time, is a profound disconnection from the body's wisdom. Somatic body dialogue is the practice of restoring that connection, not through discipline or effort, but through genuine curiosity and listening. Research on interoceptive awareness consistently shows that people with stronger body-awareness have better emotional regulation, more accurate self-knowledge, and greater capacity for empathy. The body is not a second-class citizen in the healing process. It is often the wisest voice in the room.

## How to Practise

1. Find a comfortable position and take several slow breaths to settle.
2. Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly.
3. Ask the body, silently or aloud, a simple open question. What are you carrying right now? What do you need? What are you trying to tell me? Choose one question and let it land.
4. Wait. Do not reach for a verbal answer. Instead, notice what happens in the body. A shift in tension, a sensation that intensifies or softens, a warmth, a heaviness, an impulse to move. These are the body's responses.

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5. If a sensation arises, describe it to yourself using physical language rather than emotional labels. Not I feel sad but there is a heaviness in my chest, like something pressing from the inside. Stay with the physical description.
  6. Continue asking and listening for five to ten minutes. You may find that the body's responses shift and develop as the conversation continues. A sensation may move, transform, intensify, or dissolve.
  7. Close the practice by thanking your body. This is not a performative gesture. It is a genuine act of completing the communication and signalling to the nervous system that the dialogue has been received.

### **When to Use It**

Somatic body dialogue is ideal as a morning practice, before any major decision, whenever you feel confused about what you want or need, and as an integration practice after working with other techniques. It is one of the most powerful practices in this book for the fawn pattern, as it directly rebuilds the relationship between a person and their own inner knowing.



*Figure 13: Somatic body dialogue opens a direct line of communication between your conscious awareness and your body's intelligence.*

Pattern note: Priority technique for the fawn pattern.

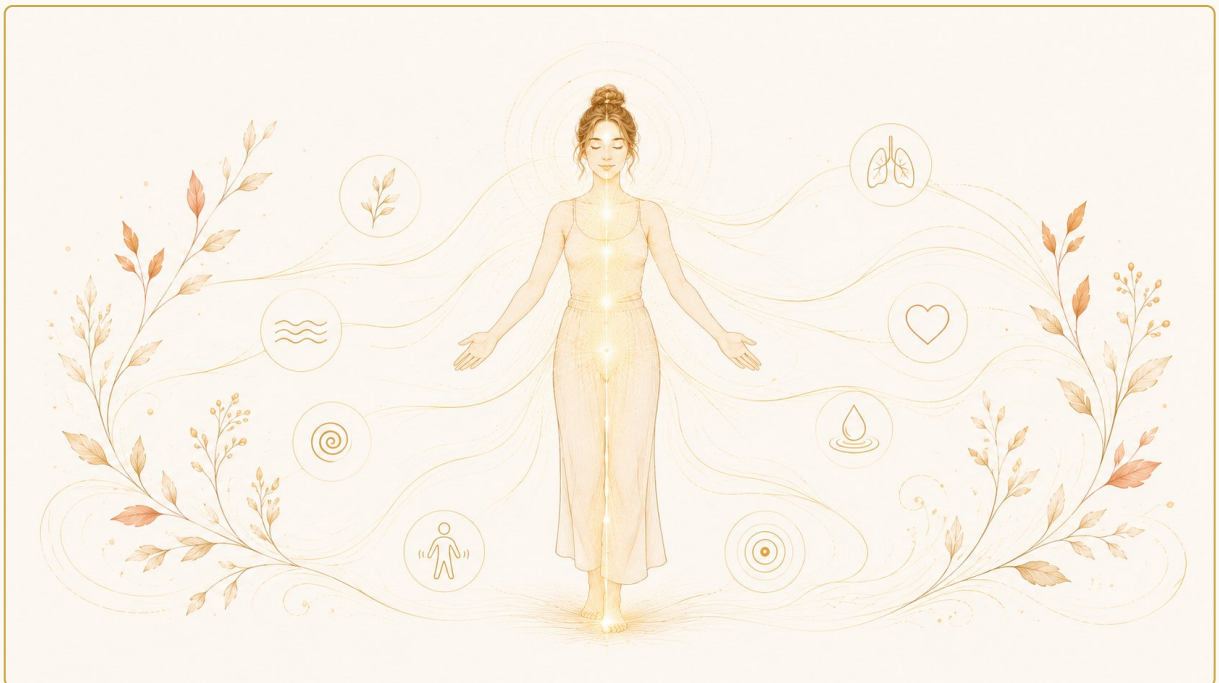
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PART THREE

# Putting It Together

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*From individual techniques to a living practice*



# The Technique Sequencing Guide

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Knowing twelve techniques is one thing. Knowing how to combine them into a coherent, effective practice is another. This chapter gives you the sequencing logic, the understanding of how techniques relate to each other and in what order they produce the best results.

## The Three Phases of Any Somatic Session

Every effective somatic practice session, whether five minutes or forty-five, moves through three phases. Arriving, processing, and integrating. The techniques map onto these phases as follows.

### Phase One: Arriving

The arriving phase brings you into the body and establishes a foundation of safety before any deeper work begins. It typically lasts two to five minutes. The sequence for arriving is: Orienting first to establish present-moment safety in the environment, then Grounding to connect the physical body to the present, then a brief Body Scan to take stock of your current state. This three-step arriving sequence is the foundation of every practice session regardless of what follows.

### Phase Two: Processing

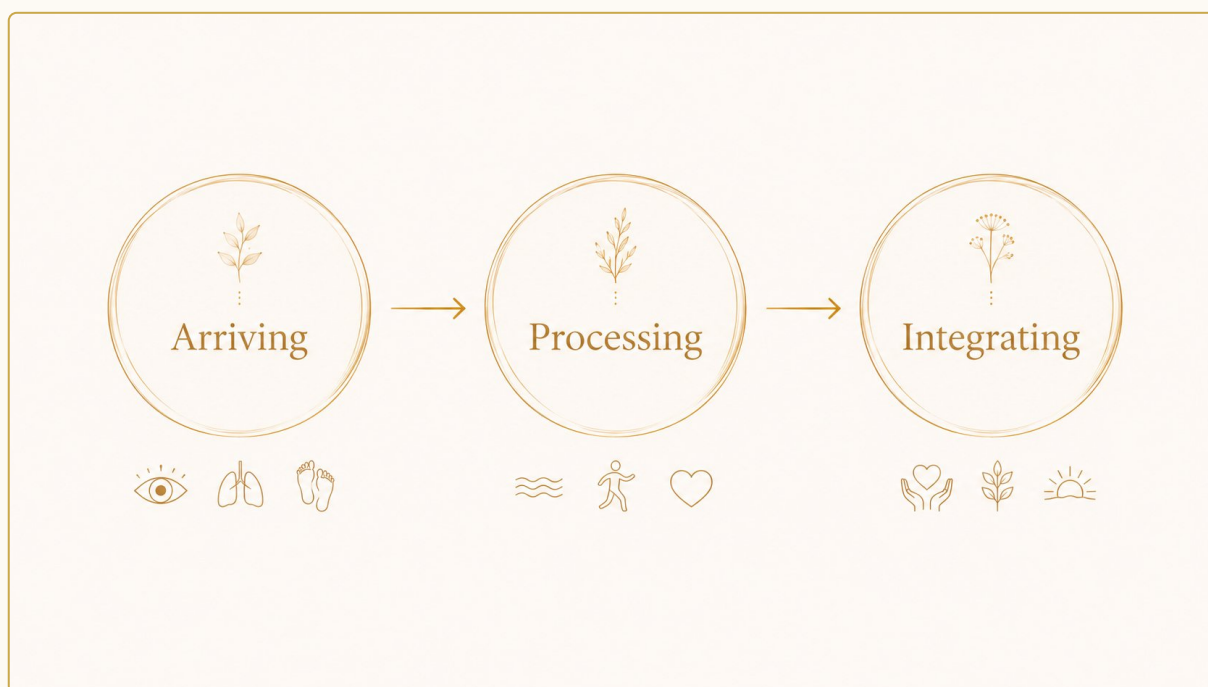
The processing phase is where the deeper work happens. This is where you use the techniques most suited to your current state and your dominant pattern. For hyperactivated states (fight or flight), prioritise Breathwork, Pendulation, and Shaking. For shutdown states (freeze), prioritise Humming, Shaking, and Titration. For relational and identity patterns (fawn), prioritise Resourcing, Butterfly Hug, EFT Tapping, and Somatic Body Dialogue. Always use Resourcing before and after working with difficult material in this phase.

### Phase Three: Integrating

The integrating phase allows the nervous system to absorb and consolidate what has happened in the processing phase. This is not a step to skip. Integration is where the change actually takes root. A brief Body Scan to notice what has shifted, followed by Grounding, and a final Resourcing

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practice to close the session safely. This phase needs only two to three minutes but makes a significant difference in how lasting the effects of the session are.



*Figure 14: The three-phase structure of an effective somatic practice session.*

## **Combining Techniques Within a Session**

Within the processing phase, the most effective combinations are Pendulation followed by Titration when working with emotionally charged material, Breathwork followed by Body Scan to come down from acute activation, and Shaking followed by Grounding to complete and integrate a TRE session. EFT Tapping works well as a standalone within the processing phase and does not require other techniques before or after it, though Grounding afterward is always beneficial.

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## CHAPTER 19

# The Which Technique When Reference

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This chapter is designed to be used in the moment. When you are in a particular state and need to know which technique to reach for, come here. Each state maps to the two or three most effective techniques for that specific experience.

| State                         | Primary Technique               | Secondary Technique             |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Anxiety and racing thoughts   | Breathwork (box breathing)      | Orienting                       |
| Overwhelm and flooding        | Grounding (five senses)         | Breathwork (physiological sigh) |
| Freeze and numbness           | Shaking and TRE                 | Humming and Voo Sounding        |
| Anger and irritability        | Breathwork (box breathing)      | Shaking and TRE                 |
| Grief and sadness             | Butterfly Hug                   | Resourcing                      |
| Dissociation                  | Grounding (cold water)          | Orienting                       |
| Shame                         | EFT Tapping                     | Butterfly Hug                   |
| Chronic physical tension      | Body Scan                       | Shaking and TRE                 |
| Difficulty sleeping           | Humming and Voo Sounding        | Pendulation                     |
| Acute stress                  | Breathwork (physiological sigh) | Grounding                       |
| Low energy and flatness       | Shaking and TRE                 | Orienting                       |
| Confusion about what you want | Somatic Body Dialogue           | Resourcing                      |

Screenshot this page or bookmark it. The goal is to reach for this reference in the middle of a difficult moment rather than after it has passed. Over time, as you practise regularly, the associations will become automatic and you will find yourself instinctively reaching for the right technique without needing to

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consult the chart.

# Your Daily Regulation Menu

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Somatic healing is not only a practice you do when you are in distress. It is most effective when it becomes part of the rhythm of daily life, a few minutes in the morning, a brief reset in the middle of the day, and a gentle wind-down in the evening. Each of these sequences is designed to be genuinely achievable, not aspirationally long.

## Morning Practice: Eight to Ten Minutes

This sequence sets the nervous system's baseline for the day. Done consistently, it gradually shifts your default state toward greater regulation and ease.

|                                                                                                                                                 |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Orienting                                                                                                                                       | 2 minutes |
| Slowly scan the room as you sit in bed or at the edge of a chair. Name what you see. Let your nervous system register that the morning is safe. |           |

|                                                                                                                                                  |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Body Scan                                                                                                                                        | 3 minutes |
| Move your attention from head to feet, noticing the current state of the body without trying to change anything. Simply witness what is present. |           |

|                                                                                                                                                                                           |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Conscious Breathwork                                                                                                                                                                      | 3 minutes |
| Practise diaphragmatic breathing. Hand on the belly, breath directed downward, exhale slightly longer than inhale. This sets a regulated breathing pattern that often persists for hours. |           |

|                                                                                                                                    |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Somatic Body Dialogue                                                                                                              | 2 minutes |
| Place one hand on your heart. Ask: what do I need today? Listen to what arises in the body before reaching for a cognitive answer. |           |

## Midday Reset: Two to Three Minutes

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This sequence is designed for the middle of a busy or stressful day. It does not require privacy or a particular setting.

|                                                                                                                                 |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Physiological Sigh                                                                                                              | 30 seconds |
| Two to three physiological sighs to rapidly downregulate any accumulated stress activation.                                     |            |
| Grounding                                                                                                                       | 1 minute   |
| Both feet flat on the floor, hands on thighs, thirty seconds of noticing the physical sensations of contact and weight.         |            |
| Orienting                                                                                                                       | 1 minute   |
| A brief, quiet scan of the immediate environment. Name five things you can see. Let the nervous system find the present moment. |            |

### **Evening Wind-Down: Five Minutes**

This sequence helps the nervous system transition from the day's activation into the receptive state needed for genuine rest. Sleep quality tends to improve noticeably with consistent use.

|                                                                                                                                                                                    |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Humming                                                                                                                                                                            | 2 minutes |
| Five to eight extended hums, lying down or seated. Let the vibration move through the chest and belly. This is one of the most effective pre-sleep regulation practices available. |           |
| Pendulation                                                                                                                                                                        | 2 minutes |
| Identify any remaining tension from the day and a place of ease. Gently oscillate between them until the tension softens.                                                          |           |
| Resourcing                                                                                                                                                                         | 1 minute  |
| Close with a memory or body-based resource. Let safety be the last felt experience of the day.                                                                                     |           |

# The Overwhelm Protocol

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This chapter is here because responsible somatic practice acknowledges that going inward sometimes brings up more than expected. This is not a failure of the practice or of you. It is a sign that the nervous system is beginning to trust the process enough to let more through. But it requires a clear, simple protocol to navigate safely.

## Recognising Flooding

Flooding is different from a somatic release. A release has movement, direction, and a quality of completion even if it is intense. Flooding feels like being submerged without any sense of progress or resolution. Signs of flooding include feeling completely unable to function, a sense of terror that is escalating rather than moving through, complete dissociation or inability to sense the body at all, a feeling that you cannot breathe properly despite attempting breathwork, and an overwhelming sense of helplessness or hopelessness that is increasing.

If any of these arise, stop the practice immediately. This is not giving up. This is taking care of your nervous system with the same intelligence that the rest of this book has been building.

## The Five-Step Stabilisation Sequence

- 1 Open your eyes if they are closed. This alone is often sufficient to begin interrupting a flooding state.
- 2 Plant both feet firmly on the floor. Press down. Feel the floor pressing back. Say to yourself, aloud if possible: I am here. I am safe. My feet are on the floor.
- 3 Look around the room and name ten objects. Take your time. Let your eyes move slowly.

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4 Place one hand on your sternum (breastbone) and apply gentle, firm pressure. This activates touch receptors and begins to stimulate the vagal pathway. Breathe slowly.

5 Take three physiological sighs. Double inhale through the nose, long slow exhale through the mouth. These three breaths are often sufficient to begin shifting a flooding state.

### **After Flooding: What to Do Next**

After using the stabilisation sequence, rest. Do not try to return to somatic practice on the same day. Do something gentle and familiar that your nervous system associates with safety. Eat something warm. Take a walk. Watch something comforting. Give the system time to consolidate.

In the following days, begin practice again at the arriving phase only. Orienting, Grounding, and Body Scan with no processing phase. Let the nervous system rebuild its trust in the process gradually before going deeper again.

*Healing does not require you to push through. The most sustainable somatic practice is one that respects the nervous system's pace rather than overriding it.*

### **When to Seek Professional Support**

If you experience repeated flooding, if the stabilisation sequence does not bring you back to a functional state, or if you find that somatic practice is consistently destabilising rather than regulating, these are clear signals that working with a trained somatic therapist would serve you better than self-directed practice at this time. This is not a statement about how severe or how healed you are. It is simply a recognition that some nervous systems, having been through significant experiences, need the co-regulation of another trained person as part of the healing process. There is no less dignity in that. There is, in fact, great wisdom in it.

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PART FOUR

# The Bridge

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*Connecting regulation to receiving*



# The Regulated Body Receives

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We have covered a great deal of ground together. You understand your nervous system. You know your pattern. You have twelve techniques in your toolkit and the sequencing logic to use them effectively. You have a daily practice structure and a protocol for when things get difficult.

Now it is time to talk about why all of this matters beyond the alleviation of symptoms. Because this book is not only about feeling less anxious or less tense. It is about opening. And opening, in the most fundamental sense, is what the regulated nervous system does.

## The Biology of Receiving

Think about what happens in the body when the sympathetic nervous system is dominant. Blood is redirected to the limbs for action. The digestive system slows or stops. The immune system is suppressed. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for perspective, creativity, and connection, goes offline. The entire organism narrows its focus to the single question: how do I survive this?

In this state, receiving is not possible. Not because of a spiritual blockage. Not because of limiting beliefs, though those play their role. But because the biological function of survival mode is to reduce rather than expand. To defend rather than open. To conserve rather than receive.

*The nervous system in survival mode cannot receive what the mind is calling in. Not because the universe is withholding it. But because the body is biologically configured to block it.*

Now think about what happens in the body when the parasympathetic system is engaged and ventral vagal activation is present. Blood returns to the digestive system and the organs. The heart rate variability increases. The prefrontal cortex comes back online. The face softens. The posture opens. The

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breath deepens. And the organism shifts from the question of survival to the question of flourishing.

In this state, receiving becomes possible. Not just emotionally or energetically, though those things are real. But physiologically. The body's systems are oriented toward growth, connection, and integration rather than defence. This is the biological basis of abundance. Not as a mindset practice, but as a body practice. The nervous system is the gate.

## **The Somatic Gap, Closed**

The somatic gap is the distance between what the mind knows and what the body believes. It is the gap between consciously wanting abundance, love, health, or expansion, and the body's deeply encoded conviction that these things are not safe, not available, or not for you.

Every technique in this book has been working on that gap from a different angle. The body scan began the conversation. Breathwork changed the biochemistry. Orienting taught the nervous system to register present-moment safety. Grounding brought you back into your body when it wanted to leave. Pendulation and titration expanded the window of tolerance. Shaking discharged what had been stored. Humming woke up the vagus nerve. EFT began rewiring the emotional charges attached to specific blocks. The butterfly hug offered the body an experience of being held. Resourcing built a reservoir of safety. Somatic body dialogue restored the line of communication.

Taken together, these practices do not just reduce symptoms. They recalibrate the thermostat. They teach the nervous system, through repeated physical experience rather than through thought, that safety is real, that ease is real, that receiving is possible. And when that recalibration takes root, the things that felt perpetually out of reach begin, quietly and inexorably, to arrive.

## **The Practice Is the Portal**

This is not a book you read once and put on a shelf. It is a book you return to. The practices here are not a temporary course of treatment. They are a way of living in relationship with your body, with the intelligence that has been running in your cells since before you had language, with the part of you that knows more than your conscious mind has access to.

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Start small. Two minutes of breathwork in the morning. A body scan before bed. One round of EFT when something feels sticky. The nervous system does not change through heroic effort. It changes through consistent, gentle, repeated signals that something new is available. You are the one who sends those signals. You are the one who teaches the body that it is safe to open.

*Your body has been waiting for this conversation. It knows how to heal. Your job is simply to show up and let it.*

Welcome to the other side of the gap.

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**BACK MATTER**

# Technique Quick Reference Card

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All twelve techniques at a glance. Return to the relevant chapter for full instructions.

| Technique                | Primary Use                  | Best For Pattern |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Body Scan                | Interoceptive awareness      | Flight           |
| Conscious Breathwork     | Rapid regulation             | Fight            |
| Orienting                | Present-moment safety        | Flight           |
| Grounding                | Dissociation and freeze      | Freeze, Flight   |
| Pendulation              | Expanding capacity           | Fight, Freeze    |
| Titration                | Processing without flooding  | Freeze           |
| Shaking and TRE          | Discharging stored tension   | Fight, Freeze    |
| Humming and Voo Sounding | Vagal toning                 | Freeze           |
| EFT Tapping              | Specific blocks and fears    | All patterns     |
| Butterfly Hug            | Self-soothing and comfort    | Fawn             |
| Resourcing               | Safety reservoir             | Fawn             |
| Somatic Body Dialogue    | Inner knowing and self-trust | Fawn             |

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## Recommended Reading and Resources

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These books and practitioners represent the most important voices in somatic healing. Each one will take you deeper into the territory this book has introduced.

Healing Trauma by Peter A. Levine

The foundational text of Somatic Experiencing. Levine's writing is accessible, compassionate, and deeply practical. This is the book to read first after completing this guide.

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk

A landmark work in trauma science that makes the neurological and physiological case for body-based healing with extraordinary clarity and compassion. Essential reading.

In an Unspoken Voice by Peter A. Levine

A deeper exploration of the theory and practice behind Somatic Experiencing, with case studies and practice guidance. For readers who want to go further into the science.

Waking the Tiger by Peter A. Levine

The book that first introduced Levine's work to a broad audience. Accessible, eye-opening, and a natural companion to this guide.

The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy by Deb Dana

An accessible translation of Stephen Porges' polyvagal theory into clinical practice. Highly relevant to the nervous system framework introduced in Part One.

Focusing by Eugene T. Gendlin

The original text on felt sense work, which underlies the somatic body dialogue practice in Chapter 17. A quiet and profound book.

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## A Note on Professional Support

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*This book is an educational resource designed to introduce you to somatic healing practices and support you in developing a self-directed practice. It is not a substitute for professional therapeutic support, and it is not designed to replace clinical care for complex trauma, PTSD, or significant mental health challenges.*

*If you are currently working with a therapist, the practices in this book are designed to complement that process. Many somatic therapists actively encourage their clients to develop a self-practice between sessions, and the techniques here align well with Somatic Experiencing, EMDR, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, and trauma-informed approaches broadly.*

*If you are not currently working with a therapist and feel that your healing requires more support than self-directed practice can provide, the following resources can help you find a qualified practitioner. The Somatic Experiencing International website at [traumahealing.org](http://traumahealing.org) maintains a directory of certified SE practitioners worldwide. The EMDR International Association at [emdria.org](http://emdria.org) provides a therapist finder for trained EMDR practitioners. The United States Association for Body Psychotherapy at [usabp.org](http://usabp.org) offers a directory of body-centred therapists across the country.*

*Seeking support is not a sign that the practices in this book have not worked. It is a sign that you take your healing seriously enough to give it what it needs. That is not a step backward. That is the work.*

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Body First is published by Higher Self Awakening. For more resources, visit [higherselfawakening.org](http://higherselfawakening.org)