

BODY AWARENESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

The brain-body connection's
role in better health and
behavior.



CREATE

WE'RE LEARNING

- What somatics is
- How the nervous system impacts emotional regulation
- How body awareness creates better behavior
- How recognizing body signals leads to better health
- How body awareness creates better communication
- How to practice Body Scanning
- 3 techniques that ground the body



SOMATICS: USING THE BODY TO **BETTER CONNECT** WITH THE MIND.

The brain-body connection is a complex and dynamic relationship that influences our overall well-being. Understanding and nurturing this connection can have profound effects on our health, behavior, and emotional regulation.

In this guide, we will explore the concept of interoception and its positive benefits, with a specific focus on how it leads to faster reactions to health concerns, supports better behavior, and enhances emotional regulation.

Let's dive in.



SOMATIC THERAPY IS A BODY-FOCUSED APPROACH

Somatic therapy, was originally developed by Peter Levine in the late 1970s. It was conceptualized as an alternative to other trauma-focused therapies that didn't work for everyone.

When you practice these body-focused exercises, you focus **on physical sensations**, instead of thoughts and emotions as you'd do in talk therapy, or your fears as you'd do with exposure therapy.

Somatics defines trauma as **“when too much happens too soon for the nervous system to process,”** (Valerie Candela Brower, licensed counselor and certified somatic practitioner). Those sensations become recorded within the body and return as overwhelmed reactions or causes of future misbehavior.



“It’s like eating a big meal and not fully digesting it, but then eating another big meal, and then another,” Candela Brower explains. “The **body does not digest what has happened** and instead, we stuff our feelings, numb out, or deny reality.”

Somatic work offers the body time and space to complete **whatever it needed to do at the time that it didn’t get to.**



HOW IT WORKS:

Body creates **tension in hands** when angry.



Coping doesn’t happen so the child **stores that tension** as a memory in the body.



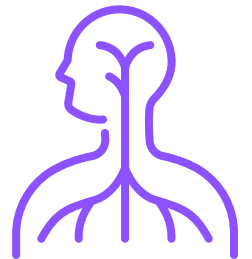
When child is angered again in a similar way **they react with extra pent up fight nervous system reactions.**

Instead body awareness creates the skills to **regularly de-stress** and support **better reactions in the moment.**

OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM & EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Our nervous system plays a significant role in how we interpret and regulate emotions. Understanding this connection means greater emotional well-being:

Autonomic Nervous System: The autonomic nervous system, consisting of the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches, regulates our physiological responses to stress and emotions. A balanced autonomic nervous system supports emotional regulation.



Fight-or-Flight Responses: The sympathetic nervous system triggers the "fight-or-flight" response, which can lead to intense emotions and physical sensations. Recognizing when this response is activated helps us manage our emotional reactions.



Rest-and-Digest Response: The parasympathetic nervous system promotes relaxation and emotional regulation. Practices like deep breathing, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation activate this system, allowing us to calm down and make more balanced emotional judgments.



BETTER BEHAVIOR

Emotions are physical sensations experienced in the body. By learning to sit with these sensations comfortably, we can positively impact our behavior and automatic reactions:

Emotion Regulation: Many kids struggle with controlling their emotional responses. Being more comfortable with the physical sensations associated with emotions helps prevent impulsive reactions because children can sit with an emotion until its natural completion.



Mindful Awareness: Tuning into our body's responses to emotions strengthens mindfulness. This awareness allows a child to acknowledge the physical representation of their emotions without judgment, which then calms the brain and allows it to respond more thoughtfully.



Improved Decision-Making: Tolerating emotional discomfort also means a child is less likely to make impulsive choices driven by short-term relief. This leads to wiser and more intentional decision-making and more long term success.



BETTER COMMUNICATION

A child that understands that anger makes their hands tense or that fear makes their feet feel antsy sits with that emotion until it completes and their brain can think better. Feeling safe in their own body lets them speak out their needs; notice where they feel hurt and act on feeling better.



When children are overwhelmed they shut down and speak less.

Often emotional overwhelm stimulates flight and fawn responses that make a person disassociate or retract into silence. However, that is when speaking out frustration, fear or sadness matters most!



Body awareness gives a child the language they need to advocate for themselves in the moment. Whether its explaining boundaries, dissatisfaction or even reporting a health concern faster; body awareness gives children the tools to act of better health.

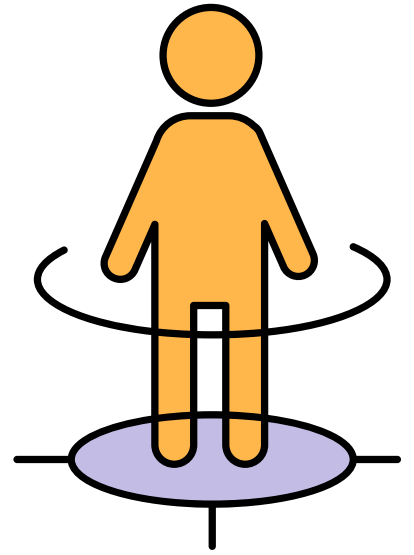


BODY SCANNING

Body scans are a form of “**active meditation**” that may help you relax but also increase the brain-body connection.

Here’s how to teach kids:

1. Start by getting comfortable, possibly in a seated position. Close your eyes.
2. Focus on your lower body. Notice how your feet feel on the floor. Slowly, move your attention to your ankles, knees, thighs, and then pelvis. Identify temperature, pressure, tension, and any other sensations as you move up your body.
3. When you feel any tension, take a deep breath and exhale as you release it. When you feel the body part relax, you can move to the next one.
4. When you finish with your lower body, do the same with your upper body. Include some of your internal organs like your stomach, heart, and lungs.
5. Finally, end by focusing on your neck, head, and face.



3 coping strategies that ground the body

1. Run water over your hands.

Start by running cold water over your hands. Focus on how the temperature feels on each part of your hand, from your wrist to your nails. Switch to warm water and focus on how the sensation on your hands changes. Do this for a few minutes until you calm down.

Immersion in cold water results in peripheral vasoconstriction which causes blood to centrally pool, followed by peripheral vasodilation directly after removal from the water, thereby enhancing circulation. It also helps bring a person back into the present moment out of highly emotional states.



3 coping strategies that ground the body

Shaking and jumping

This can include jumping up and down, dancing, jogging in place, or stretching. As you move, focus on how your body feels. You can do this with a body scan: Start with your toes and go all the way up your face, one body part at a time.

According to Dr Peter Levine, shaking can help release muscular tension, as well as burn excess adrenaline which is triggered when we're living in fight or flight mode when we're constantly stressed.

Dr David Berceci developed Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE), an integrative neurophysiological approach that recognizes the homeostatic and thus therapeutic value of this type of tremor in the human body under stress.



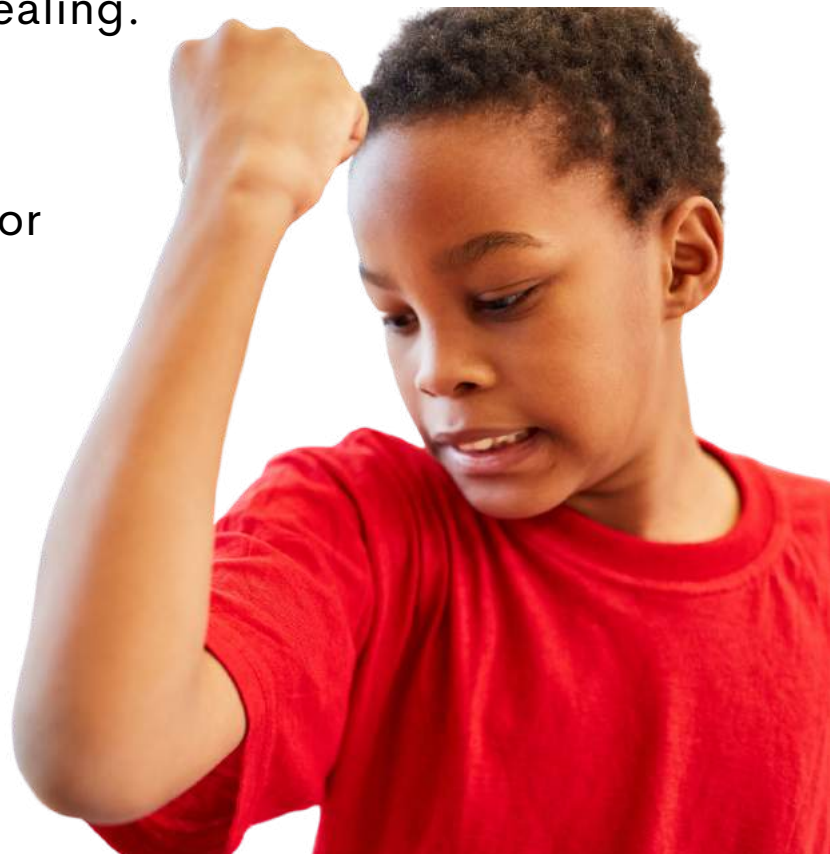
3 coping strategies that ground the body

Tense and relax different parts of your body.

Tension Release Exercises are a body based (somatic) process which can allow the individual to discharge tension from the body.

The exercises activate a shaking mechanism, which causes the muscles to relax. Relaxing tense muscle patterns can often reduce stress in the spine, neck, shoulders and pelvis. When tension is released anywhere in the body, the brain registers a reduction in pain signals, producing new hormones that promotes healing.

For example, press your feet to the ground as hard as you can for a few seconds. Release the pressure and notice how your feet feel now. You can also squeeze the arms of your chair as tightly as you can and then slowly relax and let go.



Thank you for learning about your body with us!

We hope you learned valuable information about your body and ways you can support it during stressful moments.

CREATE has many free resources for parents like explaining modern parenting techniques backed by science, a somatics skill building basketball program for public schools and free live workshops on important parenting topics like punishment, managing anger and gut health. Join our community by scanning the QR code!



Get our learning tools to help your child learn **the entire cycle of emotional intelligence.**



1. Name the feeling,
2. Find it in the body,
3. Describe how it feels in the body,
4. Choose a coping techniques that matches



Educational Workshops
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Nurturing Today, **Shaping Tomorrow.**