

BODYWISE

SOMATIC RESOURCES

FOR THERAPISTS & CLIENTS



GUIDEBOOK

ANNABELLE COOTE

 MIND BODY MATTERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Principles
3. Window of Tolerance
4. Breath
5. Orienting
6. Grounding
7. Centering
8. Boundaries
9. Cross-Body Movement
10. Shake Off Movement
11. Mind-Body Awareness
12. Resources

© 2024. Annabelle Coote. All rights reserved.

You may print or download this document for your own therapy practice use only.

You may not reproduce or use for any commercial purposes.

These materials are for informational purposes only and are not intended as therapy or clinical recommendations. Please consult with a mental health and/or medical professional to discuss any concerns about your own health, and seek clinical consultation as needed.



Embrace the body as a pathway to healing & growth.

Introduction

The BodyWise cards and guide are a collection of somatic resources that give therapists and clients alike tools to make therapy more effective.

Somatic resources are tools and practices that make use of the body and the nervous system. They can help clients with nervous system regulation, increasing mind-body awareness, tolerating difficult material, feeling more connected to themselves, dealing with relationships differently, and integrating healing and change.

Each of the activities included in these materials are just one example of how to work with the particular focus. There are infinite ways to make use of somatic resources in therapy and these materials are just the beginning of the possibilities. They can also be a springboard for other ideas and practices.

Keep the cards handy for use during sessions. You can use them at the beginning of a session as a warm-up or during sessions when the activities will support the process. You can also encourage clients to make use of any of the practices at home between sessions.



Principles to Keep in Mind

1. Somatic approaches in therapy are powerful. This is part of what makes them effective. It also calls for a great deal of attention to safety, pacing and trauma-sensitivity. Proceed gently and seek training and consultation.
2. Only ask your clients to do somatic work that you are familiar with. Practice the activities yourself. Integrate them into your own toolbox and use them for your own resourcing and development.
3. Collaborate with your clients. Introduce principles and activities that you think your clients will be receptive to and are ready to try. Explain why you are suggesting something and give clients the opportunity to ask questions.
4. Modify all suggestions based on your own clinical judgement, the needs of the situation and client collaboration. Adjust them to individual comfort and ability.
5. Use language that clients will understand and use caution when talking about the body. Pay attention to how clients respond and adjust as needed.





Window of Tolerance

The Window of Tolerance (WOT), coined by Dr. Dan Siegel, describes the emotional and nervous system state when we feel okay, safe enough, and able to respond instead of react. We can tolerate our emotions and experience while remaining regulated.

Working with the window of tolerance sets the foundation for making use of somatic resources in therapy. All of the resources in the BodyWise deck and guide can be helpful tools for working with nervous system regulation and growing the window of tolerance for our clients and for ourselves.

Understanding the Window of Tolerance

In a regulated nervous system, there is a working balance between the sympathetic (energizing – “gas”) and parasympathetic (calming – “brakes”) branches of the nervous system.

Outside the window of tolerance, when there is hyperarousal – too much sympathetic arousal, we become overwhelmed, anxious, or chaotic. When there is hypoarousal – too much parasympathetic activity, we become shut down, depressed, or numb.

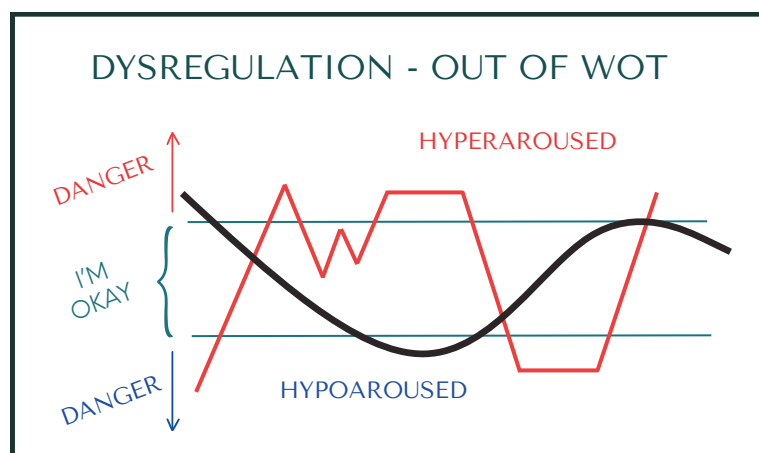
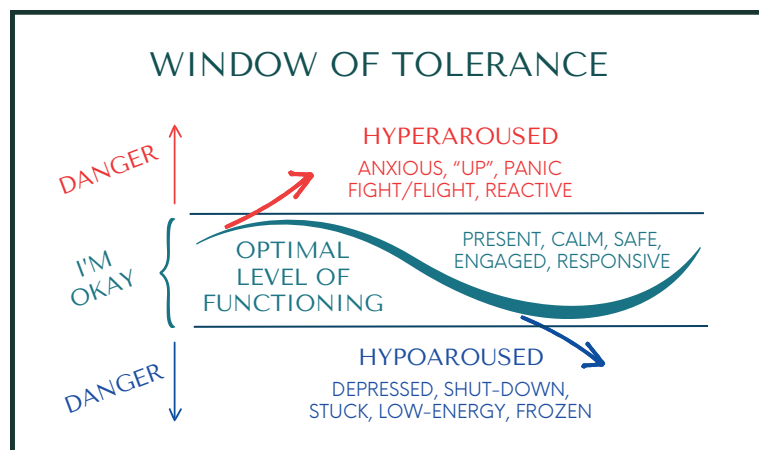
Using the lens of the polyvagal theory developed by Dr. Stephen Porges, being in the window of tolerance is akin to being in the “safe and okay” ventral vagal state and being outside of the window of tolerance corresponds with states of danger and threat, the sympathetic and dorsal vagal states.

Clients are unable to learn new things or integrate change when they are dysregulated, so it is crucial for us to prioritize nervous system state in therapy.

Helping our clients learn to recognize when they are in or outside of their window of tolerance is key to working on developing skills and resources for nervous system regulation both in therapy and in day-to-day living.

Therapists can also move out of their own window of tolerance while in sessions in response to their own experiences of the work. Prioritizing our own nervous system regulation will help us to be present and effective with our clients.

Window of Tolerance



Chronic dysregulation can lead to sharp changes in arousal as well as periods of "stuck" in a hyper- or hypoaroused state or sudden shifts between the two.

Window of Tolerance Activity



Check in with yourself to see if you feel:

In your window: I'm okay. I can cope and things feel manageable, even if I'm having big feelings or a lot going on.

Out of your window, UP (hyperaroused): I feel stressed, anxious, jittery, too many thoughts, can't cope, or other "too up" energy.

Out of your window, DOWN (hypoaroused): I feel shut-down, depressed, sluggish, don't want to cope, or other "too down" energy.



Working with Breath

Working with breath is a powerful way to regulate the nervous system, feel more connected to ourselves, and integrate therapeutic work.

Paying attention to the quality of breath can also give information about what clients may be experiencing. Shallow or held breath, for example, might indicate tension, conflict, or a sense of feeling unsafe. When breath expands or relaxes, it might reflect a letting go or a feeling more ease about something you are working on.

When therapists pay attention to their own breath in session, it can give them a lot of information about not only what the therapist is experiencing, but also what might be going on for the client.

Inhalation & Exhalation

Inhaling activates the sympathetic nervous system, creating “up energy”.

Exhaling activates the parasympathetic nervous system, and brings the energy “down”.

Emphasizing the in-breath may help when clients are hypoaroused, numb or “down”.

A longer out-breath supports calm and regulation.

Long Exhale Activity

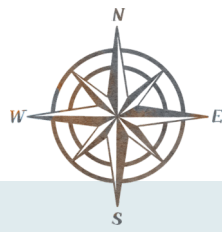
Get comfortable and lengthen your spine.

Inhale through your nose to the count of 4.

Exhale through your nose or pursed lips (like blowing through a straw) for a count of 6 or 8.

Repeat several times and see if you can feel a sense of settling.





Orienting

Being oriented is having a sense of where we are in time & space and knowing what's around us.

Orienting helps us to assess danger and take action when we sense there might be threat.

When we are safe, orienting helps us pay attention to what's important, both in the here and now, and in our lives overall.

How Orienting Helps

We all tend to pay attention to some things more than others. For example, trauma survivors are often more oriented to signs of danger than signals of safety. Some people may look for fun or adventure and some may be on the lookout for problems.

When we notice what we are paying attention to, and ask ourselves to expand our perception, it gives us more information about the environment around us, including who we are with, what it feels like, how safe the situation is, and what options we have in front of us.

When we perceive more, we can more accurately assess our experiences and we discover that we have more options.

Orienting Activity



Use the 5 senses to pay attention to the here & now. What do you use, hear, feel, smell and taste? Can you notice 5 sights, 4 sounds, 3 things you touch, 2 smells and 1 taste?

Look around 360 degrees, turn your head, neck and torso to see what's behind you.

Get curious about what is – and is not – present in the environment.



Grounding

Being grounded is the feeling that we have a foundation beneath us. It is feeling rooted and supported.

Grounding calms our energy. It gives us a solid base from which to move and grow. This is true in the literal sense of being able to move our bodies through space, like when we walk or run or play. It is also the feeling we have in ourselves that supports us to grow emotionally and develop our relationships, interests, and life pursuits.

How Grounding Feels

When we don't feel grounded, we feel disconnected and adrift. When we do feel grounded, we have a sense of solidity.

When grounded, we don't feel stuck or stagnant. We have a sense of lightness, like trees blowing in the breeze. Rooted, but flexible.

Grounding and centering are complimentary.



Grounding Activity

Sit comfortably. Feel your seat and back in the chair. Relax and feel the support beneath you and behind you.

Place your feet on the floor and push them into the ground. Lengthen your spine, reaching both down to the earth and up to the sky.

You can also push your palms into your thighs.



Centering

Being centered is the feeling of being connected to ourselves and sensing that we have a homebase in our own body.

Centering helps us move through life with greater stability and ease.

How Centering Feels

When we are not centered, we can feel pulled in many different directions, feel “all over the place” or have a sense of being empty or hollow in our core.

When we are centered, we have a better sense of balance – physically as well as emotionally. We have a center of gravity that helps us to make our own choices about where we want to turn and how we want to do things.

Centering and grounding are complimentary.



Centering Activity

Sit, stand, or lie down in a comfortable position. Place one hand on your heart and the other on your belly.

Inhale and exhale gently. Notice your body expand and contract. See if you can sense the strength in your core.

You can reach your hands way out to the sides and then bring them back to your center.



Developing Boundaries

Boundaries are guidelines or limits we set for ourselves. Boundaries can be physical, emotional, relational, environmental, or other.

Boundaries help us to have clarity about what we do and don't want and what is acceptable to us for our well-being. Boundaries can and do change.

Understanding Boundaries

People can struggle with boundaries when they are not clear enough, when they are too rigid, when they are not firm enough, or when we are not comfortable setting limits or asking for support.

There are many kinds of boundaries. Ideally, we can make and adjust many types of boundaries as the situation calls for.

Boundaries are not for another person – boundaries are for us. They are our rules, whether someone else decides to follow them or not. So, working with boundaries means not only learning to make them, but also to learn how to cope or respond when they are not respected.

Boundary Activity



Sit or stand in a place that is comfortable.

Put your hands, palms out, in front of you. Move your hands forward or back, out to the side, maybe even up or behind you, exploring what feels good as you explore boundaries.

Imagine someone you know sitting or standing in front of you and see if this changes how you make boundaries with your hands.



Cross-Body Movement

Using movement that connects the two sides of our body, or crosses from one side of our body to the other, helps to regulate the flow of energy in our bodies.

It also helps the two sides of our brain communicate and work together better.

Understanding Cross-Body Movement

Examples of cross-body movement are crawling, walking, and stretching across the body from one side to the other.

Cross-body movement is a fundamental part of a growing child's movement and brain development. Making use of it throughout the lifespan can support our learning and growth.

Cross-body movement is a powerful tool to calm anxious energy and bring chaotic energy into more focus and calm.

Cross-Body Movement Activity



Stand with hands out to the side. Bring one hand to the opposite knee, while bringing the knee up in a marching motion and then switch to the other side. Repeat several (or many) times.

You can also do this seated.

Any motion where one arm or leg crosses to the other side of your body will work, such as swinging your arms from one side to the other.



Shake Off Movement

Our bodies cope with stress and energy in many ways, including “shaking things off”. This is not just an expression!

Shaking movement helps to release tension, bring stress hormones down, and calm the nervous system and the body.

Understanding Shake Off Movement

After a mammal experiences threat or trauma, shaking helps recuperation and returning to normal. Stress hormones are metabolized and the biological system resets to homeostasis.

Humans don’t “shake it out” as automatically as our counterparts in the wild, but we can make use of intentional shaking to get the nervous system benefits and regulation.

Shaking off movement is a natural follow up to cross-body movement, and people will often naturally begin to “shake things off” after crossing or swaying once anxious energy begins to dissipate.

Shake Off Movement Activity



Stand comfortably with your feet firmly on the ground. Start by shaking your hands, as gently or vigorously as you’d like. Let the motion move into your arms, torso, legs, feet and head.

You can also do this seated.

Move how your body wants to, for a few minutes or as long as you’d like. You might imagine shaking something off your body.



Mind-Body Awareness

Mind and body awareness supports the development of somatic resources and also becomes the benefit of using them.

Increased awareness of our thoughts, feelings/emotions, physical sensations, and movement gives us information about what we are experiencing in the moment and makes space for us to discover meaningful ways to respond.

Mind-Body Awareness Increases Options

When we slow down and get curious about ourselves, we learn more about what is underneath the surface, and what needs attention.

Being aware of our experience right in this moment can help us connect with ourselves and interrupt our go-to patterns and habits that might benefit from upgrading. We discover more options and possibilities for coping, change, and growth.



Mind-Body Awareness Activity

Take a few minutes (or longer) to pay attention to yourself with the intention to be curious and non-judgmental.

First, notice your thoughts, both the content and the quality. Next, notice your emotions. Finally, notice your physical sensations and movement.

Pay attention to how the different elements of your experience interact.

Resources



Dana, D. (2021). *Anchored: How to befriend your nervous system using polyvagal theory*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.

Dana, D. (2018). *The polyvagal theory in therapy: Engaging the rhythm of regulation*. New York: Norton.

Gilbert, A. G. (2018). *Brain-Compatible Dance Education* (2nd ed.). Human Kinetics.

Harris, D. (Host). (2022, March 7). Become an active operator of your nervous system | Deb Dana. (No. 424) [Audio podcast episode.] Ten Percent Happier. <https://www.tenpercent.com/podcast-episode/deb-dana-424>

Levine, P. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic.

Levine, P. A. (2010). *In an unspoken voice*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic.

Ogden, P. & Fisher, J. (2015). *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Porges, S. W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, self-regulation*. New York: Norton.

Porges, S. W. & Dana, D. (Eds.) (2018). *Clinical applications of the polyvagal theory: The emergence of poly-vagal informed therapies*. New York: Norton.

Rothschild, B. (2017). *The body remembers: Revolutionizing trauma treatment* (Vol. 2). W. W. Norton & Company.

Siegel, D. (2010). *The mindful therapist: A clinician's guide to mindsight and neural integration*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Siegel, D. (2012). *The Developing Mind* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.



Next Steps: Deepening Your Practice with Somatic Approaches

Invest in Yourself, Invest in Your Clients

I'm thrilled that you are interested in using somatic resources and I hope you find these BodyWise materials helpful. Here are some suggested next steps to further develop your skills and confidence:

Continuing Education: Workshops, courses, or training programs in somatic therapy can help you gain a deeper understanding of how to effectively develop this work. Look for opportunities that provide hands-on experience and guidance from experienced practitioners.

Peer Support and Collaboration: Connect with other therapists who are interested in somatic therapy. Peer consultation groups can provide a space for sharing resources, discussing clinical cases, and exchanging ideas for incorporating somatic techniques into your practice.

Reading and Research: Dive deeper into the theory and practice of somatic therapy by exploring relevant books and articles. Stay updated on the latest developments in the field and consider how emerging material can inform your clinical practice.

Consultation: Seek consultation from seasoned therapists who have experience with somatic approaches. Exploring your cases and experiences and receiving feedback from a knowledgeable mentor can help you refine your skills, address challenges as they arise, and engage in the work with creativity and confidence.

Get in touch: Work with me to get personalized guidance and in-depth support to integrate somatic therapy and help your clients heal and thrive.

Annabelle Coote, MA, LMHC, BC-DMT

Annabelle is an accomplished somatic psychotherapist with over 25 years of experience. A licensed mental health therapist, board-certified dance/movement therapist and advanced certified Sensorimotor Psychotherapist, she has a wealth of experience in the field of mind-body therapy.

She loves integrating the art and science of therapy. Her interests include mindfulness, neurobiology, trauma, anxiety, women's issues, life transitions, cultivating creativity, and therapist resilience and vitality.



Thank you!

Get excited about using mind, body & creativity in therapy! Grow your confidence & skills using somatic, experiential and creative approaches in clinical work.



hello@annabellecoote.com

www.annabellecoote.com
