

THE MOTHER LODE

Somatic Practices

Here are four simple exercises that I practice myself, that come from the field of Somatic Experiencing®. I am not a licensed or certified SE™ professional, and the practices I am sharing here can be found in various places on the Internet.

NOTE: If doing any of these practices is uncomfortable or distressful in any way, stop. As well, know that what I share here can be an effective companion to therapy but it is not a replacement for it. If you are in therapy, you may want to share these practices with your therapist.

1. Affirm yourself and your presence. “I am here. My name is _____. It is [date, time] and I am here [location].”

Notice how it feels in your body to do this. Try it standing up and see how it changes. Notice what your body wants to do as you affirm yourself and your presence.

2. Orient yourself. This can be done when you’re calm and it can be done in stressful situations or environments.

Sit as comfortably as you can and let your attention wander around your space. Make sure to turn your head and twist your torso to look behind you, both ways. Notice what attracts your attention and draws your interest. Pick three things and say, out loud, or inside your head, each thing as your eyes focus on it.

For example, as I write this, I am sitting in my home office. I sat back and let my eyes wander. I noticed, and said to myself, “There’s the Scorpio print that was made for me in Italy. And the photo of my husband that I love so much. And the blanket, which is about to fall off the chair.”

Then move your attention inward and notice what attracts your attention there. Notice sensations: urges to move, tightness, softness, pressure, etc. Name them and see how they evolve.

“My shoulders are scrunched up, I am breathing shallowly, and I can feel a tenseness in my lower back.”

Don’t judge your observations. Simply make a note of them. In this way you will establish yourself in the here and now.

3. Hold yourself. This is a way to define your literal boundaries and it has a calming effect on the nervous system.

Stand comfortably and place your hands on either side of your head. You can apply a bit of pressure, or not. Imagine that you are molding a container for your thoughts. Feel the sensations on both your head and your hands.

Now move one hand to your forehead and the other to the back of your skull. Continue to notice the sensations and boundaries your hands are creating.

Move the hand on the back of your head to your heart and keep the other hand on your forehead. What changes? Are there sensations between your two hands?

Now move the hand that was on your forehead to your belly and keep the other hand on your heart. Continue to feel and notice the sensations.

And finally, move one hand to your solar plexus and one to the base of your head, where your head and neck meet.

4. Express yourself. This is a combination breathing exercise and chant, much like the “Om” in yoga. The vibrations created when you sound or chant a deep “voo” (on the exhale) “tone” the vagus nerve. The longest nerve in your body, the vagus nerve has two main functions: first, it monitors all the major organs in your body and communicates with the brain stem, and second, it regulates social engagement, digestion, alertness/consciousness, and emotions.

To practice, inhale through your nose and as you exhale, make the “voo” sound (imagine a fog horn) in as low a tone as you can, making the effort to feel the vibrations in your lower abdomen.

After each round, close your eyes and sit calmly, noticing what you feel in your body.

These simple practices can expand the capacity of your nervous system and cue your body to know that it is safe. Why is this important in difficult mother-daughter relationships? There’s likely trauma in your maternal lineage that gets in the way of having a healthier relationship.

From The Tend chapter in The Difficult Mother-Daughter Relationship Journal: A Guide For Revealing & Healing Toxic Generational Patterns, by Karen C.L. Anderson