

Listening to Your Body

Objective

To increase your somatic (body) awareness to help you better listen to all the ways your body communicates with you.

What to Know

Somatic therapy, also known as somatic experiencing therapy (SET), aims to treat trauma and other mental health issues through the connection of mind and body. This body-centric approach works by helping you to release stress, tension, and trauma from your body.

You can practice sensing more and listening to your body by slowing down, paying attention to bodily sensations, and listening with focus and curiosity. As you learn to listen and attune to your body you will:

- become better at self-care.
- arrive at a deeper knowing, understanding, and love for yourself.
- become more aware of and responsive to your own needs and desires.
- improve your ability to set healthy boundaries.
- feel more grounded.
- increase your resilience during stressful situations.
- have greater access to pleasure, joy, and ease.

There are many ways you can listen to your body, including observing and naming what you physically and emotionally experience. Here are some ideas.

1. Tune into the five senses. Mindfully and intentionally focus on what you hear, see, smell, touch, and taste.

2. Notice your breath. The quality of your breathing is affected by stress and your emotions. This is the foundational practice of mindful attention and somatic awareness.

3. Focus on physiological cues. You can receive information about which branch of the nervous system is operating. The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) governs fight, flight, and taking action, prompting the release of cortisol and adrenaline. The Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) governs rest, digest, feed, and breed functions. The PNS helps calm and settle you down.

4. Observe and name sensations. Identifying sensations in the body offers you important information so you can quickly and effectively respond to your own needs.

5. Tune in to facial expression and body posture. Your facial expressions and body posture communicate much more than you may realize.

6. Pay attention to your “brace patterns.” This is the habitual way you hold your body in a situation – whether your muscles are engaged or contracted. When you identify how you brace, you can do something different, especially if it is painful or uncomfortable. Examples of brace patterns include:

- shrugging your shoulders up by your ears.
- clenching your jaw.
- sucking in your stomach.
- curling your toes.
- “hard-gazing” with your eyes, increasing muscle tension.

7. Notice impulses. Become aware of what your body *wants* to do so you can choose differently. When you react without awareness, you might act out of integrity or engage in self-destructive behaviors.

8. Tap into your emotions. All emotions have a corresponding motor program – an action or gesture that expresses energy.

The language of the body is vast, varied, and nuanced. The better you get at listening to your body, the more resilient you will be. This worksheet can help increase your somatic (body) awareness and intelligence to help you better listen to all the ways your body communicates with you.

What to Know

When you practice listening to your body, take an inventory of what you notice. You may answer one or all the following questions as you practice each day.

Do you get enough, healthy, loving, and safe touch every day? Yes / No

What tells you when the touch you are receiving is “just right?”

What sensations describe the kind of touch you enjoy?

How do you like to be held or touched?

What sense is most alive for you? _____

Does this frequently change? Yes / No

What are you touching, seeing, smelling, tasting, and hearing right now?

Describe the quality of your breathing. Some words to describe your breath: fast, deep, slow, steady, pressured, shallow, constricted.

What parts of your body move when you breathe? Chest? Shoulders? Belly?

How do changes in posture affect your breathing?

What are you craving? What tells you when you're hungry? Do you know when you are full?

What is your body temperature? Just right? Chills? Hot flashes? _____

What is your digestion like? Do you feel bloated? Gassy? Can you feel your belly digesting after you've eaten?

Is your heart rate steady? Pounding? Smooth? Even? Calm? Can you feel your heart beating?

Are your eyes wet? Tearful? Dry? _____

Is your skin clammy? Sweaty? Dry? Moist? Itchy? _____

Can you feel air on your skin? Describe what it feels like. _____

Do you have pain? Where does it hurt? What would help reduce the pain? _____

Where do you notice pressure? Does the pressure move in a certain direction?

Do you have tension? Where? How intense on a scale of 1-10, where 1 = very little, to 10 = extreme?

Where do you notice tingling in your body? Is it warm? Like pins and needles? How does it move or travel in your body?

Is your body stance more open or more closed? What tells you that?

Is your eye contact a hard stare? A soft gaze? Are you avoiding eye contact?

Is your jaw clenched, soft, or just right? _____

How does your face feel? Soft? Tight? Do you know what your facial expression tells others?

What are your shoulders doing? Up by your ears or easily resting down?

How does your neck feel? _____

How do your spine and back feel? Slumped? Rigid? Sore? Tight? Fluid? _____

Where do you notice feeling neutral, solid, or alive and well? Where feels good right now?

Where do you notice your body trying to get your attention? _____

Where does the sensation begin and end in your body? _____

How does your body want to express itself through movement or action?

What happens if you sit with an impulse without acting on it?

What might your impulses be telling you about what is happening right now?

Where in your body do you feel emotion? _____

What sensations come along with the emotion? Warmth? Tingling? Softness?

What impulses are present with the emotion? _____

What is your body doing when the emotion is present? Crying? Constricting? Eyes widening?
Jaw clenching?

Which emotions give you more energy? _____

Which ones feel draining or tiring? _____

How does your body feel overall when you are in motion? _____

What kinds of movement does your body enjoy doing? Dance? Running? Yoga? _____

What is your body doing right now? _____

How is your energy level right now? Up? Low? Just right? Crashing? _____

For the next two weeks, do the following exercise daily and fill in the chart.

1. Settle into a comfortable lying down or seated position.
2. Connect with the chair or the ground beneath you. Breathe and ground your body.
3. Scan your body, noticing tension, temperature, or anything else that stands out.
4. Focus your attention as you become aware of your entire body.
5. Rest your attention on areas of interest. For example, if your stomach feels tight, rest your attention there and wait. See if anything shifts by just paying attention to the area.
6. Work through several areas of your body in this manner.
7. Try not to problem-solve or get caught up in details. Begin to ask some simple questions.
8. Notice how your body responds.
9. If you experience emotions, notice what comes up.
10. Simply listen to any insights or ideas that arise during this exercise. Refer to the questions above as you complete the chart.

Date	Your body feels:	Your body senses:	Your body story:	Notes

Date	Your body feels:	Your body senses:	Your body story:	Notes

Did this exercise help you listen to your body? Why or why not?

What obstacles did you experience when completing this activity?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
