

Exercise and Reflection: Somatic Dialoguing

Somatic dialoguing allows you to communicate, in a sense, with your bodily knowledge. If you pay enough attention, you may be able to recognize that somewhere between your conscious and subconscious, there is a region of knowing that is expressed and recognized through the sensations of your body. Eugene Gendlin referred to this as a felt sense. This felt sense is often manifest as unclear inner sensations that can initially appear vague, but with gentle awareness and prompting, it can develop into a fully conscious yet novel or intuitive way of understanding. Somatic dialoguing doesn't come from a cognitive space of trying to figure something out; it comes from a gentle space of letting a different kind of information emerge. Further, in staying true to the roots of the practice of Focusing, the language is intentionally general. It is important that you let the somatic sensations of your body guide your process without too much cognitive analysis.

1. Find a space and time where you can sit quietly, get fully grounded, and bring a gentle awareness to your body.
2. Take several deep breaths and discharge any overt emotional reactivity.
3. Settle into a deep and quiet awareness of your body and notice if any physical sensations become evident. Remember, somatic dialoguing is about letting your body tell you, not the other way around. Your job is to be a patient, quiet, fully engaged listener.
4. When a physical sensation appears, ask if it has a message for you, and be fully open to receiving its message without analysis. Notice if any images, intuitive knowings, or other nonspecific information emerge. Don't push too hard or overthink it; remember, you are merely trying to gently coax what may feel murky into a more defined awareness.
5. If an image, a more defined sensation, or other nonspecific information emerges, gently sit with it and see if the original sensation shifts a bit. This is how your body responds. You will feel an "intuitive yes" if you are on the path to revealing the emotional truth that may lie beneath the sensations. It is a delicate dance between the emerging sensations and images, your receiving, and further testing your embodied response for validity— but when the original felt sense shifts in its bodily expression, you know you are on the path to discovery.
6. Keep with this process until you feel a noticeable shift in bodily sensations and a better cognitive understanding of their message. In other words, often, when you come to a conscious and emotional understanding of what is beneath the surface of your somatic awareness, you will feel a shift in bodily sensations; they may shift in placement, lessen in intensity, or diminish altogether. It is often experienced as that moment of aha!

After you have spent some time in somatic dialoguing with the sensations you feel, write in a stream-of-consciousness style to process your experience. You can use the writing as an extension of your dialog or even as the tool to help you receive the information in the first place, as if you are in conversation with the felt sense. The writing, connected with the dialoging itself, can be a powerful combination in consciously recognizing what your body already knows.

Excerpted from *Unstressed* by **ALANE K. DAUGHERTY, PhD**

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