

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING 101



Simple Tools for Working With Stress in the Body

A practical guide to understanding your physiology, noticing patterns, and accessing more choice.

INTRODUCTION

Most people come into Somatic Experiencing because they've tried to think their way out of patterns that won't budge. Insight is useful, but the body often holds its own timeline.

This guide offers a grounded introduction to how stress physiology works and simple SE-based practices you can try at your own pace. These tools won't replace the depth of working with a practitioner, but they can help you build awareness, find small pockets of ease, and understand what is happening inside your system.



YOUR DIRECTION

WHAT SOMATIC EXPERIENCING IS

Somatic Experiencing® (SE) works with the physiology of stress—not just thoughts or emotions.

When something overwhelming happens, the body's instinctive responses (fight, flight, freeze) can get interrupted or stuck. SE helps you notice these responses, move at a pace that doesn't overwhelm you, and allow your body to complete pieces of what it never had the space to finish.

SE is:

- Slow, precise, and sensation-based
- Centred on tracking physiology
- Tailored to your pacing and capacity
- About creating choice, not catharsis

You don't have to "go into the story" for change to happen. Often, learning to track the smallest shift is what creates the biggest difference.



STRESS PHYSIOLOGY 101



FIGHT

Your system prepares to protect or push back. Muscles tense, breath gets shorter, energy rises.

FLIGHT

Your system prepares to get away. Legs feel charged, heart rate increases, attention sharpens.

FREEZE/SHUTDOWN

When fight or flight aren't possible, the body may collapse, go numb, or feel disconnected. This isn't a failure - it's the most intelligent survival strategy available at the time.

WHY THESE STATES STICK

Your physiology doesn't shift just because you understand what happened. If the body didn't get to complete the response it wanted to take, the unfinished energy can keep looping. SE helps you work with these loops in small, manageable pieces.



CORE SE SKILLS YOU CAN TRY TODAY



Orienting

Why it helps: It signals to your physiology that you are here, now, which can bring more stability.

Prompt: Let your eyes wander around the room and settle on a few things that feel neutral or pleasant. Notice shape, colour, light, texture. Let your system take in the environment instead of scanning internally.

Contact + Support

Why it helps: Feeling supported by an external surface can interrupt collapse or overwhelm.

Prompt: Press your feet into the floor, your back into the chair, or your hands onto your legs.

Notice any micro-shifts— maybe your breath changes, maybe a muscle softens, or maybe nothing changes yet. All of that is information.

CORE SKILLS CONTINUED

Resource Spotting

Why it helps: It anchors your physiology in stability before approaching anything difficult.

Prompt: Bring to mind someone, something, or somewhere that feels even slightly supportive or neutral. Notice where in your body you feel the smallest sign of steadiness or warmth. Stay with that for a few breaths and let it build.

Micro-Tracking

Why it helps: It builds your capacity to feel sensation without getting overwhelmed.

Prompt: Pick one small area - your hands, your chest, your jaw. Notice temperature, pressure, movement, or stillness. Wait 5–10 seconds. See if anything shifts, even slightly. Sensation often changes when given attention.



CORE SKILLS CONTINUED

Pendulation

Why it helps: The body naturally regulates by moving between activation and settling.

Prompt:

Notice one place in your body that feels tense, tight, charged, or buzzy.

Then find an area that feels more neutral. Move your attention back and forth for just a few seconds at a time. Let the body show you its natural rhythm of expansion and settling.

Titration

Why it helps: Small doses prevent overwhelm and allow the system to reorganize.

Prompt: Let one moment from your day come into awareness at 5%.

Stay with it briefly, then return to the room or your breath. You don't need to "go in" deeply - tiny steps change physiology more effectively than pushing.



HOW TO TRACK CAPACITY



Impulse Completions

Why it helps: Many stress responses get stuck because the body didn't get to move.

Prompt: Notice if your body has a tiny impulse — to stretch, push, curl, turn, or brace. Give that impulse 1–2 seconds of permission, even if the movement is very small. You're not performing a technique — you're letting the body show you what it wants.

A few signs you're within your window of capacity:

- Breath stays steady
- You can stay curious
- You feel grounded or connected to the environment

Signs you may be going too fast:

- Numbness or dissociation
- Feeling suddenly overwhelmed
- Big emotion without context
- Losing track of the present moment

If that happens, pause. Come back to orienting or contact.

what brings you to life

WHAT SE SESSIONS ARE LIKE

Working with a practitioner lets the process go deeper while still staying paced and safe. Sessions may include:

- Tracking sensations and impulses
- Following the body's pacing
- Working with micro-movements
- Somatic touch work (when appropriate) to support settling, containment, or activation

The work is collaborative. You're not expected to "push through" anything. We follow the body's timing, not the story's urgency.



THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF SMALL SHIFTS

Your physiology shifts through small, doable moments — not pressure or intensity. Here's the science in simple terms:

The nervous system changes through tiny, repeatable shifts in breath, muscle tone, and orientation.

Survival patterns are held in deeper brain structures, so they respond to sensation and pacing, not thinking harder.

Practices like orienting, pendulation, and titration work because they offer manageable doses of activation paired with settling.

Even brief pockets of ease show that your system still has access to adaptation and forward movement.

These small steps are enough to create meaningful change over time.



Inquiry, curiosity, self-awareness

NEED SUPPORT?

STAY CONNECTED

NEED SUPPORT?

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A SOMATIC EXPERIENCING PRACTICE