

## Orientation to Somatic Psychology in Group Psychotherapy

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I will be demonstrating ways that the group therapist who is oriented psychodynamically and interpersonally can help group members to integrate sensory experiences with cognitive insight and emotional awareness. This expanded perspective helps the group members to connect emotional, cognitive, and somatic experiences, facilitating the development of a coherent self and promoting successful adaptation. The body's experiencing is often more direct and more connected to core material than thinking is.

As a way to introduce somatic integration, I say the following as I prepare group members: "This group integrates thoughts, feelings, and sensations to give you opportunities to learn about yourself and others, and about your relationships. In order for us to know about ourselves we need to know what we are thinking and feeling, and what we are sensing in our bodies. The group process will help you to be able to describe your thoughts, feelings, and sensations in words. Being able to label these inner states will help you to understand yourself, to be empathic with others, and to have more satisfying relationships. In the group we look at other group members, as well as listen, so that we are attentive to and attuned to both verbal and non-verbal communication."

I will guide you at the beginning of the demonstration group to help you to be aware of yourself somatically. I call this "coming into sensation." This is a way to develop body-based mindfulness. As we practice coming into sensation we learn how to be present and to focus on our inner experiences. You will be encouraged to share your experiences in the demonstration group. The group process will proceed from there.

## *Sensory Vocabulary*

Compiled by Suzanne L. Cohen, Ed.D., CGP

The language of the body is sensation. What am I sensing in my body now? Sensory awareness is always in the present moment. Circle words that identify sensations you are familiar with in yourself; add sensory words that are not on the list. We feel sensation in: the viscera; joints, bones, ligaments; the skin; breath and heart rate.

Whole body sensations: flexible, strong, balanced, stuck, off-balance, unstable, stable, stiff, paralyzed, floating

Temperature: hot, cold, warm, cool, becoming hot or cold, warm or cool; icy

Tension: contraction, tension, rigidity, constricted, pressure, pulling, constriction, tight, gripping; blocked; Lack of tension: relaxed, loose, flowing, floating, fluid, open, soft, released

Pain: uncomfortable, pain, sore, sharp, dull, lingering, pressure, achy, throbbing, burning, on fire, increasing pain/decreasing pain, heavy

Comfort: comfort, pleasant, easy, full, spacious, open, free, light, strong, strength

Numbness: numb, cold, no sensation, energy stuck, energy absent, paralyzed, unmoving, stuck, wooden, thick; blocked

Excitation: lots of sensation, charged, excited, buzzing, tingling, a-flutter, shaking, shaky, tickly, electric; flowing, deep currents of sensation through whole body; energy flowing, excited, excitation; alive; vibrating

Fear: tingly, prickly, creeping sensations, pins and needles, tickling, twitchy, goose-bumps, chills, shaking, trembling, jumpy, throbbing, a-flutter, shaky; butterflies; pit-of-the-stomach feeling, dizzy, spacey, wobbly, tremulous, electric; blocked; weak

Hard: hard, like a rock, like a walnut; Soft: soft, fluffy, feathery, velvet

Full: expanded, open; Empty: empty, hollow, closed

Wet: wet, clammy, moist, sweaty, liquid; Dry: scratchy, parched, sticky, sweaty

Visceral: queasy, nauseous, tight, churning, gassy, bloated, full, pit-of-stomach pain, knotted, hungry

Breath: breathless, can't breathe, suffocating; easy flowing breath, a wave, stuck, shallow

Heart: beating fast, fluttering, stopping and starting, slow and easy, racing

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