Bioenergetic Fundamentals
A Self-Exploration Manual

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Introduction

The material covered in this manual is a homework assignment for the pre-clinical years of bioenergetic training. It is your own personal log of certain basic bioenergetic experiences, and a way for you to experience and understand the interventions you will be teaching your clients. There are 8 groups of exercises that we would like you to explore:

(1) The Body Scan
(2) The world of your Internal Body Sensations
(3) Explorations of your Breathing Pattern:
(4) Grounding and connecting to the Earth
(5) Centering and Being Present
(6) Movements with an emotional and bioenergetic flavor,
(7) Attachments and connections to other people,
(8) The Emotions and the Process of Healing.

In the pages that follow, each of these processes will be explained, and there will be a recommended structure for how you are to begin working with them. We will demonstrate and practice all of these processes in the training seminars, and you will have an opportunity to explore them in depth on your own. These exercises form the basis for many of the bioenergetic interventions that you will be using as part of this therapeutic approach, and your own experience with these processes will help you understand the impact they will have on your clients. The goals of these experiences include becoming much more aware of your body and the behavior patterns associated with your physical and emotional life; helping to bring deeply buried issues (both positive and negative) up in your consciousness; developing ways to handle and manage emotional experiences; and forming the basis for a deeper connection to yourself and the life around you.

In each section of this manual, the exercise is described and some suggestions are made about how you can chart your progress. At the end of each section are descriptions of how this experience might be used in therapy and the bioenergetic process that this exercise tries to enlighten.

The final log is due at the end of your preclinical stage of training.
Bioenergetic Fundamentals-2
M. Maley

The Spirit Behind These Exercises

There are at least three basic ideas that weave themselves throughout all these exercises. They represent the deepest intent of these experiences from a healing perspective, and keep them from becoming mechanical and lifeless while they are being practiced:

• Bioenergetic work with the body is always accompanied by the development and practice of mindfulness;

• These experiences are practiced from, and help develop, the healthiest side of ourselves; and,

• Work with the body is a relational process and always involves a “connection to” something or someone.

Mindfulness:
The fundamental idea behind the practice of mindfulness is that whatever part of the self is uncovered, it is accepted fully without judgement, and with that acceptance, is able to move toward resolution, healing, or creative, choiceful expression. Mindfulness is an attitude, a way of using your attention, and the development of a non-judgmental, intentional, observing-self around your body experience. Mindfulness is a way to develop the Witness within us, and a way to come into present time with whatever we are experiencing. In these exercises, we are applying this attitude to the exploration of our physical and emotional bodies and will be attempting to teach this to our clients in whatever kind of self-exploration they might need our help with. The structure of the physical and emotional body is able to change because we connect to these parts of ourselves with consciousness and we are able to stay in present time with that connection. We intend and allow change to occur, and we bring our attention and awareness to what we experience in our bodies with acceptance, with patience, a beginners mind, trust, non-striving, and the ability to let go of expectations and
any other mental construct that might get in the way of direct body experience. Mindfulness is not control of the experience, but the ability to see it as it is in the moment.

The most powerful therapeutic tool you have to work with is your skill in assisting the client to develop their Witness—their ability to come into present time with their feelings, body experience, and innermost expressions. The willingness and ability to be in the present moment has enormous healing power, and being present with whatever is being experienced or remembered is a necessary feature of all treatments of traumatic conditions. To do this work successfully means that you, as the therapist, must also be in present time with your feelings and body experience. The practice of mindfulness is a way to strengthen the ego and develop the ability of the person to view themselves without judgement.

Mindfulness practices do not have a goal to change anything—just help to live it fully in the moment and notice the changes that occur when that state is achieved.


**Focus on Health:**

All of the exercises in this manual require you to strengthen the parts of yourself that are healthy and strong—the parts that are able to be conscious, in present time, witness where your energy moves, and where you are able to feel and make choices around the expression of your emotions. You may find that doing these exercises sometimes puts you into contact with parts of yourself that cannot do this—parts that feel stuck, helpless, reactive, or negative. Healthy and wounded parts of the self exist side by side in all individuals and these exercises require you to step away from the less healthy parts, whenever possible, and bring your focus back on your strengths—where you can stay in present time, and where you can be
without judgement. These exercises are meant to strengthen you emotionally—to help you develop your witness, your awareness of your body, and your ability to express yourself. The training seminars will also focus on defenses, energy blocks, and wounds, but in these exercises, the strengths are built up and emphasized. This is a way to learn to focus your attention on what moves rather than what is stuck, and on what is healing rather than what is wounding. This builds flexibility in your attention and consciousness and activates parts of the brain that are not linked to trauma, but linked to creativity, movement, and strength.

In your work with clients you will often find it helpful to strengthen the person before working on their trauma or losses. This is called “resourcing” and constitutes an important part of bioenergetic work with individuals whose wounding has precluded the development of the healthy side of the personality.

**Relationality:**

Bioenergetic Analysis is sometimes called a “relational somatic psychotherapy”—that is, it encompasses work with the physical body; the emotions; the bioenergy systems of the body; the relational connections the client has to their own body and their friends and family; the patterns of transference and countertransference observed in the therapeutic alliance; as well as the belief systems and behaviors associated with their emotional life. Most emotional wounds occur because of relational faults, and most emotional healing involves the restoration of relationships and new forms of connection. At every level the work is both somatic and relational, and these two aspects blend and intertwine in both the uncovering of the wounding and in the healing process.

As you will see, each of these exercises has both a body component and a relational one. Internally, you can experience something in your body and you can have a variety of relational attitudes toward it. You can judge it as bad, be frightened of it, hate it, love it, or be accepting and compassionate toward it. These experiences are important exercises in developing an attitude toward your body that will facilitate healing. The core of that
attitude is the practice of acceptance, since in acceptance more and more is revealed to you about who you are—the processes go deeper and expand more. Energy and life stops when judgements are made. Energy flows begin when relational connections are made, since all energetic flows are circular and involve exchanges with someone or something. Because these connections are so dynamic, the outcomes of the experiences are never the same. No body scan is ever like the previous one, no grounding or centering exercise repeats itself over and over again. You are not learning to discover anything that is very fixed—instead, you are primarily strengthening your abilities to connect to your body, to the Earth, and to other people. It is your own abilities in seeing, listening, and feeling that become stronger. When there are parts that remain unchanged or seem to always be the same, those are often the aspects of the self that will be processed as defenses or trauma networks and they will be accepted and encouraged to move as they are able. In the first few exercises, the relationship is with yourself and your own body energy and experience. In some of the others, like grounding and connecting, a relationship is built with an energy system outside yourself. The energy flows in these exercises are totally dependent on your ability to connect outside yourselves to the world around you.

If you can be aware of these dimensions of the work as you do these exercises, it will help you understand what you are doing from a therapeutic perspective.

A Final Note:
In advanced bioenergetic work, there are interventions and exercises that involve building up the energy charge in the body and observing (along with the client) the effects of that increased charge. These interventions often involve deepening the breathing and increasing the amount of movement—sometimes in the form of active emotional expressions, physical challenges, or contact exercises. These experiences promote a gradual increase in the vitality of the body and also reveal many other features of the emotional landscape that stay hidden when
the energy of the body is depressed. As the charge increases, our fears of being fully alive emerge and can be witnessed and challenged.

We are recommending that you begin the exercises in this manual without artificially increasing the charge in the body with deep breathing or overly strenuous movements. Do the exercises slowly and mindfully. Stop and let yourself feel what is happening in your body and let the charge come from the expression naturally rather than build it up mechanically. Stop if you are feeling spacey or overwhelmed and try to notice what the triggers for those experiences were. Treat numbness or lack of feeling as a part of the experience—note when and where you are aware of it and try to go deeper into it by exploring its boundaries or its qualities. The processes we are learning here are primarily focused on increasing body awareness and the conscious witnessing of energetic flows in the body. As we progress in the training, you will notice an increase in the charge of the body as your emotional expression develops and as your breathing deepens. The energetic charge in the body will naturally increase and the ability to sustain higher levels of energy will be strengthened. The body’s energy charge is dependent on energetic exchanges with other people and the environment, and we increase our vitality as these connections increase, deepen, become more honest, and as we practice expressing ourselves more fully. Many forms of bioenergetic treatment involve working at levels of low charge so that ego strength can be increased (especially in work with trauma and physical illness), and these exercises will form the basis of that type of work.
THE EXERCISES

The Body Scan and Internal Body Sensations

These two sets of exercises are an introduction to ways in which people can access the many levels of their own body experience (their SOMA). They are often the first tools you use to ask your clients about their body experience, and they provide a way for you to give them a structure in which to learn the language of their own bodies.

The Body Scan

The Body Scan is one of the most basic exercises for developing body awareness. The Body Scan is the way that people first learn to “take stock” of how they are feeling, and how their body is moving (or not moving) in any given moment. This simple procedure can yield so much in terms of developing mindfulness, highlighting your ability to regard your body with acceptance, and discovering deeper parts of yourself. It can be a way to experience your body in a safe, relaxing way and is the beginning step in any kind of body accessing intervention that might be a part of your therapy.

Here is a typical protocol for the Body Scan:

1. Lie down on your back in a comfortable place with your legs uncrossed and your arms down by your sides. Make sure that you are warm and comfortable (but able to stay awake!).
2. Allow your eyes to gently close.
3. Take a few minutes to feel your body as a whole, from head to toe, the surface of your skin, and the sensations associated with the touch of the floor or pad you are lying on. Let yourself “sink” into the floor or mattress and allow the surface to fully support you.
4. Feel the rising and falling of your belly with each inbreath and outbreath. Just breathe naturally and notice....
   - What parts of your body move when you breathe?
   - In what order are they moving?
   - Are you breathing through your mouth or your nose?
   - Are you inhaling fully, or is there some restriction that prevents you from taking a full in-breath?
   - When you exhale, do you empty your lungs fully?

5. Try to sense how much of the surface of your body is present in your awareness. Scan the surface of your body and notice how much of it is in your awareness. Note those areas that seem to be missing.

6. Go down to your feet and toes. First direct your attention to your toes, notice the sensations there, and then try to direct your breathing down into your toes. See if you can breathe “in” and “out” of your toes. Just notice what happens, even if it seems nothing is happening. Notice the sensations and what occurs when you direct your attention and your breath to that area.

7. Begin to move on to other areas of the foot, ankle and legs. Do the same process with each area—first take note of the sensations, then see if you can (imagine, or) feel your breath going in and out of the area. Slowly dissolve your connection with one area and gently and slowly move on to the next one—the soles of your feet, the whole foot, the ankle, the shin area, the calf, the knee, the upper leg, the hips. Buttocks, pelvis, belly, low back, etc. Breathe with each area, note the sensations, note your level of awareness of that part of the body.

8. This exercise is best done frequently at first, since it is designed to teach you to focus your attention on your body in a mindful and open way.

One of the ways to make the body scan more visual is to begin drawing body maps based on what is experienced in this exercise. A set of body maps is included in this manual to be copied and used in the exercise. As a beginning, record your experience in those places that seem to be the most noticeable. Where are the most aches and pains? Where are the most relaxed areas? Where does the energy seem to accumulate? What areas are numb and not much in your awareness?
Do the basic exercise of a body scan several times a week for at least two or three weeks. Use the body map and make notes of: a) the range and kind of sensations you experience; b) the areas of the body where energy pools; c) areas of numbness; and, d) areas of over- or undercharge. This is a mindfulness practice around the body with no other goal except to record and practice acceptance around what is experienced.

What do you notice about your body and its inside and outside? Where are its boundaries and how intact do those boundaries feel? Record the sensations you experience around your bodies boundaries. Note the areas on the body map where you are missing feeling or sensation. Sit or stand quietly and have a friend slowly move around you—first from at least 10 feet away, and then slowly allow them to come closer. As they get closer, notice any body sensations that arise when your energy space is contacted. Are there any areas of the body that seem to be especially sensitive to energetic contact with another person? What are the sensations in your body that arise with this contact? Have there been any injuries to that area? Draw the areas on the body map and explore them in the body scan exercise.

Do you notice the difference between the physical experience of your body and the energetic one? Can you experience your energy field?

What do you do if you are having difficulty with an area of your body or the intensity of sensations is too uncomfortable to handle? Skip over the area—go around it, let it be, come back to it later—remember, the goal is mindfulness and acceptance and not changing anything. Witness the lack of ease or comfort, make a note of it or sketch it on the body map, and move on. It will change as you witness it.
Theoretical Note: The ultimate goal of the body scan exercise to carry an awareness of our bodies with us all day, everyday, every moment. What you will encounter in client after client is how much the “felt sense” of the body has been suppressed and how much the numbing of body sensation has been the way that early childhood pain was handled. We will see numbing (and dissociation) as a part of the response to unresolved trauma, as the consequence of shame, as an aspect of depression, and as a response to unmet childhood needs. All traumas leave their impact on the body either in terms of blocking the felt sense or leaving an area of the body and its boundaries in a hypersensitive state. In the treatment of traumatic conditions you will learn to use the body scan as one of your initial interventions and as a way to access the impact of trauma on the bodymind.

You will also begin to note that there are several “levels” of body experience. One classification makes a distinction between:

a) body sensations such as temperature, muscle tension patterns, proprioception, the kinesthetic sense, pain, sensory reactions, etc.;
b) emotional responses associated with the 9 basic affects—interest, surprise, joy, fear, anger, shame, sadness, disgust, and dismell, and,
c) body experiences we have that are associated with past memories, images, fantasy, distorted perceptions of the body, or buried traumatic memories, etc.

You can have an attitude or feeling about the body that actually masks or numbs direct body experience itself—shame can do that, as can the immobilization reaction characteristic of trauma. Feelings (or emotional patterns) are one level of experience that is different from the sensation base, and many clients have to be taught the difference between a thought, a feeling, and a sensation. (a) and (b) above are experiences more associated with being in present time and are both aspects of the “felt sense” of the body. The levels described in (c) are often the targets in trauma work and the completed processing of those buried events brings great relief to the person.
The Body Scan can be the beginning of reclaiming the felt sense of the body and leads directly to work with the sensations or emotional patterns that are carried somatically. It is a way to access material that lies unconscious and a way to begin emotional processing. Just the phrase “what are you noticing in your body right now?” is a way to begin deeper processing in a session and is the basic idea behind the body scan experience.


**Body Sensations**

Working with the world of your internal body sensations goes deeper than the body scan and begins to look at the relationship between your body experience and how you are impacted by the world outside you. Witnessing this level of bodily life allows you to track how your experiences, both past and present, continue to change you at the deepest levels of your being.

Internal body sensations (IBS) are not the same as emotions—they are a different level of body experience—a universe of their own, and are produced by many different kinds of energetic processes in the body. They originate from many different levels of the physical and energetic body. Mostly they are produced by sensory input from our physical senses—smell, sight, sound, taste, light, deep touch, vibration, pain, and joint position. They can also be a dynamic component of our emotional states and how we perceive the emotional states of others.

In IBS work, the focus is often on learning to use the body as a resource—as a source of information about how you are feeling, how experiences are impacting you, whether things are toxic or nurturing, and/or what you need each moment.
Here are some examples of exercises in internal body sensations:

- Next time you take a shower, slow the experience down a little and pay attention to the warmth (or cold) of the water flowing down your body. Feel all the body sensations that this experience creates from the effect on your skin, your muscles, your breath, and how it alters your circulation, etc.
- Go back in your memory to last Christmas or the last big family event you attended. Begin to form a “imaginal videotape” of the experience and review all the things that led up to the event. As you do this, pay close attention to your body response. Note the sensations that occur as you review the events. Note carefully the sensations that occur in those moments that were especially happy, surprising, difficult or painful. Pay close attention to the sensations (and not so much the feelings) that linger from those moments even as you recall them.

Here are the exercises that we would like you to do in the area of Internal Body Sensations:

- Keep a log of your primary body sensations, including everything from pain to tingling, to warmth, to cold, to numbness, to whatever...just make a simple list of which sensations you experience, where in your body you feel them, and what situations produced them.
- Develop the practice of noting your body sensations to a host of different life experiences—your favorite fantasies; taking a shower; driving; going to work or a party; dating; sex; working; exercising; eating; cravings; taking medications or other substances; etc. Make a list of 5 of these activities and record the body sensations that accompany them. Again, where you feel them in your body and what are the sensations.
- Notice the body sensations associated with your emotional states. Be able to describe the sensation pattern that occurs when you are hungry, afraid, angry, sad, sexually aroused, exhausted, and happy.
Theoretical Note: Body sensations are a very powerful tool for the processing of trauma and illness. Often, the memories of early trauma and painful body experience are held only in somatic memory with no words or narratives to make sense of the experiences. These sensations may be accompanied by visual or sensory images of past events and be powerful elicitors of arousal and distress. This is known as non-declarative or episodic memory, and these images and sensations become the targets of trauma processing interventions. Body sensation work becomes a sensitive and powerful way to access these memories and do the emotional processing involved.

Breathwork

The most fundamental and perhaps, the most powerful, processes in all of the body therapies are the changes that occur in an individual as they become conscious of their breathing patterns and the empowerment that this awareness provides. Oxygen provides the most important component of our vitality, and without the capacity to deeply breath the body cannot function in a healthy way or have the energy to complete all of its tasks. Since breathing is both an unconsciously mediated function and one that can be regulated consciously, changing the pattern of the breath allows state changes, more abilities in emotional regulation, increased vitality, and the ability to sustain balance in our body. The breath rhythm is also deeply affected by stress, emotional trauma, body posture, and physical illness, and the restoration of a complete breath pattern can help with the healing of all those conditions.

Here are the exercises we recommend you experience and log:

• Begin with breath awareness, spend some time each day just listening and following your normal breath pattern noting where you do and do not breath, what happens to your breathing throughout the day, etc. This exercise is called the “check-in” or “sitting with your breath” and its only goal is awareness. Try to stay with “breath awareness” as much as possible during your waking hours. Write a story or bring to consciousness some images around your breath and make a special note of these aspects of your breathing:
  (a) what is it like normally?
  (b) how conscious of your breath cycle are you normally?
  (c) when it is disturbed by a stressor or disturbance, what is the recovery like?
  (d) what parts of your body breathe?; and,
  (e) where do the major restrictions seem to be located?
• Begin to interact with your breath. Spend time practicing deepening your breath. Consciously expand into your belly, your ribs, your diaphragm, back and chest. Do not overcharge, just deepen and feel the effects of a deeper and more expanded breath. Note what it feels like to claim more space, reach out for more air, expand your body cavities. Record the effects of 5 sessions in which you worked with your breath and tried to expand the internal spaces (you can use the Hanna exercise as your structure).

• Make yourself a bioenergetic stool, a barrel, or purchase one of the larger (75 cm.) exercise balls and do some of the stretching exercises recommended in Lowen’s exercise manual. Do this work gently, but consistently, and note the changes in your posture and breath as you stretch deeply into the muscles of the chest, rib cage, back, and shoulder girdle. Record the effect of this work for 5 sessions.

• Work with different breath rhythms. Try continuous breathing in a circle; change the ratio of the inhalation and exhalation and note the effects on your level of alertness and/or relaxation. Try hemispheric breathing; straw breathing; nose breathing; and note the effects. What is your favorite breath practice and why is it so effective for you. Record which practice you use most and what effect it has on you.

• Study the difference between just noting how your breathe; allowing breathing to occur and not inhibiting it; and mechanically altering the breath cycle. Just give us some impressions of how this work has affected you.

**Theoretical Note:** Breathing/Movement/Feeling are the three sides of an energetic triangle that we can use in Bioenergetic Analysis to help bring the body more alive as well as access unconscious issues and emotions. Each of these dimensions of body experience affects the other two and they all represent expressions of the deeper energetic pulsations in the body. Just by watching a
persons breathing pattern you can tell a lot about how they handle stress, how capable they are of changing their state, and how much energy they have. Constrictions in the breathing pattern affect every single activity we engage in, and make a huge difference in how much pleasure is experienced in our lives and how much control we feel we have over our inner emotional states.

The rhythm of the breath is one of the major parts of what is called the charge-discharge cycle—a fundamental (Reichian) formula describing energetic exchanges between the body and the environment. In Bioenergetic Analysis, the restoration of pulsatory rhythms in the body is a major part of enhancing the life of the body and we will work extensively with cycles of breath, expansion-contraction, and contact-withdrawal.

Inhalation and exhalation represent the most basic pulsation in the body with respect to energy exchanges. In bioenergetic work, we seek to reestablish this pulsation in the body when it has been suppressed. Constriction of the breathing wave accompanies almost all emotional trauma and the restoration of this pulsation signifies the bodies ability to operate in present time. Charge and discharge is a basic pulsation related to midbrain, brain stem, and autonomic nervous system functions, and is one of the mechanisms by which the vitality of the body is regulated. You can see it operate in reactive emotional discharges, in surges of emotional excitement followed by quiet, in the sexual orgasm, and in basic levels of the pleasure function (e.g., when the mother helps the infant develop affect regulation by meeting their distress with soothing and calming). You can see it dis-regulated in trauma, experiences of being emotionally overwhelmed and unable to release emotion, in postures of collapse, and in chronic tension patterns in the body.

As higher emotional functions become developed in an individual, the charge-discharge function expands into patterns of giving and receiving mediated by the heart, and the more consciously directed energy exchanges that occur when we are continuously connected to the Earth and other people.
There are a number of ways to approach breathwork with clients and you will see the differences if you look at the references. Some approaches are more technique oriented (e.g., the Zi book) and teach exercises in altering the breath pattern consciously in order to influence the physiology of the body and strengthen all the muscles involved in breathing. Other approaches emphasize a gentle exploration with no techniques taught (e.g., the Speads book). In Bioenergetic Analysis we might work with all types of breathwork interventions, although changes in the breath cycle are closely related to changes in expression of emotions (feeling) and the ability to release the muscles involved in the suppression of breath (movement).

Lowen, A. “Bioenergetics”, “Joy”, & “Pleasure”

These first three exercises are primarily focused on exploring the relationship between you and your body—what your body is like and how it responds to what happens to you. These exercises bring to light any judgements, shame, fear, etc. that we feel about making a connection to our body and form the basis for the development of more and more awareness and acceptance of our bodily states. The next patterns—Grounding, Centering, Presencing, and Attachment involve a relational connection between you, other people, and the Earth.
Grounding, Centering, and Presencing

Grounding and Centering represent two movements toward connection—one referring to our connections to the Earth, our body and our biology, and the other representing our connection to the self, our world (space) and the people around us. They are a pulsation—one direction going toward the world and the other deep into the self—one direction going deep into our bodies and what our biology connects us to (the Earth) and the other toward our self and soul and what those aspects of ourselves are connected to (other souls and our spiritual source). These two pulses develop together as we grow up—they both are strengthened when our connections to our caregivers are strong and our bodies and brains know how to reach out and touch others and the world. They are both weakened by poor attachments in childhood and the loss of trust, security, and love.

The different authors that have written about these concepts divide up this world of connections differently (see the references)—some using grounding to mean the connection to the Earth only and others using the term to refer to any connections we have made that assists us in becoming embodied (Grounding=Body or Body + Earth). Centering often has the same variations—for some, centering is the connection to the inner self only including the body, while for others, it means all the connections the self makes to the world. In this manual, I will use the terms as follows: I like to use the term Grounding to refer to those connections that create the eventual connection to the Earth and to our biological selves. This includes the connection to our body, those loving connections to caregivers that helped form that connection, and finally, as we become more vertical, to the Earth itself. I will use the term Centering to refer to the connection to the many parts of the psychic and energetic self. Centering means that you are developing a witness to all your parts and that you can achieve a state in which all are accepted and choicefully expressed (or not). Centering is the way that we organize ourselves consciously and try to make some unity out of all the disparate parts that clamor for attention. It is
an organizing process that we do all our lives. Centering is a knowledge of self, while Grounding is a knowledge of body and Earth. The boundary between these gets thinner as we develop, since the idea of inside vs. outside get a little blurred as we open up more and more and realize how dependent we are on our connections to the world to form who we are. Both centering and grounding are relationship/connection dependent—both are established through the connections we have to others and the physical/energetic world. Both depend on hardwired parts of our nervous system as well as the nurturance we receive.

**Grounding**

When you are grounded, you are connecting to the Earth—physically, emotionally, electromagnetically, and energetically. Grounding means that you are literally exchanging energy with the planet under your feet and you are both nourishing and being nourished through that connection. The human body has a longitudinal energy flow that reflects the condition that we are creatures of both Earth and Heaven. We stand on the Earth and below the heavens—our energies connect to what is above and below us, and we have energy centers that serve the connection to both of these sources of energy.

The function of grounding exercises in Bioenergetic Analysis is to help us begin to become aware of our bodies and our connection to the Earth—in how we stand on it, move across it, relate to it, and how we feel that connection in our body. We are part of nature and a microcosm of the planet—we, like the Earth, have a physical structure, an atmosphere, life forms both on the surface and within, a unique living ecology and energy system, as well as a connection to the solar system that surrounds us. Grounding provides an energetic connection for our bodies (the connection to the Earth is part of how we sustain our aliveness), and also provides for emotional balancing—the movement of energy downward in the body allows for discharge, surrender, letting go, and the psychological experiences
of belonging, feeling secure, and stable. It is the physical and emotional dimensions of grounding that make it so important in bioenergetic work, since the experience of being “ungrounded” can lead to increased levels of psychological distress, muscular tension, and dissociation. Ungroundedness means the loss of connection to our bodies and the loss of the wisdom the body provides as to how to live life. Being grounded allows a much clearer perception of reality since a grounded person is less defended, more stable, and better able to connect to the world as it is.

In bioenergetic work, grounding is a developmental concept—that is, in each stage of our development from infancy to adulthood, the requirements for being grounded change as do the ways in which grounding is established and maintained. Grounding represents a connection that allows energetic exchanges to occur and it is the quality of those exchanges that helps the body develop.

- As a fetus, you are totally and dependently grounded in your mother’s womb. Energy exchanges between you and her “hold” you and shape your earliest connections to the life that sustains you.
- As an infant, grounding means that you are being held lovingly and that you can “give into”, trust, and receive that support. You learn to crawl and move across the ground and experience the reality of gravity and how it affects your body.
- As a toddler, you begin to explore being upright for the first time—you test your legs and learn to walk and run across the surface of the earth. Your verticality starts to develop, and your dependence on your caregiver begins to shift as you explore the world as a separate individual.
- As a young person and a young adult, the vertical pulsation in the body becomes more established. Your legs become stronger, your energy moves more strongly, and your pelvis develops along with the energy centers associated with sexuality and your personal identity. Grounding now includes sexuality and the sense of “standing on your own two feet” in the world.
As an adult, grounding means having one's feet on the ground, standing upright in the strength of self-possession, and being able to face the world from that position. The energetic exchanges that occur also means that you are able to “let go” of feelings that arise, allowing discharge to occur when tension builds, and reestablishing balance in the body by being able to exchange with the earth.

To achieve grounding as an adult requires that we have resolved some of developmental steps necessary to come to one's feet—that we have been supported as children in our strength; that we have been supported and held well and can surrender when necessary; and that we have acquired some level of trust and do not live in fear and contraction. Grounding means that our feet and legs, and pelvis are open energetically—that our bodies can respond to the energy patterns below us in the earth, be nourished by the earth, and return the favor. Grounding means that we can exchange with the Earth and other people in an energetic cycle of giving and receiving. As you can see, Grounding is a highly relational concept—deep connection is required to become and stay grounded, and we spend our whole life reclaiming, developing, and deepening the process. The process never ends because we continue to change in our bodies and biology and each new phase requires a “re-grounding” in the altered biology.

For the exercises to explore your own level of grounding, we would like you to begin by working with the physical aspects of being grounded—by witnessing the level of feeling in the feet, legs, and pelvis, and the amount of sensation and flexibility in the lower body. Learn the basic grounding positions (i.e., hang over with feet straight, knees slightly bent, head and shoulders hanging freely, breath down in the belly) and begin to feel the energy movements in your lower body—especially the feet, legs and pelvis. See Lowens’ Manual of Bioenergetic Exercises or his book “Bioenergetics.”
Here are some exercises that will help you explore your grounding:

- Begin by lying down on a comfortable surface both on your back and on the front of your body, and try to put into words your relationship to gravity and the ground under you. What does it feel like? Does it feel safe; can you let the Earth support you; can you “let down” into the experience and relax your body? How much of your body touches the carpet? Do you feel yourself holding up away from the ground—which parts of your body relax and which ones hold off the ground?
- If you can, have someone hold your feet or touch the bottoms of your feet. What happens in your body? What feelings come up?
- Next, come up on all fours and begin crawling. What do your remember about learning to crawl? Is the movement familiar to you? How does it feel to move across the ground? Can you both move and feel grounded and connected to the Earth at the same time?
- With a partner, experience the feeling of having your body supported—first while lying down having your head held or someone’s hands supporting your back. Then, lean against someone while sitting and while standing. Explore these positions and notice if you begin to “let down” into the experiences and what feelings emerge when you do.
- Come to your feet and begin to systematically work with the basic bioenergetic grounding positions: (a) stand erect with your knees bent slightly, feet straight ahead, eyes forward, and the body in a slight bow; and, (b) standing while hanging over with knees slightly bent. Note how it feels to begin to open up those parts of the body that have the energy centers that are most connected to the Earth—the feet, legs, and pelvis. It will help a great deal if you also begin to do some stretching of the toes, feet, ankles, calves, legs, hips, and low back. We will show you in the training seminars how to work with the vibrations that can occur in this exercise and you can read in Lowen’s books more about this important process. Keep a log of your progress in this experience. Begin a practice of letting down, getting down, giving
up, and surrendering to the downward flow of energy in your body. Grounding exercises also include working with the breath and helping yourself breath more deeply into the belly and deepening the exhalation.

- Practice walking slowly and consciously. Feel your feet on the ground while coming down into the step and while pushing off. Learn to stand with your knees unlocked. Practice putting a psychic-energetic connection down into the Earth through the base of your spine and through the bottom of your feet. These exercises emphasize the energetic aspect of grounding.

- How do you experience the psychological aspects of the grounding process. How do the exercises feel to you? What issues come up as you work with your body in this way? What feelings are triggered as you begin to feel the vibrations in your legs and as your breath drops deeper into your belly and pelvis?

- Make a practice of going outside and feeling what it is like to actually connect to the Earth. Work in a garden, feel the connection in your body while walking, connect to trees and plants, be outside and notice the energetic signature of your garden, your yard, your favorite wilderness area. Become aware if you can actually exchange energy with these areas. Develop the experience of receiving from the Earth as well as sharing your energy with life forms around you.

- Recall and note any experiences you have with sacred sites or power centers—both positive and negative. Note your experiences there and what effect it has on your body. Stay aware of whether the areas around your house, yard, neighborhood, or workplace are negative. How do your feel around these places?

For your journal, we would like you to record a section called “Working on Grounding” and for at least several months, record your progress in this process weekly. Use as many of the exercises described above as you can to explore the experience and keep a running record of how your grounding changes and how you have
developed and deepened it. Note especially...a) the changes in your body experience as your grounding deepens; b) what you did to create those changes; and c) what emotional changes accompanied the changes in your grounding. It is often more fun to do these processes with another person (some require a partner), but try to foster an atmosphere of mindfulness and quiet when you are exploring your inner somatic experience. Many of the changes are quite subtle and require you to pay close attention at first to new energy movements that might be forming.

**Theoretical Note:** In Bioenergetic Analysis, grounding is a very important concept. Grounding, in the largest sense, is our connection to “all that is outside and inside in the physical world”—to the reality of the environment that nurtures and holds our physical selves energetically. In earliest life, it is our important caregivers and our connection to them that allows us to connect to our bodies and proceed with our own unfoldment and development. Grounding and centering develop together over the life span since we organize ourselves through our connections to others. We change only through connection. Disturbances in grounding reflect disturbances in our connection to the physical (somatic) world, and the Earth is a major part of our external world (as far as the health and balance of our body is concerned). Lowen has also emphasized the quality of grounding that reflects our connection to reality, and says quite clearly that without a grounded (earth-bound) presence in the world, our perception and connection to reality is weak.

There are several bioenergetic principles that are used to understand grounding—one is the process of cepalocaudal development—the progressive development of the lower parts of the body from infancy through adulthood. This progression includes the changes in the body as the infant becomes more vertical and the development of the centers of the body associated with sexuality. The adult grounding process includes being able to complete this vertical pulsation in the body.
In therapy, grounding work often begins with those earlier phases of development in which there were emotional wounds that left the body in a state of contraction that interfered with the development of a healthy ground. States of chronic fear, loss, unresolved anger, or lack of attachment to caregivers can all interfere with the ability to be in the body and establish a ground. There are several different dimensions to grounding work that can be worked with therapeutically: (1) The connection to the body and the sensation and feeling aspects of body experience; (2) the issue of early support and being held safely and consistently so that trust can be learned; (3) the experience of falling, surrendering, and letting go of the chronic tensions that keep the body held up off the Earth; (4) the claiming of healthy sexuality from adolescence up through the adult years, and (5) the issue of standing your ground, feeling your strength, acknowledging your own personal reality, and facing the world. All of these important developmental issues have a psychological, a somatic, and a relational aspect.

Bioenergetic therapy can provide the support needed to process those traumas and the reestablishment of a connection to the Earth can occur. Grounding is something that we do our whole life—it constantly changes, as we do, and it deepens continuously as we recognize that we are a part of nature and work to embody that truth. As it grows, it takes on spiritual dimensions as well as the physical and emotional aspects emphasized in the therapy.

Reich, W. *Function of the Orgasm*,
Centering

Building on the experience of the body scan, internal body sensations, and grounding, the process of centering goes one more step into the experience of what we are like, what has formed us, and how we are able to connect to ourselves. Centering is the ability to follow an energetic pulsation down into the experience of the self and holding that connection consciously while we connect to the world. Centering is how we organize the experience that we call the Self—that complex mix of body sensations, emotional states, images and thought patterns, energy experiences, and our sense of our essence or soul. The overall goal of a centering practice is to establish balance in the bodymind, and each time we change, a new balance is required. Centering requires that we be in present time.

Centering goes further and deeper than just the body and its physical sensations. The practice seeks to establish a connection to any part of the self—both light and dark, developed or undeveloped, wounded or healthy, physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual, and, to hold that connection in mindfulness and acceptance. A “centered” person knows themselves, and can be said to be “self-possessed.” Centering will highlight questions about your identity—who are you, now, and what do you base that identity on? This is a deeply relational experience even though you are looking inward—since you are connecting to all that you are connected to!! Centering means acknowledging that you have been formed and are being formed by those you connect to and that they may still be inside you in various forms—in healthy and (sometimes) unhealthy ways. Centering will also put you in touch with your voids—places where you cannot connect to yourself or others and where emptiness is experienced.

There are many different ways to develop centering. Any strong energy center of the body can be a focus for this work—you can center yourself in your belly, in your hara, in your heart, or in your mind. You can focus on your breath, on your heartbeat, on the energy that runs in your body, or on any connection to a spiritual source (as in centering prayer). These are all good beginnings to gathering ourselves together and knowing who we are. In general, the practice of centering is used to strengthen our connection to
many facets of ourselves—especially those that we might like to develop further, or ones that prove to be helpful in reducing stress, calming the body during a crisis, or separating from a difficult external situation to clear our perspective. It can mean “coming back to our adult self”, or “finding a still place within” from which to view a situation. Centering shows us that we can view the world from many perspectives and perceiving a situation from the heart can be quite different from perceiving it from the intellect. Centering involves “going more deeply within”, and witnessing what is there. It can help us challenge old beliefs or positions that no longer serve us. It is necessary to center ourselves constantly—to check in and ask how any situation has changed us and how we are now.

In bioenergetic work, the centering processes we work with most often are associated with how we integrate the different levels of body experience into our identity. What new view of the self emerges as the body is claimed more and more—how does the definition of self and the identity shift as body experience is brought to awareness? In therapy, we will often ask a client to spend some time centering themselves in their belly or hara or their legs if those centers are undeveloped or blocked (this is similar to grounding). For other clients, we will ask them to focus on their heart and to expand their expressions of caring and compassion. When we ask a person to get centered, we are also asking them to come into present time—to focus on their feelings or their body or their energy and to be present with who they are now. If a client is overwhelmed with feelings, we might give them an exercise to focus on their thinking—to become more cognitive about a situation rather than get lost in the feelings of the moment—to include thinking in their responses to situations. Centering is about noting and restoring balance to the bodymind and knowing more about who you are and what you might need in any given situation.

Here are some exercises for you to journal:

- How do you “organize” yourself? Do you have a practice in which you do this consciously? Do you talk to yourself, connect to your body, go for a walk, have an energy practice, reach out to others?
• While grounding is the experience of connecting to the Earth, centering includes the experience of connecting to yourself—all the parts of yourself! Begin a section in your journal called “Centering” and begin to note what parts of yourself you are able to connect to without judgement—just looking, listening, and feeling those parts as they reveal themselves to you. Do you have different parts—an adult, an inner child, a caretaker, a defiant part, a creator, a victim? Can you regard them with acceptance and compassion—even the darker ones or the wounded ones? Develop a practice of sitting still and noticing yourself—just being. As we progress in the training, we might ask you to develop a “cognitive map” of yourself—a way to look at your different parts and how they interact with each other and the world. Then, note where in your body where the “center” of those different parts seem to lie or emerge from. Note what the sensation base of those parts is and what emotions seem to be associated with those parts.

• One of the most important aspects of the self that will develop in this training is the Witness. This “observing yourself with compassion” part of yourself is a major part of the centering practice, since it allows us to make choices as to how we organize ourselves in different situations. Include in your journal some comments on how your witness state is developing. What happens when you center yourself in your Witness? What is your attitude toward yourself from this place?

Presencing

The experience of being disconnected from yourself or others is a part of most therapy experiences. It is almost always an aspect of uncovering the wounded parts of the self, since dissociation is a biologically based protective function to keep the psyche from being overwhelmed with too much stimulation and disorganization. You could say that when we cannot get centered or grounded, we dissociate as a protective response. Dissociation is a part of every
traumatic reaction. Everyone lives with some level of disconnection and dissociation. It is impossible to avoid and so part of every therapy is to assist ourselves and others to become “present” in the here and now—to connect to the external world, to other people, to let go of control, and experience life as it impacts us—to be open, aware, and feel like we have choices. There is a spiritual dimension to this work as well—since the development of the experience of being in present time represents the only doorway to the spiritual world. Both the past and the present are fantasy and serve as disconnections from what is occurring in the present.

Here are some further exercises that have to do with centering:

• Connecting involves the act of “presencing” yourself or bringing yourself into present time—to be here now! It is “centering” yourself so you can connect to another person. Begin a part of your journal called “Being Present”. Keep a record of this experience and how it develops in yourself. Learn to be aware of how present you are. This is the core of the Witness. What do you notice about your ability to be present and not dissociated? How and when do you go away and not be here now? Where does your consciousness go in those moments? Begin to notice what somatic states “limit” your ability to stay present...is it when you are overstimulated or overwhelmed?; is it when you are ill or exhausted?; is it when you are not able to tolerate certain emotional states or feelings? Keep a log of your ability to be present and what your limits appear to be. Note which somatic states and body sensation patterns make it difficult to be present.
• What is the most effective body experience practice that helps you stay present when connecting to others—breathing, grounding, centering, body sensation awareness, etc?
• Explore the role of physical touch for you in helping you become or stay more present? Does touch help you to “come into your body” or does it trigger material from the past? Touch is a powerful organizer in the early years of our lives and our history with touch will be important in our work as therapists.
• Practice this exercise each morning when you wake up: Sit or stand, begin to be aware of your breath, your body and its sensations, then move your awareness to what is around you, how present are you? How awake are your centers—the feelings in your belly and/or lower body, your heart, diaphragm, heart, throat, brain? How do you organize yourself for your day? Bring your attention to areas that are stuck or blocked, place your hand over them, sense them coming alive. Have a good day.

**Theoretical Note:** In Bioenergetic Analysis, we often begin and end each session with an opportunity to get centered and come into present time. This act of “presencing” ourselves is a way to get connected to what we feel and what is happening around us. It is something that both client and therapist can profit from. It helps to start from (and stay in connection with) present time when accessing traumatic material and it helps to come back to our adult present time self after working with deep material from the past. Presencing is a mixture of grounding, centering, body scan, internal body sensations, breathwork, etc., since each moment is different and each day and each session will bring out a different aspect of yourself that you might wish to access more deeply.

Moving

The exercises that have do with exploring movement in Bioenergetic Analysis form the basis of very powerful therapeutic interventions. As you now know, movement is the third leg of the bioenergetic triangle Breathing /Movement/ Feeling, and as such, shows us a way to access deeper feelings, discharge excess excitation, express ourselves, and connect ourselves together in a more integrated way. Movement (i.e., the expression and discharge of energy) and containment are the two major choices we make about how to manage our aliveness and excitation.

There are three classes of movements that we would like you to explore on your own:

1. **Emergent movements**, that is, movement patterns that evolve or emerge from sensation patterns or feeling states in the body. They are “calls to action” for our needs and expressions. To allow these movements means that I can meet my needs, move in such a way as to rebalance my body states when needed, get out of the way when I sense danger, and dialog with my body about what I am sensing or feeling.
   - The exercises involved are called Integrating feelings and movements, Amplification, and Spontaneous Healing.

2. **Expressive movements** are movements that we engage in when we are expressing feelings. We simply move out with a particular feeling (like speaking up when we are angry, asking for what we need, or expressing our love). We express ourselves, and in doing so, restore balance to our energy system through some kind of connection to others. If those expressions are blocked, imbalance results and the consequences can be dangerous for our health. In bioenergetic work, opening the capacity for expression and the discharge of energy is a form of work that goes hand in hand with containment. They are two choices that we have to manage our excitation and the more developed they are the more aliveness we have. When expressions of any of the emotions are blocked, we need
to both discover the belief systems behind the inhibitions and also begin to encourage the body movements that have been held back. We can discover the parts of the body that are used to hold back the expressions and feel our way into the experience.

Another tool that can be used is to explore the principle of “using the tail to wag the dog”—that is, it is possible to engage in the movement to stimulate the feeling state. The best example of this is smiling. If you engage in a smile, even if somewhat mechanical at first, the movement of those facial muscles will stimulate the physiology of happiness and release the chemicals associated with a state of joy. In bioenergetic work, we can use the same principle to help the client get in touch with the sensations of anger, the feeling of strength, the vulnerability of asking and reaching, and the opening of energy flows in the back and front of the body.

- The exercises are vocalizing, reaching, kicking, and hitting.

3. **Integrative movements** are movement patterns that begin to unite parts and functions of the body to form larger flows of energy. The one you have already done in the training and in the section on grounding is to bring the breathing cycle together with a pumping action of the legs to increase the charge in the legs and the movement of energy down the body. These movements begin to build on a sense of flow between body segments. These exercises can also integrate movements between different levels of the body, like the inner core and the muscular system, and they form the basis for experiences of entrainment and coherence that allow the body to function at a higher level of resonance with the outside world.

The jellyfish exercise is an exercise that builds this capacity.

- The movement pattern is the Jellyfish
The Emergent Movement Exercises

1. Integrating Movement and Feelings: This first exercise is one in which you are learning to track your sensations and discover what movements are associated with those sensations. Choose either hunger, exhaustion, arousal, or loneliness (i.e., not sufficient contact with others) and begin to note what behaviors (movements) are associated with increases or decreases in these sensation/feeling states. Pick the one that is currently charged for you—that is the one that you will learn a lot from following. Just keep a journal of how you become aware of the feeling in your body; where you feel it in your body; what you usually feel impelled to do when that feeling arises; and how you are able to make choices around how to handle the sensation/feeling state.

2. Amplification: This exercise is one that allows you to explore the meaning of tensions in your body. It begins with an awareness of a muscular tension pattern—like elevated shoulders, a collapsed chest, a retracted pelvis, tension in the legs, jaw, or belly, etc. The next step is to carefully and gently explore that pattern by first feeling your way into the pattern and then increasing the tension beyond its normal range, and then slowly letting it go beyond its normal range. First amplify it, and then see if you can let it go. Do this several times and note the changes from the original position. Also note any feelings that emerge when the pattern is explored either in the amplified form or in the letting go. Choose one of the tension patterns in your body and journal how you have explored it in this way. Be aware that you may begin with what you feel is a localized tension pattern and find that it is part of a much larger pattern that involves many segments of the body. You may try this standing, sitting, and lying down depending on how effective each position is in increasing your awareness of the pattern. Journal your exploration of one of your muscular tension patterns.
3. **Spontaneous Healing:** This is a very free form exercise in which you are following the energy movements of your body and allowing your body and its energetic expressions to lead your movements. Choose your favorite music and begin to move freely around the space. Go deeply inside yourself and see what movements want to emerge. Follow those impulses—respecting the speed, direction, and feeling behind the emergent movements. Allow the energy to move you until there is a sense of completion for any given pattern. Journal two of those sessions for the manual.

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**The Expressive Movement Exercises**

1. **Vocalizing:** The act of vocalizing is one of the most important ways in which feelings are discharged since it involves the movement of the breath, the creation of your own personal sound (a vital part of your physical identity), and the expression of your own words. Vocalizing is the primary way in which you “extend yourself out into the world”, and bring your insides outside.

   The practice of vocalizing ranges from shouting and singing, to talking and whispering, and we would like you to explore all of these forms, first by yourself and then with others. The exercise is to allow yourself to feel and express the sounds in your body. Make more sounds, breath loudly, laugh often, and try to bring out the sounds that accompany all the feeling states you have. Listen and feel the sounds of your body. Journal your experience of finding the sound of your body and the learning you experienced while expressing that sound. Find the sounds that go with all the movement exercises and bring those sounds out until you can feel the energy center in your throat open up more.
2. **Reaching:** Reaching out to others is often difficult and there are many feelings that come up when the movements are made and the needs are stimulated. This exercise is done either standing or lying down on your back. Reach your arms out as if you are asking for something and allow the feelings to build in the arms, belly, heart, throat, jaw, and face. Reach out and bring your hands toward you and allow the reaching movement to come to completion. Bring in energy, love, connection or whatever your body needs. Journal those sensations and the feelings that emerge when you reach out. Allow the sounds that come with this act to emerge and find a phrase that accompanies the act of reaching for you. Note the images that come up and any memories that emerge. Do it with someone you feel safe with, and journal your exploration of these movements.

3. **Kicking:** The kicking exercise is a process in which you are exploring your ability to protest, to mobilize energetic movements in the lower half of the body, and to strengthen and sustain a strong powerful assertive movement. It is done on a mattress or cushioned mat while lying down. Begin kicking with legs extended, leaving the arms and upper body as relaxed as possible, jaw relaxed and eyes open. You can use your voice as needed (a prolonged statement of Noooooo! will help you breathe deeply). After you are comfortable with the lower body movements and can sustain a bout of kicking (from 10 to 50 kicks), you can also add arm movements and extend the expression into a full body “tantrum” in which the movements of the legs, the arms, the breath, and the head are coordinated. Since this is a strong bioenergetic expression, use caution with yourself—respect your back, your ability to tolerate the feelings, and your physical condition. Do it with someone else present if you feel like this is a challenging expression for you. Have fun with it—it is to strengthen you, not overwhelm you. Do not do it if you feel it will bring up more fear than pleasure—there are many other ways to build up to this expressive exercise that we will be teaching in the training. The kicking exercise is used both to explore how integrating the expression of aggression can be in the body and to encourage the expression of protest. Having a temper tantrum as a
way of dealing with the issues in your life is not the goal of this process (although it became something of a discharge pattern in some of the early Primal Therapy work). The goal of this process is to develop containment, not to shortcut it. When early childhood expressions of any emotion are not developed, containment is thwarted, and the experience of the sensations of anger, frustration, or rage cannot be tolerated. The expressive exercises in bioenergetic Analysis are designed to teach tolerance for the sensations in the body and allow for the reclaiming of early childhood expressions of emotions that lead to contained, choiceful, and creative adult expressions.

4. **Hitting**: Hitting is another strong expressive exercise that both strengthens the person and allows for the discharge of energy associated with anger. It is done while standing with a tennis racket or one of those small padded baseball bats that will give a good “thwap” on the mat or cushion. Keep your knees bent and your back flexible when you wind up to begin. Keep your attention on your body experience rather than any fantasized targets (whether alive or dead). In this context, this is an expressive (and integrative) body experience exercise and not one in which anger, rage, or hatred at others is encouraged. There are many cautions in working with strong expressions of anger in clients, including their ability to tolerate anger and the images that occur in these exercises. In this exercise, focus on how it feels in the body to be strong and use the muscles of the back, legs, and arms. If anger arises, witness it and allow it to be there. Use the voice as needed and allow any verbal expressions that arise to be expressed.

- In each of these exercises, you are exploring both the body sensations and the feelings that are stimulated in the process. Note both of these in your journal and do these exercises until they feel free and comfortable to you, and you can feel how they deepen the experience of your body, allow discharge to occur, and open the door to feelings that were previously unavailable.
The Integrative Movement Exercise

The Jellyfish: The jellyfish is an exercise that helps integrate breathing, movement, and feeling all together. It can provide a deep sense of internal connection and flow in the body provided it is developed slowly and with a sense of respect for sensation tolerance. It is usually done in steps, adding components as the energy builds and can be experienced. The jellyfish is done lying down on a comfortable mat with the legs bent and the soles of the feet touching the mat. In the first stage of the exercise, the arms are extended to the side of the body (the crucifixion position). On the exhalation, the arms stay extended and are brought in front of the body with palms touching. On the inhalation, they are extended to the side again. Keep repeating this movement with the breath for many minutes—it will open the energy in the chest and arms and slowly relax the upper segments of the torso and the neck. Do the movements slowly, in synchrony with the breath and a connection to the sensations arising in the body.

In the second stage of the exercise, the legs are added. With the knees bent and the feet flat on the floor, the legs are opened and closed in the same rhythm (like a butterfly). The legs should be opened as wide as you are comfortable with, and the excursion of the legs and arms synchronized to come together at the top and be fully opened with the same timing. This movement pattern will open the energy flows in the lower body, the belly, and diaphragm, and in the upper torso, shoulders, arms, and throat. As you go further into the jellyfish experience, note the movements of the head that emerge at the end of the breath.

We would like you to journal your experiences with this exercise. Do at least 10 sessions of 15 minutes with yourself and note the changes as you learn to do the exercises.

Theoretical Note: The primary principle of Bioenergetic Analysis emphasized in this manual has been the energetic triangle of Breathing-Movement-Feeling. This is one of the more helpful ways to think about what happens in our bodies as we claim more aliveness—the more we move (both internally and externally), the deeper we breathe, and the more we feel. Many of the interventions you will make with your clients will serve that goal of enlivening the body, and bringing up to consciousness the belief systems, the emotional states, and the somatic tension patterns that prevent aliveness from being fully claimed. Obviously, not all the movements practiced in these exercises will be applicable for all clients. Some will be too strong for certain clients, and some will not be applicable for the problems they are wishing to address in their therapy. We have asked you to try them all in order to sense in your own body what happens energetically and emotionally when certain movements are made.
Connection and Attunement

This section in the manual is an extension of the work with Centering and Presencing, and begins with some questions first asked in the section on centering. These questions are designed to help you begin to explore the patterns of your attachments to significant people in your life as well as your clients. We will do a great deal of work with the process of attachment in the training, as it provides a way to understand how we connect to our clients and how we can be effective containers for the healing process they are creating.

These are the major questions that we will ask you to explore:

- How do your organize yourself—psychologically and somatically— in your attachments to other people? To answer this means that you are becoming conscious of the feelings you have when you are connecting to others, and you are aware of how you hold your body in those interactions. What feeling states emerge in you as you become more intimate with others? Do you feel secure in your attachments to others, or are there struggles with those connections that bring up the memories and feelings from experiences from the past? Anything you can journal about this will be helpful, as our intimate connections to others are often rife with dissociation, and a lack of awareness about what we are feeling and how we are impacting others with our energy. This is an area of exploration that we can usefully do our whole lives since our ability to change depends on our connections to others.
- What issues (or states or needs or feelings) in your clients do you have a difficult time connecting and staying present with? Have you noticed that certain emotional states are more difficult to “be present with” than others? Which ones are the hardest for you to stay present and connect to? Hint: Which emotional states in others do you have the most judgements about?
- What is your own body experience when you are in “limbic resonance” with another person? What does it feel like in your body?

As we cover the material on attachment in the training, you will be able to see some of the structure of your own attachment pattern, as well as how that attachment pattern has been shaped within your own personality and character structure.
Emotional Patterns

Earlier in this manual, I have referred to what are called the “basic affects”. There is strong evidence that these patterns are hardwired universal programs in the brains of all humans, and the facial expressions associated with these affects are more or less recognizable by all peoples everywhere. There is, in this area of study, a vocabulary for these emotional patterns that we will use in this course as much as possible. More will be said about these in the training, but here is a brief summary of the patterns and some of the terms used to describe them;

1. There are 9 basic AFFECTS in humans, 2 positive, 1 neutral, and 6 negative.

   Positive: Interest-Excitement and Enjoyment-Joy
   Neutral: Surprise-Startle
   Negative: Fear-Terror; Distress-Anguish; Anger-Rage; Dismell; Disgust; and Shame-Humiliation.

Affects are biological patterns triggered by the intensity of stimuli that impact us. Low levels of stimulation trigger interest-excitement or surprise-startle. Decreasing levels of stimulation trigger enjoyment-joy. Higher levels of stimulation trigger fear-terror, distress=anguish, or anger-rage. Shame is triggered when positive affects are interrupted. The intensity of a stimulus can come from any one of a number of sources—from internal sensations, perceptions, thoughts, drives (like sex and hunger), or external events.

2. The term AFFECT is used to describe the hardwired pattern while the term FEELING is used to describe the conscious awareness of an affect being triggered. So we have a feeling when we are consciously aware of an affect that has been activated.
3. The term EMOTION is used to describe the linkage of an affect with a memory. That is, we are having emotions when our affects are being triggered along with our memories of past experiences. Emotions are very complicated and can be blends of affects or have the particular and unique mixtures that are made up from our memories. Emotions are a blend of our biology and our biography. While affects last only a moment, emotions last much longer, and moods can go on for a very long time.

4. The last term, MOOD, refers to enduring and lasting patterns of emotions that continue to loop around and leave the individual in a perpetual emotional state. E.g., Distress-Anguish, when constantly triggered by memories of stress and loss can create a constant state of sadness and depression. Disgust at the self, along with shame, can produce a long lasting mood of low self-esteem. Enduring patterns of fear-terror can produce a mood state of a generalized anxiety disorder.

Here is an exercise that can get you thinking about emotions and the words we have for our emotional states. For each of the affects listed below, list some of the many different emotional states that can be derivatives of the basic affect pattern and provide the variety of emotional states that we can feel:

**Interest-Excitement:** fascinated, awestruck, enchanted, curious,

__________________________, ____________, ____________, ____________

**Enjoyment-Joy:** contented, pleased, relieved, __________,

__________________________, ____________, ____________, ____________

**Surprise-Startle:** stunned, shaken, __________, __________,

__________________________, ____________, ____________, ____________
Fear-Terror: scared, frightened, cautious, anxious, ____________,

______________, ________________, ________________, ________________

Distress-Anguish: sad, stressed, overwhelmed, agitated, grieving,

______________, ________________, ________________, ________________

Anger-Rage: irritated, explosive, hostile, hateful, ____________,

______________, ________________, ________________, ________________

Shame: humiliated, embarrassed, worthless, despicable, ____________,

______________, ________________, ________________, ________________

Disgust: contemptuous, haughty, nauseated, ____________,

______________, ________________, ________________, ________________
**Bioenergetic States**

As a psychotherapy, Bioenergetic Analysis involves working directly with body experience and with the emotional states and traumatic memories that can be accessed when someone begins to experience themselves at this level. All of these states have intense emotions associated with their emergence as well as body sensations, visceral expressions, physiological discharges, and often, altered states of consciousness. They are extremely energetic and somatic in their expression, and thus, the term, bioenergetic came to be associated with these emotional expressions. In Bioenergetic Analysis, we work with several levels of energetic expression in the body, and try to help clients to become aware of all these levels in themselves. They can be illustrated as follows:

- **Spiritual energies and the body.** Influences on bodily states from non-physical sources.
- **The Intent and Choices we make with our energy.** The way we work with the energy of our bodymind to stay open, balanced, and connected to others. The effect of our beliefs and thoughts on the energies of our body.
- **Our Emotional energies, both positive and negative.** The effect of emotional states on psychosomatic conditions and emotional states related to intimacy. Emotional states associated with healing & health.
- **Physical sensations, vegetative movements, physiological effects of emotional states, organic rhythms and streamings, the biology of aliveness.**
- **The effects of nutrition, energy systems like the body like the meridians, electromagnetic therapies and the effects of earth energies on the body.**
The middle three core energetic systems are the ones most often addressed in Bioenergetic Analysis, and the outer boxes “bump up” to our work and form alliances with other healing systems. Some bioenergetic therapists have studied these areas and incorporated them into their work, and many of our students have abilities that allow them to sense and feel energies at all of these levels.

Here are some exercises that we would like you to do with this topic:

• Make an assessment of which of these levels you regularly sense and feel with your clients and how these energetic phenomena provide you with information about your client and their states of being. Which ones do you “tune into” regularly, and which ones do you use most to give your client feedback about what they are experiencing? If you work mostly as a verbal therapist, you would certainly be tuning into their belief systems, thought patterns, and to some extent their emotional states. As a bioenergetic therapist, you will be learning a great deal about emotional states and how to work with sensations and body experience.

• Which dimensions of body energy and experience would you like to learn about? Which ones would help you the most in your practice?
Affect Regulation

If there is one aspect of clinical work that requires an integration of, and a creative use of, all of the tools we have discussed so far—that issue is how to help clients achieve a better and more stable degree of affect regulation. When our emotional response to what happens to us is either unexpressed (because it cannot be tolerated), or it surges up so strongly that we cannot contain the feeling, this creates conflict and symptoms— attempts to either defend against the feeling, banish it from consciousness, or act it out so it cannot be felt so directly. Much of the clinical suffering and discomfort that we are trying to help our clients deal with comes from their inability to fully experience their feelings in ways that allow them choice over their expression. The psychosomatic consequences of defended ways of dealing with feelings are enormous and destructive, and underlie much of the imbalances that people experience in their physical and emotional bodies. In your training, you will discuss this problem at length, and come to understand how the expression of affects can be either destructive or healing. The term affect regulation means that we work toward helping our (and our clients) emotional lives become vital, conscious, and tolerable, and that their regulation comes to include both skills that we have individually to deal with our feelings, and the connections we have with others that helps us be more stable and fulfilled in our emotional life. Early in life, affect regulation begins as a relational dynamic, and if that fails, it becomes something that we feel we must either do totally alone, or something that we cannot do at all without the help of others. In Bioenergetic Analysis, we make the attempt to work with both polarities—helping our clients develop skills to work with feelings within themselves, and helping them come to know how much their emotional regulation and fulfillment is dependent upon their relationships with others.

Affect regulation involves using all these skills we have discussed— mindfulness, body awareness, grounding, centering, breathing, expression, and attunement. As a clinician, you will be challenged to come up with even more creative ways to enter the emotional lives of your clients and help them discover and handle even the deepest and most painful feelings.
Here are some study questions around this clinical phenomena that will help you delve into the issue more deeply:

• In your experience, what are most difficult emotions that you have to deal with in your own life? Are they positive or negative emotions—that is, is it harder to deal with affirmations, gifts, and expressions of love toward you, or is it harder to handle fear, rage, sadness, or shame? How do you “handle” these emotions—through denial, dissociation, putting another feeling in place (an affect defense)? Ask some people that know you well (and you feel safe with) how they see you dealing with these feelings (this is hard, but yields some interesting feedback).

• What skills do you now possess that help you deal with strong or overwhelming feelings that are healthy skills (not splitting off or denial)? Do you use some somatic skills like breathing or grounding? Which ones? Do you use imagery, or practice the ability to change your bodily state through a meditation?

• When you do “lose it”, is there an emotional pattern that is somewhat predictable (e.g., is it anger followed by shame, or shame followed by anger, or anxiety followed by cravings, etc.)? See if you can identify any of these kinds of patterns and explore whether you can find a way to “uncouple” some of the linkages just by witnessing them and using your skills to stay present through the pattern.

• Explore where you use others in your emotional regulation and balancing. This could be a whole range of experiences from talking about stresses and emotional situations through requests for touch, hugs, time, reassurance, etc.? What belief systems do you have about this kind of “relational regulation”? Does it feel too needy?, not deserved?, expected?, appreciated?, etc.

What Heals?

There is one other issue that we would like to have you consider as a part of your pre-clinical training experience, and that is, an understanding of what the effective components of the healing process are. We would like you to write something in your journal about (1) what have been the most “healing moments” for you in your own development, and (2) what do you think are the essential qualities of a healing interaction between client and therapist?

Summary of the Fundamentals
Homework Assignment

Here are the entries that we have asked you to record in your journal to hand in at the end of your pre-clinical training. Be sure to ask us lots of questions and try to involve yourself in each exercise as though it will make a difference in your life and clinical practice. It will. As we have emphasized, the more deeply you can claim the experience of your own body, the more you will be able to help people claim theirs. We have asked you to write your experiences down because it makes the process more thoughtful and often reveals more questions than just a verbal report would. We hope these experiences have been fruitful for you and have made a difference in your relationship to your body, and to your own understanding of how Bioenergetic Analysis can be helpful for your clients. Suggestions about how to improve this manual and your experience in training are most welcome.

The Body Scan:
• 12-15 sessions of body scan maps with notes on your experiences
• Boundary exercises and body mapping with a colleague

Body Sensations:
• A journaling of your experience with the felt sense of your body
• A list of 5 activities and the body sensations that accompany them
• The sensation patterns associated with hunger, fear, anger, sadness, sexual arousal, exhaustion, and contentment.

**Breathwork:**
• The breath awareness or “check-in” journal. Images, sensations, and body awarenesses associated with your breath cycle.
• A journaling of your work with your breathing pattern (how you worked with it, which techniques, use of the stool, etc.) over a period of time.

**Grounding:**
Your journal of your work alone and with a partner on your grounding experiences—including your work on feeling your feet, legs, and pelvis, your connection to the Earth, releasing tension in the legs by working with the vibrations, integrating breathing and grounding, exchanging energy with the Earth in walking and connecting to nature, and your experiences with the energies of the Earth. Choose a period of several months in which you log this and track your progress and the changes you feel occurring.

**Centering:**
A journal of your awarenesses on how you became (are becoming) more centered and learning to organize yourself more consciously. What are the practices you developed, how did they work for you, what are the parts of you that you more deeply connect to and what did you have to learn to connect to those parts of yourself?

**Presencing:**
A journal of your experience of becoming more present. What have you noticed about the development of your Witness? What emotional or somatic states make it difficult for you to stay present? What practice helps you the most to stay present? What are your experiences with touch and its role in helping you become or stay present?
Movements:

Emergent Movements:
A journaling of your experiences with the 3 emergent movement exercises.

Expressive Movements:
Your journaling of your experiences with vocalization, reaching, hitting, and kicking.

Integrative Movements:
Your journaling of your 10 sessions with the Jellyfish.

Connection:
Your journal of your awaremesses of the feelings and sensations around your connection to others and the way you bodily know how it feels to connect.

Emotions:
Find some creative words for common emotional states.

What Heals?:
Two essays—one on your own healing experiences and one on what you think the healing process entails.
Bioenergetic Fundamentals-50
M. Maley

Selected Bibliography


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Siegel, Daniel, MD. *The Developing Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience*. Gilford Press, 1999. A text on the way the brain develops in the field of interpersonal connections and some ideas about the treatment of emotional illness based on these findings.