

—BODY AND BREATH PRACTICES—

HUMMING

Focus your attention on the center of your belly, behind your navel. Breathe in and out, deeply and slowly, a few times. Feel your belly pull the air all the way down into it. On the fourth or fifth exhalation, hum a low, even tone. Inhale naturally and repeat this a few times, varying your pitch with each new exhalation. Do this for two or three minutes. Then stop and notice what your body experiences afterward. What has changed from before you started humming? What has stayed the same? What sensations, thoughts, and images are arising? What does your body want to do now? Does it want to move? Hum some more? Run and hide? Fight? Without doing anything else, just notice whatever your body is experiencing right now. Alternative: pick a song with a simple melody that feels comforting to your body. It can be anything—a hymn, a gospel tune, a lullaby, a military march, a punk rock song. Hum it all the way through from beginning to end from your belly. When you're done, stop and pay attention to your body. Feel free to experiment with a variety of tunes.

BELLY BREATHING

Focus your attention on the center of your belly, behind your navel. Breathe in and out, deeply and slowly, a few times. Pull the air all the way down into your belly. Keep breathing, deeply and slowly. Follow your breath as it flows in through your nose, down your throat, into and through your lungs, and into your belly. Keep following it as it flows back out again. (You won't actually pull air into your belly, of course, but it will feel that way.) Continue breathing this way for four to five minutes. Stop and notice what you experience in your body.

BUZZING

Get comfortable. Take a few deep, slow breaths. Focus your attention behind your navel. Relax your shoulders. Rest your tongue gently behind the top row of your teeth. Relax your jaw and let your mouth hang open. Breathe out slowly and firmly. As you exhale, make a buzzing sound, like a bee. Extend the buzz and the exhalation as long as you can without strain or discomfort. Repeat for two to three minutes. Then stop and notice what you experience in your body. Experiment with different tones, volumes, and vibrations until you find some that feel the most comfortable.

SLOW ROCKING

Get comfortable and take a few slow, deep breaths. Then, slowly rock your upper body from side to side, or forward and back. If you like, play or hum a slow, soothing tune and rock to its beat. Feel free to experiment with standing versus sitting; with rocking side to side versus forward and back; with a range of different (but always slow) speeds; and

with sitting in a variety of seats and positions. Discover what feels best to your body. When you are done, stop and notice what your body is experiencing. Alternative: Keep your body still, but let your head and neck rock slowly from side to side.

RUBBING YOUR BELLY

Get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Let your shoulders relax. Place your palm on the center of your belly, just above your navel. Press in gently. Hold your hand in place for a moment or two. Then, slowly rub your belly for three to four minutes, in whatever way feels good to your body. When you're done, pay attention to all the sensations in your body. You can do this with or without clothes, but remove any heavy outerwear. Alternative 1: Rub the center of your breastbone. Alternative 2: Rub your solar plexus—your center of gravity, halfway between your breastbone and your navel.

20's

Get comfortable. Slowly rotate your foot at the ankle twenty times in either direction. If you like, move it in one direction; pause for ten seconds; then rotate it in the opposite direction. Do this with each ankle, one at a time, pausing for ten seconds in between each set of rotations. Then do the same for each knee; for your hips; for each wrist; for each elbow; and for each shoulder. Pause for ten seconds after each set of rotations. Sometimes trauma energy can get stuck in the joints. These rotations help to release that energy.

OM-ING

The vibration of the word om (or aum) has a uniquely powerful settling effect on the human body. Get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Let your shoulders relax. Breathe in slowly and deeply. As you exhale, for the full duration of your exhalation, very slowly utter the word om. It will sound and feel more like ohhhhhh-ummmmm-muhhhhh. Pay attention to how your body vibrates to the sounds. Then breathe in and begin again. Do this for ten long, slow exhalations. When you are done, pay attention to whatever sensations you experience in your body.

SINGING ALOUD TO YOURSELF

Sing a slow, soothing song to yourself—perhaps a lullaby or a gospel tune—as you work, walk, drive, or exercise. Afterward, notice what your body experiences.

CHANTING

Chanting usually involves repeating a word, phrase, or line over and over. Most chants contain a mantra, a prayer, a song, or a scripture passage. However, chanting appears to have a settling effect on the body no matter what you chant. When you're finished chanting, stop and pay attention to the sensations in your body.

BREATHE, GROUND, AND RESOURCE

Take a few deep breaths. Let your body relax as much as it wants to. Think of a person, an animal, or a place that makes you feel safe and secure. Then imagine that, right now, this person or animal is beside you, or that you are in that safe place. Breathing naturally, simply let yourself experience that safety and security for one to two minutes. Afterward, notice how and what you experience in your body. Slowly look around, including directly behind you, and locate yourself in the here and now. You can do this standing, sitting, or lying down, with your eyes either open or closed.

TOUCHING YOUR DISCOMFORT

This final activity is an especially helpful way of teaching your body to settle during times of stress or difficulty.

Think of a moderately painful but not traumatic incident from your past. Then, for five seconds—no longer, at first—focus your attention on a painful aspect of that incident. As you do, notice all the sensations in your body. Also notice what thoughts, images, and emotions arise—without responding to them in any way. Without disengaging from that incident or from your body, practice breathing, grounding, and resourcing (from the activity above). Feel your body as it relaxes and settles. Then let go of the incident from your past. Return to the here and now. If a part of your body feels sore, or tight, or strange in some way, simply put your hand on it and support it for a few seconds. Practice this activity every day or two. Over time, slowly increase how long you stay with the painful memory, until you are able to relax and settle while experiencing it for a minute or more.