

SOMA:HOME

a 6 week deep-dive into befriending
your body and mind. Facilitated by Erica Webb

Week 1: Somatic Exercise
movement as the language of the body

Well, here we are at **Week 1** of **SOMA:HOME!**

I am so looking forward to exploring with you over the next 6 weeks. Finding a sense of home within your own skin starts here - through connecting with your body through awareness and movement.

We're starting with a look at Somatic Exercise and how movement can be a communication tool - allowing you to tune into your body and 'speak' with it in a loving way. In this way, movement can become a cornerstone of self-care that is quite distinct to the ideas of exercise and fitness.

So ... let's get into Week 1, shall we?

First, a quick little intro, just in case we haven't met before.

About me (Erica):

- Bachelor of Behavioural Science
- Yoga teacher since 2013
- Somatic Exercise Coach since 2016
- Mat Pilates Instructor
- Registered Counsellor
- Have had to learn to be kind and compassionate toward myself
- A few of my favourite things: my kids and husband, chocolate chip cookies, roller skating, my pets, books.

MOVEMENT AS LANGUAGE (THAT YOUR BODY ALREADY SPEAKS)

Movement is ANY kind of movement, not just exercise.

Exercise is always movement. Movement is not always exercise. And while exercise is fabulous, it can do movement a dirty deal - by making it seem not good enough if it's not burning energy, building muscle, breaking a sweat (and on and on that narrative goes).

I say *nuh, uh* to that. Movement is a vital cornerstone of self-care. It's so far from pointless. It can:

- support you to find more comfort in your body by releasing tension and deepening the brain-body connection
- give you more conscious control over your movement and, consequently, how you feel
- give you insight into the outcomes of neuroception* and a way to respond
- be a sign of safety* for your nervous system
- deepen your capacity to interoception* (listen)

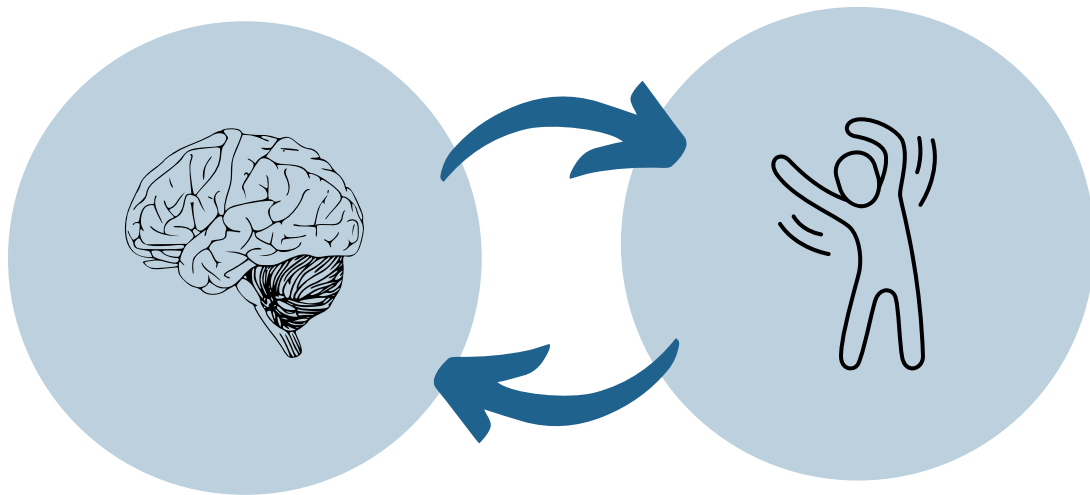
**Note these are terms and concepts we will discuss in greater depth in subsequent weeks. We'll talk about them briefly now, but stay tuned for more.*

Neuroception: how the nervous system 'listens' to the environment. Outside of conscious awareness.

Sign of safety: Signs in the environment (internal and external) that signal safety to the nervous system.

Interoception: Your capacity to notice changes in your body.

MOVEMENT AS LANGUAGE (THAT YOUR BODY ALREADY SPEAKS)



It's not a one-way street: When it comes to brain-body communication, information goes both ways - **brain to body** and **body to brain**.

What your brain interprets from your body impacts what you think (“The mind narrates what the nervous system knows” - Deb Dana. That is, your mind will story-tell based on signals from the body).

The signals your body receives from your brain impacts how your body feels - including how much tension muscles are holding, how you're breathing and so on.

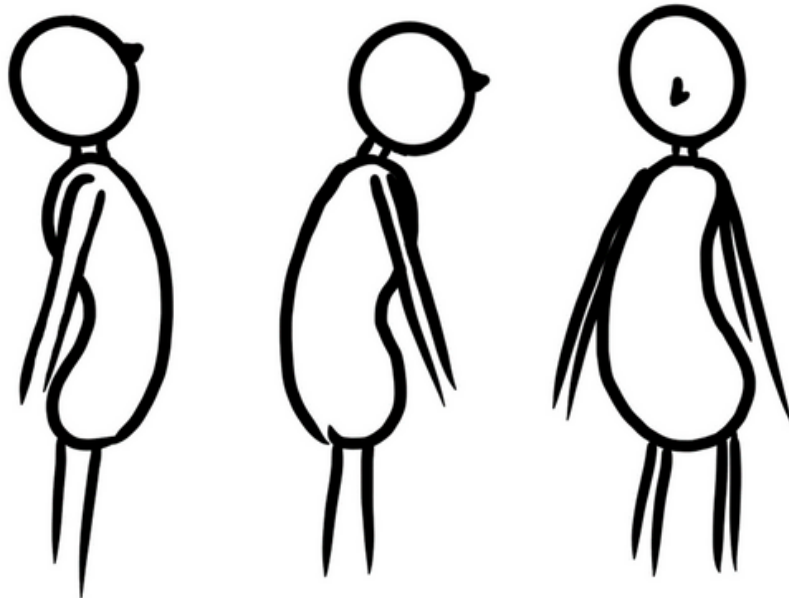
The  symbol is a good representation of this communication loop.

SOMATIC EXERCISE + SOMATIC REFLEXES

Today we're exploring a particular form of movement - Somatic Exercise. Let's start by looking at the **reflexes** that inspire the practice.

Thomas Hanna (founder of Hanna Somatics) spoke of three primary reflexes that create tension in the body. They map beautifully to what we know about how neuroception impacts bodily responses - that is, how responding to signs of threat (and safety) lead to changes in muscular tension, posture, heart rate and breathing.

These reflexes are not BAD, WRONG or INCORRECT. They are adaptive responses. But ... they may result in excessive, hard to shift tension if we aren't able to move between states with relative ease.



**Landau response /
Green light (GO!):**
Action required!
Go, do, rush,
perform, perfect.

**Startle reflex /
Red light:**
Protective against
worry, anxiety,
threat.

Trauma reflex:
Protection of injury,
habitual use
patterns.
Speaks to how
clever the body is to
'find a way'

Why does Somatic Exercise make a difference?
By increasing conscious body awareness and control to alter
Sensory Motor Amnesia.

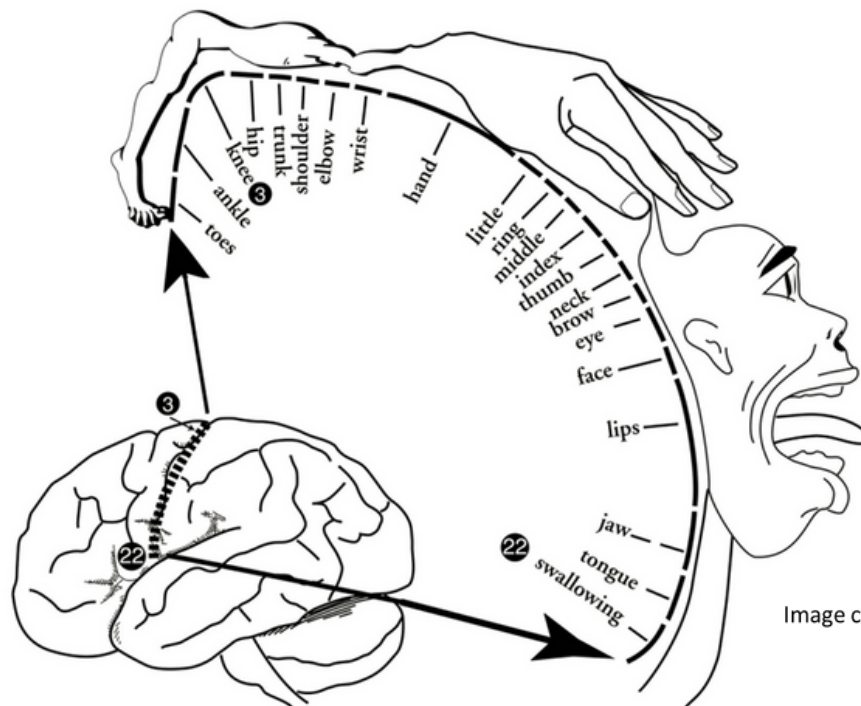
Sensory Motor Amnesia: *“a memory loss of how certain muscle groups feel and how to control them.”*

“... our sensory-motor systems continually respond to daily stresses and traumas with specific muscular reflexes ... These muscular contractions have become so deeply involuntary and unconscious that, eventually, we no longer remember how to move about freely. The result is stiffness, soreness and a restricted range of movement.”

(All quotes from Thomas Hanna’s book *Somatics*)

Through **sensory motor awareness** (as opposed to habitual patterns) you nudge the sensory motor cortex to pay attention, giving you more conscious control. It relies on sensing, noticing and consciously moving the body using pandiculation.

That is, you **embody** more of your **SOMA**.
The result? More freedom of movement, less tension, more self-listening and enhanced capacity to respond to how you feel.



Cortical smudging: In a nutshell, the brain cells that are responsible for doing a certain thing (like perceiving sensation or executing movement in a body part) can get a little overzealous.

Instead of *inhibiting* neighbouring cells, they *excite* them. This blurs the brain map (homunculus, above). We go from precise representation to less precise representation.

This isn't as scary as it sounds - it just means a little less precision in sensing and/or moving (depending on the area of the brain impacted). This is often implicated in persistent pain.

Smudging that relates to movement can be 'cleaned up' through movement (and somatics is particularly effective at this!)

BRING YOUR WHOLE SELF

Your SOMA is, by definition, your body. But the way we'll be talking about the SOMA is SO much more than that. Your Soma is your very individual capacity to experience yourself from the inside out.

Embodying your soma asks you to see your *full* human-ness and befriend that, rather than shame it, blame it, hide it or dismiss it. To embody your SOMA is to see yourself as a whole human with feelings, sensations, thoughts, memories, worries and all the rest.

Rather than saying *my body is broken and against me*, this view of the body allows you to ask: *what can I do to **support** my body?*

Rather than pulling against the tension or saying it shouldn't be so, we give the tension space to be seen, felt and unfurl.

Key Principles

- Pandiculation
- Somatic awareness
- Quality over quantity
- Attention and patience
- Move and melt

Key Impacts

- Reduced tension
- Improved interoception
- Improved quality of movement
- Breath awareness

THE SOMATIC PAUSE

It's time to get present to yourself and your body.
Let's start with a **somatic pause**.

Feel your feet on the floor.
Your bottom on your chair.
The breath filling and emptying from your lungs.
Meet yourself with curiosity.
Meet yourself with compassion.

Before we move, take note of how you feel? What do you notice about your state? Consider sensations, thoughts, comfort, discomfort, and anything else that is apparent.

LET'S MOVE TOGETHER

Reflection: What did you notice during and after this practice?

EXPLORING THE RESOURCES INSIDE SOMA:HOME

How will you explore somatic exercise in the week ahead?

Can you put the time in your calendar now?

You can do a somatics session every day, but consider what is actually DOABLE for you. Start small. Really small is ok!

It's the best gift you can give yourself.

And also consider using the concept of the **MOVEMENT SNACK** - a movement that takes literally seconds to minutes to explore, as a little love note to yourself and your body. For example:

- Rolling your tight shoulders in circles
- Opening and closing your mouth a few times when your jaw is tight
- Rocking your pelvis forward and back to get a little arch and rounding in your lower back (sitting or laying down)
- Circling ankles and hips
- Taking a little walk around your space

WHAT NEXT?

Explore somatic exercise and the somatic pause throughout the week. Take note of how you feel.

Also take the time to:

- **Listen to the Self-Compassion Audio track** inside the resource page of the SOMA:HOME portal. Self-compassion is a key part of this course and the best place to start is with giving it a go!
- **Share and ask questions** in the Facebook group.

Next week ... we'll be looking at VALUES.

Specifically, we'll be exploring the values you hold (and wish to hold) in relation to yourself, your body and self-care.