

Body, Brain, Love
A Therapist's Workbook
for Affect Regulation and Somatic Attachment
(Preview)

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Contents

Introduction.....	i
Invitation.....	iii

PART I – Nervous System Regulation and Dysregulation

<i>Chapter 1</i>	
Mindfulness and Mindfulness Induction.....	3
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
We are Braingrowers, not Shrinks.....	7
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
Normal Regulation.....	9
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
The Fear and Recovery Process of our Brains: Dysregulation.....	15
<i>Chapter 5</i>	
Working with Dysregulation: Window of Tolerance, Mindfulness, and Resourcing..	25
<i>Chapter 6</i>	
Introduction to Trauma and Trauma Treatment.....	47

PART II – Attachment through a Somatic Lens

<i>Chapter 7</i>	
History: Bowlby, Ainsworth, Main, and The Strange Situation.....	53
<i>Chapter 8</i>	
Four Attachment Styles Charts.....	61
<i>Chapter 9</i>	
Basic Neuroscience of Attachment.....	73
<i>Chapter 10</i>	
The New Model of Attachment: Primary and Secondary Systems.....	85

PART III – An Introduction to Somatic Attachment Therapy

<i>Chapter 11</i>	Stance of the Therapist	95
<i>Chapter 12</i>	MENCAP: Principles of Somatic Attachment Therapy	97
<i>Chapter 13</i>	Neuroscience and Theory of Tracking	99
<i>Chapter 14</i>	Tracking and Contacting	105
<i>Chapter 15</i>	Slowing	111
<i>Chapter 16</i>	Supporting the Wisdom of Defenses	115
<i>Chapter 17</i>	Deepening One and Two	123
<i>Chapter 18</i>	Special Consideration: Use of Touch	127
<i>Chapter 19</i>	Recognizing a Child State	131
<i>Chapter 20</i>	Meaning, Anchoring, and Integration	135
<i>Chapter 21</i>	Understanding and Working with Your Attachment Strategies	139
<i>Chapter 22</i>	Working with Attachment in Therapy	143

PART IV – Annotated Transcript and Vignettes

<i>Chapter 23</i>	Annotated Transcript of a Somatic Attachment Therapy Session	157
<i>Chapter 24</i>	Vignettes	173

PART V – Tying It All Together: Body, Brain, Love

Chapter 25

Body, Brain, Love	187
--------------------------------	-----

Appendices

Appendix 1

Glossary	193
-----------------------	-----

Appendix 2

Bibliography	198
---------------------------	-----

Appendix 3

Resources: Where Do You Go From Here?	201
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Appendix 4

Answer Key	202
-------------------------	-----

Appendix 5

CEU Opportunity — CEU Exam and Course Evaluation	212
---	-----

Appendix 6

DVD Ordering Information	220
---------------------------------------	-----

Credits and Acknowledgments	221
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Introduction

Welcome to the world of body-brain integration. Many of you have already been exposed to various aspects such as mindfulness and the use of the body to help contain anxiety through breathing or depression through sunlight and exercise. Common sense and well-researched medical advice all point in the direction of mental health being inseparable from physical health.

This workbook intends to take that concept and extend it into the language and practice of psychotherapy. What we understand about the brain and our ability to translate that into psychoeducation and active therapeutic interventions will make a world of difference in our clients' ability to heal from seemingly intractable wounds and behavior patterns.

I have come to believe that not knowing certain basic neuroscience can, at times, lead to an unethical practice. If a therapist cannot recognize nervous system dysregulation, clients may be re-traumatized or be left feeling or being unsafe. **Part I** provides the initial focus of this book. It specifically teaches the basic neuroscience referred to above in simple, accessible terms for direct application in the therapy room. Affect regulation through mindfulness and resourcing are essential tools in any therapist's toolbox. This part of the workbook will give you enough information to help regulate your clients. Any regulating interventions will be greatly enhanced by using the basic somatic skills of tracking, contacting, and deepening. These skills are taught in Part III.

Part II teaches attachment theory through the lens of neuroscience and nervous system regulation. Intrapersonal affect regulation often has its roots in the interpersonal regulation that did, or did not, take place in early attachment relationships. This part of the book seeks to help you apply body-brain understanding of your own and your clients' attachment dynamics. When put together, affect regulation, somatic skills, and attachment

theory can influence and deepen your work in unexpected, moving ways. Ultimately, this work will help grow your clients' brains by facilitating neural connections and integrating critical brain structures.

Part III is optional and I do hope you will read it. It reflects my special invitation to you to try out the world of Somatic Attachment Therapy. Please also read the next chapter, "Invitation," if you are curious about this specific therapy approach. By reading Part III, you will gain some tools to provide a powerful, deep and transformative therapeutic experience. Having a sense of what a somatic attachment approach can look like, I hope, will answer that nagging thought you may have had, "I know there is something else there I could get to if I had the right tool." Working directly and frequently with the body can begin to answer that question.

Part IV offers substantive real-life examples of what this approach looks like in actual practice. An annotated and analyzed transcript of a Somatic Attachment Therapy session is provided as well as two vignettes by other therapists.

Part V addresses the "love" aspect of "Body, Brain, Love." In this section, I discuss the nature of love as a physiological, regulatory entity that has a fundamental place in the therapy we practice.

Finally, the Appendix contains a glossary, bibliography, resources for continued learning, and an answer key for the exercises in the workbook. In addition, the Appendix offers a Continuing Education Opportunity for licensed LCSWs and MFTs in California. A course exam and evaluation is included. Readers may also read how to order the DVD that will accompany this workbook in April, 2015.

Invitation to Somatic Attachment Therapy

After almost ten years of working mostly psychodynamically, I found myself restless and vaguely frustrated with the work my clients and I were doing together. While I felt confident that childhood patterns and subsequent reinforcement were the basis of a person's capacity for resilience to life events, my sessions felt repetitive, not quite alive, and, worst of all, not very effective. My clients and I had good relationships and we processed what came up between us; I knew that was critical for change. But, for several years I'd been feeling there was something I needed to access with more depth and resonance and, primarily, more tangible transformative change.

I heard about somatics early on in my internships following graduate school. I thought the approach was interesting but believed it didn't fit with my psychodynamic way of thinking. At least that was what I told myself: "Therapists shouldn't use techniques, per se. We need to stay with the relationship, the transference." Some of those thoughts were true to my orientation and some were a reflection of something more about myself: I was afraid to try, afraid I couldn't do it right, afraid it would turn clients off, afraid I would be too vulnerable.

Over the years, the nagging feeling that there was more powerful and satisfying work possible led me to EMDR. EMDR seemed so very different at the time I learned it. It was definitely a technique and I felt less interpersonally engaged with clients while doing the processing. It did, however, teach me some important things: 1) The body matters; 2) The capacity to heal lives within each client's mind and body; 3) As a therapist, I need to get out of the way to let that capacity come forward; and 4) I don't have to know everything: It can unfold.

After finding value in EMDR, which I still use, I sought more direct somatics training

and took the Hakomi Psychotherapy Professional Skills Training. Hakomi opened doors for me that desperately needed to be opened. These were my doors as a person, not just as a therapist. In Hakomi, I learned: 1) It is not only okay but vital that I let myself love my clients; 2) Being gentle, compassionate and loving with myself was a prerequisite for being that way with clients; 3) Focusing on positive things was a fundamental part of healing; 4) “Resistance” and “personality disorders” are ways of being and behaving which enabled someone, including myself, to psychologically survive; 5) The process of therapy is a collaborative journey where the client and the therapist are both in the unknown together.

As I worked toward Hakomi certification, the stress and pressure to know and understand everything diminished, my capacity to be more myself in session grew as did my capacity to simply “be with” my clients.

Hakomi was a route to changing my life and my practice but it couldn't stop there. A given client's intense emotional lability or another client's difficulty being emotionally connected led me to study emotional and physiological regulation, trauma treatment, and attachment through a somatic lens. I took trainings in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, Emotionally-Focused Couples Therapy, Julie Murphy's “Attending to Attachment” course, and began to study the neuroscience of attachment.

In one of the first somatics/attachment consultation groups I facilitated, I realized some students did not know about regulation. I started teaching them about recognizing dysregulation and trauma, and how to work with it with their clients. Over time, it became clear to me that not knowing about regulation put therapists and clients at risk. Clients could be re-traumatized or not feel safe. And, the path to safety (Stephen Porges' term) through attachment was not being accessed.

Jaklyn Brookman, my collaborator, was in that first group/class. After a few weeks, she said, “You need to write a workbook.” Thank you, Jackie. The curriculum I was then writing on the fly became the skeleton of this workbook. I later devised the term, Somatic Attachment Therapy, to describe the work.

This workbook and, particularly Part III, is for you as a person and you as a therapist.

I have designed it to be accessible, easy to digest, and to provide just the right amount of neuroscience therapists need. I invite you to find the parts that fit, to learn about your own regulation, how your brain and your mind come together to keep you safe, relate to important others, take risks, feel joy, play, and survive trauma, grief, and the profound difficulties of our lives in a too-often inhumane world.

This particular workbook will also enable you to step at your own pace, if you choose, into the world of somatics and invite you to look at your own regulation and attachment strategies as a fundamental aspect of your relationships with clients. Attachment refines transference and countertransference; it gives us a map for the intrapersonal and intersubjective field that is the basis for any change. Attachment with somatics gives us an active, process-apparent way of seeing what unfolds and how to change/transform in the moment.

Welcome to the alive world of Somatic Attachment Therapy. May it help you grow in ways that nourish you and your clients.