

Welcome to Understanding Somatics

Have you ever wondered why your body tenses when you're anxious, or why a deep breath can shift your entire mood?

Somatics invites us to listen to our bodies. Not as machines to be controlled, but as living, sensing, meaning-making beings with profound wisdom to share.

This educational guide was created to demystify somatics by exploring a few essential questions: What is it? Why does it matter? How does it work? And Who has shaped this field?

Along the way, we'll discover how these principles apply to trauma recovery, chronic pain, stress resilience, sexuality education, and everyday life. Whether you're a student, practitioner, educator, or simply someone curious about the mind-body connection, this resource offers clarity and inspiration for your own somatic journey.

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Donavon's vCard

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Understanding Somatics

Exploring What, Why, How, Who and In SSE of Body-Centered Practices



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How Does Somatics Work?

Methods, mechanisms, and practical applications

Core Principle:

Somatics is fundamentally an educational process, not passive therapy. It empowers students to learn, explore, and care for themselves actively.

Major Methods:

Movement Education:
• Feldenkrais Method - gentle movement, neuroplastic learning
• Alexander Technique - conscious inhibition of tension patterns
• Body-Mind Centering (BMC) - embodied anatomy exploration

Therapeutic & Clinical:

• Somatic Experiencing (SE) - completing interrupted responses
• Sensorimotor Psychotherapy - somatic + cognitive processing
• Hanna Somatic Education - addresses Sensory Motor Amnesia
• Neuro Affective Touch (NAT) - attachment + attuned touch

Ancient/Traditional:

• Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong - ancient practices from India and China

Some Core Practices:

- Intra-Somatic Awareness (Internal Sensing) - Attending to internal bodily sensation as primary information.
- Body Scanning
- Systematically moving attention through the body to notice sensation or absence of sensation.
- Present-Moment Sensation Tracking
- Sustaining attention on how a sensation changes over time.
- Mindful Movement
- Exploring movement through felt experience rather than performance or outcome.
- Conscious Breathwork
- Using awareness of breathing to sense and influence internal state.
- Grounding & Centering
- Sensing support, gravity, and orientation to establish stability and presence.
- Pendulation
- Gently shifting attention between ease and challenge to build capacity.
- Release & Activation
- Letting go of habitual tension while engaging underused sensory or movement pathways.

What is Somatics?

Understanding the body as experienced from within

Key Definition:

- Somatics comes from Greek "soma" (the body as experienced from within)
- Emphasizes first-person, lived experience rather than external observation
- About the mind-body-emotion connection - not compartmentalized

Some Core Principles:

- Interoception - internal bodily sensation awareness
- Proprioception - awareness of body position and movement
- Exteroception - external sensory input awareness
- Breath & Rhythm - regulating through intentional breathing
- Nervous System Safety - working with autonomic states
- Somatic Patterning - awareness of habitual patterns
- Sensory Tracking - following sensations as they shift
- Curiosity - noticing without fixing or judging
- Choice & Agency - the body as authority
- Integration - allowing experiences to become embodied knowing
- Cultural Dimensions - carrying collective history in bodies

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- Can be practiced anywhere, anytime
- Lifespan practice from children to elders
- Low/no cost; no special equipment required
- No prerequisites needed; adaptable for all abilities

Accessibility:

- Personal Development - everyday moments and growth
- Social Justice - collective trauma healing, sustainable activism
- Rehabilitation
- Healthcare - chronic conditions, pain management, enhancement
- Sports & Movement - injury prevention, performance
- Workplace - burnout prevention, team building, productivity
- Education - emotion regulation, focus, stress reduction
- Pain
- Clinical Settings - trauma, PTSD, anxiety, depression, chronic

Wide Applications:

- Clinical Settings - trauma, PTSD, anxiety, depression, chronic
- Enhanced Self-Awareness - develops interoceptive awareness
- Resilience & Stress Reduction - regulates nervous system

Key Benefits:

- Trauma Recovery & Emotional Healing - Addresses trauma stored in body's implicit systems
- Improved Physical Health - reduces chronic pain through awareness

Benefits and applications of body-centered practices

Why Practice Somatics?

In Somatic Sex Education

Body-centered principles applied to embodiment, consent, and pleasure

Core Principle:

SSE views sexuality, pleasure, and aliveness as embodied, relational experience. Learning involves direct attention to bodily sensation and presence.

Key Components:

- Embodiment - living in the body, feeling sensation, recognizing arousal
- Mind-Body Connection - trauma, shame, pleasure all have somatic imprints
- Body-Based Practices - movements, breathing, body scanning, mindful touch
- Communication & Consent - consent as embodied practice via Wheel of Consent

Consent is Somatic:

"Yes" can feel like openness, lightness, warmth, or ease. "No" can feel like tightness, heaviness, tension, or unease. These signals vary. Trauma, stress, neurodivergence, and conditioning shape how the body communicates. There is no single "correct" response.

Key Contributors:

- Joseph Kramer - Body Electric School; Sexological Bodywork
- Annie Sprinkle - Sex-positive education; ecosexuality
- Betty Martin - Wheel of Consent framework
- Caffyn Jesse - Trauma-informed practice
- Staci K. Haines - Healing Sex; social justice integration

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- Women pioneers: Ida Rolf, Anna Halprin, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Pat Ogden
- Prentiss Hemphill - Embodiment Institute, healing justice
- Dr. Resmaa Menakem - Somatic Abolitionism
- Katherine Dunham - "matriarch of Black dance"

Underrepresented Voices:

- Staci K. Haines - generative somatics + social justice
- Peter Levine, PhD - developed Somatic Experiencing
- F. Matthias Alexander - created Alexander Technique
- Moshe Feldenkrais - developed Feldenkrais Method
- Thomas Hanna - coined term "somatics" (1970)

Western Pioneers:

- Shamanic practices (global Indigenous traditions)
- African & Indigenous rituals (dance, drumming, healing)
- Qi Gong & Tai Chi (Ancient China)
- Yoga (India - thousands of years)

Ancient Traditions:

Honoring diverse voices and ancient wisdom

Who Has Contributed?