

## LEADING A BIOENERGETICS EXERCISE CLASS

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The purpose of a Bioenergetic exercise group is to help each participant become more aware of their body, where holding is, and to restore more open energy flow. It is not therapy. It is not for the purpose of processing wounds, although each participant brings his/her wounds to the class. It is simply to dialogue with and attend to the body.

The leader's role is to keep the class safe, and to assist participants to move into various exercises at their own pace, always with self-care paramount, in order to assist in this body-awareness dialogue. Each exercise leader is different. I learned a lot by going to different exercise classes, experiencing different exercises, and how they were strung together, what the pacing was etc. What I'm giving below is my approach ... I hope it assists you in developing your own ... for that is one key to a useful exercise class ... the **presence** of the leader. The other key is to avoid exercises at cross purposes, i.e. if the pacing is off, if charging occurs too early, or by not allowing enough discharge or grounding, a more open flow of energy and aliveness becomes blocked. The intent of the exercise gets blocked by what is happening at another level.

I find it helpful to have 4 stages in an exercise class: warming up, charging, expression/discharge, and relaxation to allow integration of increased energy flow. Warming up helps the participant develop body awareness, or mindfulness. It sets a base for the dialogue, like saying "hello" to a friend. Beginning with a body scan, notice where is there tension in the body? Usually this is done from the align position. Then, gentle exercises to warm the muscles and increase awareness (rocking on the feet, stretches, deepening breathing). I like to be sure to warm the joints, ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, neck, elbows, wrists ... tension in these narrow channels impedes energy flow, then work with the larger muscles.

In progressing to charging exercises, the energy has more places to flow. Discharging energy can be general (as in grounding) or more focused as in protest exercises (get off my back, kicking), or expressing need (reaching exercises), or pain (sobbing). Relaxing exercises (lying down & belly breathing, walking meditation) help the person be aware of being with this increased charge, and to find ways to allow it, not hold on to it, nor brace against it, but to soak it up, to marinate in it. I then find it is important to plan a transition back into the real world (look around, move unhurriedly) where we need our defenses, but can

continue to access this increased aliveness.

People coming to exercise classes will generally be unfamiliar with Bioenergetic concepts and be unfamiliar with being in their body. I usually have a theme for each exercise class, to help participants focus on some aspect of re-entry to their body. The themes below build from laying a foundation to being interactive with the world. Breathing (increasing awareness, building some charge) is the first theme, then grounding (being with a sense of self), movement (now that self is more familiar), next containing (now that I feel my freedom to move, and can feel the seed of movement, how do I contain it and shape it), then expression (to give the movement *my* stamp and move with the fullness of my expression and self-possession), setting my boundaries in the presence of another (balancing my wants with what another wants ... finding the common ground), holding my ground (similar to containing, but in relationship), then letting go of old habit ways of being (now that I can construct a safe place to be), seeing and being seen more as a true self (to see from my core, and allow my core to be seen), and experiencing joy at being more fully alive. Below is a brief description I give to people - I also like to hand out the exercises after each class, so people can practice the ones that have particular meaning for them.

### **BREATHING**

Full and relaxed breathing allows the body its full range of taking in energy and letting go of tension. The diaphragm is involved, the muscles of the rib cage, the neck and head move back at inspiration, and forward at expiration. The pelvis is similarly involved. Chronic tension from daily living stifles this natural breathing pattern. Reclaiming some of this natural rhythm is the focus of this series.

***Bioenergetic breathing - in the align position, breathe into your abdomen first, then let your chest and upper chest follow the in breath. Breathe out. Repeat five times.***

### **GROUNDING**

Bioenergetically, grounding refers to feeling the free movement of energy through the body from the feet to the head. To be grounded is to feel the contact with the ground, to feel the support of the ground and through this, feel the support we have for the self. We can then claim the ground we stand upon.

***Grounding - standing - in the align position, bend your knees slightly as you inhale, and straighten your knees as you exhale. Continue for two minutes.***

### MOVEMENT

"There is a basic thought-feeling process to all perception. This is to expand, swell, reach out and then pull back, shrink, contract. We go toward the world and then return to ourselves in a never-ending cycle. It becomes apparent that stress and distress disturb these patterns of pulsations." (Keleman, 1985) Becoming more aware of this process of expansion and contraction and of your own unique pattern, is the focus for this session. How does your wanting to expand shape your movement? **How** does your wanting to pull back and contract shape your movement. Try to honour your own rhythm of expansion/contraction as you use these exercises. Use this opportunity to become aware of **how** you lose your rhythm.

### CONTAINING

Containing involves holding in or holding back movement that is seeking expression, until it can be better understood and shaped appropriately. This differs from repression or denial where the impulse is pushed away. In containing, contact with the impulse, feeling or movement is maintained, but saying "WAIT".

***Breathing - breathe in as much as you can and wait until you HAVE TO breathe out. Exhale as much air as you can and wait until you HAVE TO breathe in. Continue to breathe this way, noticing how your body takes over and takes care of you ... how the impulse to breathe grows in intensity as you wait. Waiting can bring clarity.***

### EXPRESSION

As we breathe more fully and can feel the support we have from the ground and for ourselves, we can allow ourselves to feel the seed of the movement we want to give expression to. By waiting, we give ourselves the opportunity to know what we want and to check the world outside. We can then **choose** how we shape the expression we give to the movement, to own it and to be able to support it.

### BOUNDARIES

We can set our boundaries (the line which we live inside of) at different places.

Sometimes it can be four feet outside the body, sometimes the skin is the boundary, sometimes it is deep inside and the skin feels like a shell. We each are in control of when we open or close our boundary, who we let in and how far in. Keeping flexibility in boundary setting allows us to set the boundary where we want to, rather than being stuck in a closed or open state. **How** we set our boundaries is the theme for this session.

### **HOLDING YOUR GROUND**

Keeping the contact with the ground, and thereby feeling the security of our position (stand etc.) is the theme for this session. The pushes and pulls by others (and the internalized "other") are invitations to give up our ground. By feeling confident in holding our ground we are then freer to move in ways we want. We can be "surprised" and "off centre" **for our own pleasure**, knowing we can regain our ground.

### **LETTING GO**

Letting go means giving in to the life of the body. To let go in an area of tension allows the held back movement and feeling to emerge. By letting go of a body position, I let go of a particular way of organizing myself, and am open to change and reorganizing of attitudes, ideas and stance toward life.

### **SEEING & BEING SEEN**

In this session, try to stay with yourself as much as you can while setting aside the "mask" or face we present to the world. Let the "real" self see and be seen, i.e. without "shoulds" creeping in. Allow yourself to "be".

***Dyads - breathing - sitting on the floor facing your partner, place your right hand on your stomach and your left hand over your heart (to help monitor your breathing). Close your eyes and follow the rhythm of your breathing. Let your breathing become slow and full. Now slowly open your eyes and look at your partner. Is there any change in your breathing? What are you aware of? Close your eyes. Does your breathing change? Try to find a way of doing this so you can let yourself see and be seen.***

### **JOY/PLEASURE**

A total commitment to what one is doing is a basic condition of pleasure. Every chronic muscle tension is a limitation upon aliveness, self-assertion and self-awareness (and therefore of pleasure). As you feel areas of tension, let these

soften, and let go of the held back or held in feeling. In this session, allow yourself to "get into" the exercises as fully as you can **in your own way**. Notice and **follow** what is pleasurable for you in the movements of these exercises. **HOW** does pleasure move?