



BUILDING RESOURCE EXERCISE

SKILL 1: CALMING BODY AND MIND

In the space below, , describe or draw a visual representation of a resource for you. Try and include as many of your senses as appropriate (colors, textures, sounds, tastes, etc.) as you imagine this resource in your mind and include as many details as possible in your description or drawing. After you have finished, read your description or look at your drawing. Turn your attention to your body. Track any pleasant or neutral sensations in the body. If you do notice a pleasant or neutral sensation, pay attention to that sensation for a few moments.

This exercise is based on the Community Resilience Model designed by Elaine Miller-Karas.

RESOURCES

A resource is anyone or anything that helps you feel better.

It can be internal (something you like about yourself, something you like to do), external (a person, memory, place, animal, spiritual figure, faith tradition, etc.) or imagined.

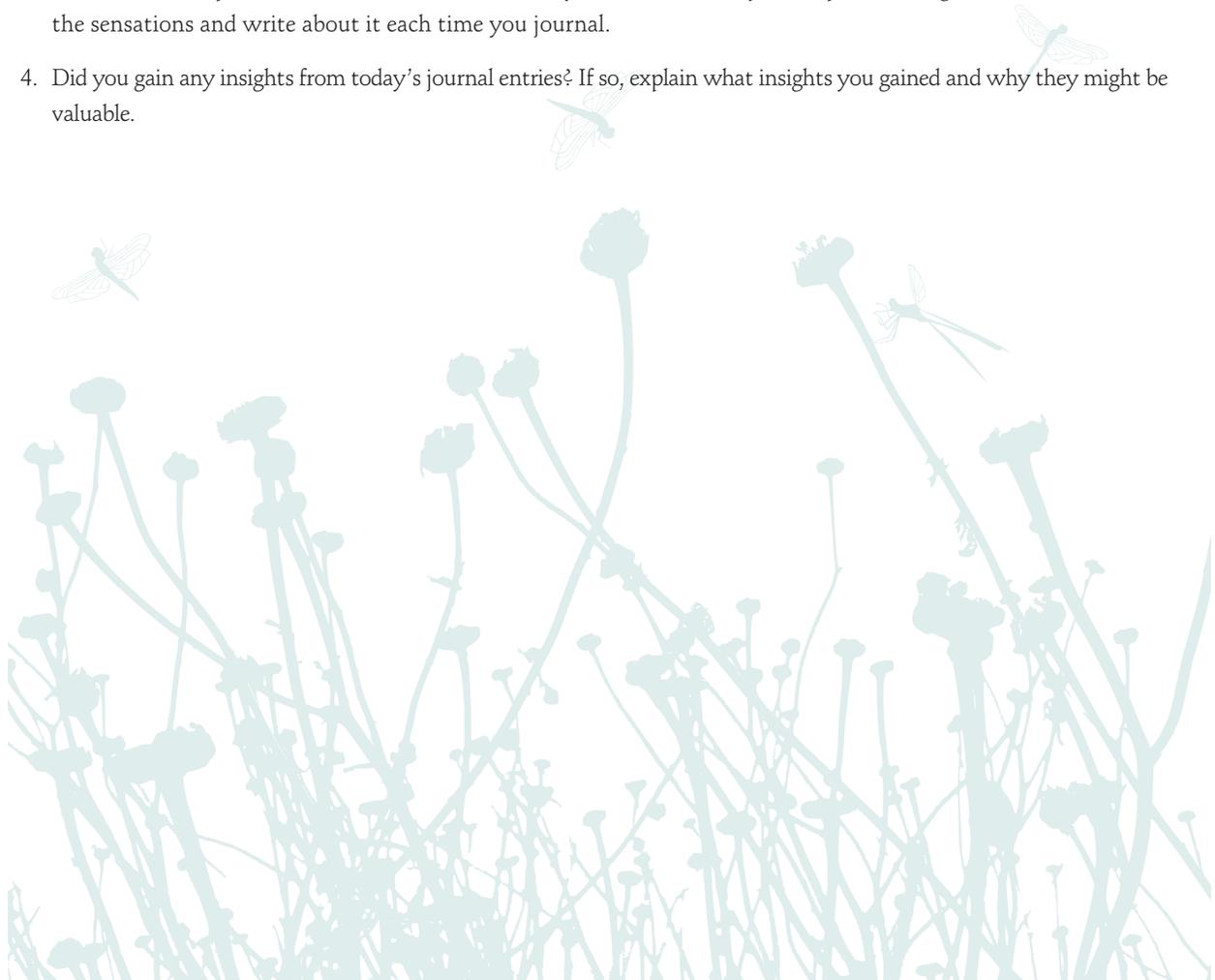


CONTEMPLATIVE JOURNAL QUESTIONS

SKILL 1: CALMING BODY AND MIND

Instructions: These journal questions are designed to help reinforce the skills you are learning in CIT. The greatest benefit will come from repeated consideration of these questions over time. They can be used in connection with, or in place of, the Contemplative Practice recordings found on the CIT website. Since space in this book is limited, you may wish to answer these questions in your personal journal.

1. Bring to mind one of your resources. Try to imagine the resource in as much detail as possible. Either draw your resource in your journal or list some of the most vivid details of your resource.
2. Notice what is happening inside as you think about the resource and notice the sensations that are pleasant or neutral. If you find a pleasant or neutral sensation, stay with it for a few moments.
3. Write down the pleasant or neutral sensations that you noticed. It may be helpful to bring a resource to mind, track the sensations and write about it each time you journal.
4. Did you gain any insights from today's journal entries? If so, explain what insights you gained and why they might be valuable.



SERIES I: SELF-CULTIVATION

SKILL 1: CALMING BODY AND MIND

Before beginning to delve into personal cultivation, we must have the ability to recognize how our body and mind respond to stimuli that either activate us into an anxious state or dampen us down into a more depressive state. We act with greatest clarity when we are in the resilient zone, neither overly activated nor overly deflated. The content and skills taught in this section are designed to enable us to recognize bodily cues that indicate when we are moving out of our resilient zone and how to return to it. Practices such as grounding, tracking and resourcing are utilized to regulate the body and mind to achieve a calm yet alert state that is suitable for developing attention and other skills.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

Content

- Participants will learn about the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and the difference between its fight or flight response (sympathetic activation) and its rest and digest response (parasympathetic activation).
- Participants will learn about the three zones their body can be in (high, low and resilient) as a useful heuristic for understanding the ANS.

Practice

- Participants will learn how to both return to the resilient zone when they move outside of it and to expand their resilient zone through practice.

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A SECULAR ETHICS APPROACH TO CULTIVATING PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FLOURISHING

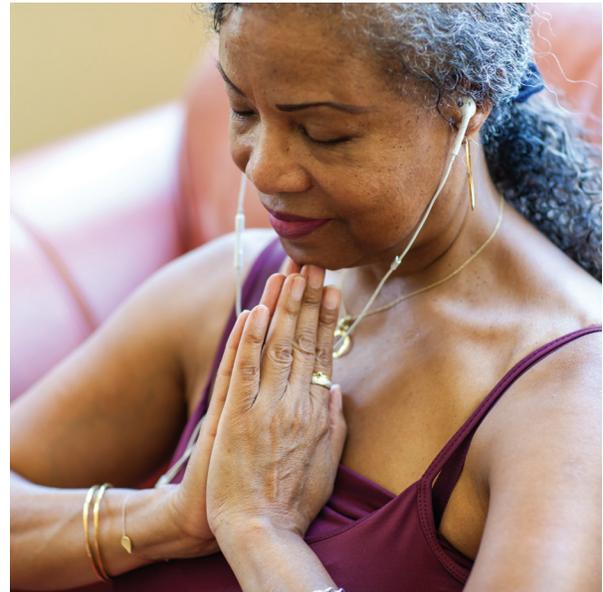
The first step in self-cultivation is developing the ability to calm the body and mind through an understanding of our nervous system. Our bodies and minds are deeply connected, and what we experience in one will have an immediate and automatic effect on the other. We start CIT with learning how to pay attention to our bodies, because our nervous systems react to external and internal stimuli very quickly. As such, our difficult emotions and thoughts often begin as bodily sensations. These bodily sensations can be the leading indicators of stress, anxiety, fear and depression. As we will see, our bodies can also alert us to our states of joy, calm and clarity.

The Nervous System

Ideally our nervous systems, and therefore our bodies and minds, operate in what can be called the “resilient zone.”⁴⁵ This is a state of being where we are able to feel a sense of clarity and calm, despite what might be going on in the external world. We are capable of making decisions in a rational way and not getting thrown off balance. We do not feel hyper-aroused, whereby our bodies are in a state of anxiety or panic, nor do we feel hypo-aroused, whereby our bodies are lethargic, depressed or dull. By learning to track our sensations, we can tell whether our body is in or out of its resilient zone. If we notice it is out of this zone, we can use practices to bring it back.

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is the part of our nervous system that controls our organs and automatic functions like breathing, heart rate, digestion, etc.

As a product of evolution, its purpose is to keep us alive by responding differently to situations of safety as opposed to situations of threat. It therefore has two pathways: the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the



parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).⁴⁶ Any time the body senses danger or a threat to its survival, it activates the sympathetic nervous system, more commonly known as the “fight or flight” system. The body releases hormones, adrenalin, cortisol and proinflammatory cytokines as it prepares for the possibility of the need to fight, run or repair itself. At the same time, it deactivates functions not needed in such situations: reducing digestion, sex-drive, growth, etc. It is easy to see why all mammals share similarities in the activation of their nervous system in this way: those who did not react with an appropriate stress response would have been less likely to survive when confronted with danger.

The other autonomic pathway, the parasympathetic nervous system, is activated when one senses safety. Here the body is ready to “rest and digest.” In this state, heart rate decreases, muscles relax, digestion increases and an overall sense of relaxation is experienced. When this system is activated, we

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feel more calm and balanced. In a healthy individual, the body naturally cycles back and forth between sympathetic and parasympathetic activation throughout the day, with brief periods of sympathetic activation (such as waking from sleep), followed by periods of relaxation. The problem comes when the body becomes dysregulated because one system is activated for too long or too much (i.e., too intensely). For example, while the “fight or flight” response is evolutionarily adaptive when a sabertoothed tiger is about to attack, it can be quite debilitating when it remains activated for extended periods of time due to workday stress, relationship issues or financial crisis. As social beings, our bodies seem not to distinguish between physical threat and psychological or social threats. Therefore, fear of embarrassment, failure or social rejection can be just as threatening to us as physical danger.

A useful heuristic is to think of the autonomic nervous system as being in one of three zones. We have mentioned the resilient zone, where we feel safe, confident and in control, and where we can make good decisions. The other two are the high zone, where we feel hyper-aroused, such as anxious, stressed, angry, nervous or agitated; and the low zone, where we feel hypo-aroused, lacking energy, lacking interest in activities and possibly depressed. If we are a human being with a body, then it is most likely that we are familiar with times when we felt stuck in the high zone or stuck in the low zone.

Tracking

What tells us whether we are in our resilient zone or not? Interestingly, because the autonomic nervous system evolved long before the higher regions of our brain, such as the cortex, we are not always conscious of whether it is exhibiting sympathetic or parasympathetic

activation. If we just think about what we’re feeling or what emotional state we may be in, our introspection can often be wrong. However, if we examine what sensations are taking place in our body, this provides far better clues. This is because, as Elaine Miller-Karas of the Trauma Resource Institute says, the body speaks the language of sensations.

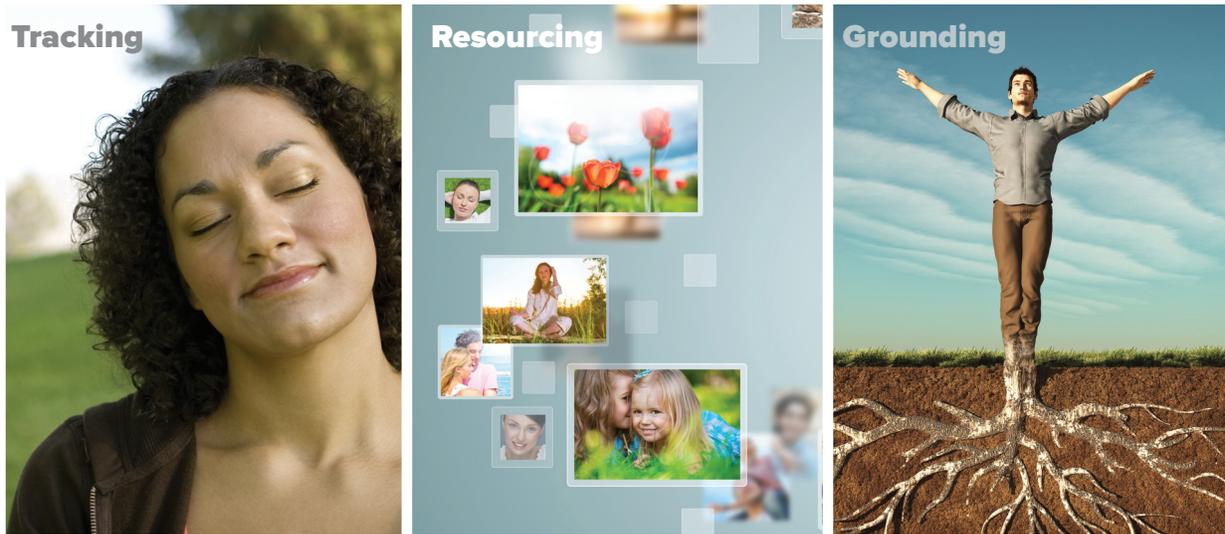
The practice of noticing sensations in the body is called “tracking.” Normally, we tend to use feeling and emotion words to describe what state we are in. For instance when someone asks us, “How are you today?” we might say, “I’m feeling good,” or “I’m feeling sad.” Rarely do we spend time acknowledging the physical sensations that are associated with “feeling good” or “feeling sad.” We can learn to do so, however, and developing this skill is enormously helpful in allowing us to know what state our body is in. Being able to recognize a warm sensation in the chest radiating out, or butterflies in one’s stomach, or the tightening or loosening of muscles gives us information about the body. As we learn about our bodies, we develop “body literacy.” We notice that our bodies are experiencing a whole host of sensations at every moment. Each sensation is giving us information about the state of our body. Interestingly, if we attend to unpleasant sensations and keep our attention on them, they have the potential to send us into the high or low zone. It is as if the body is sensing danger, and we are focusing on the threat. However, if we attend to neutral or pleasant sensations and remain with them, they have the potential to regulate our bodies and move us back into the resilient zone. When we do this, it is as if we are letting our bodies know that things are safe and okay.

Tracking, therefore, is the act of noticing the physical sensations that are occurring within the body in the



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present moment. It also involves recognizing if they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. As mentioned, if the sensation is pleasant or neutral, we can simply notice the sensation and then remain with it for a few moments. This period of remaining with the sensation helps our body recognize well-being. If the sensation is unpleasant, then we can redirect our attention, finding a place in the body that is pleasant, neutral or just somewhere that is less unpleasant than the original sensation. If we have chronic pain or discomfort across the body, there may be no place in the body that is pleasant or neutral, but there might be places in the body that are less unpleasant than other places, and we can place our attention there.

Resourcing

One effective way to move into or stay within the resilient zone is to come up with an external, internal or imagined resource that brings about a state of greater well-being, safety or security. External resources can be a memory, place or person that makes you feel better, or an activity

such as jogging, biking or swimming, that gives you a sense of greater well-being while you are engaging in it. Internal resources can be a part of oneself, like a characteristic one has (such as a sense of humor) or a part of one's body that is strong or healthy. Resources can be unique to each of us, and we can have multiple resources.

To practice resourcing, one brings the resource to mind as vividly as possible. The more detail that can be attributed to the resource, the stronger its effect. Recalling smells, sounds, tastes, physical sensations and colors will allow the resource to grow and strengthen. Once the resource is vivid, keep it in mind and engage in tracking — that is, notice what is happening inside the body in the present moment. Oftentimes, people mistakenly think resourcing involves thinking about how you felt when the event in your memory actually took place. But actually this practice involves noticing what is happening in one's body in the very moment that one is thinking of the resource.

Resources should be things that make us feel a bit better or safer when we think of them. But it's also possible that when we think of a resource, we experience unpleasant



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sensations. If this occurs, we can shift to a place in the body that feels more pleasant or neutral. Then, we can either go back to our resource or choose another resource to think about. Like all CIT skills, tracking and resourcing must be practiced and learned over time. Therefore, persistence is key.

It is also very helpful to learn tracking and resourcing with a partner. One of you will serve as the guide, and the other will engage in the resourcing and tracking. The guide can ask the practitioner to think of a resource, describe it and then notice the sensations that arise in the body. When facilitating with groups, one can ask each participant to draw their resource and then notice the sensations that arise for them when they share their resource drawing with others.

Grounding

Another skill to help regulate the nervous system is grounding. Grounding is the practice of noticing the direct contact of one's body with an object (including another part of the body) in order to bring oneself back to the present moment. When the nervous system is dysregulated, it can be helpful to notice a part of the body that feels grounding or that feels supported. For example, if you are sitting in a chair and your feet feel firm and supported on the ground, you can notice this sensation and sit with this for a few moments. As you sense into this part of the body that feels grounded, you may notice yourself relaxing and feeling more stable. This is another way of returning to or staying in the resilient zone.

Grounding is extremely helpful when someone feels anxious, "out of body," or when the person is having a difficult time sensing into the body. It is helpful to practice resourcing before grounding, because if the

body gets dysregulated while grounding, then we can use our resource as a tool to return to the resilient zone.

It's helpful to recognize that we engage in grounding practices naturally. For example, we may have a necklace, bracelet or other object that we instinctively touch or hold and that makes us feel more secure when we do so. We may cross our arms, or sit in a particular way. There may be objects that we like to keep with us because they make us feel more secure. When we consciously engage in grounding and combine it with tracking, we are strengthening our ability to regulate our nervous system consciously. Like any skill, it then develops through practice, and we become better and better at it. The advantage is that as our expertise grows, we can regulate our nervous system more quickly before we move into the high zone or low zone; or if we do find ourselves in one of these zones, we can move back into the resilient zone more quickly. This results in a healthier body and in better decision making.

The skills involved in Calming Body and Mind are useful in and of themselves in helping us to increase our overall well-being. They are also very useful as a preparation for the further practices in CIT. This is because dysregulation of our nervous system has the potential to bypass or short-circuit all other considerations. If we are stuck in the high zone, and therefore extremely agitated, we will be very limited in our ability to use discernment, understand our own and others' emotional states and make good decisions, and it will be hard for us to act with compassionate integrity for the benefit of ourselves and others. If we do learn to regulate our bodies, however, and then build on this to develop the other skills of CIT, then we are using the natural resilience of our bodies to practice self-care in a profound and meaningful way.

