



ORIGINAL
Tuning
BOARD™



Vertical Embodiment Resources and the Tuning Board

USING THE TUNING BOARD™ TO HELP THE BODY RECLAIM ITS PLACE AS PRIMARY RESOURCE

Managing a vertical relationship with gravity requires the following interrelated capacities described here as *Vertical Embodiment Resources*:

Balance:

- The ability to manage the polarity of stability and motion through the responsiveness of subtle adjustments happening throughout the body;

Grounding:

- a dynamic support system allowing the upper body to relax into a reliable and responsive foundation;

Orienting:

- The ability to orient vertically and relate to the environment while maintaining awareness of one's body and internal experience;

Spaciousness:

- The body expands, the spine lengthens, the breath is fuller, the mind is present.

Connection:

- Relationships and associations create a flow of movement and energy through the body, including spinal motility in its expression as a wave-like motion;

Centering:

- Functional symmetry and postural alignment;

Tone :

- Healthy myofascial tone and responsiveness; increased relaxation and freedom of movement through the support of properly toned intrinsic musculature and the release of functional restrictions.

BALANCE

- The ability to manage the polarity of stability and motion through the responsiveness of subtle adjustments happening throughout the body -

Balance is used here to describe that interplay of stability and motion which is the vertical human being's response to the field of gravity. Balance is not a stable, fixed state of alignment. Rather it is a never-ending series of subtle, fine adjustments to alignment that happen throughout the body. The experience of being a vertical human being is an experience of movement.

The human balance system is composed of integrated visual, vestibular, and proprioceptive functions that use multiple areas of the brain to integrate and process perceptive information. Note the combination of internal and external referencing functions needed for balance. In fact, optimal balancing could be said to rely on all of the other six vertical embodiment resources, beginning with the respective internal and external awareness of grounding and orienting. Spaciousness and connection are both needed for the flow of subtle movement. Centering and an optimal equilibrium of tone are what will ultimately make balance easy and pleasurable versus an energy-sapping struggle.

Psychological Implications of Balance

Balance relates to resiliency and an ability to manage the stability/motion polarity in multiple areas of life. Our sense of physical balance relates also to our sense of self. When we are managing that stability/mobility polarity successfully, then we are able to confidently orient in space, feeling secure about how we relate to our environment. An important repercussion of this is our ability to discern threat versus safety, and to confidently choose strategies of approach, avoidance, or other appropriate options. Our balance system is thus instrumental in helping us distinguish between self and other, between safety and danger.

Trauma and Balance

Whereas functional balancing is characterized by subtle adaptive motion, typical effects of trauma include immobility and dissociation. There is an inability to manage the task of integrating stability and motion. This often leads to either exaggerated fixation or instability. As rigidity or instability impede adequate balancing, the traumatized person loses the capacity to feel secure in his or her verticality and to relate confidently to his or her environment.

Using the Tuning Board to Encourage Balance

Through the Tuning Board experience, the client learns that balance is not an elusive, rigidly-held perfect posture. Rather, balance consists of the continual fine adjustments that compose the body's ongoing dance with gravity. As the client begins to access this sense of relative balance, the therapist may propose removing the visual support of the balance task by closing the eyes. This will heighten the client's sense of the capacity of the proprioceptive and vestibular systems to manage the balance task.

GROUNDING

- a dynamic support system allowing the upper body to relax into a reliable and responsive foundation;

Grounding refers to the human body's relationship to the earth, as its weight passes down through the base of support (feet) and into the ground. The support of grounding is the basis for verticality. The condition, structure, and responsiveness of the feet, ankles, and legs are key to the human capacity to be well-grounded. It is important to note that grounding does not equate with a rigid stability. Rather, it is dynamic and implies responsive motion, beginning with the feet, ankles, and lower legs.

Psychological Implications of Grounding

Grounding is the safe foundation from which the human being can successfully orient to the surrounding environment, recognizing and responding appropriately to safety or danger. Dynamic support from optimal grounding allows the upper body to be freer and more responsive, and therefore to more easily engage appropriately with the environment, leading in turn to a greater sense of safety and confidence. Being grounded implies a proprioceptive and kinesthetic awareness of one's own body as it relates and responds to gravity and experiences support from the ground.

Trauma and Grounding

When the body is expressing an experience of trauma, there may be a noticeable imbalance in the distribution of the weight of the body coming down through the feet. For example, there may be significantly more weight coming down through one leg than the other. There is little awareness of how the feet are contacting the ground and little motility through the many joints in the feet. Full contact with the ground may be impeded by functional restrictions related to memories, emotions, or the relation to the external space. There may be a sense of dissociation in relation to the feet and legs. The Earth and being grounded to it may in some way be perceived as threatening or unavailable.

Using the Tuning Board to Encourage Grounding

Because the user is required to respond to the continually moving surface of the Tuning Board, the responsiveness and sensing capacity of the feet, ankles, and lower legs increase. This responsiveness is further increased by upper-body tasks that demand even more lower body support. The therapist encourages the client to become aware of this responsiveness and support; this continues as an awareness of the relationship to the ground even after the person has dismounted the Tuning Board.

ORIENTING

- The ability to orient vertically and relate to the environment while maintaining awareness of one's body and internal experience;

When a person's orienting capacity is fully functional, then there is an ability to be simultaneously aware of and present in the external environment, as well as aware of and present in the internal experience of one's own body. In the upright standing posture, we have the potential to see and to relate to 360 degrees of the 3-dimensional space that surrounds us, as well as to what is above us and below us. Yet this potential is often not realized, due to limitations imposed by structural or functional restrictions that may be associated with traumatic patterning.

Psychological Implications of Orienting

This orienting capacity is key to appropriate responsive behaviors to safety or threats in the environment (approach, defense, or retreat). Orienting is a present-moment behavior, and therefore its encouragement as an embodied resource brings the person into the present. Because it is dependent on other vertical embodiment resources such as grounding, it also encourages a balanced awareness of internal experience and external conditions which supports affect regulation. Improving the orienting capacity also encourages greater awareness of and connection with others, thereby fostering the use of the social aspects of the autonomic nervous system, and lessening dependency on hyper and hypo-arousal as defense strategies. It is a resource that will encourage confidence and a sense of self. As we orient toward safety, a sense of connection or belonging with others is fostered, as well as an ability to relate functionally and emotionally to other human beings.

Trauma and Orienting

The traumatized person's spatial perceptions and kinesphere may be diminished. Certain directional segments may be unavailable, and the person may respond to this unavailability with avoidance, adapting their life to the traumatic orientation. This could relate to a particular traumatic event. For example, someone might no longer feel comfortable turning in a certain direction when driving after a car accident, a traumatic response which can in itself be dangerous. Hypervigilance is also a trauma reaction which relates to the orienting capacity. Hypervigilance, constriction, avoidance, dissociation and hyperarousal with respect to internal or external spaces can leave us vulnerable to stress and threat.

Using the Tuning Board to Improve Orienting Capacity

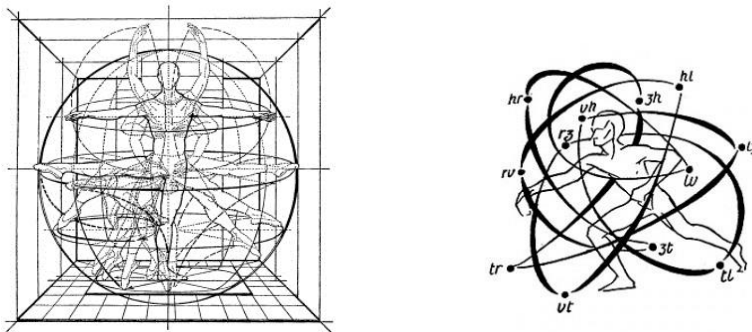
The Tuning Board's orienting task is that of fostering internal responsiveness simultaneously with external awareness of the environment. The relation between the vertical posture and orienting is implicitly and explicitly experienced, with the discovery that an erect posture facilitates a 360 degree range of vision more easily. This resource imparts an ability to evaluate the environment for safety or threat, enabling the person to respond appropriately to environmental conditions. It contributes to a secure sense of self and the ability to be fully present in the moment.

SPACIOUSNESS

- *The body expands, the spine lengthens, the breath is fuller, the mind is present.*

Internal spaciousness is experienced as a subtle openness in the joints that allows for freedom of movement. This creates room for the responsive micro-movements that establish functional grounding, and also allows the movements of the head, shoulders, pelvis and spine that are essential to ease of orienting. Internal spaciousness is important for breath, as the movement capacity of skeletal structures allows or inhibits ease of breathing and oxygen intake.

The external aspect of spaciousness is the body's capacity to interact with the environment through movement and gesture. When this is fully embodied, then one's full kinesphere is available for expression and interaction through the corporeal presence and movement.



Illustrations of the concept of "kinesphere." Adapted from "Space and relationship: An exploration of Laban's spatial concepts in current dance practice." Found online at <http://thespaceintherelationship.wordpress.com/kinesphere/>.

Psychological Implications of Spaciousness

Spaciousness is the body's natural response to a safe environment - the expansive posture of exploration, rest, play, learning, growth, and taking initiative to fill material and relational needs.

Trauma and Spaciousness

Spaciousness contrasts with contraction, a natural defensive fear response to threat. Where spaciousness may be represented in upstretched arms and an extended spine, the archetypal traumatic representation of fear and defensiveness is a hunching or curling forward to protect the vulnerable visceral area of the abdomen - a not uncommon somatic fixation.

Using the Tuning Board to Encourage Spaciousness

Increased spaciousness of the joints is coaxed by the subtle motion making its way up through the body, and then somatically rewarded with an awareness of more connection and motion as joints open up. This increase in inner spaciousness can be followed by therapist cues for larger movements. Interacting gesturally with the surrounding space while maintaining grounding through the ongoing balance task creates a sense of ownership of one's personal space, thereby increasing confidence and a secure sense of oneself and one's boundaries.

CONNECTION

- Relationships and associations create a flow of movement and energy through the body, including spinal motility in its expression as a wave-like motion;

Connection as used here relates closely to integration, and refers to the relating of parts to create a whole. As the motility of one joint relates to the motility of adjacent joints, movement is able to traverse and permeate a person's standing posture. The body becomes a living, moving whole, rather than a collection of disjointed or dissociated parts. Awareness of internal somatic relationships expands. Information (sensation) flows through the body.

Psychological Implications of Connection

Because emotions are experiences based in physical sensation, the creation of somatic connection or integration taps into emotional awareness. When emotions and their sensation-based felt sense become more available to conscious experience, then there is greater integration and connection between right and left brain hemisphere functions. The various channels of being (behaviors, emotions, sensations, thoughts, images, meaning, etc.) begin to integratively interact with one another. This cross-channel integration of movement and information is a foundation of human creativity, and leads to transformational experiences and insights.

Trauma and Connection:

The dissociation, hypertension, and constriction typical of trauma states are all signs of disconnection. They contrast with the fluidity, resiliency, and flow that occur when the body is integrated and connected. On the Tuning Board, it is possible for both client and practitioner to recognize where the movement is not connecting through. Areas of disconnection represent stressful fixations that can be addressed through movement.

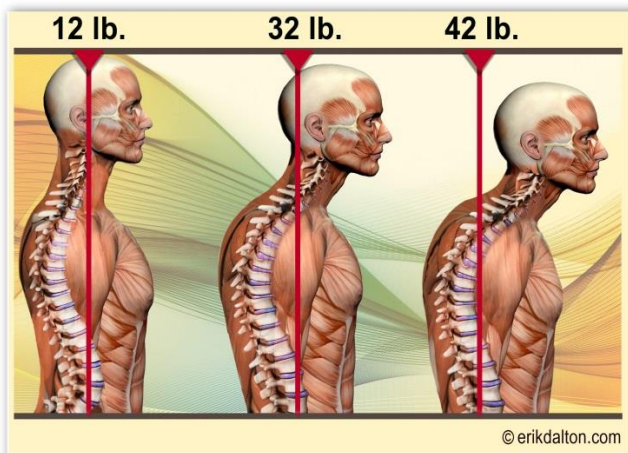
Using the Tuning Board to Encourage Connection

The Tuning Board increases the body's capacity for subtle motion and the flowing transmission of movement throughout by persistently confronting fixations with gentle, continual movement. Therapist and client observe a gradually increasing sense of connection in the client's body, beginning at the feet and working its way up to the head. Eventually, vertical integration triumphs as fixations begin to open and wave-like motions are seen and felt in the client's increasingly responsive and available body. Dissociation and disconnection are replaced with integration and awareness of the wholeness of the body. This in turn leads to a better capacity to connect to the world around.

CENTERING

- *Functional symmetry and postural alignment;*

Centering, long used as a psychological metaphor, may be visualized as the organization of the body around a vertical center line. It implies a functional symmetry and balance of the body's principle masses (pelvis, thorax, and head). A well-centered body manages verticality more efficiently, expending less energy than one that is poorly centered. Additionally, when the head is centered over the spine, its range and ease of motion are improved, enhancing orienting capacity and thus improving one's presence in and awareness of the environment. Centering facilitates connection and integration, because movement transmission improves with alignment.



This wonderful illustration of why a less-centered posture uses more energy is provided courtesy of Erik Dalton.

Psychological Implications of Centering

Improved centering means more energy is available to manage problems and cope with stress. Better alignment also promotes greater balance of myofascial tone in the body. Centeredness feels good. When centered, we feel more at ease, and more responsive and open to life.

Trauma and Centering:

Off-center patterns may relate back to defensive movement expressions unable to complete at the time of the trauma. Traumatic experiences and stress tend to isolate areas of the body from one another and set up unbalanced patterns of compensation. A lack of centering may be associated with fatigue, anxiety, dissociation, depression, and an inability to feel at home in the body.

Using the Tuning Board to Encourage Centering

Some centering is inherently required by the Tuning Board, because any large imbalance will tilt it and stop its motion. More subtle imbalances are addressed as the motility fed up through the body coaxes the release of restrictions that keep the body off-center. Therapists can also train clients to experience and recognize off-center patterns related to traumatic fixations. The client is taken completely into the pattern, then opposite the pattern, in order to discover a truer center.

TONE

- Healthy myofascial tone and responsiveness; increased relaxation and freedom of movement through the support of appropriately toned musculature and the release of functional restrictions.

Optimal myofascial tone could be described as a readiness in the tissue to respond appropriately to environmental or behavioral needs, or the quality of engagement that permits or inhibits movement. It would represent a balance between sufficient tone for an adequate response of movement and strength, yet the ability to access relaxation and rest when appropriate. This balance of tone also refers to balance between opposing muscles groups, as well as between extrinsic and intrinsic muscles. It also refers to balance between the left and right sides of the body, the front and back, and the upper and lower body. Put simply, healthy tone means that tissue is not too strong, nor too weak, neither too stiff, nor too slack. There is a sense of “springy” responsiveness to it in relation to the demands of movement or gravity.

Psychological Implications of Tone

Unbalanced myofascial tension has been noted as an accompaniment to a number of psychological disorders. Relaxation exercises not associated with verticality have been used for many years to address tone issues involved in such disorders, but with little consideration for the individual nature of imbalances that develop due to life history and circumstances. Indeed, over the course of life, the body’s tissue is continually adjusting and fixating in order to accommodate mishaps, trauma, or ongoing repetitive habits. Compensations of myofascial tension are created which may persist even after physical damage has healed. With improved balance of tone and release of compensations, there is a greater sense of freedom. Actions feel as though they contain more possibility. There is more room for joy, pleasure, and gratitude. A sense of exhilaration may come with the realization that the body is able to learn a new way of being as patterns change.

Trauma and Tone

Immobilized patterns of fight or flight can be observed as a battle of hypertoned and constricted tissue fighting against gravity. Incomplete defensive reactions can continue as myofascial tonus patterns that are a part of the nervous system’s ongoing attempt to protect against a danger that no longer exists. Challenging emotional reactions cause the body’s tissues to become less balanced and to experience less ease of movement. This is especially seen in flexion of the body, a curling postural pattern that represents a need for greater emotional security or protection. Unresolved defensive patterns monopolize a person’s energy and contribute to fatigue or exhaustion, leaving one less able to respond appropriately to any given stimulus.

Using the Tuning Board to Encourage Healthy Myofascial Tone

Initial efforts to control the Tuning Board typically are based in conscious, effortful patterns of extrinsic muscular control. Yet proficiency progresses through release into implicit responses that are unconsciously governed by reflex processes. This induces a deeper understanding of and trust in the body. The Tuning Board can be used to teach clients how to work with personal myofascial tonus patterns to support and improve both centering and muscular relaxation.