

## TUNING IN TO OUR BODIES

by Deb Elkin, LPC

Your body has many messages for you. It tells you when you are tired, when you are tense or overwhelmed, when you are scared, when you are angry, when you are excited – IF you know how to listen to it! When you learn how to listen to your body, life will get easier for you. You will be healthier. You will be happier and more clear headed. You will live more honestly and with more personal integrity in your life. You will make better decisions. And you will be more at peace with yourself because you are listening to and responding to yourself. That will generate more self-respect.

Listening to your body means you must give yourself time to be present to it, take time to breathe into it, and learn how to read its messages. It doesn't require a lot of time. More, it requires familiarity with how your body talks to you, what its language is.

Many of us have “disconnected” from our bodies. We ignore them. We don't take care of them. Sometimes we even forget that we live in a body! And when we do this, we leave an important piece of ourselves behind.

How does that happen that we so ignore and disregard our “home”? (Our body is our home you know.) Sometimes the pace of our every day lives keeps us so busy, so “in our heads”, that it doesn't even occur to us to think about or feel our body. Sometimes we don't much like our body, and so we choose to ignore it. And sometimes, our growing up experiences (from abuse to shaming messages we got about our body or about who we are), have made us feel uncomfortable and that it is not safe to live consciously in our body.

Reclaiming life in your body can be quite a challenge! It can be scary. It can be quite exciting. It certainly may be unfamiliar. Sometimes we may need the help of a counselor or therapist to help create enough safety to go back inside.

So how do you begin to reclaim and re-inhabit your body? You know those headaches and stomach aches you get? That's your body talking to you. High blood pressure, knots in your stomach, clenched teeth, chronic shoulder, neck or back pain, feeling run down or exhausted, lethargy, difficulty focusing or paying attention, constant illnesses – these are ALL ways in which your body is trying to tell you something. It is letting you know that it isn't happy with someone or something in your life.

So your first job is to begin to learn how your body typically talks to you. Once you get familiar with that “language”, then it's time to figure out exactly what it is your body is trying to tell you. And from there, you can figure out what it is you want to or need to do about it.

For me, one of my sure fire messages that there is something wrong is that my chest gets very tight. When that happens, I've learned that it usually means I am scared about something. Knowing that, I can figure out what's got me scared and then decide what I

want to do about it. It may be about taking a particular action or it may simply be that I need to reassure the scared kid inside of me that I'll protect her and she's going to be OK.

So begin to get familiar with how your body speaks to you. Some ways will be obvious. Others will reveal themselves over time. What's most important is that you continue to pay attention. Begin to notice if there is a theme or pattern to what you feel when that particular "symptom" shows itself to you. Then pay attention to who or what has you unhappy or stressed or angry in your life. Know that it may be a current situation or it may be something old and unfinished that is resurfacing. And finally, decide what needs to happen to "alleviate the pain."

A friend of mine today was telling me today about a very important decision she is trying to make, and her words were, "My body is screaming at me!". What her body was screaming was, "Don't do it!" Her body clearly knew what her head did not.

Your body carries an innate wisdom, a gut knowing, about what is right or wrong for you. When you live in your body and learn to listen to its messages, you become more fully present to yourself and you live more fully and consciously in the world.

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