



EXERCISE

Breathing & Moving with Our Climate Emotions

by Bonita Eloise Ford

Find a quiet space where you can do this exercise alone. Choose a time when you have no commitments.

Dress comfortably. Have some water as well as paper and a pencil/pen nearby.

Take care of yourself and ease off if any part of this exercise is too much for you. Read through the entire description below before getting started.

Take a moment to notice how you feel right now. What is the intensity/volume of your feeling on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being mild/quiet and 10 being very strong/loud)? Write down your feeling and the number.

Sit or stand comfortably. Start by observing your breath. Notice the inhale and exhale. Feel the physical sensations of breathing. Invite the breath to be a little bit slower and softer than before. Take several breaths in this way.

Briefly, turn your thoughts to the state of the Earth and the climate. What do you feel? Take a moment to identify the feeling. (You might find it helpful to look at the list of “Feelings when our needs are not met” on page 3.)

Ask yourself to really feel the emotion in your body for one full inhale and one full exhale.


Now, let your body move (or imagine doing so). You can stretch, wiggle, and/or shake (or imagine doing so). Simply follow the impulses of your body. You might have tension, contraction, or bracing from the emotion. Let your body move it out. Make any movements to help your body let go, expand, or soften a bit more than before. Remember, the movement does not have to be or look like anything in particular. Slowly, as your body is ready, come back to stillness.

Next, think of a time when you felt really happy, hopeful, or inspired. Immerse yourself in that experience. Remember any colours, sounds, smells, and/or tastes associated with that memory. Let your imagination fill in the gaps. You feel really happy, hopeful, or inspired. Feel the sensations in your body. Breathe with that and soak that in.

Gently, bring your attention back to the breath. Notice the inhale and the exhale, inviting the sensations to be soft and slow.

If that is enough for you today, you can end the practice here.





If you would like to continue, you can repeat the sequence again:

- **Breathe.**
- *Think about the **Earth and climate.***
- *Notice the **feeling.***
- **Move** the body.
- *Connect with a **happy** experience.*
- **Breathe** again.

When you are ready to finish your practice for today, take a few moments to focus on slow and soft breathing.

Notice how you feel now. What is the intensity/volume of your feeling on a scale of 1 to 10? Write down your feeling and the number.

Afterwards, you may wish to write, draw, drink some water, or go for a walk.

ADVANCED VARIATION

Once you've tried and feel comfortable with this practice, you might try the following variation.

The purpose of this variation is to strengthen your capacity to experience uncomfortable emotions. However, it is important that you be mindful of and gentle with yourself so you do not create additional stress or distress.

Read through the entire description below before getting started.

Start the sequence as described above and “feel the emotion in your body for ONE full inhale and ONE full exhale.”

Then, repeat the sequence and “feel the emotion in your body for TWO full inhales and TWO full exhales.”

On your next repetition of the sequence, “feel the emotion in your body for THREE full inhales and THREE full exhales.”

At any time, listen to yourself and stop when you've had enough.

Do something grounding and supportive for yourself afterwards.

FEELINGS when our needs are NOT met

- **afraid** * dread * panicked * scared * terrified * worried
- **annoyed** * frustrated * impatient * irritated
- **angry** * furious * outraged * resentful
- **confused** * hesitant * lost * torn
- **disconnected** * distracted * indifferent * numb * withdrawn
- **disgusted** * hate * horrified
- **disturbed** * shocked * troubled * uncomfortable * unsettled * upset
- **embarrassed** * ashamed * guilty
- **fatigue** * burnt out * depleted * exhausted * tired
- **pain** * devastated * grief * heartbroken * hurt * lonely * regretful
- **sad** * depressed * despair * disappointed * discouraged * hopeless
- **tense** * anxious * distressed * nervous * overwhelmed * stressed
- **vulnerable** * fragile * helpless * insecure
- **yearning** * jealous * longing * nostalgic

Adapted from the Center for Nonviolent Communication, copyright 2005.
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RESOURCES

If you appreciated this exercise and would like to go deeper, check out:

- Bonita's book, *Embers of Hope: Embracing Life in an Age of Ecological Destruction and Climate Chaos*.
- *Embers of Hope* video (10 minutes): https://youtu.be/FR8bkH6Xiqo?si=09dnSehN71YJv_ZB
- "Engaging with Climate Emotions" session recording (1 hour): <https://youtu.be/lZckSq93WRo?si=mcNcg45gACn19N4u>
- Bonita on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ourlivinghearth/>

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Listen to your needs and take care of yourself. If you are having a hard time and don't have access to a safe and supportive person to talk with, here are a few 24/7 help lines:

- Talk Suicide Canada, call 1-833-456-4566.
- In the USA: Suicide and crisis lifeline, call 988. SAMHSA's National Helpline, call 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

To look for a help line in another country:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_suicide_crisis_lines
- <https://findahelpline.com/>



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WRITING PROMPTS

You can respond to the questions in the space below or write more in a journal.

How did you feel before, during, and after the practice?

What did you notice about yourself?

Did anything surprise you?

What do you struggle with most in relation to our climate and ecological crises?

What might you do to take care of yourself? Which of these things could you do alone and which require collaboration with others? Write “a” beside the things you could do alone and “c” beside the things you could do with others.

What might you do to help take care of your community? Which of these things could you do alone and which require collaboration with others? Write “a” beside the things you could do alone and “c” beside the things you could do with others.

What might you do to help take care of the Earth? Which of these things could you do alone and which require collaboration with others? Write “a” beside the things you could do alone and “c” beside the things you could do with others.

