

Healing Skills Summary and Self-Assessment

Healing is a process of cultivating and bringing together four basic transformational skills. I support people in cultivating these four skills, and in bringing these skills together to have powerful and deep healing experiences.

Your Nervous System Needs an Outlet to Heal

Why are these skills important? Together, these four skills form a quality of attention that allows the nervous system's inherent capacity to resolve uncomfortable emotions to work. It does this by allowing the feeling of discomfort to fully be felt and expressed - for the internal stress to be discharged. For example, crying, shaking, shouting, sighing, hitting (pillows or other safe surfaces), are all ways the nervous system tries to resolve emotional distress.

Many People and Cultures Don't Understand How the Nervous System Works

Cultures (and many families and caretakers) often overtly or subtly shame and condemn such discharging behaviors as being wrong, weak, or weird, and as a result condition a lot of people into believing their natural body's responses are not okay. This makes it very difficult for those people to have some way of discharging and relieving their distress. As a result, I often run into people who are stuck in the paradigm that distress can only be managed or should be ignored, rather than giving that distress an appropriate outlet to be fully expressed and in doing so, be resolved. Emotional distress doesn't go away when we ignore or manage it.

People also are often confused about their emotional discomfort - they try to avoid it or see it as an obstacle to feeling better, but often our emotional discomfort is the very attempt of the nervous system to recover from difficult experiences and feel better.

The 4 Healing Skills:

1. **Inhabiting** - The capacity to focus on sensations and feelings in our bodies without getting overly distracted with thoughts (what you can feel, you can heal)
2. **Awareness** - The capacity to notice if we are resisting an experience or not, and if we are resisting, to shift our attention to understanding our resistance, rather than trying to resist resistance (What you Resist, Persists)
3. **Compassion** - The capacity to access a feeling of self-compassion or self-love, and/or receive care and compassion from others in a viscerally felt way
4. **Surrender** - The capacity to fully feel and express an experience (typically an experience of stored discomfort) such that it intensifies, plateaus, dissipates, and transforms. The opposite of manipulating, fixing, managing, or controlling an experience.

The first 3 skills can be used in any order, however, surrender always comes last as to avoid the possibility that we may use any of the prior skills to attempt to manipulate or control our experience.

Healing Skills are Hard-Earned

While the above four skills may sound simple, they are typically hard-earned. Most people I know that have facility with these skills have achieved mastery over long periods of time through regular body-oriented practices such as meditation, chi-gong, tai-chi, yoga, etc...or have been in environments that have in some way cultivated these skills (including having positive upbringing and good parenting). Unfortunately, most societies don't educate people about the significance of these four skills, and so their development is typically neglected. These skills are often learned through interaction with other people we feel connected and safe with.

If the skills are new to you, it can take time to develop them until you can consistently have transformational or healing experiences. It's best to approach development of these skills as a long-term process.

The Skills Make Healing Possible

Once someone reaches a certain threshold of capacity with all four skills, the skills can be brought together to have a very fluid, powerful, and consistent experience of transformation and healing. The combination of the skills creates a kind of pipeline that can be used for a tremendous amount of healing and personal empowerment in a short period of time. We need the 4 skills and an appropriate place/environment to express and resolve our uncomfortable feelings in order to heal.

The Cost of Neglecting the 4 Skills

Neglecting these skills can lead to long-term accumulation of stress that can cause health issues as well as low self-esteem, and prevent you from having fulfilling relationships, and prevent you from realizing your full potential in the world and your life.

The Four Skills in Action

Here is a simple example that shows how the four skills come together: Sam notices that as he is preparing to give a public presentation/talk, he is struggling to make the presentation “perfect”. Noticing that the task is no longer enjoyable, he brings his attention to his body, only to find that he is feeling a lot of uncomfortable nervousness. (Inhabiting)

Upon paying closer attention he finds that his natural response to the nervousness is to try to get it to go away, ignore it, and “fix” it by making the presentation perfect. He realizes that a resistant part of him believes that the nervousness will overwhelm him, and that’s why he tries to fix or change his nervousness. He realizes though, that trying to resist his nervousness actually makes it worse (what you resist, persists). Having caught himself trying to make the nervousness go away, he now instead shifts his attention to the resistance. (Awareness)

He reassures the resistant part of himself that he will be okay and that the nervousness is a natural response his body is having that he doesn’t need to resist, and that he needs to allow his body to have that full response and emotions that come with the nervousness so that they can resolve and pass away. (Compassion)

The resistance loosens as he does this, so he turns his attention to the nervousness in a gentle way. He finds that the nervousness is a younger part of himself that is scared of being judged by others and being socially ostracized. He realizes that some part of him must have had an experience of being ostracized as a result of speaking publicly in front of people in the past, and is having a similar response to the prospect of giving his presentation. He gives compassion to this part of himself, and soothes it. (Compassion)

As he continues to give it compassion, the nervousness intensifies, turning to fear, and then to hurt and sadness. He cries, and the sensations/emotions increase, plateau, and then decrease in intensity. He feels relief from the crying. (Surrender)

Sam realizes he most likely won’t be socially ostracized from the talk he is going to give, but that even if not everyone enjoys his talk, he will be able to care for, and give connection to the part of himself that is scared of being ostracized. He finds that as he returns to working on his presentation, he experiences much less nervousness and the task is enjoyable again. (Healing and Transformation)

Self Assessment

Frequency of Transformational or Healing Experiences:

1. In general how often do you have transformational healing experiences? How often do you get to have a full expression of your emotional experience - you get to cry, grieve, be fully expressed in your anger or frustration, fear, terror, etc...in a way that is relieving?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Frequently

2. When was the last time you had an experience like that?

Inhabiting:

3. How easy is it for you to focus on your body sensations/emotions without getting overly distracted by your thoughts?

Difficult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Easy

(If you are unsure of this take a few minutes to do a simple body-awareness meditation, focus on the sensations/emotions that you feel inside the core of your body, and notice when thoughts come into the foreground distracting you from those sensations, pushing them into the background. See if you can catch this when it happens and bring the sensations and emotions of your body back into the foreground of your attention without being distracted by your thoughts for a long time. How easy is it for you to do this?)

Awareness:

4. When you consciously experience uncomfortable sensations or emotions, are you usually aware of how you try to resist them - push them away, maybe even shame yourself, try to ignore them, or make them disappear and go away?

Unaware 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Aware

5. When you catch yourself resisting an emotion or discomfort you are having - do you take a moment to become aware of your resistance so that you can understand and disarm the resistance?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always

6. Do you understand the following?:

-Holding uncomfortable sensations “at bay” or distracting from them may be necessary in the short term (like while driving, working, or circumstances you believe may generally be unsafe emotionally or otherwise)

-However, in the long-term, pushing away, resisting, and not dealing with uncomfortable feelings leads to further suffering by creating more emotional baggage for you to deal with (What you Resist, Persists). Emotions don’t magically disappear when you push them away. They resolve over time when you fully face and feel them within a sense of safety and compassion or connection.

Yes / No

Compassion:

7. How often do you experience a sense of self-compassion, or self-love in your everyday life? (You may experience this as a localized or general feeling, or as thoughts: “I’m a mess, but I love myself”)

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Frequently

8. How often do you experience a feeling of being cared for, seen, or receive a visceral sense of compassion from others in your everyday life?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Frequently

9. If you take a moment right now to invoke a feeling of self-compassion or self-love for yourself, how easy is it for you to do that? (It may help to recite a mantra as is done in loving-kindness meditation: “May this good being be well and happy” or to visualize a loving presence - person, deity, energy, force, etc... - being with or enfolding you)

Difficult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Easy

Surrender:

10. How often do you internally “parent” and soothe parts of yourself that may be stuck in overwhelming experiences in the past by bringing compassion to discomfort and allowing the discomfort to be fully experienced and then pass away? (Allowing the body to naturally resolve the uncomfortable emotion or experience)

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always

11. Do you generally relate to all of your negative emotions as something that will come and go, rather than be worried about whether you will be overwhelmed by them, stuck in them, whether they will be a bottomless pit, etc...?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always

Application of The 4 Skills

12. Where in your life do you find it easy to apply the four skills together so that your nervous system has an outlet to heal? Do you have a regular place/environment to do this? Please Describe:

13. Where in your life do you find it challenging to apply the four skills together and need to work on developing an outlet for your nervous system to heal? Please Describe:

Closing Comments:

I hope you have found this self-assessment useful or eye-opening in some way as a window into how much you actually behave in alignment with the nervous system's capacity to heal itself out of emotional distress.

Please note that many people have an easier or harder time doing these skills by themselves than with the help of another person. The self-assessment gives us a general sense of what capacities you have, and what you might want to work on further. It is also normal that the varying intensity of challenges in our lives may make it more or less difficult to access certain skills during certain periods of our life. Just because you might have difficulty accessing a capacity right now doesn't mean that it is now gone, or that any work you have done around that capacity in the past isn't useful.

If you find that you have limited skillfulness in a particular area, it may take some time for you to master that internal skill set.

I can guide you around what practices and understanding of your internal landscape you will need in order to gain facility with that skill set.