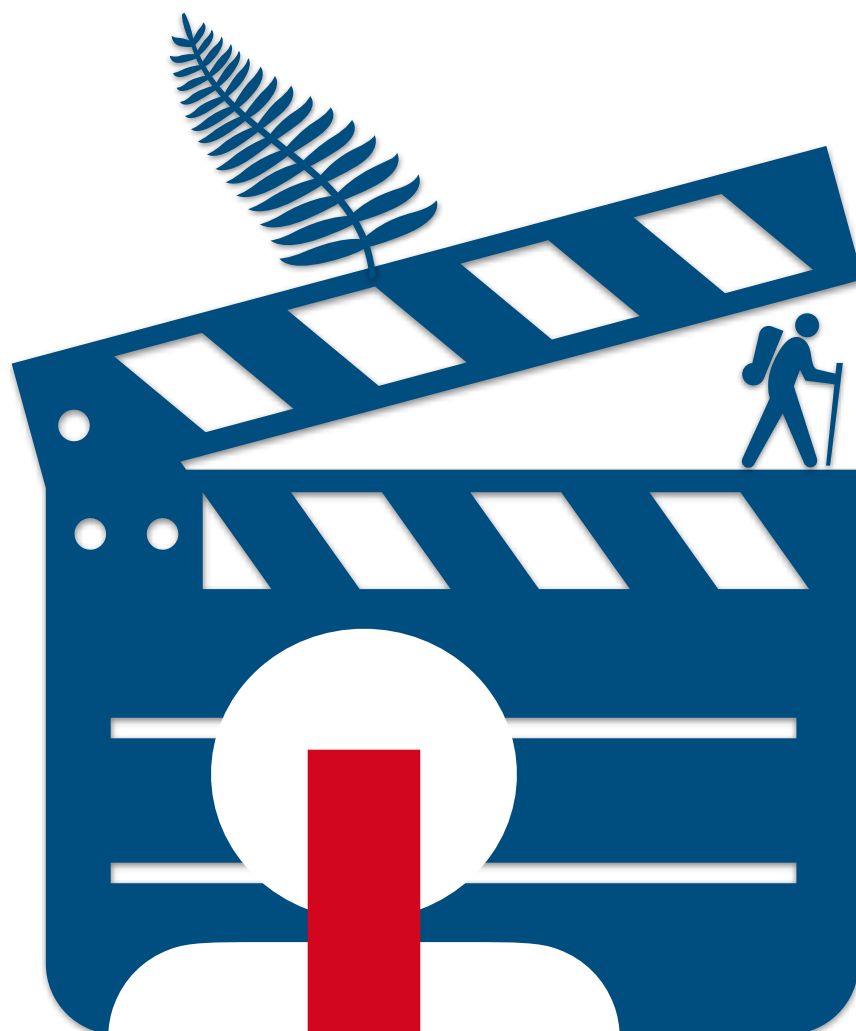
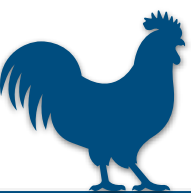


BODY comes to **MIND**



CENTERING GUIDE

RECLAIM your CENTER



RECLAIM your CENTER

Does any of this sound familiar?

I struggle with feeling drained at the end of the day. Is there something that I can do differently to feel more energetic?

I want to communicate better and experience less conflict.

I have trouble speaking up when I need to. How can I get better at that?

I don't want to be such a perfectionist, but I don't know how to stop.

I want to be more connected to myself and have the ability to bring others along with me.

I want to be able to navigate uncertainty and complexity in my work.

I want to have a better balance between my work and home life. How can I do that?

These are the most frequently asked questions and struggles presented by our clients. And they all boil down to this:

“How can I get from REACT ability to RESPONSE ability?”

Increasing your self-awareness provides you with information to help resolve these issues. Recognizing and interpreting the information your body provides offers tools for sustainable change. It is a key component for effectively leading yourself and others. In our complex and changing world, relying on our intellect is not enough. We need the body on board. Increasing self-awareness starts with embodied awareness.

This guide gives you a key ingredient to do just that!



WHEN THE BODY COMES TO MIND

“I think, therefore I am.”

René Descartes’ (1596 – 1650) famous proposition has kept us in our head for most of our lives. From an early age our success is based on intellectual knowledge and skill. We devalued the importance of the body and because of that, lost a vital connection with ourselves.

The world has become increasingly complex and change happens at light speed. It often leaves us behind, feeling drained and a bit lost. We become stuck. We don’t have the flexibility and stamina we need to navigate the challenge. The human and corporate costs of getting left behind are enormous, both emotionally and fiscally.

Pressure activates our automatic stress response, also known as being “triggered.” When our system is preoccupied with reacting to pressure we are less effective. This becomes evident in the quality of our collaboration, the accuracy of our work and through our ability to manage setbacks.

MAKING A SHIFT

To successfully navigate uncertainty and complexity we need our body on board. By re-establishing the connection between our head and our body we can tap into a fresh and reliable source of knowledge and wisdom. Our body provides us with immediate access to information that will help us to:

- *Understand our unique reaction patterns*
- *Develop self-awareness and self-confidence*
- *Improve our ability to be present, flexible, and communicate clearly*
- *Clarify our decision making*



- *Create sustainable change in our lives*
- *Align with our values and allow us to be more open and light in the face of conflict and change*
- *Create collaboration between our intellectual, emotional and physical intelligence*

Developing embodied awareness profoundly impacts our ability to connect with ourselves and others. Developing embodied awareness profoundly impacts our ability to be our best selves.

WHAT THIS GUIDE PROVIDES

To align the body and mind we need to be able to shift our attention to our body. A simple practice to do this is what we call “*centering*.” Centering is the first step to unlocking the power of the connection between the mind and the body. It helps to improve our clarity, expand our options, and develop a greater sense of ease in our lives.

In the following pages we cover the what and how of centering:

1 | WHAT IS CENTERING? pages 4-7

2 | HOW DO I CENTER? pages 8-14

3 | HOW DO I USE CENTERING? page 15

4 | WHAT’S THE NEXT STEP? pages 16



1 | WHAT IS CENTERING?

FOCUSING ATTENTION

Centering is a term often heard in the context of contemplation and concentration practices, and is an important part of various martial arts. Centering helps us access an alternate state of being by quieting the busy mind. It allows another intelligence to come forth. A skilled martial artist understands that in unpredictable, pressured and complex situations, intellect alone is not enough. The cognitive process is not fast enough and often increases tension. The more tension there is in the body, the less able we are to respond effectively.

The increasing speed of world change presents us with more uncertainty and complexity than ever before. To deal effectively with change we need to build our capacity to use our emotional and physical intelligence as well as our intellect. Centering helps us do that.

Centering is an attention exercise. We shift our attention from our head — where we generally reside — to a point situated just below our belly button called the “*hara*.”

FOCUSING ON THE HARA

The word *hara* originates from the Japanese medical and martial arts traditions and refers to the area of the soft belly. Here we use *hara* in reference to a location just below the belly button. As the physical center of the body, according to eastern philosophy, the *hara* is the place where life energy originates.

By dropping our attention and connecting with the *hara* we can access an open and alert presence. The effect of centering is elucidated through comparison and contrast.



UNCENTERED vs CENTERED

UNCENTERED

During your presentation you are aware of someone who is not listening as attentively as you'd like him to . . . Your colleague is interrupting your work flow and you become irritated . . . You punish yourself for not being able to say "no," again! . . . These relatively minor occurrences upset and unbalance your day.

You might even notice a physical stress reaction: Your mouth is dry, you begin to sweat or you feel a knot tightening in your stomach. Most of the time you get into your head, start thinking and rationalizing, and it is difficult to silence the internal critic.

CENTERED

You felt a sense of ease and flow during your presentation. You were able to connect with your listeners, hold eye contact, smile, and knew you were providing useful information . . . During a tense moment with your colleague you were able to withhold from reacting and later realized you had a greater understanding of where they were coming from . . . You are grateful because instead of "letting it go," again, you were able to calmly state your needs . . . You notice that your day was spent in an open, present and curious place.

Centering allows you to experience the present moment, to become aware of how situations and people are affecting you. You begin to choose how to respond instead of being at the mercy of your habitual reaction patterns. Centering is a relatively easy skill to learn. Benefiting from centering, however, requires cultivation and practice. By incorporating centering throughout your day you will quickly notice a positive effect.



DO I NEED TO BE CENTERED THE WHOLE DAY?

Centering is not a permanent state but an attention skill. It is impossible to focus your attention on your hara continuously. Even the most trained martial artists are not attempting to do that.

To paraphrase Morihei Ueshiba, founder of the Japanese martial art of Aikido and a superb martial artist: *It's not that I don't get off center, it's that I regain center so quickly it's not noticeable.*

The more we are able to practice getting in touch with our center, and returning to a sense of center when we realize we have lost it, the quicker we are able to do so over time and bring ourselves back to a more balanced and aligned state.



LEVELS OF CENTERING

There are three levels of centering, each one building on the next.

LEVEL 1

The basic level of centering helps you to connect to your body. It's where you drop from your thinking self to your feeling self. Your head quiets and you become more capable of listening, both to yourself and to others.

People report they feel more stable, stronger and calm when they are able to connect to their center. Centering increases self confidence and ease of decision making. It enables you to say no, and to be more flexible in the face of setbacks.

LEVEL 2

The next level of centering moves from connecting with yourself to applying centering in relationships and with the world around you. Can you stay connected to yourself while dealing with the circumstances at hand? What happens when you are pressured or become irritated? Are you able to maintain connection with yourself while connecting with others?

Centering in Level 2 will have a positive effect on your communication with others, on your ability to receive feedback and to act effectively in stressful situations.

LEVEL 3

Level 3 centering cultivates connection with your core values and aligns your intellectual, emotional and physical intelligences. It improves your sense of self direction and builds your inner strength and perseverance. It connects you with the best of you!

By working up from the core centering practice to advanced centering, you will find that your purpose is more accessible, that you find yourself regretting a decision or comment less and less frequently, that you are more satisfied in your personal and professional lives.



2 | HOW DO I CENTER?

In this section we will share two centering practices. We start with a Level 1 exercise involving a core centering practice. The second gives you access to Level 2, where you increase connection between you and the world around you.

EXERCISE 1

Experiencing the Difference Between Head and Hara

The objective of this exercise is to clarify the distinction between focusing your attention in your body or focusing on your head, where we typically reside. When you are unfamiliar with centering we recommended starting your centering practice by repeating this exercise on a daily basis for at least two weeks. At the end of that time you will find you can more easily determine where you are focusing your attention and are able to bring your attention to your center more readily.

PREPARATION

In the beginning it is best to practice in a quiet room without too much distraction. You can practice sitting or standing. In general we have found that as a beginner it is easier to access the sensations in standing. Closing your eyes also makes it easier to sense your body. Once you feel comfortable doing this Level 1 exercise with your eyes closed, start practicing with your eyes open. It is important to be able to center when you let the world in!

PRACTICE: Connecting Head and Hara

- *Take a stable stance with your feet apart at shoulder width. Close your eyes and allow them sink into your eye sockets. Drop your jaw (your mouth might open slightly) and allow your shoulders to soften and lower.*
- *Place your hands just below your belly button and take a couple of deep breaths. Behind your hands imagine a marble, a point of radiating warmth or expanding light.*



- *marble, a point of radiating warmth or expanding light. Bring your attention down to your hands, descending from your head.*
- *Feel the weight of your body down to the soles of your feet.*
- *Ask yourself the following core questions:
How stable am I?
Am I able to feel my body?
Where is the tension in my body?
How am I breathing?
What am I thinking about*
- *Now shift all your attention to your head, just behind your eyes. Check in again, asking the questions above. What has changed, if anything?*
- *Take a long exhale and drop your attention down into your belly again. Connect to the marble, warmth or light. Other visualizations that people have found helpful are imagining dropping a stone or emptying a bucket of water into the belly.*
- *Repeat this process a couple of times, alternating between your head and hara. Pay attention to the recurring changes by asking yourself the core questions after each shift of attention.*
- *Always end with your attention in your hara!*

How did this exercise change your thoughts and sensations?

People often report feeling calmer and more stable and powerful through core centering. One participant described it as being on vacation in her own belly!

Although most people experience being centered and connected to their hara as more pleasant, it might be different for you. If you are a particularly 'heady' person, connecting with your body might be so unfamiliar that it



feels uncomfortable. You may feel emotional or vulnerable. The discomfort may be because you are connecting to an aspect of yourself that you have hid or numbed for a long time. Being in your head feels more known and safe. You can start experimenting by bringing your attention down slowly and gently, dipping for a moment into discomfort and then allowing your attention to come back up. You will likely discover that you are able to rest your attention in your body more and more over time.

EXERCISE 2

Aligning Your Body and Experiencing the Space Around You

This centering exercise aligns your body and supports your ability to be present in the space around you. By becoming aligned you can literally take a different stance in the world!

PREPARATION

As with the previous exercise, stand in a quiet room without too much distraction. Closing your eyes makes it easier to be aware of the sensations in your body. As the exercise becomes more familiar, start practicing it with your eyes open and with additional distractions. You want to build the ability to center in this way during meetings and difficult conversations or under pressure.

PRACTICE: Centering in Three Dimensions*

Aligning

- *Place your feet on shoulder width and let your arms relax down beside you.*

* Adapted from the work of Richard Strozzi Heckler, The Strozzi Institute <https://strozziinstitute.com/>
See also: <https://strozziinstitute.com/centering-the-unity-of-action-and-being/>



- *Imagine your body is hollow, like the air filled figures in front of supermarkets or a hot air balloon: a full upright position is possible only when they are totally filled with air. Imagine that and sense where you can open your body to let in more air in order to attain a fully upright posture.*
- *Focus on your pelvic and abdominal area, your chest, shoulders and neck. Where can you open and soften the joints of your legs and arms and expand the space between your front and back rib cage?*
- *Once you have found your fully upright and open posture, you can shift your attention to focusing on three dimensions.*

Length

- *Begin by imaging that you are much taller than your physical body, that there is a stream of energy emanating from your head that runs up toward the sky.*
- *Now envision a column of energy running down from your feet. You sense that you have roots that go deep into the center of the earth.*
- *How much space you are taking up both above and below your physical body? Is there more above or below or are they equal?*
- *Consider the length dimension as a representation of dignity: your place in the world and the way you present yourself. Notice the possible connection between your sense of length and the dignity you feel.*

Width

- *Bring your awareness to your torso. Now feel your right arm and then sense the space on your right side. How far does it extend? Do the same on the left side. Which side extends farther? Are they equal? How far can you extend your awareness on either side of your body?*



- *Width represents our connection with others: how we reach out to others and how we receive from others. Observe the relationship between your sense of extension to either side and the way you are feeling toward others right now. Do you notice a similarity?*

Depth

- *Place your awareness on your back and with the space behind you. How wide is that space and how far back does it go? What do you notice about your emotional state when you do that?*
- *Here the front and back of our body represent our past and future, with the physical space that we occupy being the present. The space behind you is your past, that in front, your future. We feel differently about our past, present & future at different times. Can you make a connection between the visualization of space in front of and behind you? How you are currently sensing your past, present and future?*

A NOTE ABOUT ALIGNMENT

Filling yourself up from the inside and focusing on the three dimensions most certainly changed your body posture. It is likely you stood more upright and that your joints were stacked on top of one another. Increased alignment creates more ease in our physical body by requiring less muscle activity to hold ourselves up against gravity. Finding the correct alignment decreases tension in your muscles.

An aligned posture might at first feel a little awkward. By regularly practicing alignment your body will become accustomed to it and it will feel more natural.

You can see the difference between a collapsed and an upright body posture in the figure on the next page.



Collapsed versus Aligned Posture

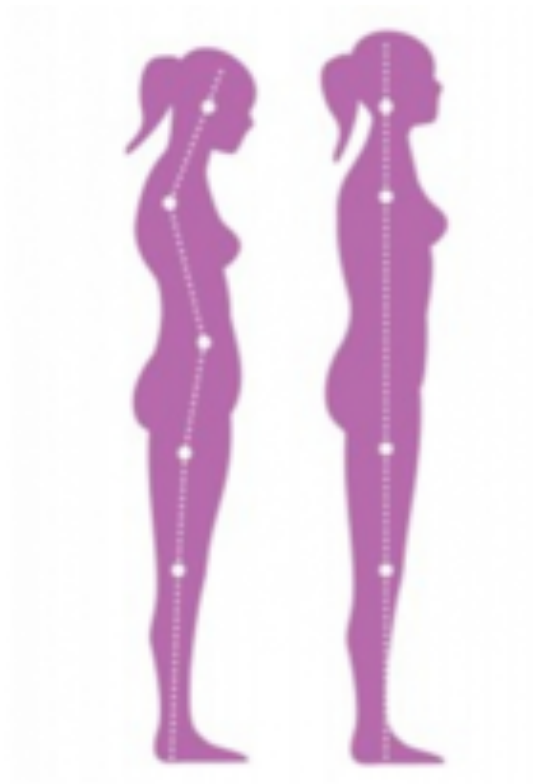


Image used with kind permission of [MuTu System Limited](#)



3 | HOW DO I USE CENTERING?

FIRST STEP: Practice!

At first start practicing centering in quiet, calm area at home. As you notice that you are able to drop your attention to your hara quickly and easily, begin to practice centering in more distracting environments: waiting in line, walking to the office, or sitting in traffic.

The more you practice the easier and quicker it gets. You may begin to notice how the practice of centering radiates out into your life: how you relate to the store clerk, how you feel about going to the office, how you manage the traffic jam.

WHEN TO USE CENTERING

- *When you feel tense*
- *As preparation for an important meeting or conversation*
- *When you feel unbalanced by a person or situation*
- *After an unpleasant encounter, meeting or conversation*

HOW CENTERING HELPS YOU

Developing a centering practice contributes to your ability to use the information your body provides to more successfully navigate uncertainty and complexity. You will:

- *Feel more energized throughout the day*
- *Communicate more effectively*
- *Experience less conflict*
- *Feel confident about speaking up when needed*
- *Make choices about when and when not to voice your opinion or take control*
- *Become better at connecting with yourself and others*

In essence, centering helps you to move from **REACT** ability to **RESPONSE** ability!



4 | WHAT'S NEXT?

Centering is one skill in a multi-step process that helps you change your **REACT** ability into **RESPONSE** ability.

Your nervous system drives your actions. Your body “knows” what’s going on well before your brain catches on. Without insight into how your physiology typically reacts, you may experience difficulty being aligned, calm and self-assured, especially in pressured settings.

That’s where we come in.

Through the evidence-informed practice of *Embodied Exploration*™, we provide you with concrete tools that open your options and create more choice in your life.

Centering is a crucial part of the process, it helps you realize that you can focus your attention and consciously shift your experience. And it lays the foundation for the next step: Understanding how your head and your body collaborate and influence one another.

Our 3-module online course, ***Get the Body Online***, walks you through the steps you’ll need to learn *how* your system connects. You will come away from the course with a clear understanding of how you might use that connection to better support your well-being.

[go to Get the Body Online](#)

The instructive and interactive videos, combined with worksheets and audio, provide you with a manageable next step that you can easily undertake in one hour-long session or 3 shorter ones.

Click the button above to take the next step!



SHARE

We'd love to hear about how *Embodied Exploration™* impacts you! Email us at contact@bodycomestomind.com and let us know how it's going or ask us any questions that come up.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Body Comes to Mind is an international organization offering online courses and custom workshops addressing the prevalent issues of well-being and resilience, with a specific focus on the healthcare setting.

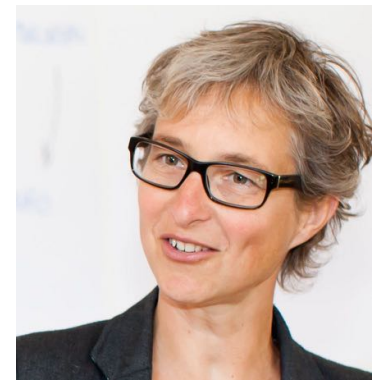
Feel free to contact us for more information about how we can help you with your specific needs.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Karin Karis is founder of **Ki to Change**. She is an experienced somatic leadership coach and consultant working with individuals, teams and organizations. Karin's approach is rooted in 20+ years of experience in working with people, her martial training and draws from her diverse knowledge of neuroscience, embodiment, and leadership theories.



Kimberly Woodland is co-founder of **Body Comes to Mind**. As a facilitator, occupational therapist working in acute care, and 4th degree black-belt in the martial art of Aikido, Kimberly is well versed in the language of embodied awareness and the benefits it can provide.

Kimberly has been immersed in the study of Embodied Exploration™ for 20 years, beginning with Wendy Palmer's *Leadership Embodiment* courses. Her practice was deepened by ongoing training and supported by her studies focused on Sensory Processing Disorder, neuroanatomy, physiology and trauma. In her work in high-acuity settings, teaching teaching Aikido and developing course curricula for the Body Comes to Mind offerings. In Kimberly's words:

"When we connect our body and our head, we strip away our self-limitations. I find it thrilling to know that we can get out of our small selves and step into something greater, something that helps us be the person we know we can be!"

