



Standing Awareness

All students, whether they are new or experienced, should do the Standing Awareness exercise before and after each practice of Clinical Somatics exercises. Noticing how their body feels internally before and after each practice is an essential part of the learning process.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

Stand normally, relax as much as possible, and don't try to have perfect posture. Let your arms hang by your sides, and close your eyes. Do a very slow internal scan of your body, focusing completely on your internal sensations. Start with your feet, and spend at least 5-10 seconds noticing how each part of your body feels as your scan moves upward, ending with your neck and head. Take as long as you want to do this body scan and do not rush it. Take the time to articulate to yourself what you are feeling; for example, "My weight is more on my right foot than my left" or "I feel like my left shoulder is higher than my right."

INTENTION OF STANDING AWARENESS

Building internal sensory-motor awareness of the body is an essential part of the Clinical Somatics learning process. Students must build awareness so that they can sense their muscle tension, posture and movement. Having finely tuned sensory-motor awareness will help students to correct their posture and movement as they move through their daily lives, as well as prevent injuries.

Some students have difficulty internally sensing their body when they first begin practicing Clinical Somatics exercises. This is perfectly normal, and it is usually a sign that they are very out of touch with their body. These students will need extra time, guidance and encouragement in order to build awareness and begin noticing differences in how they feel before and after practicing their exercises.

Sensory-motor awareness can be improved infinitely with practice. Students should be strongly encouraged to practice the standing awareness exercise on a regular basis, even after they have been doing Clinical Somatics exercises for a long time.

Note: While you are guiding the student through the awareness exercise, you have a good opportunity to observe the student's standing posture while they are relaxed and have their eyes closed. As you become comfortable talking the student through the exercise, you can take this opportunity to write down your observations on your intake sheet.

HOW TO TEACH STANDING AWARENESS

Get the student in their starting position. Instruct the student to stand normally, relax as much as possible, and to not try to have perfect posture. They should let their arms hang by their sides, and close their eyes.

Talk the student through an internal scan of their body. Starting with the feet and slowly moving upward, ask the student to focus on each part of their body one at a time. Ask some specific questions so that they notice specific sensations, such as differences they might feel between their right or left sides (more examples are below in my sample script). Make sure to give the student plenty of time to notice how each body part feels before moving on to the next. Try this exercise for yourself to get a feel for appropriate timing that does not feel rushed.

Discuss first-person and third-person observations. When the exercise is complete, ask the student to open their eyes, remain standing, and ask them what they noticed. Don't make it feel like a test; simply ask the student if they noticed anything as they did their internal scan. After they have told you what they noticed, you can share with them what you noticed. Don't nit-pick or overwhelm them with your observations. Make sure to be neutral or positive when discussing your observations; do not be negative or make them feel bad about their physical issues.

The following is an example of how I teach the Standing Awareness exercise at the beginning of a practice:

Start by standing up. Just relax and stand normally, and don't try to have perfect posture. Let your arms hang by your sides, and close your eyes. As you focus on each part of your body, I want you to just notice what you are feeling. Don't try to change anything.

Get a sense of how your feet feel on the floor, and how your weight is distributed. Is your weight more on your heels or on the balls of your feet? Do you feel more weight on the insides of your feet or on the outsides?

Do you feel like your weight is more on your right or left foot? Notice if one foot feels different than the other in some way.

Now, let your awareness travel up your legs to your knees. Are you locking your knees and pushing them back? Or are your knees relaxed, or maybe a little bent?

Notice how your hips are feeling. Does your right hip feel different than your left hip in any way? Does one hip feel higher than the other?

Now get a sense of your pelvis as a whole. Does it feel like it is straight up and down? Or do you feel like it is tipping forward at all, so that you're sticking out your belly and arching your lower back? Or, do you feel like you're doing the opposite—tucking your pelvis under and tightening your belly?

Now notice how your lower back feels. Do you feel any areas of tightness or tension?

Notice how your upper back, chest and shoulders feel. Do you feel any areas of tightness or tension? Do you feel like your shoulders are even, or is one shoulder higher than the other?

Do you feel like you are pulling your shoulders back and sticking out your chest? Or are you doing the opposite—letting your shoulders round forward? Is one shoulder pulled more forward or backward than the other?

Notice how your neck and your head are feeling. Notice any tightness or tension in your neck. Notice how you're holding your head; is it straight up and down, tilted forward or backward, or turned or tilted to one side?

Now you can open your eyes, and remain standing where you are. What did you notice as you did that internal scan?

The following is an example of how I teach the Standing Awareness exercise at the end of a practice:

Stand normally, letting your arms hang by your sides, and close your eyes. Try to remember how you felt standing here before doing your exercises, and notice any changes that you feel, or any new sensations that you've become aware of.

Notice how your feet feel on the floor. Notice how your knees and legs feel.

Notice how your hips and lower back feel.

Notice any new sensations in your upper back, your chest, shoulders and neck. Notice how you're holding your head.

When you're ready, open your eyes. Did you notice any changes or new sensations?