



## Teaching Principles

### CREATING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**Instructor:** You as the instructor are the most important aspect of your student's learning environment. Your energy, demeanor and language determine your student's experience in their session or class with you.

- If you are relaxed and positive, then your student will feel relaxed and positive. If you are nervous, stressed, overly energetic, or in a negative mood, your client will pick up on your energy and it will negatively impact their learning experience.
- Make your client feel safe and secure. Always be respectful and do not judge them in any way.
- Always remember that the session or class is not about you – it is about your student and their learning experience.

**Physical environment:** The physical environment in which you are conducting your session or class should be as neutral as possible, allowing the student to focus completely on learning the exercises without being distracted. The space should have:

- No music or background noise
- No scent or smell
- A comfortable temperature that can be adjusted when needed
- No excess clutter
- Appropriate lighting that can be adjusted. There should not be a bright light overhead during the session, as many of the exercises are done lying on the back and an overhead light will be distracting.
- An appropriate surface for the student to lie down on while doing the exercises (a yoga mat or exercise mat is ideal)
- A full-length mirror and chair for doing proprioceptive exercises

Tell your student ahead of time to wear appropriate clothing for the session. They should wear comfortable, stretchy clothing that allows complete freedom in their movement.

## GENERAL TEACHING PRINCIPLES

**The Clinical Somatic Education learning process is student centered.** Keep checking in with your student to ask how and what they are feeling as they do the exercises. Ask them to tell you if they feel any discomfort or pain. If they do, make the necessary modifications (adjust their position, make the movement smaller, use a bolster or towel, or skip the movement altogether). If the student is not physically comfortable, they will not be able to learn effectively.

**You are in partnership with your student.** You and your student share control of the session. You provide third-person feedback to your student about their posture, movement, muscle tension, and how they are performing the exercises. Your student gives you first-person feedback about what they are feeling as they do the exercises. Both viewpoints are necessary in the Clinical Somatics learning process.

**Do not demonstrate the exercises unless absolutely necessary.** If you are coming from a background of teaching group fitness or yoga classes, it may seem strange to not demonstrate the exercises. However, visually copying someone else's movement versus doing the movement completely on your own entail different neurological processes. Students are more effectively able to retrain their nervous system by doing the movement on their own, with all of their focus on their own sensory-motor experience of the movement. So, whether you are working with students individually or in group class, do not demonstrate the exercises. Your students should be lying down, preferably with their eyes closed, while you verbally describe the exercises. The only times that you should ever demonstrate the exercises is if you are working with someone who has a hearing loss or who speaks a different language.

**Touch is used as little as possible in the teaching of Clinical Somatics self-care exercises.** This is to allow the student to focus completely on their internal sensations. Touch can be distracting, and for some students, uncomfortable or invasive. Touch is only used when necessary in order to bring a student's attention to an area of their body or to instruct the student on correct body position. If a student is having trouble sensing a certain part of their body, you may gently tap that area (after requesting permission from the student) in order to bring the student's sensory awareness to the area. In addition, you should teach the student that they can bring their hand to any part of their body where they want to enhance their sensory awareness. If a student is having difficulty understanding proper body position through your verbal description, you may touch them or gently move them (with permission) in order to help them get into the correct position.

**Consider the sequence in which you teach the exercises.** It is very important to begin working with the core of the body and then move outward. As you become familiar with Clinical Somatics exercises and principles, you will gain an understanding of which exercises should typically be taught before others. This topic will be discussed further in Section 10 of this course.

**Don't overwhelm your student.** It is important to start with the basics and gradually teach the student more exercises when they are ready. You may want to teach your new student everything right away, but you must resist the urge to do so! In the first session, you should give your student only two or three exercises to practice at home. Take the time during the session to make sure they fully understand how to do each exercise correctly and get the most benefit from each one.

**Focus on giving clear, simple instructions while the student is doing the movements.** Save other helpful information – like the purpose of the movement, what pandiculation is, how we develop learned muscular patterns, etc. - for before or after the movements. Saying too much while the student is moving is distracting and overwhelming. You need to let them focus on their internal sensations as they do the movement.

**Don't let your student worry or wonder about anything.** Nothing about the exercises or teaching methods needs to be kept secret; your student will benefit from understanding why Clinical Somatics exercises are taught the way that they are. During your session, explain what you're going to do before you do it so that your student knows what to expect and can relax.

**Consider the setting in which you are teaching the exercises.** Traditionally, the self-care exercises are taught either at the end of a private session as homework exercises, or in group classes. Both of these settings are dedicated completely to the teaching of Clinical Somatics exercises and do not incorporate any other movement techniques or modalities. However, this course is geared toward people who have a background in teaching some other form of exercise or movement. I expect that you may be incorporating Clinical Somatics exercises into private training sessions or group movement classes that are focused on a modality other than Clinical Somatics. It is still your responsibility as the instructor to create the ideal learning environment for teaching Clinical Somatics exercises. For example:

- If you are teaching a class with music or bright lights, turn them off while teaching Clinical Somatics exercises.
- If you are teaching in a loud or crowded space like a gym, find the most quiet, private space you can in which to teach your student the exercises.
- Adjust your teaching style and energy to suit the teaching of Clinical Somatics exercises.
- Explain to your student how Clinical Somatics exercises are different from what they have previously learned.
- Explain to your student the ideal way to practice the exercises at home (on a mat or carpet and in a quiet, private space where they will not be distracted by other people or noise).

**Always be true to the principles and methods of Clinical Somatic Education.** If you want to teach Clinical Somatics, then you want to help people get out of pain, live full lives, and feel wonderful in their bodies. The best way to do this is to stick to the tried-and-true, highly effective methods of Clinical Somatic Education. Always teach the movements correctly, and

make sure your student is getting maximum benefit from them. Be sure that your student understands how to practice the exercises at home, and the importance of continuing to practice the exercises on their own. By helping your students get out of pain, everybody wins:

- Your student is free from pain and knows how to take care of themselves
- You feel successful and fulfilled as an instructor
- Your business grows
- Clinical Somatic Education becomes more widely known as a highly effective method of pain relief and self-care

## TEACHING THE EXERCISES

**Don't skip the Standing Awareness exercise before and after each practice.** Taking the time to notice how they feel before and after each practice is an essential part of the learning process for beginners as well as experienced students. There is also a sense of accomplishment when the student notices internal changes and when the instructor notices changes in posture or movement. In addition to the Standing Awareness, you can have your student slowly walk around the room or down the hall before and after their practice. This gives the student a chance to notice how they feel when they're moving, and allows you to observe how they walk.

**Be neutral in your observations.** Be non-judgmental when describing to your client what you are observing in their posture and movement. Don't ever make them feel bad, insecure, or abnormal.

**Encourage your student to close their eyes.** As long as the student is comfortable having their eyes closed, it will improve their learning experience to keep their eyes closed while practicing the exercises. Closing the eyes removes all the visual information that their brain would otherwise have to process, and allows them to focus completely on their internal sensations.

**Be aware of your pace.** Never rush the teaching of Clinical Somatics exercises. You must allow plenty of time for explaining the exercises and for the student to practice them and understand them fully. It is important for you to practice the exercises regularly on your own so that you have a good sense of the appropriate pace at which to teach and practice them. Let the student rest in between exercises; it gives them a chance to absorb what they've learned and gives you a chance to gather your thoughts.

**Make sure the student understands the purpose and method of each exercise.** Explain to the student the basic purpose of each exercise (for example, to release and gain control of the muscles of the lower back). Also explain the basic method by which this is achieved (by first contracting the muscles of the lower back and then very slowly releasing them to a neutral

and fully released position).

**Keep reminding your student to notice what muscles they feel contracting.** Teaching the exercises effectively is not just about getting the student to do the mechanics of the movement correctly; it is about getting them to feel internally what is happening during the movement. As your student contracts into the movement, always say something like “Notice what muscles you feel contracting.” Then as they release, you can say “Now, release those muscles as slowly as you possibly can.” If the student is having trouble sensing what muscles are contracting, you can gently tap your fingers on the muscles that are working. Bringing the sensation of touch to an area makes it much easier to sense internally. Your student will need to be reminded many times to notice what muscles are contracting and releasing, so be sure to mention it often!

**Emphasize that the student should release to neutral as slowly as they possibly can.** Explain to your student why they need to release as slowly as they can, using all their mental focus: because that is how the nervous system is able to learn new things. The more slowly they move, the more conscious their movement will be, and the better their nervous system will be able to learn. If they feel that they aren't getting benefit from a movement, they should move more slowly. While teaching, you should repeat the instruction “release as slowly as you can” many times to ensure that they really get it. If a student is having trouble moving slowly, counting while releasing can be a useful technique. Ask the student to count to eight, ten or twelve while releasing back to neutral so that they get a sense of how to pace themselves.

**Don't over-instruct the breathing during the exercises.** I have noticed many yoga instructors telling their Clinical Somatics students to inhale and exhale when that instruction is not necessary, and this can be confusing or distracting to students. Many of the releases can be done so slowly that the student will need to take multiple breaths while releasing. It is important that the student inhales when arching their back, and exhales when flattening their back into the floor or curling up. Apart from those movements, let your student know that they should breathe as needed and never hold their breath. Students should also be encouraged to breathe down into their lower belly as much as possible while doing the exercises.

**Adjust your teaching style to the situation.** If you're teaching a group class, your teaching style can be similar to how I teach in the video demonstrations. But when you're teaching individual sessions, your teaching can be more casual and conversational. You won't be trying to stick to a script or to your typical way of describing the movement. Instead, you'll be adjusting your teaching to the person you're working with. You'll be noticing things that they're doing and talking about them, and you'll be asking them how they feel as they do the movement. It will be a more casual, personal teaching scenario.

**Always remember:**

*It is my responsibility to find a way to teach my student.*

*If I have taught well then my student will own it.*

*"Education is not the filling of the bucket, but the lighting of a fire." -William Yeats*