



🖐️ Somatic Experiencing® Tools for Therapists

A Practical Guide to Body-Based Interventions (Even If You're Just Starting)

Whether you're newly somatically curious or mid-way through your trauma training rabbit hole, this guide offers 90 tools across six key domains of Somatic Experiencing®-informed work.

Each tool includes a therapist-facing description and a client-centered prompt, designed to help you stay grounded in scope while offering powerful body-based interventions that support regulation, safety, and embodied healing.

Use these as inspiration, not a script. The real magick comes when you show up with presence, pace, and permission to slow things way, way down.

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Disclaimer

This resource is designed for educational and clinical inspiration purposes only. It is not a substitute for formal training in Somatic Experiencing® or other trauma-focused modalities. Some tools included here—particularly those involving discharge, completion, or trauma titration—are best used under supervision or by clinicians with advanced training in nervous system regulation and trauma work.

Please always use your clinical judgment, remain within your professional scope of practice, and consult with your supervisor, consultant, or licensing board when integrating new interventions. When in doubt: go slower, stay curious, and prioritize safety—for your client and yourself.

Domain 1: Resourcing & Regulation

Builds safety, stability, and internal capacity

These tools help clients access and connect with supportive internal and external experiences—whether drawn from memory, imagination, or the senses. Resourcing strengthens the nervous system's ability to tolerate distress by anchoring in what feels good, warm, strong, or connected.

1. Internal Resource Memory

When to use: Client feels anxious, disconnected, or unsafe.

Prompt: “Can you recall a memory—however small—when you felt safe, supported, or just a little more okay?”

2. Supportive Person Visualization

When to use: Client has a history of isolation or needs to borrow felt safety.

Prompt: “Imagine someone who makes you feel seen or cared for. What’s it like to picture them near you right now?”

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3. Favorite Place Visualization

When to use: To evoke calming sensory input or safety through imagery.

Prompt: “If you could be anywhere that feels good, where would you go? Let’s imagine it together—what do you see, hear, smell?”

4. Resourcing with Pets or Animals

When to use: Client connects easily with animals or struggles with human trust.

Prompt: “Think of a pet or animal you love or feel calm around. What happens in your body when you imagine them here with you?”

5. Somatic Strength Resource

When to use: To reconnect with a sense of empowerment or resilience.

Prompt: “Can you remember a moment when you felt strong, capable, or proud? What shifts when you bring that into your body?”

6. Color Resource

When to use: For clients who are visual or struggle with internal resourcing.

Prompt: “What color feels soothing or steady to you? Can you imagine wrapping yourself in that color right now?”

7. Object Anchoring

When to use: In-session regulation or safety cue.

Prompt: “Is there an object you could keep with you—something that feels grounding or comforting when things feel tough?”

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8. Texture or Temperature Resource

When to use: Sensory support for dysregulation or shutdown.

Prompt: “What textures or temperatures feel good to you—like warm tea, cool sheets, soft blankets?”

9. Imaginary Protective Figure

When to use: With clients who didn’t have real protection in early life.

Prompt: “If you could imagine a protector—real or fictional—who would they be? What do they do that helps you feel safe?”

10. Safe Symbol or Image

When to use: For clients with complex trauma who struggle with people-based resources.

Prompt: “Is there a symbol or image that represents calm, strength, or safety for you—something meaningful?”

11. Layering Resource with Breath

When to use: To combine internal imagery with body awareness.

Prompt: “As you imagine that calming place or person, can you breathe into that image for a few moments and notice what happens?”

12. Naming Resource Qualities

When to use: To help solidify a felt sense.

Prompt: “What qualities make this memory or person feel supportive—gentleness? Warmth? Strength? Let’s name them together.”

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13. Drawing or Mapping Resources

When to use: With creative or nonverbal clients.

Prompt: “Would you like to draw or map out the people, places, and things that help you feel okay or strong?”

14. Collective Resource Recall

When to use: Group settings or clients with shared community identity.

Prompt: “Is there a time you felt connected to something bigger—your culture, community, or even a moment of shared joy?”

15. Multi-Sensory Resource Stack

When to use: To deepen safety through layering senses.

Prompt: “Let’s layer in sounds, smells, and textures from that memory or image. What does your body do when we build that together?”



Domain 2: Grounding & Orientation

Anchors clients in time, space, and bodily presence

These tools support clients in reconnecting with their body and surroundings. By drawing attention to physical sensations and the external environment, grounding and orientation help reduce dissociation, regulate overwhelm, and foster safety in the here-and-now.

16. Five-Sense Check-In

When to use: Client feels “floaty,” anxious, or disconnected.

Prompt: “Let’s check in with your senses—can you name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, and 1 you taste?”

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17. Feet on the Floor

When to use: For grounding during strong emotion or when client is dissociating.

Prompt: “Can you feel your feet on the floor? Maybe press them down just a little and notice the support underneath you.”

18. Chair Contact Awareness

When to use: When the client is overwhelmed or “spinning out.”

Prompt: “Notice how the chair is holding you—your back, your seat. What parts of your body are making contact?”

19. Orienting with Head Turns

When to use: To reconnect with safety through visual exploration.

Prompt: “Slowly turn your head and look around the room. Just notice what catches your attention—no need to explain it.”

20. Temperature Check

When to use: To anchor attention through external sensation.

Prompt: “What’s the temperature like in here right now? Can you feel it on your skin?”

21. Anchor Object Focus

When to use: Clients benefit from visual or tactile focus.

Prompt: “Is there something in the room you can hold or look at that feels steady or comforting right now?”

22. Floor Texture Awareness

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When to use: Clients who respond to tactile awareness.

Prompt: "Can you notice the texture of the floor beneath your shoes—or what your socks feel like against your feet?"

23. Environmental Scanning (Safe Spot)

When to use: To find calming visual cues.

Prompt: "Take a moment to look around and find something in the room that feels safe, interesting, or pleasant to look at."

24. Name the Now

When to use: To anchor in time/place during emotional overwhelm.

Prompt: "Can you name three things you see, two things you hear, and what day it is today?"

25. Grip & Release

When to use: To support re-entry from freeze or collapse.

Prompt: "Try gently squeezing your hands into fists... and then letting go. Notice what happens inside when you do."

26. Weight Shift Awareness

When to use: With clients who fidget or need movement to regulate.

Prompt: "Can you shift your weight in the chair or press your feet down and notice how your body adjusts?"

27. Lean Into Support

When to use: To increase somatic awareness and grounding through contact.

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Prompt: “Can you lean your back into the chair or couch? Let your body feel supported.”

28. Eye Gaze Anchoring

When to use: With clients who disconnect visually.

Prompt: “Is there a spot in the room you can look at while we breathe together—something steady or neutral?”

29. Describe the Room

When to use: Dissociation or when orientation needs support.

Prompt: “Can you describe what’s in this room, out loud? Walls, colors, textures, shapes... whatever you see.”

30. Stand & Stretch (if appropriate)

When to use: When clients feel frozen, shut down, or overly tense.

Prompt: “Would you like to stand or stretch for a moment and notice how your body responds to the movement?”



Domain 3: Tracking & Interoception

Strengthens internal body awareness and self-attunement

These tools invite clients to notice internal experiences—such as temperature, tension, movement, and pressure—without analysis or judgment. Tracking and interoception build the foundation for embodied self-awareness and deepen connection to the nervous system’s signals.

31. Body Scan (Modified)

When to use: To increase connection and awareness of the whole body.

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Prompt: “Let’s slowly scan from your head down to your feet. No need to fix anything—just notice what’s there.”

32. Temperature Tracking

When to use: To bring subtle awareness to internal states.

Prompt: “Are there any parts of your body that feel warm, cool, or neutral right now?”

33. Tension vs. Softness Noticing

When to use: Client is describing stress or pain without clarity.

Prompt: “Are there any areas that feel tight? What about areas that feel softer or more neutral?”

34. Movement Impulse Awareness

When to use: Clients who fidget, freeze, or suppress movement.

Prompt: “Do you notice any part of your body that wants to move, stretch, shift?”

35. Breath Curiosity (Not Control)

When to use: To build awareness without altering breath.

Prompt: “Can you notice your breath right now—where it moves, how deep or shallow it feels—without changing it?”

36. Buzzing, Tingling, or Numbness Inquiry

When to use: Clients report “weird” or unexplained sensations.

Prompt: “Do you notice any buzzing, tingling, or numbness in your body? Where is it? Does it stay or shift?”

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37. Heartbeat or Pulse Awareness

When to use: To help clients notice autonomic responses.

Prompt: "Can you feel your heartbeat anywhere in your body right now?"

38. Heavy vs. Light Sensations

When to use: Clients feel "weighed down" or "checked out."

Prompt: "Do any parts of your body feel heavy? Any that feel light, floaty, or absent?"

39. Surface vs. Deep Awareness

When to use: To guide layered sensation tracking.

Prompt: "What do you notice on the surface of your body? And what's happening deeper inside, if anything?"

40. Symmetry Check

When to use: To anchor clients in body awareness via comparison.

Prompt: "What do your left and right arms or legs feel like right now—similar or different?"

41. Shape or Volume of Sensation

When to use: To externalize and slow down overwhelming feelings.

Prompt: "If that sensation had a shape or size, what would it be? A ball? A tight line? A fog?"

42. Texture of Internal Experience

When to use: To support language for preverbal or somatic memory.

Prompt: "What's the texture of that sensation—smooth, gritty, soft, jagged?"

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43. Movement of Sensation

When to use: Client notices something shifting or active.

Prompt: "Is that sensation still, or does it move—does it grow, shrink, pulse, swirl?"

44. Naming the Sensation (Without Emotion Words)

When to use: To separate feeling about something from body sensation.

Prompt: "Let's set emotion words aside. Can you describe just the physical experience—what's happening in your body?"

45. Stay With It, Then Shift

When to use: To build tolerance and practice detaching from content.

Prompt: "Can we stay with that sensation for just a few more seconds... and now shift to something neutral or comfortable in your body?"



Domain 4: Pendulation & Titration

Gently expands the window of tolerance through shifting and pacing

Pendulation involves moving between activation and regulation, while titration refers to approaching intense material in small, digestible doses. These tools help clients stay present with difficult sensations or emotions without becoming overwhelmed or dissociative.

46. Activation → Safety Tracking

When to use: Client is beginning to feel anxious or activated.

Prompt: "Notice that tightness in your chest... now is there anywhere in your body that feels more neutral or steady?"

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47. Safe→Uncomfortable→Safe Sandwich

When to use: To explore difficult sensations with a buffer.

Prompt: “Let’s start with a calming image, check in briefly with the uncomfortable sensation, and then return to the safe one.”

48. Micro-Dosing the Story

When to use: Clients begin to share trauma content or overwhelm.

Prompt: “Let’s pause there for a moment—what’s happening in your body as you say that part?”

(Scope note: don’t go deep into the trauma unless trained—just titrate)

49. Movement Between Two Points

When to use: Physical anchor to help with emotional pendulation.

Prompt: “Press your feet into the floor... now relax. Let’s gently go back and forth—what do you notice?”

50. Emotional/Body Sensation Toggle

When to use: To avoid over-identifying with the emotional story.

Prompt: “Let’s switch between the emotion you’re feeling and what your body is experiencing right now—just observe the shift.”

51. Touch-and-Go Awareness

When to use: Clients with trauma or dissociation who need extra pacing.

Prompt: “Let’s touch into that sensation for just a second... and now let’s shift our attention somewhere steadier.”

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52. Scale the Sensation

When to use: To help clients gauge intensity.

Prompt: “On a scale from 1 to 10, how strong is that sensation right now? What would it look like to move it one point down?”

53. Containment Hand Movement

When to use: To give sensation a boundary.

Prompt: “Can you place your hands on either side of the area where you feel that sensation? Just to give it a gentle container.”

54. Expansion & Contraction

When to use: Clients feel pulled between extremes.

Prompt: “Does the sensation feel like it’s expanding or contracting? Can we gently track those shifts together?”

55. Layered Check-Ins

When to use: Clients are “in the deep end” of emotion.

Prompt: “Let’s go back and forth—check in with your body, then the room, then me. Repeat as needed.”

56. “What Happens Next?” Curiosity

When to use: A sensation begins to move or shift.

Prompt: “You’re noticing tightness that’s starting to soften—can we stay curious and see what happens next?”

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57. Paced Verbalization

When to use: To interrupt a flood of narrative.

Prompt: “Can we pause there and take a breath before continuing? What’s your body saying in this moment?”

58. Switch the Channel

When to use: Overwhelm or rumination needs interruption.

Prompt: “Let’s change the channel for a moment. Look around—can you name something interesting or unusual in the room?”

59. Sensation Window of Tolerance Mapping

When to use: Teaching self-awareness of “how much is too much.”

Prompt: “As we talk about that, does your body feel inside your comfort zone—or edging toward too much?”

60. Allow + Redirect

When to use: For holding intensity briefly, then shifting attention.

Prompt: “Let’s allow that sensation for just a few seconds... and now come back to your breath, your feet, or the room.”



Domain 5: Discharge & Completion

Supports the safe release of stored survival responses

Discharge is the nervous system’s natural way of completing incomplete fight, flight, or freeze responses. These tools help therapists recognize and hold space for spontaneous expressions of release—such as sighs, tremors, tears, or subtle movement shifts. Use with care; many of these are best supported by trained SE practitioners.

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61. Spontaneous Sigh or Exhale

When to use: When the body lets go, unprompted.

Prompt: “Did you notice that sigh just now? Let’s take a moment to stay with it.”

(Scope note: Support, don’t cue)

62. Full-Body Shiver or Tremble

When to use: After intense emotion or freeze.

Prompt: “If your body wants to shake or tremble, that’s okay. You’re not doing anything wrong—it’s just your nervous system moving.”

63. Yawning or Stretching

When to use: The body’s way of down-regulating.

Prompt: “Let’s pause and notice that yawn. What’s shifting inside as that happens?”

64. Tears as Discharge (Not Just Emotion)

When to use: Tears emerge without emotional narrative.

Prompt: “Can we stay with the tears without needing to explain them right away? What’s your body doing as they come?”

65. Spontaneous Movement (Arm, Leg, Neck, etc.)

When to use: Limb shifts or twitching begins.

Prompt: “I noticed your hand moved—let’s stay with that. Does your body want to keep moving?”

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66. Heat, Cold, or Tingling Waves

When to use: Somatic response after stress release.

Prompt: “You mentioned a wave of warmth—can we slow down and track where it goes in your body?”

67. Orienting After Discharge

When to use: To help settle post-release.

Prompt: “Would it feel okay to look around the room again—just to help your body know you’re safe here?”

68. Gentle Touch Containment (Self)

When to use: Self-holding after tremor or tears.

Prompt: “Can you place one hand on your chest and one on your belly as we pause? Let’s just notice the contact.”

69. Micro-Movements Toward Completion

When to use: When full discharge is too intense.

Prompt: “If that sensation had a direction—forward, backward, out—what would it be?”

70. Noticing Natural Stillness

When to use: After movement or emotion.

Prompt: “There’s a stillness here now—can we just be with it, even for a few seconds?”

71. Tracking Completion Signals

When to use: After a session arc or emotional shift.

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Prompt: “Is there any part of you that feels done with that moment, like it reached the end of a wave?”

72. Stomp or Shake Out (If Invited by Client)

When to use: Built-up tension or freeze starts to thaw.

Prompt: “Would it feel good to press your feet down or shake out your hands before we continue?”

73. Nervous System Language Invitation

When to use: To externalize internal shifts.

Prompt: “What would your nervous system say right now if it could speak—relief, pause, exhale?”

74. Open Palms / Arms Uncurling

When to use: Subtle body cues during emotional regulation.

Prompt: “I noticed your hands opened just now. Let’s pause with that—what does it feel like?”

75. No Completion = Still a Completion

When to use: When nothing dramatic happens (and that’s okay).

Prompt: “Sometimes noticing the tension without needing to release it is enough. What’s it like to stay right here?”



Domain 6: Therapist Co-Regulation & Embodiment

Reminds therapists that their nervous system is part of the session

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These tools focus on your own regulation, presence, and embodied awareness. Whether you're modeling breath, grounding in your own body, or softening your tone, your attunement helps shape the therapeutic container and supports co-regulation.

76. Therapist Breath Awareness

When to use: Anytime (especially if you're holding your breath).

Prompt to self: "Am I breathing right now... or just surviving this sentence?"

77. Slow the Pace of Speech

When to use: When client is escalated, disorganized, or overwhelmed.

Micro-adjustment: Drop your tone slightly. Slow your words. Let your voice become the invitation to regulation.

78. Soften Eye Contact

When to use: To reduce pressure or support safety.

Try: Gaze softly at the bridge of their nose or let your eyes move naturally—don't stare like a diagnosis is about to fall out of their forehead.

79. Postural Awareness

When to use: To model openness, steadiness, and attunement.

Self-check: Are you hunched forward like a cryptid, or settled back with a supported spine?

80. Mirror Neuron Modeling

When to use: To co-regulate subtle shifts.

Action: As you breathe, yawn, or release tension, clients may unconsciously follow—especially if safety is building.

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81. Attuned Pauses

When to use: After emotional content, spontaneous movement, or sighs.

Try: Wait. Don't fill the silence. Let the nervous system catch up.

82. Therapist Foot Contact

When to use: When you feel activated or untethered.

Try: Bring attention to your feet. Feel the floor. Let that anchor support your presence.

83. Body Double Grounding

When to use: When the client can't access grounding alone.

Action: Ground in yourself first, then invite them to join.

Prompt: "I'm taking a breath and pressing into my chair—want to try that too?"

84. Co-Regulation Through Stillness

When to use: When client is emotionally overwhelmed.

Try: Stay with them. Stay regulated. Your presence is more powerful than a perfectly crafted question.

85. Tuning into Your Own Body Cues

When to use: To track the relational field.

Self-prompt: "What's my body telling me about the energy in this room? Is this mine, theirs, or both?"

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86. Naming Your Somatic Awareness (When Appropriate)

When to use: To model embodied presence and curiosity.

Prompt: “I just noticed my breath deepen as you said that—I wonder if something settled for you, too?”

87. Embodied Ending Ritual

When to use: At the close of session, to settle both nervous systems.

Prompt: “Let’s take a breath or scan the room before we wrap—just to come back into the here-and-now.”

88. Therapist Self-Regulation Reset (Between Sessions)

When to use: Always. Especially after intense or numbing sessions.

Try: Shake your hands, step outside, name five things you see. You’re a person too.

89. Nervous System “Ping” Awareness

When to use: When a session feels off but words aren’t landing.

Self-check: “Am I feeling tight, numb, sleepy, jittery?” Your body may be tracking rupture before your brain catches up.

90. Therapist Scope Check-In

When to use: When you feel pressure to “fix” or “go deeper.”

Self-prompt: “Is this mine to hold right now—or is my job just to stay with, not solve?”

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