



Kim Read

## Using Body Wisdom to Calm the Stressed Brain



This self-paced module utilizes straightforward language and hands-on activities to guide participants in developing new tools for self-regulating during times of stress. This is an experiential module and many of the activities can easily be adapted for use with students in the classroom. Beginning with a simple art making exercise, learners will illustrate their typical stress reaction. This will be followed by an overview of how our brains identify stressful events and signal our bodies to respond on our behalf. Harnessing the body's wisdom, we will conclude by using "bottom up" processing techniques in the form of basic yoga exercises to calm our minds and better respond to stressful challenges. Learners who would like to enhance their experience are encouraged to gather a handful of colored pens/markers and a tennis (or similar sized) ball before starting the module, although these are not necessary to benefit from this module.

This module should take you approximately one & one half (1.5) hours to complete and 2 PDUs are available for completing the module.

This interactive learning module consists of content presented in numerous ways. Please read, watch, listen, and interact with all content before proceeding with any


section. While navigating through the course, remember to scroll down if you are unsure of where to go next.

 Introduction and Objectives

 Touchstones of Body Wisdom

 Good Stress and Bad Stress

 Pleasant and Unpleasant Experiences

 Stress Response and Stress Reaction

 The Anatomy of Anxiety


 Reaction vs. Response

 Revisiting the Three Touchstones - Grounding

 Revisiting the Three Touchstones - Softening

 Revisiting the Three Touchstones - Breathing

 Body Wisdom Within the Stress Response

 Check your understanding

 Closing

# Introduction and Objectives

KR Kim Read

---



**In this module you will be introduced to the foundational concepts of Using Body Wisdom to Calm the Stressed Brain.**

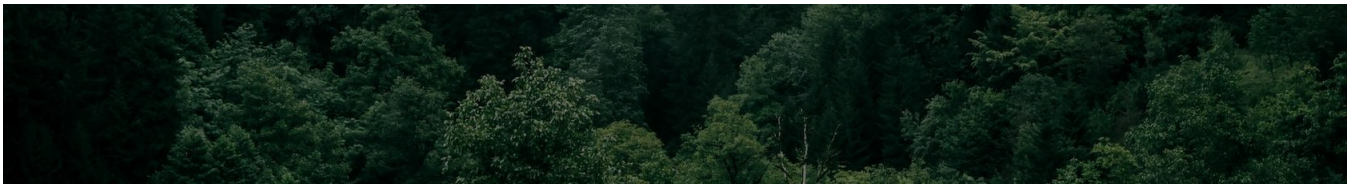
## **After this module you will be able to:**

- 1** Define good stress and bad stress.
- 2** Understand the stress response cycle and the stress reaction cycle.
- 3** Use simple hands on strategies with yourself and/or students to calm the stressed brain.



---

**Meet OEA member Christina Salter, your instructor for this course.**



Christina Salter, MS, NCC

Christina has worked in the Oregon Community College system for much of her career. Trained as a professional counselor, her focus has been on helping students maintain their health and wellbeing while progressing toward their educational goals. To this end, Christina utilizes her knowledge of expressive arts therapy and yoga psychology to promote resilience and growth. Most recently, Christina has served as a Human Services faculty instructor and internship coordinator at Lane Community College in Eugene.

# Touchstones of Body Wisdom



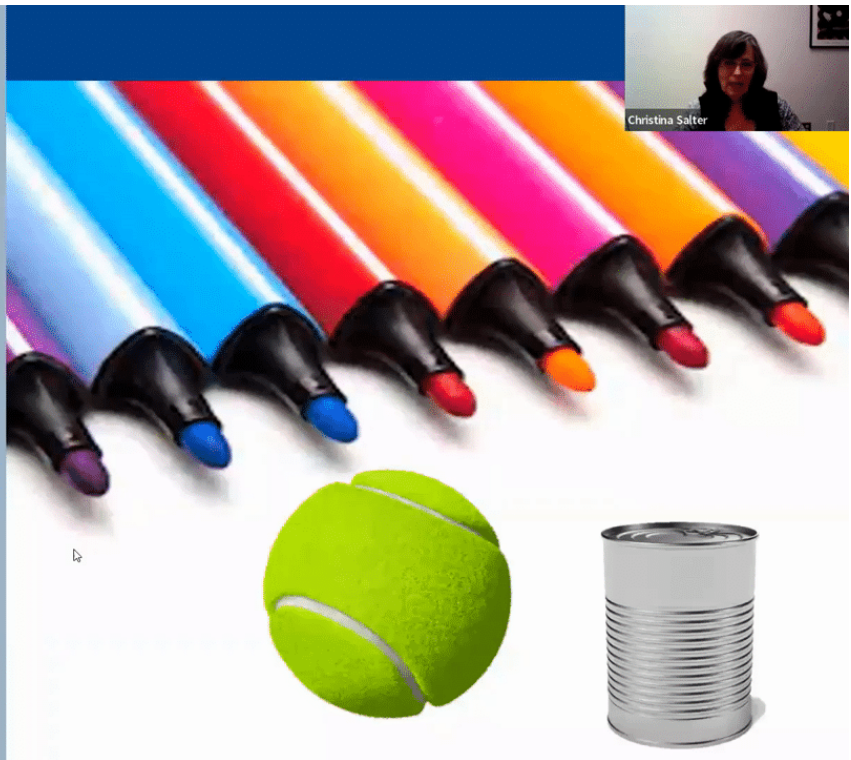
## Arriving

Listen while Christina provides us an opportunity to "arrive" to this module and our journey to calm the stressed brain. She leads us through grounding, softening, and breathing - three touchstones of body wisdom. To get started, press the play icon on the video below.

# Welcome!

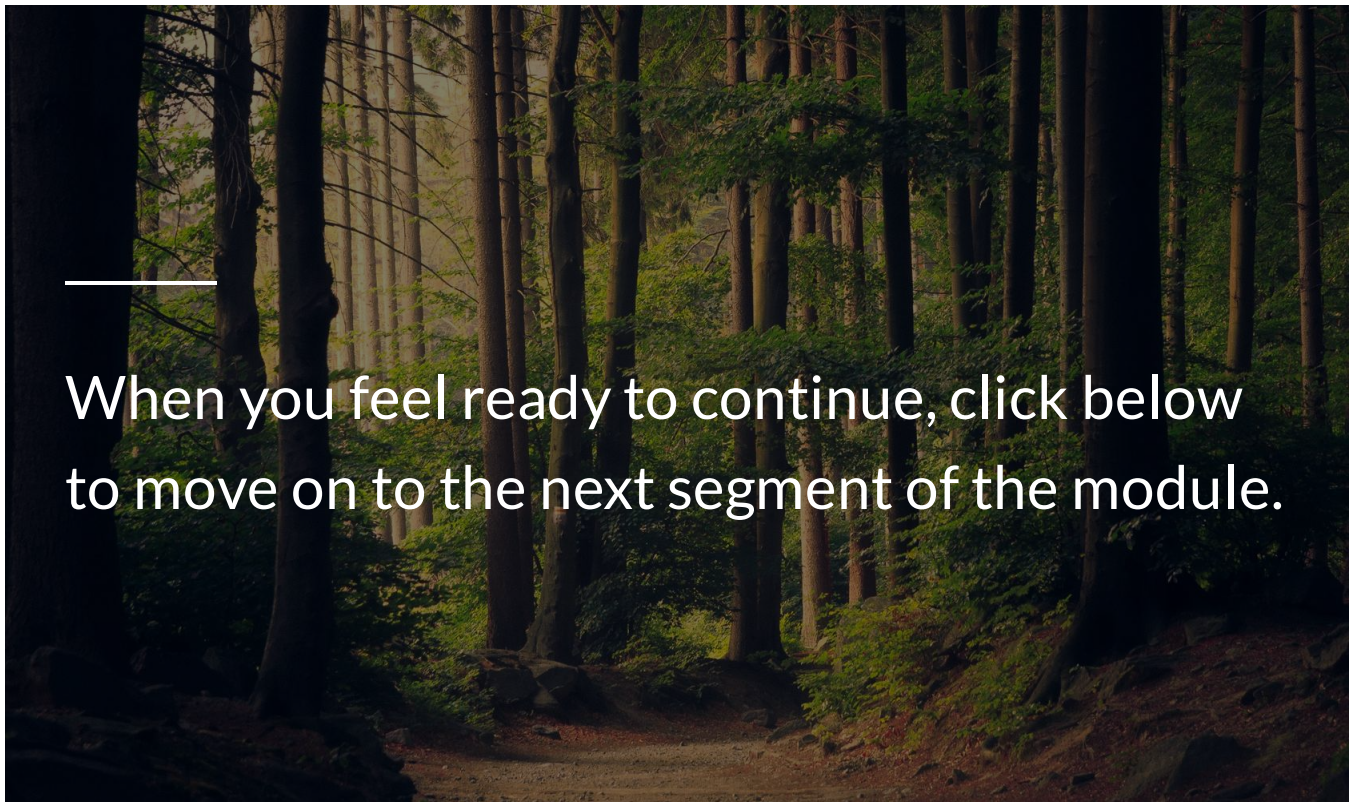
Participants who would like to enhance their experience of today's activities are encouraged to gather a handful of colored pens/markers and a tennis ball or soup can, if available.

Those with printer access may want to print out a copy of the templates linked in the chat.



---

When you feel ready to continue, click below to move on to the next segment of the module.



Click to Continue



# Good Stress and Bad Stress



## Stress

Now that we've arrived, Christina will talk to us about stress and describe the difference between "good stress" and "bad stress." Press the play icon to get started.



“ Stress is a transaction between a person and his or her environment that is appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources.

Richard Lazarus

# Defining Stress

**“Stress is a transaction between a person and their environment that is appraised as taxing or exceeding one’s resources.”**

**-Richard Lazarus**

Christina Salter

## Knowledge Check

Research shows a certain amount of stress is actually useful, however too much stress can become debilitating. Match the following definitions with the different types of stress.

Good Stress

**Useful stress**

**Helps us get motivated**

**Typically brief**

**Usually mild**

**Can be controlled**

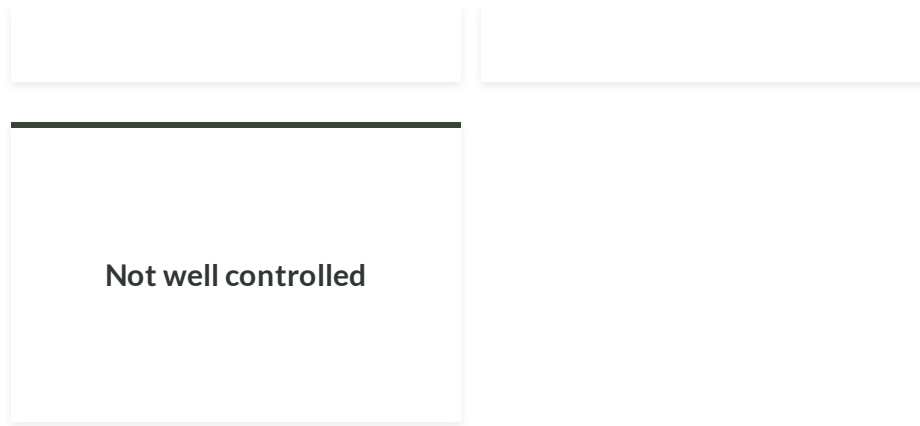
**Bad Stress**

**Debilitating stress**

**Overwhelming**

**Typically longer lasting**

**Usually intense**



## Knowledge Check

Within the definition of stress by Richard Lazarus are clues about how one can mitigate stress. They include:

---

- Changing our environment
- Increasing our resources
- Changing our perspective
- All of the above

SUBMIT

Click to Continue

# Pleasant and Unpleasant Experiences

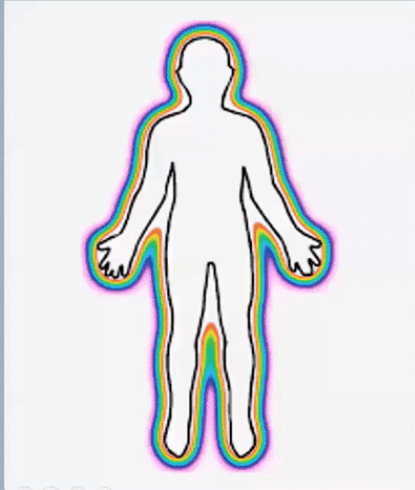


Kim Read

## Pleasant Experiences


In this first hands on exercise, Christina guides us in recalling a pleasant experience and noting thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations associated with the experience. This short video provides instructions for the exercise. Press the play icon to watch the instructions.

### Recalling a Pleasant Experience



- Reflect on...
- What were the Thoughts?
- What were the Emotions?
- What were the Bodily Sensations?

Illustrate





**Silhouette Positive.pdf**

133.2 KB



## Reflection

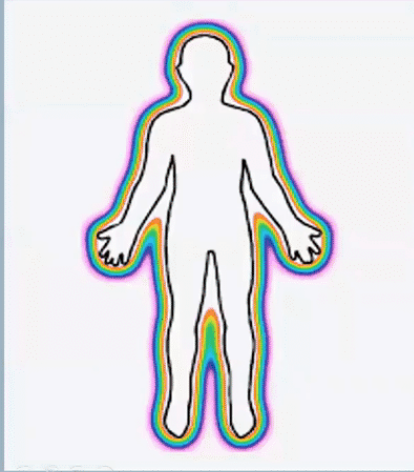
Take a few minutes to reflect and consider: What are some of the thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations you experienced during your pleasant moment? You can use the silhouette template included above or a blank sheet of paper.

[Click to Continue](#)

## Unpleasant Experiences

Now, we will recall an unpleasant experience. Think of something that is **not** a current problem or stress-inducing situation but something you've overcome in the past. Listen to Christina's instructions in the video, then continue on to the reflection below.

## Recalling an Unpleasant Experience



Reflect on...

- What were the Thoughts?
- What were the Emotions?
- What were the Bodily Sensations?

**Illustrate**



**Silhouette Negative.pdf**  
133.2 KB



## Reflection

Take a few minutes to reflect and consider: When experiencing distress, what are some of the early cues your body gives you that signal a rising stress level?

Recognizing these signs allows us to intervene early before the stress becomes debilitating. You can use the silhouette above or a blank piece of paper. We're creating these images to help us become familiar with what those early bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions are that may be the precursor to a stress response. Because recognizing them at their onset is our opportunity to intervene.



[Click to Continue](#)

## Reflection

Take a few minutes to reflect and consider: What similarities and differences did you notice about how your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations responded to a pleasant vs an unpleasant event?

[Click to Continue](#)

# Stress Response and Stress Reaction



## Typical Stress Response

Most of us are familiar with the characteristics of a typical stress response. Listen to Christina explain more.

### Typical Stress Responses



**Fight** – An agitated response accompanied by hyperarousal. Characterized by anger, heatedness, and readiness to defend.

**Flight** – An agitated response accompanied by hyperarousal. Characterized by fear, distress, and readiness to flee.

**Freeze** – An agitated response accompanied by immobility. Characterized by overwhelm, indecision, and nonaction.

Click to Continue

## Knowledge Check

Match the three typical stress reactions with their definitions:

---

SUBMIT

## Explore More

[Understanding the Stress Response from Harvard Medical School](#)

Open the short article linked above to learn more about how the amygdala and the hypothalamus work together as a "command center" during stressful events and how repeated activation of this stress response takes a toll on the body.

[Click to Continue](#)

# The Anatomy of Anxiety



When we're thinking about what kind of signals the brain is sending to our bodies, it's helpful to think about our stress reactions as our body's wisdom. Our bodies are always advocating on our behalf to keep us safe and alive. However, a lot of today's stressors don't merit the need to fight or flee for physical safety but we still have these stress reactions.

In this next segment, Christina will explain in more detail the responses from our brains and the anatomy of anxiety.

# THE ANATOMY OF ANXIETY

Source: survival-m



## The Short Cut

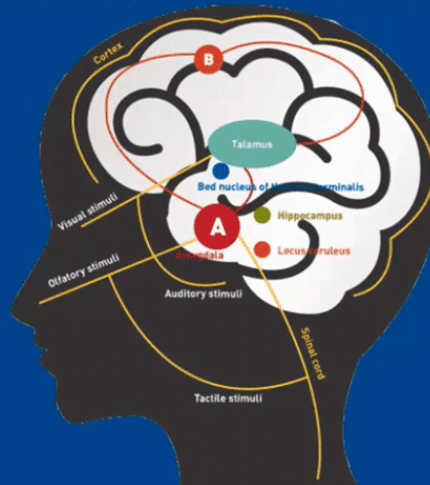
Brain automatically engages directly with the **amygdala** activating the classic stress response:

- Racing heart
- Shallow breathing
- Tingling/Sweating
- Digestive shut down
- Rise in blood pressure
- Increased cortisol
- Increased adrenaline

## The High Road

Only after stress response is activated does the conscious mind engage:

- Sensory information gets processed by the **thalamus** and then the **cortex**.
- The cortex gives sensory input meaning, analyzing the data
- Taking the high road results in a reasoned response – either downplaying the stimulus, or further activating the amygdala.



[Click to Continue](#)

# Reaction vs. Response

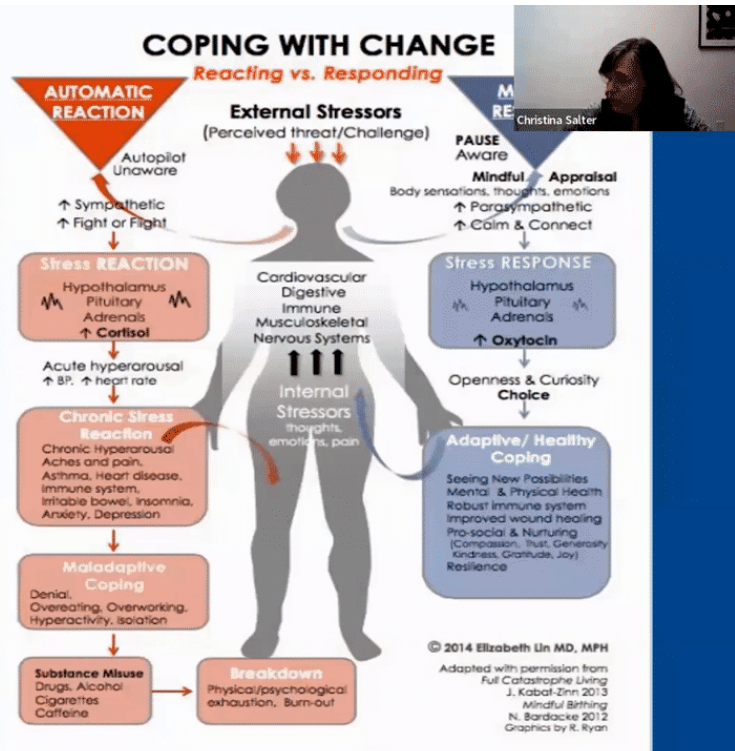


Much of the information Christina is sharing with us next is based on what's referred to as mindful stress response. In this video, Christina shares more about the difference between mindful stress response and automatic stress reaction. Let's starting learning how to mitigate stress!

## Reaction vs Response

**Chronic Stress Reactions** can tax our bodies and lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms.

**Mindful Stress Responses** can mitigate reaction through awareness and appraisal of body sensations, thoughts, and emotions.



## Explore More

1. [Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn.](#)
2. [B. K. S. Iyengar](#)

Click to Continue

## Knowledge Check

Match the terms to the definitions.

Match the stress terms on the left to the correct definition on the right.

---

SUBMIT



## Reflection

Reflect on what is meant by the Iyengar quote “The mind is king of the senses. The breath is king of the mind.”

[Click to Continue](#)

# Revisiting the Three Touchstones - Grounding



Next, Christina will revisit the three touchstones from the beginning of the module to demonstrate how to create a mindful stress response. We will deepen our experience of grounding, softening, and breathing to see how we can send signals from the body back up to the brain to create calm.

## Time to engage!

In the next video Christina will lead us through a six-minute grounding exercise.

First, grab a ball (for example a tennis ball) or a cylinder (for example a can of vegetables). You could also use a rolling pin or a glass jar. If you don't have either of these, that is okay. If possible, remove your shoes.


Next, stand up. You may want to be close to a wall or desk for support. If you don't have a ball or cylinder, you can remain seated for the exercise and massage your feet with your fingers.

Inbox (3) - salterc@lanecc.edu | Post Attendee - Zoom | scan\_salterc\_2023-03-14-10-54 | scan\_salterc\_2023-03-14-10-54 | Foot rolling.MOV - Google E | +

drive.google.com/file/d/1en5VvWovQyH67Vh0ajXWNPLUxwLUXQvZ5L/view

The Library Logo | LaneOnline | Lane Community C... | Imported From IE | Bookmarks | MBSR Guided Audi... | Program Resources... | counseledneuro [... | Inbox (418) - salterc... | My Drive - Google... | Early Outreach Refe... | Compass

Christina Salter



0:00 / 2:29

4:39 PM 4/11/2023

The image shows a web browser window with a video player. The video player displays a red ball on a blue carpet in front of a purple blanket on a couch. The browser's address bar shows a Google Drive link. The Windows taskbar is visible at the bottom, showing the time as 4:39 PM on 4/11/2023. A small video thumbnail of Christina Salter is visible in the top right corner of the browser window.

Click to Continue

# Revisiting the Three Touchstones - Softening



Kim Read

---

Next, Christina revisits the touchstone of softening and guides us in a softening exercise of side stretches. Our diaphragm is connected to our lower ribs and this stretching exercise stimulates our diaphragm. Standing is preferred but not necessary for this activity. If sitting, place both feet on the floor, if possible.

**Revisiting the Three Touchstones**

Christina Salter

Grounding  
**Softening**  
**Breathing**

Top-Down

Bottom-Up

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1en0VWw0rQyH67Yh0qjXWNPfUxwLXQz2/view?usp=sharing>

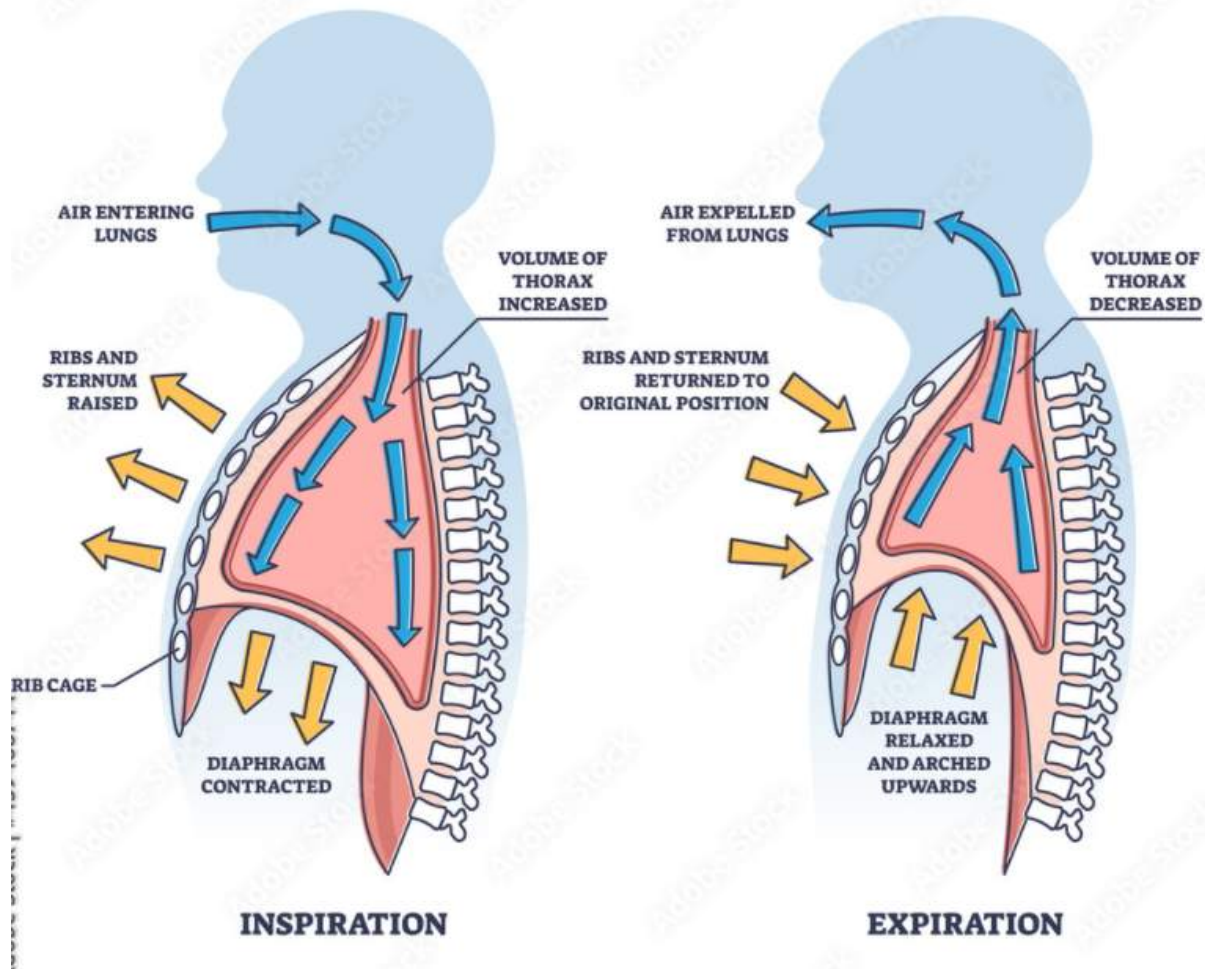
Click to Continue

# Revisiting the Three Touchstones - Breathing



The final touchstone is breathing. The diaphragm is important here because diaphragmatic breathing is the kind of breathing that sends messages from the body to the brain that our current stressful situation is not an emergency that requires a fight or a flee.

# MECHANISM OF BREATHING



In this final exercise, Christina leads us in a diaphragmatic breathing exercise. Sitting down, if possible, is best for this activity. Christina uses this breathing exercise often with her students.

# Revisiting the Three Touchstone

Christina Salter

Grounding  
Softening  
Breathing



In this activity, we change what's going on with our body and use our body's wisdom to tell our mind to calm down and bring our higher level thinking back on board. You can also use a breathing activity like this one with your students in moments of high stress or before a test.

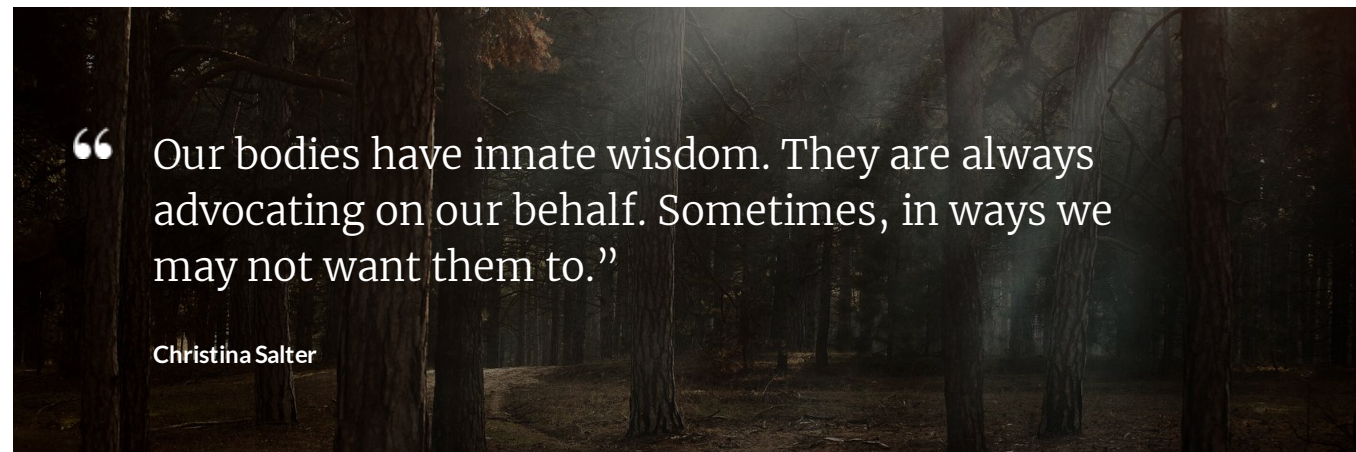
## Reflection

How was this breathing activity? Did you experience a deeper sense of relaxation? Can you imagine using a breathing exercise with your students?

Click to Continue



# Body Wisdom Within the Stress Response



“ Our bodies have innate wisdom. They are always advocating on our behalf. Sometimes, in ways we may not want them to.”

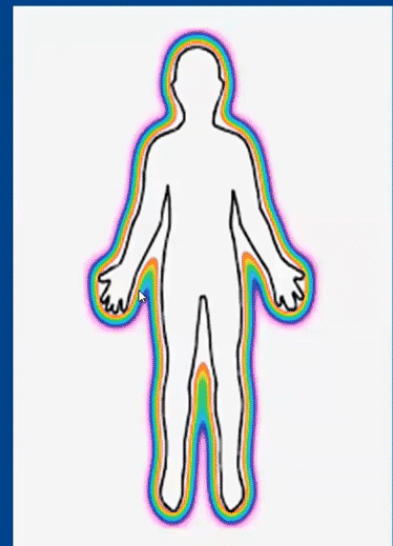
Christina Salter

Next, Christina helps us identify life skills that correspond to stress reactions. If we can identify our stress reaction and match it to a life skill, we can work with our bodies to achieve the outcomes we want. Learn about how this works in the next video.

# Body Wisdom within the Stress Response



Stress Reaction	Life Skill
<b>Fight -</b> External conflict, and also internal conflict	<b>Advocacy</b>
<b>Flight -</b> Fleeing from stressor, and also disconnecting from body, mind, intention or resources	<b>Perspective</b>
<b>Freeze -</b> Paralyzed by conflict between poor choices	<b>Stillness</b>



CONTINUE

Christina talked about there being “wisdom within the stress response,” and provided alternative ways of conceptualizing matters when faced with a typical stress reaction. Match the typical reaction with the corresponding concept.

When you feel the urge to fight

---

**it may signal the need for  
advocacy.**

**When you feel the urge to  
flee**

**it may signal the need for  
perspective.**

**When you feel the urge to  
freeze**

**it may signal the need for  
stillness**

CONTINUE

# Check your understanding



After you complete the knowledge check, the evaluation will display in your module. After you complete the evaluation, your PDU certificate will display. A score of 80% is needed to complete the knowledge check. There is no limit on attempts.

---

*Question*

**01/10**

What are the three touchstones of body wisdom?

---

- eyes, ears, touch
- relaxation, sleeping, exercise
- grounding, softening, breathing

Question

02/10

The module utilizes the following definition of stress:

“Stress is a transaction between a person and their environment that is appraised as taxing or exceeding one’s resources.” - Richard Lazarus

Within this definition are clues about how one can mitigate stress. They include:

---

- Changing our perspective
- Changing our environment
- Increasing our resources
- All of the above

Question

03/10

The limbic system of the brain processes emotions and memory. One of its structures, the \_\_\_\_\_, scans the environment for stimuli that recall potential threats.

---

- occipital lobe
- amygdala
- cerebellum
- thalamus



Question

04/10

When the amygdala is activated, access to the cerebral cortex, where \_\_\_\_\_ occurs, is cut off. This is what is meant by the term “flipping your lid.”

---

- higher level thinking
- face recognition
- sense of smell and taste
- memory

Question

05/10

The activated amygdala sends signals down the brain stem which triggers an instinctual, bodily response to stress. Some of the most common bodily responses include which of the following:

---

- Rapid heart rate, rise in blood pressure, shallow breathing, tingling/sweating
- Decreased cortisol, slowed breathing, muscle lengthening

Question

06/10

When you feel the urge to fight, it may signal the need for \_\_\_\_\_.

---

- advocacy
- perspective
- stillness

Question

07/10

When you feel the urge to freeze, it may signal the need for \_\_\_\_\_.

---

- advocacy
- perspective
- stillness

Question

08/10

When you feel the urge to flee, it may signal the need for \_\_\_\_\_.

---

- advocacy
- perspective
- stillness

Question

09/10

What kind of breathing sends messages from the body to the brain that an event or situation is not an emergency that requires a fight or a flee?

---

- deep and long
- diaphragmatic
- amygdala
- shallow and short

Question

10/10

Match the term to the definition:

---

☰ Automatic stress reaction

Early awareness of body sensations, thoughts, & emotions allows for problem solving

☰ Mindful stress response

Lack of awareness of body sensations, thoughts, & emotions leads to poor coping mechanisms

# Closing



Congratulations you have completed the course. Return to the main page to complete the evaluation and receive your certificate.

For more self-paced modules, self enroll from your dashboard in OEA Learn. For other professional learning opportunities and events free as a benefit of your membership, visit <https://oregoned.org/events>