

Bioenergetics

Objectives: To become aware of the way in which emotional tensions are stored in our muscles.

To learn some bioenergetic exercises to help release these tensions.

Session Times: 1 hour: Sections A–C

Recommended: Managing Emotions

Sections: A. Experiencing Emotions in our Bodies V.2

B. An Introduction to Bioenergetics V.4

C. Bioenergetics in Context V.4

Activities: Bioenergetics Exercises A.V.1



Bioenergetics

Releasing Tension Through Movement

This is a valuable addition to the material in Chapter 6. Managing Emotions. It is particularly relevant to participants who find dealing with emotions in conflict very difficult, or who want to learn ways of releasing anger and managing stress.

However, it would not be appropriate for trainers who have not had direct experience of these exercises in a Conflict Resolution (or other) course, to attempt this material.

A. Experiencing Emotions in our Bodies

(15 minutes)

(See Chapter 6. Managing Emotions: Section A.)

Choose the question below most relevant to your group.

Question: Think of a recent conflict. What emotion(s) did you feel? In what part of your body did you feel them?

or

Question: Where in your body do you feel anger?

or

Question: Where in your body do you feel stress?

Discussion: Ask participants to jot down and then share their responses. In addition, you might consider:

- "butterflies" and churning in the stomach
- stiffness, tight muscles and tension in neck, shoulders, jaw and chest
- headache
- pain in lower or upper back
- soreness in legs
- fidgeting.



Question: What are some of the ways we express or deal with our emotions?

(See Chapter 6. Managing Emotions: Section B.)

Discussion: Draw out participants responses. In addition, you might consider:

Short term

take time-out

doodle

stamp your foot

snap a pencil

tear up a piece of paper

wash-up

Long term

exercise

talk

listen

meditate

cuddle

Question: Many of these ways are physical or involve activity. Are you aware of a physical release, or a sense of relaxation in your body, after you've expressed emotions in these ways?

Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- It may feel cathartic.
- We may feel physically tired or weak.
- We may feel invigorated.

Question: What happens if we don't express our emotions?

Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- ill health
- stress
- withdrawal
- explosion
- diminished capacity to experience pleasure and happiness.



B. An Introduction to Bioenergetics

(30 minutes)

See Alexander Lowen MD and Leslie Lowen ***The Way to Vibrant Health: A Manual of Bioenergetic Exercises*** (New York: 1977).

Bioenergetics is a way of understanding our body, how much energy we have, and how we use it. It is based on the idea that what goes on in our minds reflects what is happening in our bodies and vice versa.

Every stress produces tension in the body. Normally, tension disappears when stress is relieved, but if we have chronic stress, tensions can persist in our muscles. This may disturb our emotional health, so we feel less energetic and "blocked up". We're no longer as mobile nor as self-expressive.

Bioenergetic exercises can help relieve this chronic tension. They are designed to make us aware of which muscles are tense and to release these tensions through appropriate movement.

So doing bioenergetic exercises on a regular basis allows our bodies to let go of the chronic muscle tension that causes us to feel emotionally numb.

Group Activity: *Bioenergetic Exercises: participants are taught some simple bioenergetic exercises to release emotional tensions. (See Bioenergetic Activities, p A.V.1.)* (20 minutes)

C. Bioenergetics in Context

Bioenergetics is one tool for managing emotions and dealing with stress. We can also combine bioenergetics with other long and short term methods for expressing our emotions (see *Chapter 6. Managing Emotions: Section B*) and managing our stress.

As well, explore the sources of persistent emotional tension (e.g. see Chapter 7. Willingness to Resolve) and consider practical solutions for reducing stress (time management strategies, reducing workload, delegating tasks etc.)



Bioenergetics Activities

Bioenergetics Exercises

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	Our feelings and thoughts find expression in our bodies. Similarly, our physical state affects our emotional state. By releasing muscle tension, we can often release emotional tension. (<i>See Chapter V Bioenergetics: Section B</i>)
Time:	20 minutes (<i>Ensure that there is sufficient flexibility in programming to adequately debrief and support participants.</i>)
Aim:	To learn some bioenergetic exercises as a means of getting in touch with and releasing emotions

Instructions: We're going to learn a few bioenergetic exercises.

Most people find these exercises very valuable. Some people find them so powerful that they can feel quite emotionally disturbed after doing them, particularly if they're feeling tired, stressed or upset beforehand.

If you do feel disturbed, and you wish to stop, please do. If you want to continue, then do that also. After we've completed the exercises there'll be time to talk with a partner about what you felt. As well, please see me to talk further if you feel you need to. If you are nursing a physical injury, please only do what is appropriate for your own body.

Ask participants to make themselves comfortable to learn the exercises: remove shoes and close fitting jackets and find themselves a space to work in about a metre away from anyone else.

These few exercises will make us more aware of different muscles, and release some of the stored tension. If we deliberately put a muscle under stress by contracting it, then, when we relax it, it relaxes past the level of tension it had before.



BASIC ORIENTING POSITION (referred to as BOP in text below)

Purpose: to "let go" and let our attention drop down to our feet.

Stand with your feet parallel, about 20cm (8") apart.

Put your weight on the balls of your feet.

Bend your knees slightly.

Relax your pelvis – let it fall slightly.

Keep the upper part of your body straight and relaxed.

Relax your jaw – mouth slightly open.

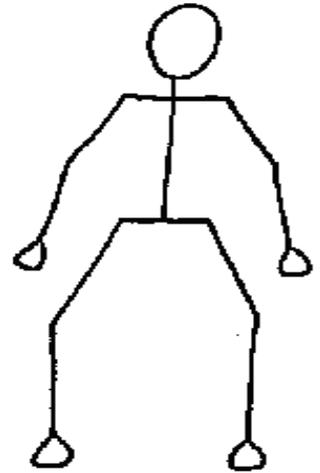
Let your belly out.

Arms should be floppy. (Make the joke: dumb, loose and floppy.)

Drop your pelvic floor.

Breathe easily and deeply.

Allow 2–3 minutes. Remind them of the instructions and, particularly, to breathe deeply.



FOOT TURNING

Purpose: to release tensions in the arches of your feet.

Stand as in the first exercise (BOP).

(Remind them of how this is done.)

Roll onto the outside edges of your feet.

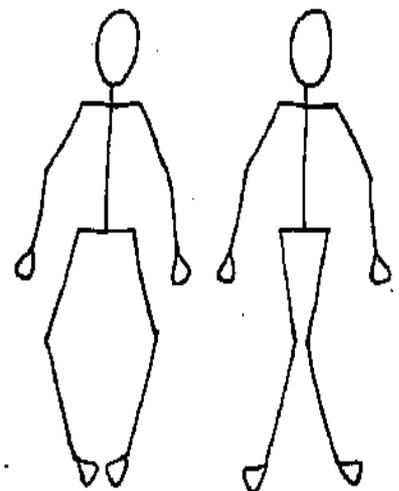
Breathe easily and deeply.

Allow 20 seconds.

Move your feet back to their central position.

Now roll onto the inside edges of your feet. Continue breathing deeply.

Allow 10 seconds.



BASIC GROUNDING

Purpose: release pain and tensions in the legs.

Stand as in the first exercise (BOP).

(Remind them of how this is done.)

Now bend your left knee slightly.

Shift all your weight onto your left foot.

Keep your body facing forward. Don't twist it.

Let your right foot rest lightly flat on the floor.

Breathe easily and deeply.

Hold that position until it feels uncomfortable.

Allow 20–30 seconds.

Now do the same with the other leg.



STRETCH

Purpose: to stretch muscles in the chest wall and relax tension in the throat.

Stand as in BOP, but this time with your feet about 45cm (18") apart

BOP

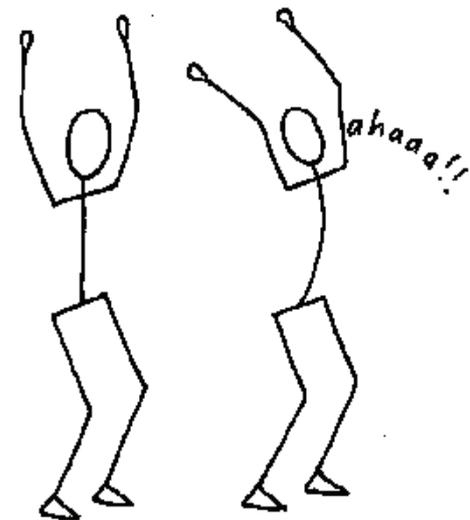
Reach your hands up into the air, as if to touch the ceiling.

Note any tensions in your body. Is there tightness in your throat or your chest? Is there pain or tingling in your arms or fingers, shoulder joints or along the sides of your body?

Reach backwards. As you do, let go with your voice. Let out a sound (ahaaa!)

Encourage noise. Allow 20 seconds.

Come back to the standing position.



BOW

Purpose: to open up breathing more fully, to release tension in the legs and in the belly.

Stand as in BOP, but with feet about 45cm (18") apart.

Place both your fists, with knuckles facing upwards, into the small of your back.

Bend both your knees, without lifting your heels off the floor.

Arch gently backward over your fists.

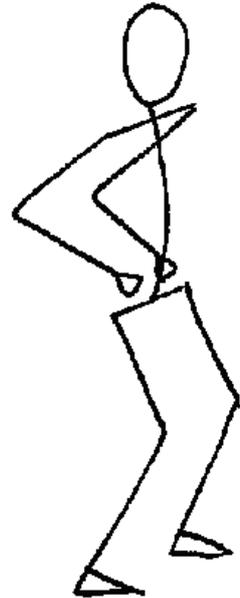
Make sure your weight remains forward on the balls of your feet.

Breathe deeply and into your belly.

Keep your neck in line with your spine.

Hold. You may experience vibration of muscles; hold as long as this is pleasant.

When you come out of this exercise, go straight over into the bent forward position.
(See **Bend below.**)



BEND

Purpose: to relax the muscles in the legs and back.

Keep your legs in the same position as they have been in Bow.

Bend over slowly and let your fingertips gently touch the floor with no weight.

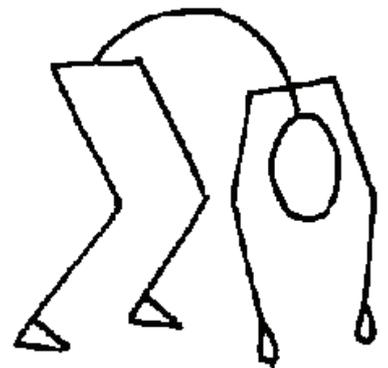
Keep your weight on the balls of your feet.

Let your head drop and hang loosely.

Breathe through your mouth.

Straighten knees slowly, but only as much as is comfortable, to feel a slight hamstring stretch.

Slowly and gently return to the standing position.



ARM CIRCLES

Purpose: to release tension around shoulder joints and the sides of your body.

Stand as in BOP.

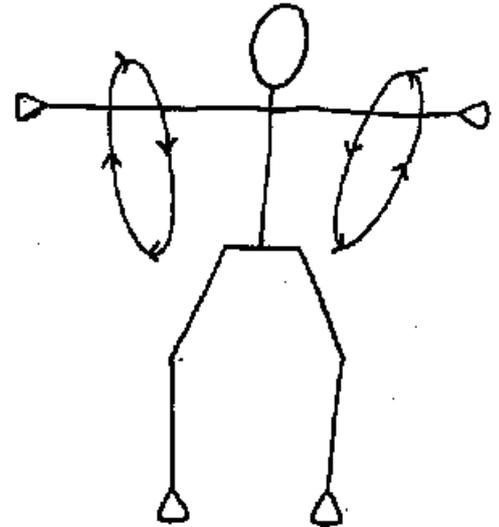
Extend both your arms sideways, level with your shoulders.

Slowly swing your arms forward and down past your sides, breathing out gently as you do so.

Now as you bring your arms upwards for the next swing, breathe in.

Keep doing the swings, gradually moving and breathing faster with each swing.

Do this until your arms begin to tire.



GET OFF MY BACK

Purpose: to have a sensation of lifting a burden off your back, to straighten up your back.

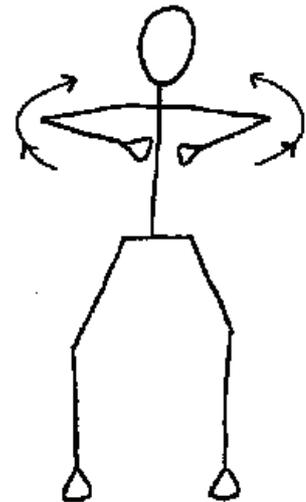
Stand as in BOP.

Bend your elbows and raise them to shoulder height.

Now, with some force, thrust your elbows backwards.

Bring your elbows forward, and thrust them back again.

As you do it, shout something like: "Get off my back" or "Leave me alone." Do this several times.



NECK ROTATION

Purpose: to release pressure between the joints of the neck vertebrae.

Stand as in BOP.

Let your head roll forward lightly.

Let your shoulders hang as low as possible.

Roll your head in a forward direction gently and slowly from left to right and then right to left like a pendulum. **Do not** complete the circle by letting the head drop right back.

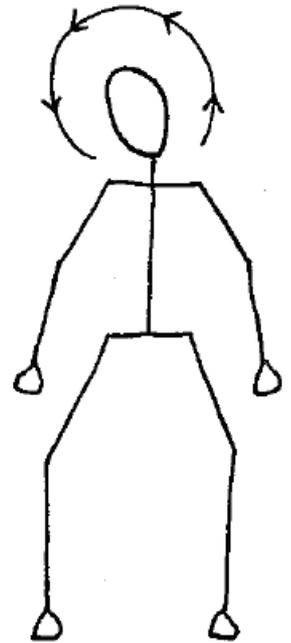
Breathe slowly and easily.

Keep your eyes open.

Focus on objects that pass your line of vision.

Blink your eyes often.

Do this three times.



PELVIC THRUST

Purpose: to sense tensions in your pelvic area and mobilise the lower part of your body.

Stand as in BOP but with your feet about 30cm (12') apart.

Keep your weight on the balls of your feet.

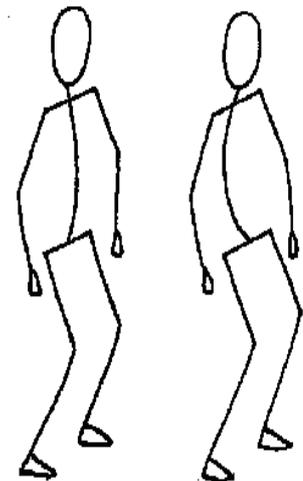
Keep your knees bent.

Tilt your pelvis backwards by arching your lower back slightly.

Hold for a few seconds.

Now, let your pelvis tilt forward by pressing on the balls of your feet and breathing out.

Repeat several times.



This exercise can also be used to release anger locked in the pelvis. With appropriate groups, repeat the exercise encouraging the thrust to be faster and for people to repeat their own angry phrases e.g. "You idiot" etc. This can be alienating for conservative groups and is usually inappropriate in a workplace setting. However, it is an extremely valuable personal development exercise in the right setting.



EYES CLOSED REVIEW

Purpose: to become aware of the sensation of relaxed muscles.

(Have gentle music playing quietly for this relaxation time.)

Sit down or lie on the floor.

Close your eyes and relax.

Take small sipping breaths at your natural breathing pace.

Imagine that each breath is sweet nectar gradually flowing through you, and particularly into all the muscles and joints you have stimulated during the exercises.

Allow about 4–5 minutes.

Gently open your eyes.

Pair Discussion: *Ask participants to share their responses to these exercises with a partner.*

Discussion: What did you notice?

Did you become aware of tension in particular muscles?

Did your sense of relaxation alert you to previously held tension?

How might these exercises be useful to you?

Do they link with other exercise or relaxation strategies that you already use?

