

# Cultivating Presence: Grounding and Centering Techniques for Enhanced Wellbeing

ACEP Conference May 31, 2025 Arizona, USA

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## Ways to Connect

- Register for online classes on Being Here Now Workshop. Embodied intuition.
- Schedule a consultation with Lori Hops.
- Sign up for monthly email announcements, free resources, classes.
- Free podcasts Healing Tips from the Heart with Dr. Lori Hops: Intuition with Helpers, Healers, and Guides.
- Providing online psychotherapy for people in California, USA.

## Learning Objectives

- **Define** grounding and centering based upon research studies.
- Name **three theories** that supports wellbeing when employing grounding and/or centering techniques.
- Identify **three techniques** used to establish presence, grounding, and/or centering, which may include breathing, visualization, or movement.

## Presence Definition

Geller, 2020; Malet et al., 2022; Hobbs et al., 2020.

Way of being in the moment with self and others. Direct lived experience on all aspects: physical, emotional, cognitive, relational, spiritual. Includes being grounded and centered. Capacity to respond to client and self with vulnerability.

**Presence principles.** Geller, 2020; 2018; Finck et al., 2023.

Develop self-awareness for presence, and realign when not present. Right brain to right brain co-regulation, social engagement calming connection, and activates parasympathetic nervous system. Ventral vagal pathway. More sensory awareness with mindfulness leads to increased parasympathetic activity. Promotes health and optimal growth.

## Presence is Transtheoretical

Therapist's presence leads to clients' safety, mutual alliance, and positive outcome in therapy. **Freudian** listen with the "third" (metaphoric) ear. **Rogerian** presence to create empathy, unconditional regard, and congruence. **Existential** "here and now" awareness of senses, emotions, cognitions, relationships. **CBT** needs presence for optimal timing and effectiveness of techniques. **Energy Psychology** presence with mind/body work.

## **Presence Risk and Benefits**

Therapist's 5-minute mindfulness centering practice prior to session. Stronger therapeutic alliance and presence. (Dunn et al., 2013). Can be used with any practice. Free, always available. Traumatized clients may be hypervigilant with presence, as it could signal threat. "If you are close to me, you could harm me." Go slowly to build trust.

## **Grounding Definition**

Stable physical and emotional presence in the here and now (Lowen, 1958; 1979). Supported by the ground. Present moment awareness of body contact with surfaces such as floor, your clothing, skin. Provides gravitational security, safety and control. (Grabbe & Miller-Karas, 2018).

When a person is standing and body muscles are relaxed without tension, an energetic flow and discharge of energy into the ground is possible (Guest et al., 2019).

Barefoot contact with the earth, or natural conductive surfaces like grass, soil, gravel, stone, or sand provides electrical current to the body. (Menigoz, et al., 2020). Earth has natural negative electrical charge, used to ground equipment in electrical sockets. People sometimes have a build-up of positive electrical charge, and need to balance it. Grounding with the earth can balance the positive and negative charge equation. Leads to lowered inflammation, the underpinning of many illnesses.

Physical: balancing force between weight of gravity and free movement of the body.

Psychological: capacity for emotional holding, understanding self and others.

Energetic: discharge subtle energy into the ground. Comprehend and perceive reality through the body and subtle senses (Baum, 2011).

Benefits: Grounding helps you respond rather than react. Reside solidly in your mind, body, and spirit. Resonate with awareness, balance, and centering.

Risks: Awareness of grounding can lead to hyperfocus on uncomfortable states of being, such as pain, injury, or distressing memories. Grounding may lead to greater sensitivity to medications.

## **Research on grounding:**

Waves of Wellness surf program, Australia. Sensory grounding with sand, surf, water helps youth learn about CBT and mindfulness with better focus. "Blue spaces" around water aid relaxation. (Marshall et al., 2023)

Earthing/grounding lessens perceived pain, reduces inflammation. Premature infants have increased heart rate variability and vagal tone, markers of health. (Menigoz et al, 2020).

Massage therapists reported lower fatigue, depressed mood, and pain, along with increased energy and physical function when grounded. Results were not maintained when ungrounded. One month follow up showed increased physical function, with less depressed mood and fatigue. (Chevalier et al., 2019).

**Grounding** "We move by discharge of energy into the ground. All energy finds its way eventually into the earth; this is the principle known as *grounding*." Alexander Lowen. Bioenergetic Analysis. Body psychotherapist.

To be grounded in mind and body is to be well-centered and well-balanced (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

## **Principles of Grounding**

Stable physical and emotional presence in the here and now (Lowen, 1958; 1979). Supported by the ground. Present moment awareness of body contact with surfaces such as floor, your clothing, skin. Provides gravitational security, safety, and control. (Grabbe & Miller-Karas, 2018). When a person is standing and body muscles are relaxed without tension, an energetic flow and discharge of energy into the ground is possible (Guest et al., 2019).

### ***Types of Grounding***

**Physical:** balancing force between weight of gravity and free movement of the body. On a physical plane, earth's gravity pulls down upon the body, while the body counteracts this force by activating pressure up, out and around, whether standing, leaning, walking, or crawling. Movement even while lying prone balances gravitational force with shifting of weight, from the pelvis or center of the body, to be able to move at will. Whereas passive weight allows the body to succumb to gravitational forces, active weight counteracts gravity with force. Neutral weight allows gravity to support muscles and body in a balanced fashion (Bartenieff, 2002).

**Psychological:** capacity for emotional holding, understanding self and others. On a metaphoric level, common expressions of being down to earth, or having your feet on the ground illustrate these qualities of stability, maturity, and realistic practicality in daily life.

**Energetic:** discharge subtle energy into the ground. Comprehend and perceive reality through the body and subtle senses (Baum, 2011).

### **Grounding Theory**

Lowen observed personal experiences are preserved in the body's posture, movement and breathing related to mind and emotions. Grounding through movement in pulsating waves. Similar to discharge of energy through lightning and storms.

Grounding expresses presence in the mind and body, a record of life experiences, personal reality, and relationship to the earth.

The Chinese medicine system views grounding as a whole body, mind, and spirit endeavor. It places supreme influence upon the central and governing meridians, or energy pathways which connect the front and back sides of the body, and interpenetrate the internal organs, sending messages to the entire body. When central and governing meridians are connected and stable, energy flows are able to communicate optimally, like when a battery is connected, with negative and positive charges engaged with one another.

### **Grounding Research**

Grounding is used to treat depression, PTSD, and somatoform disorders by body psychotherapists and dance movement therapists. Grounding Assessment Tool is a 13-item nonverbal observation measure; reliable, valid. Use with assessment, research, and clinical application. (Englehard et al, 2021). Fluid and rhythmic movement, emotional expression in movement, pattern of foot placement, lack of stability and weightiness. Stable physical and emotional presence in the here and now (Lowen, 1958; 1979). Supported by the ground. Provides gravitational security, safety, and control. (Grabbe & Miller-Karas, 2018). When a person is standing and body muscles are relaxed without tension, an energetic flow and discharge of energy into the ground is possible (Guest et al., 2019). Central nervous system, and vagal tone regulation. Healthy heart rate, respiration rate, improved oxygenation, and reduction in autonomic nervous system stress (Koniver, 2023). Relaxed muscles mean less pain, lower blood pressure. Possibly better sleep and anti-aging (Koniver, 2024 a, b).

## Grounding Applications

- **Why Ground?** Grounding helps you respond rather than react. Reside solidly in your mind, body, and spirit. Resonate with awareness, balance, and stability. Practical applications and personal practice.

**Grounding Benefits:** Grounding helps you respond rather than react. Reside solidly in your mind, body, and spirit. Resonate with awareness, balance, and centering.

**Grounding Risks:** Awareness of grounding can become uncomfortable, hyper focus on pain or injury, flashback memories. Grounding may cause greater sensitivity to medications, with a need for lower dosage.

**Grounding practices.** Standing poses. Visualization. Directed breathwork. Sound as carrier. Tapping/Energy Practices.

## How to Ground:

- Stand with knees slightly bent. Transfer weight between legs. Swaying. Heel bounce.
- Visualize your being from head to toes, through the body to Earth, and back from Earth through your feet, legs, spine to head. See yourself stable, supported and held by the earth.
- Direct breath into the Earth. Exhale longer than inhale. Hearing the sound of the air moving in and out of the body. Play with the sound, making it louder or quieter, or adding humming or sighing.
- Feel the weight of your body, limbs, torso, head. Are some lighter or heavier? Notice different sensations as you breathe and gently move. Notice temperature, sound, taste, smell, and sight. Switch between eyes open and eyes closed.
- Place the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth behind the teeth while breathing, connects the two meridians.
- Tap a finger below the nose above the upper lip, and below the lower lip on the chin. These energy medicine, acupressure-based techniques tell the body to pay attention to the two main meridians. Add tongue behind the teeth, eyes opened or closed.
- Gently tap on the ridge of the eye socket, directly under the pupil of each eye, on the occipital ridge, activating the stomach meridian. Energy is sent from the head through the body and legs into the earth, creating a stable ground. Not only is physical grounding achieved, but clarity of mental state, emotional balance, and spiritual guidance are more easily accessed. Add breath work and tongue, with eyes opened or closed.

## Grounding Reading

- Blog on grounding by Lori Hops

<https://www.energypsych.org/blog/groundings-vital-role-for-wellbeing-with-energy-practices>

- Koniver, L. (2023). Neurological Pathways Supported by Grounding. Open Journal of Neurology and Neuroscience, 1:1002.

## Definitions on Centering:

According to the APA dictionary,

“Centering is a technique whose aim is to increase and focus attention and energy, to provide relief from stress and anxiety, or both. Various practices (e.g., meditation, yoga) emphasize centering as a way of focusing attention on the process of breathing in order to slow it down or

regularize it. Sometimes this state of concentration is an end in itself. In other instances, at the point of concentration, negative thoughts and emotions are released and positive thoughts and emotions are encouraged. In sport psychology, the technique is used by athletes to assist them in achieving an [ideal performance state.](https://dictionary.apa.org/centering)" <https://dictionary.apa.org/centering>

Centering has also been defined as a mental and physical state of aligning and connecting to essential internal and authentic self. Centering physically and mentally resides in the physical middle of the self: head, heart, gut, hips, or other places. The center of being can be moved at will. It can be a mental space, in the here and now. Centering helps to find peace in the chaos, by quieting the mind. Common centering practices use mindful breathing and visualizations.

### **Types of Centering**

**Physical:** heart, gut, below the navel. Where the center of gravity resides in the body which changes as you move and change shape and size with growth or changes in weight and muscle mass.

**Psychological:** A state of being calm, neutral, steady, alert, active and present. Connection to true self, feelings, and awareness. Alignment with authenticity.

**Energetic:** In Qigong, the center is below the navel in the lower Dan Tian (may have alternate spelling: dantien, dantian). Some say it resides within the center of the body, in a energetic channel called the Hara line, from Japanese traditions. Christian centering prayer is in the center of being, aligned with spiritual and religious texts, with quiet contemplation. Centering is not a physical location, but the body can connect with the consciousness of centering in the energetic field.

### **Theory on Centering:**

In **Chinese Medicine**, the body has pools of energy that ideally flow unobstructed through internal channels, or meridians, creating balance, wellness, and vitality in the physical, emotional, and spiritual body. This energy is called Xi (pronounced "chee") in Chinese, or Ki in Japanese. The most important and vital area in the body for the Xi is in the lower Dan Tian. This area is the center of gravity in the body, also called the Elixir of Life. Located approximately two inches below the navel, it resides deep inside the body in the center of the guts. In Japanese it is called Hara. The Xi in the lower Dan Tian can be enhanced, increased, refined, and developed to send and receive neural impulses, directing and harmonizing energy throughout the body and mind. To center your body, mind and spirit, it is important to develop an intimate relationship with the Dan Tian, know how it functions, and use its power to enhance your experiences in movement, awareness and emotional functioning.

The heart area is recognized in the **East Indian system of Ayurveda** as the center, through the heart chakra (Sanskrit for wheel). It is connected to the thymus gland, physical heart, and lungs. The heart chakra, in the center of the chest, transmits energy from the rest of the chakras, as it sits in the middle with three main chakras above and three main chakras below it. It also processes information and communicates outside the body. A heart chakra that is healthy and open allows for universal consciousness, love, and the higher self to be expressed. A heart chakra that is closed can express grief, disappointment and anger at self and others. Some esoteric schools propose humanity is progressing as a species from relating to the energy of the solar plexus chakra (thought, identity, will power) to the energy of the heart chakra (connection, love, universal consciousness). Others say the high heart, under the collarbones, just below the dip of the throat, is opening as a "new" chakra in humanity.

The center is not only a location, but a state of mind and awareness. This is reflected in the **Christian practice of Centering Prayer**. A meditative approach based in connecting with divinity, Centering Prayer

is recommended to find quiet, equanimity, and deeper meaning in spiritual practice. It is a modern interpretation of ancient practices described in holy texts. Other faith traditions have practices which may not be called centering per se, but have similar goals and outcomes that centering practices offer.

**Centering prayer research.** College students practiced daily for four weeks. **Significant improved mindfulness and reduced stress** compared to controls. Greater resilience. (Guitierrez et al., 2021). Randomized control trial. Four-weeks college students online practiced 10 minutes at twice a day. Self-reported **less stress and more mindfulness** for treatment group compared to controls. (Dorais & Guitierrez, 2021). Counseling students practiced ten minutes a day, for four weeks. Compared to wait list control group, treatment group had **increased empathy** (Guitierrez et al., 2024). Comparison of two groups of undergrad students in Religious Studies classes. Seven weeks self-monitored home and classroom practice. Other class did not use practice in their classroom. **Decreased anxiety, increased hope and compassion** for classroom practice group, but not significantly. (Eros & Plante, 2023). Online randomized control for Christian centering prayer, N = 702. Compared to secular centering, and meditation groups. No differences during the study. Follow-up after one-month differences. All groups improved. (Rohde et al., 2024). Question if religious component matters for improved wellness. It may affect religious experience.

**High Heart Chakra** esoteric centering. Some propose humanity is progressing as a species. Currently relating to consciousness through the energy of the solar plexus chakra (thought, identity, will power). Progressing to the energy of the heart chakra (connection, love, universal consciousness). Seen as green. Others say the high heart, under the collarbones, just below the dip of the throat, is opening as a “new” chakra in humanity. Multidimensional connections. Seen as pink.

**Why Center?** Centering helps you respond from your authentic self rather than react from your conditioning. Reside solidly in your mind, body, and spirit. Resonate with awareness through balance and connection with your inner self.

**Risks and Benefits of Centering** Helps you respond from your authentic self rather than react from your conditioning. Reside solidly in your mind, body, and spirit. Resonate with awareness through balance and connection with your inner self. Increased awareness may cause greater suffering. You may not like what you learn about yourself, others, or the world. Not wanting to change, or face difficult circumstances. Scary or harmful to adapt or grow.

### **How to Center:**

Notice body sensations (feedback from muscles: tense, relaxed, jittery, numb), body positions in space (sitting, standing, moving with balance and focus for centering in 3D)

- Locate the center of your being. This can include physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual centers. Find your balance or imbalance around it, above, below, inside, outside (feedback from muscles and body sensations)
- Compare this to moving from aligned posture, even gait, balanced weight.
- Body centering with breath to the back of the nose, throat, lungs, chest, belly, back, pelvis. Position the breath on the sides, middle and edges of the body parts. Move the center in spherical shapes, spinning clockwise or anticlockwise. Breath through the top of the head, through the soles of the feet.
- Stand with arms out to the side at the shoulder level, like the wings of an airplane, with palms down. Be aware of the earth energy and vibration coming up from the ground. Breathe. (Note: Do not extend your arms out if you have any injuries, constriction, or

pain. You can try the exercise seated or standing with your arms by your sides, if comfortable, palms down).

- Flip your palms face up, and notice the difference as the energy from above comes down to meet your hands, arms, body. Breathe.

**How to center with the Mind:** Notice your thoughts, if they are about the present, past or future. Try to bring your awareness to the present, rather than solving problems yet to be, or reviewing what was. Create a still point of focus in the here and now. Take a few breaths staying with the present moment and see what you can notice you might have overlooked before.

## Reading

1. **A Guide to Understanding the Real DanTian** by Water Dragon Arts blog by Marco Lueck. <https://www.waterdragonarts.com/en/blog/dantian>
2. **The Dantian and the Daoist Internal Alchemy** BY [GWONG ZAU KUNG FU 廣州功夫](https://gwongzaukungfu.com/en/the-dantian-and-the-taoist-internal-alchemy/) <https://gwongzaukungfu.com/en/the-dantian-and-the-taoist-internal-alchemy/>
3. **Centering with Energy Practices. Blog by Lori Hops** <https://www.energypsych.org/blog/centering-with-energy-practices>
4. **Introduction to the Chakras or Energy Centers.** Blog by Sarah Murphy. <https://www.energypsych.org/blog/foundations-introduction-to-the-chakras-or-energy-centers>
5. **What is Centering Prayer?** Blog by Rich Lewis. <https://www.christianmeditationcenter.org/what-is-centering-prayer/>

## Grounding and Centering

Grounding and Centering are distinct and complementary processes. To be grounded in mind, body and spirit ideally leads to stability and foundational security. To be centered in mind, body and spirit ideally leads to a cohesive and authentic reference point for awareness, action, and reflection.

People often combine and/or confuse the principles and activities of grounding and centering. In fact, it is possible to be fully or partially grounded, centered, or both grounded and centered. Or one could be lacking meaningful grounding and centering.

*Examples:*

**Grounded but not centered** = stable but not coherent or authentic. **Centered but not grounded** = clear, authentic position but scattered in execution or easily swayed by other influences. **Centered and Grounded** = stable, coherent, authentic, clear, aware, effective. **Not centered nor grounded** = unstable, unclear, inauthentic, ineffective, unaware.

## Applications

*Why Ground and Center?* Each process can enhance the other one. Be solid in your presence with grounding, while being coherent, and authentic with centering. Strengthen boundaries within and outside yourself. It is easier to be aware of and maintain healthy boundaries for self and others when you are grounded and centered. It is also easier to see when boundaries weaken if you are a clearer observer with solid grounding and centering. Become more aware of subtle energies, emotions, creativity, intuition, and play.

**Exercises for practice.** Ground and center in physical and mental realms. Cardinal directions with breath, visualization, physical placement. Grounding and centering with psychospiritual awareness.

**Physical practice.** Grounding with airplane hands down. Grounding with airplane hands up. Centering by bringing hands together in sphere in front of the body. Imagine sphere on all sides, back, top, sides, above, below. Bring hands slowly toward chest with breath. Longer exhale than inhale.

**Psychospiritual practice.** The compass rose is two dimensions. A sphere is three dimensions, including around. You can move beyond the three dimensions into realms outside of time and space, much like dreaming or daydreaming. Place your awareness in the different directions and dimensions. Use the compass on your phone, or find the cardinal directions: North, West, South, East. Face each direction in turn. Notice your reactions before moving to the next one. You can create a circle clockwise, or anticlockwise, or skip from horizontal to vertical, etc. What is the quality of movement, air pressure, temperature, thoughts, feelings. Release and retrieve as needed.

**Grounding and Centering Ethics** Ethical practices, self-reflections, next steps. Ethics codes. ACEP Codes of Ethics and Standards for Professional Practice (2013). APA, Ethics Code (2002). Feinstein & Eden, book (2011). Hover-Kramer, book (2011). *Psychological Wellness and Self-Care as an Ethical Imperative*. Jeffrey E. Barnett, Psy.D., ABPP. (see references for full citations).

**Ethics Grounding and Centering Self-care.** Practice presence, grounding, and centering on your own, to be able to use it manage treat for high emotional arousal. Stabilize yourself first. Then co-regulate with others. Self-care for optimal functioning and avoid burn out. Sustain your attention and focus. Beginner's mind, creating awe and learning. Open to expanded awareness, nonlocal, subtle, metaphoric, outside time and space.

**A word of caution:** These practices are for your personal growth and education. Keep your awareness within your own boundaries. Please exercise the utmost respect for yourself and the world around you. What you create and send comes back to you. What you focus on, grows.

**Risks and Benefits.** You may develop **greater accuracy and awareness** of information, relationship dynamics, emotional nuance, and intuitive data. Just because you have information, does not mean you have consent to use it or share it with others. Always **seek consent** and remember you don't know what you don't know. Be **mindful, modest, and respectful** towards yourself and others.

Grounding and Centering techniques not a substitute for mental or medical health care. Seek help from professionals when necessary. Risk of harm to self, other and property requires outside assistance; Emergency room, US dial 911, US dial 988 for mental health, hospitalization. Be aware of need for specialized care with a professional team of providers for people with: long standing problems, trauma, and multigenerational patterns. Team may include medical, psychological, spiritual, social, environmental, physical, and community-based care.

**Ethics Codes and Principles.** Reading PDF. <https://www.apa.org/education-career/development/early/psychological-wellness.pdf>

Burn out is emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of accomplishment. Prolonged, unsuccessful striving for unrealistic expectations. Diminished competence. Vicarious traumatization.

### **ACEP Ethics Code.**

*Integrity.* Uphold the need for self-care on the part of energy psychology practitioners. (p.3).



## APA Ethics Code

*Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence.* “Psychologists strive to be aware of the possible effect of their own physical and mental health on their ability to help those with whom they work ” (p. 1062).

*Standard 2: Competence Standard.* Psychologists undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence (p. 1063).

*2.06 Personal Problems and Conflicts a)* Psychologists refrain from initiating an activity when they know or should know that there is a substantial likelihood that their personal problems will prevent them from performing their work -related activities in a competent manner. When psychologists become aware of personal problems that may interfere with their performing work -related duties adequately, they take appropriate measures, such as obtaining professional consultation or assistance, and determine whether they should limit, suspend, or terminate their work -related activities. (p. 1064).

## Ethics Handbook for Energy Healing Practitioners (Feinstein & Eden).

*General Principle.* “EH practitioners are committed to a lifelong process of personal development in mind, body, and spirit.” (p. 138).

*Personal Healing and Development.* “EH practitioners monitor the effects of their own physical health, mental state, and ego needs on their ability to help those with whom they work, and take appropriate steps to maximize their health in each area.” (p. 139).

*Personal and Interpersonal Boundaries.* “Because EH practitioners work with their client’s energies, they acknowledge a special responsibility to take steps that keep their own energy systems strong and resilient...and decrease vulnerability to being negatively impacted by the energies of their clients.” (p. 147).

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