

# Somatic Resonance

by Susan McConnell, MA, CHT

SOMATIC IFS

TOOL #3

Resonance. I love this word. I like to let the word *resonate* in my nasal cavity. Concerning how to label this third tool of Somatic IFS, I have vacillated about the adjective before the “Resonance.” *Cellular?* Too limiting. *Limbic?* Also too limiting. *Somatic?* A bit redundant. But *Somatic* it is, since our entire bodies are the instrument of resonance.

Somatic Resonance is a phenomenon in which bodies impact each other at a vibrational and energetic frequency. It includes concepts of empathy, mirroring, attunement, intuition, and kinesthetic sensing. Somatic Resonance is a mutual process, involving both parties. Just as two finely made violins will resonate to the same vibration when only one string is played, the Embodied Self of the therapist and client reverberate in a somatic duet.

With this tool, we have entered the watery realms of relationship. Somatic Resonance rests on the earthy foundation of Somatic Awareness and is enlivened by the air of Conscious Breathing. As we cultivate a deep awareness of our bodyminds, we form the foundation for the therapeutic container in Somatic IFS. Within this container, we physiologically witness the nonverbal, implicit stories of our clients’ parts and facilitate in them the state of Embodied Self energy.

Recent advances in neuroscience have identified right-brain structures, including “mirror neurons,” that are a possible neurological basis for mutual attunement and resonance. As mammals, our survival has depended

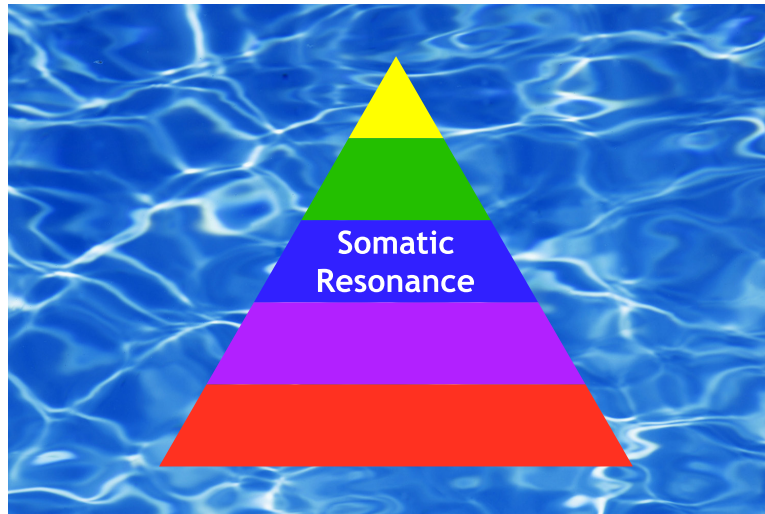
on our ability to be aware of and respond to others’ nonverbal messages. Our limbic brains are central to this process. Limbic resonance is described in a book

about the science of human emotions and biological psychiatry, *A General Theory of Love*, by Lewis, Amini, and Lannon (2000). The authors cite research that suggests that limbic resonance actually revises damaged subcortical structures in relationship—both caregiver/infant

and therapist/client. Daniel Siegel (in *The Mindful Therapist*, 2010) speaks of resonance as

“the alignment of two autonomous beings into an interdependent and functional whole as each person influences the internal state of the other. Our heart rates align, breathing becomes in-sync, nonverbal signals emerge in waves that parallel each other, and ... shifts in EEG findings and heart rate variability co-occur ... Resonance reveals the deep reality that we are a part of a larger whole ... that we are created by the ongoing dance within, between and among us.”

Although the brain and the entire body are involved in Somatic Resonance, the heart is by far the strongest resonating organ. The heart’s electromagnetic field is five thousand times more powerful than the electromagnetic field created by the brain. The heart attunes to the rhythm of the dance “within, between, and among us.”



We may need to restore our heart's ability to resonate. We have overdeveloped our ability to listen with our ears and brain. We focus on the content in order to understand, to get the facts straight, and to remember them. Our parts learn to insulate our hearts so as not to be overwhelmed by the world's pain. I'm grateful for help on this path. My first bodywork teacher, knowing my background as a clay artist, encouraged me to listen with my hands to the muscle tissue as I had to the clay. I learned to rely less on technique and to trust that my clients' flesh would inform me of what it needed. Years of Zen practice revealed to me the limitations of cognitive knowledge. IFS helped my parts to allow me to be receptive—more willing to risk the impact of another's experience. Now I am learning to listen with my heart and with my whole body.

Not only do I listen *with* my body, I listen *to* my body. I listen to my body with at least half of my attention. As I sit across from my clients, I notice a synchronicity of our body symptoms. We may simultaneously cross or uncross our legs or touch our heads or faces. We may match the pace and pitch of our voices and synchronize our breathing. I notice many sensations. The sensations may reveal a personal trailhead, or they may be information about my clients' inner world that is not yet ready to be fully embodied that finds expression in my own sensations. My body is a consultant in the therapy room.

As therapists, we have been cautioned not to take in our clients' material. We have believed it is important to discern whether a body symptom is ours or our client's. Somatic Resonance implies that the sensations emerge within the intersubjective field of the therapeutic relationship. We recall Siegel's words that a resonant relationship is "an interdependent and functional whole as each person influences the internal

state of the other." Perhaps whose symptom it is matters less than what we do with it. Using the tools of Somatic Awareness and Conscious Breathing, we allow the sensations to reveal their information and then to move through our bodies to a completion.

Recalling the vibrating violins, we know that if we were to touch one of the violins, the reverberations would stop. Our ability to somatically resonate can be blocked by parts that obstruct the natural flow of energy in our bodies. We feel bored, numb, tired, distracted, agitated, or many other physical symptoms. Instead of resonance, we experience somatic dissonance. It is essential for us as therapists to know the triggers that block our resonance and to let the sensations sequence through our bodies to restore our ability to listen with our hearts.

So, in our therapy offices, we hear the somatic soundtrack accompanying the verbal story. With the finely tuned instrument of our Embodied Selves, we reverberate with the implicit song of the client's parts expressed in posture, gesture, muscular contractions, breathing patterns, dissociation, and sexual energy. Our clients experience this full-bodied listening as the therapeutic relationship is buoyed in resonant relational waters.

Somatic Resonance revises and transforms both the therapist's and client's internal systems towards more fully embodied Self-leadership. In a state of Embodied Self, our energetic and vibrational alignment allows us to recognize our functional unity with other beings. We experience our interdependence with all of life and come to realize "the deep reality that we are a part of a larger whole."

Somatic Resonance, the third tool of the pyramid of Embodied Self, provides a safe container for exploring movement and touch, the last two tools that lead to a state of Embodied Self energy.