

The Haven

IDEAS IN ACTION

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For more than 30 years The Haven has offered programs for personal and professional growth and development.

People leave The Haven with skills to be fully alive, have healthy relationships and communicate effectively. Our programs also address life issues such as self-responsibility, anxiety, anger, sexuality, depression, addictions, passion and creativity.

The Haven is a not-for-profit charitable organization located on beautiful Gabriola Island, BC, Canada.

For information about our programs, please visit

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This booklet is dedicated to Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen with thanks to Dick and Jennifer Sass.

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Introduction

The models and ideas in this booklet are presented at Come Alive, Living Alive Phases I and II, New Horizons Phase III, Couples Alive, and many other programs at The Haven. They were originally formulated by The Haven's founders, Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen, who combined their own experience and thinking with material they drew from a range of sources.

The versions included here are intended as summaries, tasters or reminders. We have aimed to provide concise, clear accounts of the central ideas contained in the models and to convey something of their implications and potential for individual health and wellbeing, relationships, families and the societies we live in. There is also a section on how learning to breathe more fully can contribute to the growth and connection the models portray. The various forms of bodywork, gestalt and other experiential learning offered at The Haven are also opportunities for this sort of growth and development.

When these ideas are taught in Haven programs they are explained and developed in various ways, depending on the needs of the group and the styles of the leaders. Some details or perspectives may differ from what is presented here, and participants may appreciate different aspects of the models at different times. Most importantly, the programs provide opportunities to *learn by doing*. These are not only theoretical models – they have practical, down-to-earth implications for the way we live, with ourselves and with others.

The concepts reviewed in this booklet are discussed in more depth in the books listed below, which are published by The Haven and available from our store and online at our website.

Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen

Being: A Manual for Life

Joining: The Relationship Garden

A Book about Health and Happiness

The Illuminated Heart: Perspectives on East-West Psychology and Thought

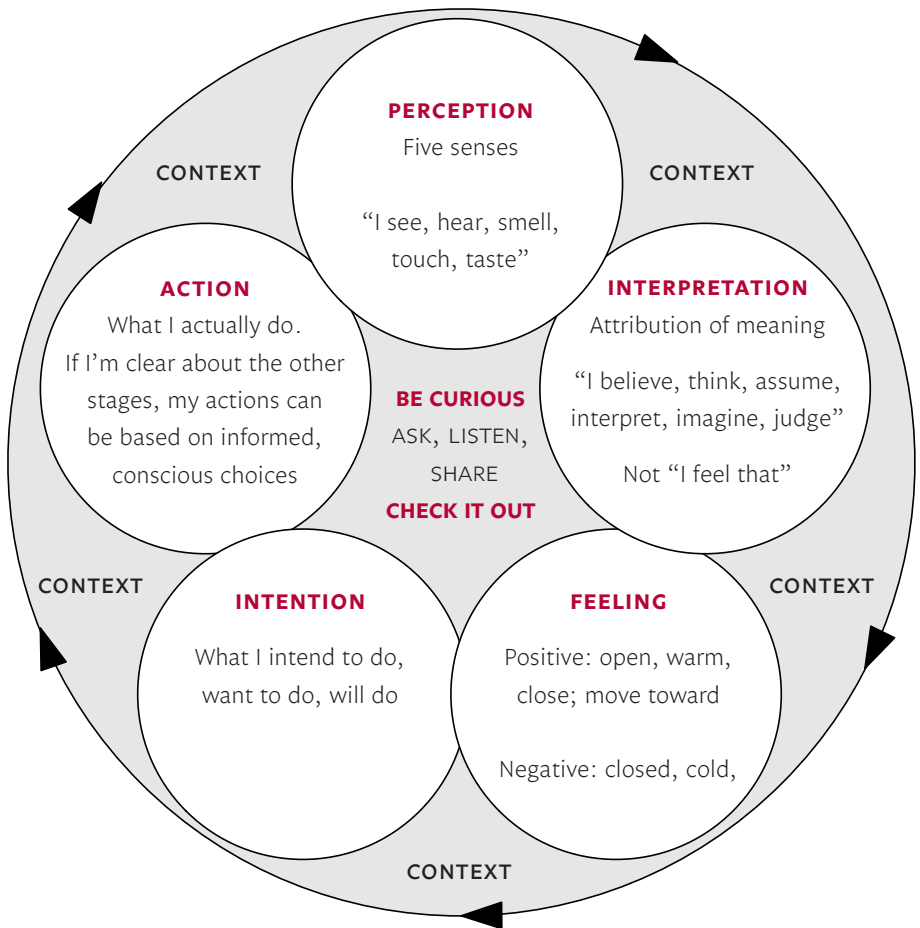
Joann Peterson

A Book about Anger, Boundaries and Safety

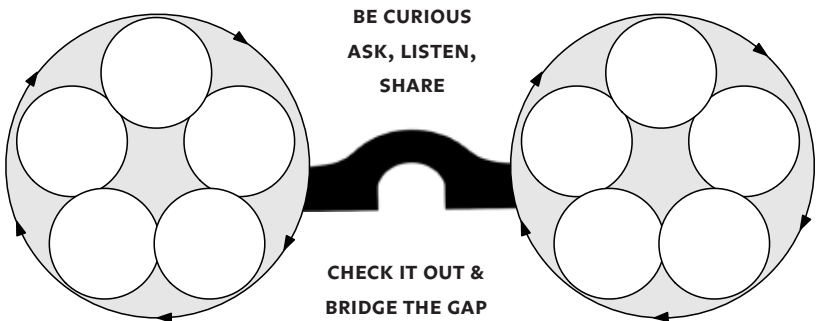
David Raithby and Sandey McCartney

A Book about Living with Passion

We hope you will visit The Haven to experience these ideas in action.



It takes two to communicate, so:



Think of agreeing or disagreeing with one another, rather than being right or wrong. Be curious about each other’s realities. Also be clear with one another about your intentions as you communicate.

The Haven Communication Model

Communication is central to what we teach at The Haven. Our Communication Model is a tool that people can use to be in relationship with one another and to learn about themselves and each other. The Haven's focus on self-responsibility, curiosity, embodiment and relationship is exemplified in this model.

Before The Haven itself existed, its founders, Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen, embarked on what they described as a 'relationship project', in which they set out to know one another and themselves as best and as honestly as they could. The communication model they developed out of ideas they encountered at that time became the principal means through which they did this. Thirty years later they describe it as their 'spiritual practice' and continue to experience it as thoroughly practical and deeply meaningful.

On one level, the Haven Communication Model is simply a description of what goes on when people try to communicate. The idea we emphasize in our programs is that by understanding this process, we can move through it more consciously, more self-responsibly, and with more awareness of our choices. In doing this we can experience personal growth while deepening, enriching and clarifying a whole range of relationships.

One of the circles in the diagram opposite contains the word *perception*. Every moment, we take in vast amounts of 'data' through our senses – sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste. In themselves, these data have no meaning. It is through *interpretation* that we make sense of all this information. The language we use to express our interpretations includes phrases such as "I think", "I imagine", "I believe", or "I interpret."

Based on our interpretations we experience body feelings, which are broadly either 'positive' (for example, open, warm, close) or 'negative' (for example, closed, cold, distant). The phrase "I feel that you are ..." does *not* describe a feeling; it is usually an interpretation, better expressed as "I think that you are ..." By representing our thoughts as feelings we can obscure the process we are going through; this confusion may be an obstacle to experiencing and communicating our actual thoughts and feelings.

Here is an example of the process. If I come home one evening and see that my partner's eyes are red and sore-looking, I will interpret that perception in some way (based in part on my context, as shown in the diagram). Perhaps I will think that my partner has been crying because of a fight we had the day before. This is my interpretation. My feelings will depend on my context and the nuances of my interpretation. I may, for example, feel 'distant',

thinking my partner should have ‘gotten over it’ by now! Or if I am sorry about my part in the argument, I may feel ‘warm’ towards my partner and want to move closer. The point is that I have done all this by myself; I have generated feelings based on my interpretation of what I have seen, given my own particular context. All this will feed into how I act and will influence how our evening develops.

My partner’s reality may be quite different. What if, rather than being sad, my partner has been having contact lens problems? Or perhaps he or she really is sad, but about something unrelated to me. My interpretation – a reasonable one based on my context and the information I had at the time – may not agree with my partner’s experience at all. If I don’t ask and check my interpretation, I may never know. (And of course, all this time my partner will be interpreting things he or she perceives about me, and having feelings as a result!)

Now, one evening turning out a particular way because of an unchecked interpretation is one thing; but it is quite easy to have most of our life work this way! Something that many people realize when they come to The Haven and practice this model is how profoundly and subtly our unchecked interpretations dictate the course of our relationships. Relationships based on such assumptions quickly run into difficulty. The key is to check our interpretations with the other person, and to listen with curiosity to what they tell us. In this way we can bridge the gap between our separate experiences and move into dialogue. If we do not do this, we may miss out on getting to know and understand the important people in our lives, and learning about ourselves and how we see the world. None of us is either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’; our view points simply differ. An attitude of curiosity promotes learning and growth.

By learning to check out our interpretations in this way, we take a huge step in understanding and expressing ourselves and expanding our worlds to include others’ realities. We will also be better able to accept and express our thoughts and feelings – and understand those of others – without letting these dictate how we live. We will be able to formulate our intentions more clearly and take actions that are congruent, self-responsible and sensitive to others. The Haven Communication Model has important implications for personal growth, relationships, and the societies we live in.

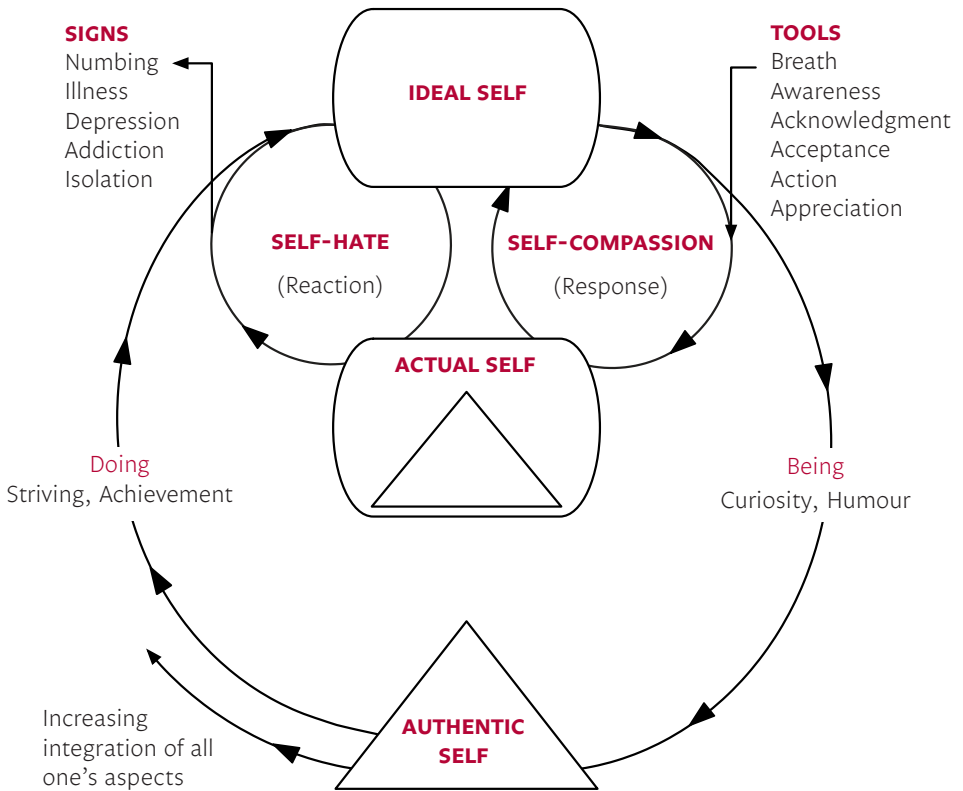
The Haven Selves Model

The Haven Selves Model offers a way of understanding ourselves and an opportunity to live our lives with more awareness and choice. It traces an individual's development from an original Authentic Self towards an Ideal Self, derived at first from external sources such as family and society, and then internalized. As people consistently fail to match up to their internalized Ideal, and are confronted instead with the reality of their Actual Self, they fall into a cycle of self-hate which has a wide range of consequences for the health and well being of the person. The Haven model offers another option, which we call the cycle of self-compassion.

The Selves model begins with the assumption that every person is born as an Authentic Self, with a basic nature that is unique to each individual. This 'essence' contains the entire potential of what the person might in time become. As children grow, they gradually become aware of their parents' expectations of them. Through daily experience they create for themselves an image of how they must be in order to please those upon whom they are dependent for their survival. This developing image is the kernel of a child's Ideal Self. Though its source is originally external, it is soon internalized and incorporated into a self-regulating system of behaviour in the maturing person. This system is further strengthened as the person encounters other sources of authority, at school and more widely in society. Frequently, the demands of the Ideal Self are in opposition to the desires of the Authentic Self, and most often the Authentic Self is surrendered in some form of compromise. This reality is a person's Actual Self.

This process is a normal and necessary part of growing up and being part of society. Each person must live as all three Selves, attempting to satisfy them all in order to maintain some emotional balance and ease. Sadly however, as we strive but consistently fail to match up to the perfect requirements of the Ideal Self, while at the same time progressively abandoning our Authentic Self, we react with self-hate. We may achieve a great deal in the process of doing and striving, but there is a price to pay. In order to carry on working against our deepest natures, we become numb or frozen. In particular we constrain our breathing in an attempt to still our feelings. In so doing we deny ourselves the full pleasure of being alive. As we lose touch with our feelings, our bodies begin to manifest symptoms. The consequences of self-hate include physical illness, addictions, depression, and a sense of isolation.

It is possible to choose another option, the cycle of self-compassion. There are tools available to help us on this path. The first step is to *breathe*; by doing this we can begin to 'unfreeze' and experience again our own



aliveness. We can then become increasingly *aware* of our patterns of striving towards our Ideal, of our Actual Self, and of the desires of our Authentic Self. In *acknowledging* this, to others as well as ourselves, we begin to *accept* our selves; and we can take *action* to further the cycle of self-compassion. As we continue, we progressively develop a fifth ‘a’, *appreciation* of ourselves. Thus we have an acronym for this cycle of self-compassion: BAAAAA – Breath, Awareness, Acknowledgment, Acceptance, Action, Appreciation.

Many people who come to The Haven know the cycle of self-hate very well, and are all too aware of both the emotional and physical symptoms that can result from it. For many, the realization that there is a powerful alternative to this marks a turning point in their lives. Awareness gives us the opportunity increasingly to respond to the events and circumstances of our lives with self-compassion, curiosity and humour, rather than simply reacting with self-hate. There is enormous potential in this for growth and increased wellbeing. The challenge is to acknowledge and honour each aspect of ourselves and to move through our lives with choice and responsibility.

The Haven Resonance Model

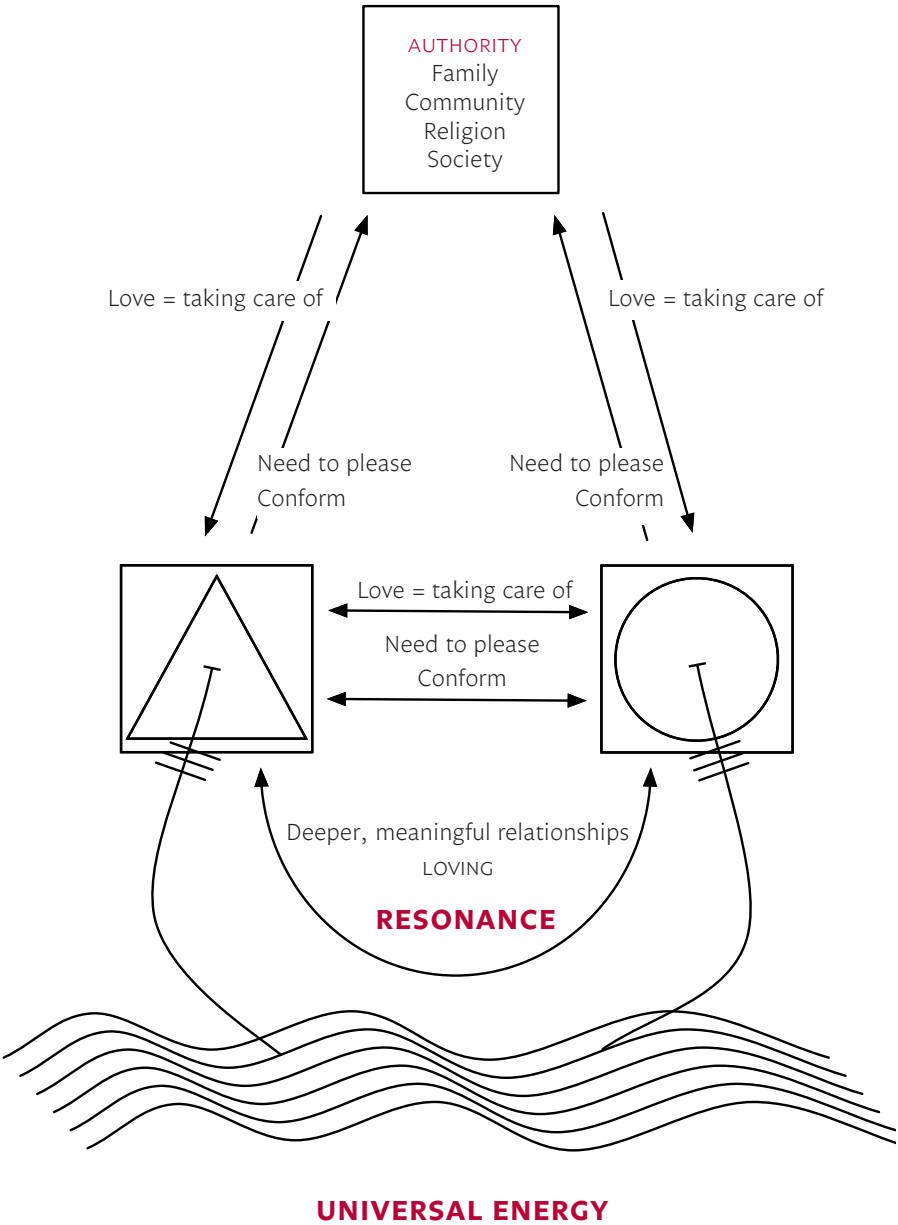
The Haven Resonance Model describes how people commonly relate to one another in families and society, and with friends and partners, through a basic dynamic of caretaking, pleasing, and conforming. It also describes the possibility of relating on a deeper, more satisfying level, through the revealing to one another of our inner selves.

The model begins with the idea that each one of us is a unique expression of a sea of ‘universal energy’, which might also be called God, or Ch’i. We are born into this world, individuated but still connected to this sea, as unique, pulsating patterns of free-flowing energy. Two such individuals are represented in the diagram, as a circle and a triangle.

As we enter this world, however, we are dependent on others for our survival. Our parents are the first people we encounter in this caretaking role, and we soon learn how best to win their attention, by pleasing them and conforming to their expectations. This first experience is replicated in many different arenas as we grow up and move through life. The square in the diagram therefore represents our parents, and also, more generally, the norms and demands of the society we grow up in, expressed through the authority of family, community, education, religion, and so on.

Our response to the demands of this caretaking square is to surrender much of our individual difference, in order to please, to conform, to fit in – ultimately, to become square ourselves. Even if we ‘rebel’ against the demands of society, we still tie ourselves to it by living in reaction against it. As we continue along this path the free flow of our energy begins to contract and freeze. This is represented in the diagram by the boxes around the circle and the triangle. As these boxes rigidify, we begin to lose our connection with universal energy (shown in the diagram with three small lines below the boxes).

Often, we set out to recover a sense of connection through seeking love and relationships. In place of our original connection to one another through universal energy, we learn to ‘take care of’ and ‘look after’ one another (as represented in the diagram by the arrows between the circle and the triangle). This is society’s dominant paradigm of what ‘love’ is, and it is what we have most experienced in our upbringing. In developing our primary and other relationships, we look for people we can look after and who will take care of us. Again we surrender our individuality and strive to please. The cost of this is that we further abandon our authentic selves and often remain with a sense of loneliness, isolation, and meaninglessness. As we experience



dissatisfaction in our relationships, we may become locked instead in unproductive conflict or in hopelessness and apathy.

Another way to connect is through a process of self-revelation and sharing. We think this is the process that so often begins in *Come Alive* and other programs at The Haven. As people begin to breathe and experience their feelings and share these with one another, other members of the group experience their own feelings in resonance. A kind of ‘thawing’ takes place and the rigidified boxes around each of us begin to melt and soften. We can then reconnect with the universal energy of which we all are a part and begin to relate to one another through that energy as well as through the various roles of our lives. In so doing we can add greatly to the quality of our lives and relationships.

The two other models described in this booklet, as well as the concepts of power and strength and the suggestions for breathing, can help us introduce into our relationships this kind of connection through self-revelation, sharing and resonance. Breathing, the Communication Model, and the self-compassion cycle are tools we can use to gradually soften the boxes we have constructed around ourselves and learn to relate to one another in deeper and more satisfying ways. In relationships of this sort we can know ourselves better and experience clarity, loving and connection.

Power and Strength

The concepts of power and strength run through the Haven models. The terms describe ways of dealing with the sense of anxiety and helplessness that we first experience as infants and that remains with us through our lives, sometimes submerged, and sometimes overwhelming. Both power and strength are important factors in our development.

Power is our society's dominant solution to anxiety and helplessness. In exercising our power we use our ego defence mechanisms to cover over and compensate for anxiety. We do this by attempting to control ourselves, situations, and other people. Through power, our angst and helplessness can seem more remote and we may achieve considerable security. In this way power can be helpful and effective; unfortunately, it tends also to limit growth.

Strength, with which we are generally less familiar, enhances growth. In strength, we investigate and accept the qualities we find within ourselves and use our ego adaptive skills, such as thought, judgment, language and other forms of expression and creativity, to develop these qualities and grow.

In the Haven Selves Model, power is foreground in our development as we strive to attain a picture of who we think we should be, our Ideal Self. Although we may achieve much in this way, we often react to our inevitable falling short of this ideal and the abandonment of our Authentic Self by developing a pattern of self-hate. Through the self-compassion cycle (BAAAAA, page 6), we can exercise and develop our strength, based on awareness and acceptance of our selves (including our striving) and opening up to others.

The foreground use of power in our development is also described in The Haven Resonance Model, in relationships of control, pleasing and conformity. This can lead to a 'rigidity' and a loss of connection with others and with our own authentic natures. Again, we may choose to soften our rigidity and rediscover connection with others through the resonance of our feelings and energy, allowing our strength to come foreground and promote growth.

The Communication Model also offers the possibility of connecting with others in a way that exercises and develops our strength. To develop strength through this model, we need to be aware of our intentions and, above all, 'Check it Out' with others and really hear what they say. The elements of the model by themselves - perceptions, interpretations, feelings, and actions - can equally well be used to control people and situations.

In *Being: A Manual for Life*, Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen list more than 40 pairs of words that exemplify the differences between power and strength approaches. The following are a few that regularly come up for discussion in Come Alive programs.

Control · Vulnerability

As children we learn to control ourselves in order to please others, starting with our parents. We continue throughout our lives to control ourselves in order to control others and our environment. This involves an emphasis on power. In vulnerability, where strength is more foreground, we accept and acknowledge our actual experience of ourselves, of others, and of the outside world. Then, with our own creativity and resources, we can begin to respond more to life rather than resisting it.

Field dependency · Field awareness

In field dependency our actions are governed by the *field* – that is, other people and our environment. Shackled to externals, we do not develop our internal sense of self. By taking account of the field and being sensitive to other people and events, without letting our actions be dictated by them, we develop autonomy and field awareness. Here the emphasis is on strength.

Victimhood/blame · Self-responsibility

Blame and victimhood are roles in a power orientation. In self-responsibility, we develop strength through accepting our own participation in events and owning our perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions (including our tendencies to blame others or make ourselves victims).

Walls · Boundaries

When we approach life from a power position, we hide behind walls rather than living at our contact boundaries. Walls are brittle barriers, defences to keep the outside away. Boundaries, on the other hand, are flexible and involve sensitivity to both self and other. Through active choices about what we want and do not want at any given moment, we are able to define ourselves and come forward in a way that allows connection with other people.

Black and white · Shades of grey

In power positions, we tend to see situations and people in terms of black and white, good or bad, right or wrong. In strength, we are more willing to see real people in complex situations, rather than impersonal objects in a world of right and wrong.

Neither power nor strength is either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Each is an important part of who we are. However, while we are all familiar with exercising power, we generally have much less experience of manifesting our strength. Programs at The Haven offer opportunities to investigate both orientations within ourselves and explore new possibilities for growth.

Breathing

Deep breathing is taught and practiced in Come Alive, Living Alive Phases I and II, New Horizons Phase III, and many other programs, including Breathe! and Body, Breath and Energy Training.

Breathing is an important part of each of the models discussed in this booklet. As we use the Communication Model, breathing will help us in the clarity of our perceptions and thoughts, in fully experiencing our feelings, and in sharing our experience with others and really hearing what others say to us. Breathing is also a very useful step in learning self-compassion as presented in the Haven Selves Model.

The Resonance Model is a picture of how, as we grow up, we tend to freeze or rigidify the natural flow of energy with which we are born. As we do this, we limit our connection with universal energy and with each other. One way we achieve this rigidity is by holding our breath or breathing only shallowly. When we begin to breathe more deeply, we begin to ‘unfreeze’, loosen up, and reactivate our energy and our connection with others.

The rigidity we create in our lives expresses itself in many ways, including in our bodies. As we hold our breath, we also hold and tighten our musculature. This is sometimes referred to as ‘body armour’, which we create to protect ourselves from perceived threats in the outside world. In terms of power and strength (page 10), this is a power-based, defensive approach to the challenges of life. While it can give us a sense of security and control, it also limits our growth and cuts us off from other people and a whole range of experiences.

Often as we breathe we have a physical experience of this armour loosening and shifting – our bodies may tingle or vibrate or want to move in other ways. We may experience feelings that we have previously ‘held down’ or make sounds that more often we have ‘swallowed’. Sometimes we experience anxiety and resistance in this process. If we continue breathing, however, we can also experience the strength that comes from discovering and accepting our natural qualities, resources and energies. These may include anger and sadness as well as pleasure, joy, loving, creativity, and more. Conscious deep breathing is a great tool in living a rich and full life.

There are many ways of breathing, adapted to a variety of purposes. The style we most often teach at The Haven involves taking deep full breaths through an open mouth, breathing into both your belly and your chest. Inhale deeply then let the air ‘fall out’; then breathe in again. Try to keep your breathing ‘circular’, without long pauses at the top or bottom of the

breath. We recommend lying on your back with your arms at your side and knees raised.

You can breathe alone or with a partner. Your partner can either sit with you and offer coaching, encouragement and contact, or you can breathe together at the same time.

Occasionally, and mostly in early sessions of breathing more deeply, people experience muscular spasms, cramping or rigidity, especially in their hands or around the mouth. This is not dangerous, but can be uncomfortable and alarming if you do not know what is happening. Caused by a lowering of carbon dioxide levels in the blood, it indicates that you are breathing enough for now, and should back off for a few minutes. You can reverse the process by quieting your breathing. If the cramping is severe or persistent, breathe slowly into and from a paper bag until it passes. As you continue regular deep breathing, your body will likely adjust to the increasing amount of air you are taking in, and this will no longer be a problem.

In 2008, a group of participants in a three-day Breathe! program at The Haven with David Raithby and Linda Nicholls took part in a daily breathing project over a period of about six weeks. After several weeks of daily breathing (20 minutes per day, 6 days per week), participants reported benefits including improved sleep, decreased stress, greater energy, more clarity of thought and action, decreased blood pressure, and a stronger sense of presence and ‘embodiment’. At the same time, several reported increasing ‘resistance’, agitation and anxiety.

A few months later some participants had stuck more or less completely to this daily routine. Some had quit, while others had stopped and started again, perhaps adapting the routine in ways that suited them. Several made comments to the effect that they found it hard to handle being so alive! “Based on our parallel personal experience,” said David and Linda, “the rising tide of anxiety/flow of life-force energy is a powerful force. Regular breathing wakes up our authentic vibrational existence, ‘inspires’ and magnifies our natural inclination toward growth and connection, and may indeed be interpreted as a threat to maintaining our everyday status quo.”

The benefits and challenges of this kind of breathing are considerable. We encourage you to experiment with integrating more breath into your life and to notice, acknowledge, accept, and appreciate yourself in the experience. The more you can do this, in all aspects of your life, the more you will grow and develop your own strength to live your life fully, responding to its challenges resourcefully and in connection with others.

For information about programs at The Haven,
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