EcoSomatic Expression with Jamie McHugh

"Our inner life is complete when it merges into nature and becomes one with it." - D. T. Suzuki

Intention: Enter your body. Wake up your senses. Soften your mind. And temporarily forget yourself to discover yourself anew as part of the natural world.

What Is EcoSomatic Expression?

EcoSomatic Expression is a somatic–expressive practice that cultivates a living, felt relationship between the **inner landscape of the human body** and the **outer landscape of the natural world**. Rather than approaching nature as something to observe from a distance, this practice invites direct participation through sensation, movement, breath, sound, touch, and stillness. It is not about performance, interpretation, or getting somewhere. It is about *arriving* in the body, in place, and in the moment.

EcoSomatic Expression is suitable for people of all ages and experience levels. It does not require prior meditation practice, artistic skill, or physical training. What it asks instead is curiosity, patience, and a willingness to listen and respond.

The Three Stages of the Practice

The methodology unfolds through three interrelated stages. While they are initially presented sequentially, they are not set in stone. It is a fluid cycle that can be enacted in any sequence.

1. Befriending the Inner Landscape (Somatic Mindfulness)

Settle into the body and find ground internally. This stage resets the nervous system and opens time through simple, repeatable activities that use the **Five Somatic Technologies**:

- **Breath** – the primary regulator and bridge between voluntary and involuntary experience
- **Vocalization** – sound as vibration, release, and expression
- **Contact** – touch as orientation, support, and perception
- **Movement** – spontaneous and intentional motion
- **Stillness** – non-action, rest, and assimilation

These technologies are indigenous to human design. When layered and blended, they occupy the mind with multiple streams of inner sensory information. As bodily perception comes more into the foreground, habitual mental commentary naturally recedes. From this ground, it becomes possible to soften the boundary of the self and enter into a fuller relationship with place.

2. Engaging the Outer Landscape (Relational Exploration)

From this resourced inner state, we move into active relationship with the environment using the **Five-Part Relational Map**:

- **Witness** – being still, open, and receptive to what is present
- **Contact** – touching the environment with different body parts and qualities of touch
- **Mirror** – becoming what you perceive through imitation
- **Respond** – allowing spontaneous movement or sound to arise
- **Rest** – pausing to assimilate and settle

Through direct sensory engagement with sky, trees, water, rock, or wind, associations, feelings, and images arise. You express your responses through movement, vocalization, and stillness. This creates a living dialogue between sensing and acting - experimenting without an agenda and being guided by present-moment curiosity.

3. Harvesting Meaning (Expressive Integration)

The final stage is reflective rather than analytical. Reflection allows experience to settle, integrate, and reveal personal significance. Meaning is not forced or imposed; it emerges by revisiting and articulating through different media. We make meaning by giving form to experience through:

- free writing
- spoken reflection
- photography or video
- drawing
- sound recording

The Five Keys: A Portable Practice Framework

Underlying all activities is a simple, flexible framework called the **Five Keys**. These keys can be used in any order and adapted to any environment:

1. **Orient Without** – scan and sense the environment: near and far, above and below
2. **Orient Within** – settle internally with breath, structure, and attention
3. **Focus & Wander** – choose a theme and explore; then widen into spontaneous discovery
4. **Pause** – end in stillness and non-action
5. **Reflect** – harvest experience through words or images

A Sample Practice Experience

Begin with a walk in a natural setting where you feel safe and undisturbed. Periodically stop when something catches your attention and pause with hands on belly or chest for a few breath cycles to witness. Listen – look - sense.

After following this rhythm of movement and stillness for some time, choose a place to linger where there is discernible movement: moving clouds, flowing water, leaves in the wind.

Settle in place and orient within; and then orient without, expanding into your full range of 360-degree awareness.

Gradually engage with place by first receptively witnessing and then actively mirroring the movement you perceive. Perhaps you start with just your gaze, and then proceed to include your arms and your whole torso. Alternate between movement and stillness, focus and wandering, engagement and rest.

The practice concludes with stillness and reflection, allowing what has been touched to assimilate and integrate.

Why This Practice Matters

In modern life, attention is often fragmented, and the body is treated as secondary. EcoSomatic Expression restores a sense of belonging within oneself and within the larger living world.

This practice supports somatic whole-body regulation, perceptual clarity, and creative expression with a renewed sense of connection.

You are invited to listen, respond, and remember what it feels like to be a sensing, expressive body within the greater body of nature.

EcoSomatic Expression

- *online workshops*
- *individual retreats*
- *week-long group retreats*

All these offerings can be found here