

Caroline Georgiou shares her experience of moving her practice to the floor

This is a story within stories. At the centre is a curious exploration into the phenomenon of taking my somatic therapy practice to the floor. I write this on my sun-baked wooden flooring and you, dear reader, are invited to make yourself comfortable, perhaps to physically, or imaginarily, leave your chair behind, and join me down here, noticing for yourself. And who knows, something you read or sense might touch you somehow, and we may meet through this shared surface of ours.

The ethics of touch

But first, let us look through the professional lens which informs and guides my work. The field of somatics consists of specialised practices which support the body to experience itself consciously. As a registered somatic therapist, it is my stance to live and know the embodied experience and to work with integrity within my competence as a practitioner (Our commitment to clients, point 2a, *Ethical Framework*).¹ Within my master's degree training, we were taught extensively how to work with many practices, including somatic touch as a resource, tailored and responsive to the consenting client's subjective embodiment.

Since graduating, I intentionally market my practice as supporting conscious embodiment, to appeal to clients who are innately drawn to working somatically, and I clearly explain that my practice includes therapeutic touch, if consent is given, and that it is in service and support of body work processing. For clients who would like to receive skilful touch as part of their work, I have consent forms from my UK registering body (The Association for Somatic Movement Dance Therapies, UK and Eire), which explain the theoretical and biological benefits, stating that consent can be withdrawn at any time. And in accordance with the ethical principle of respecting client autonomy, I check in with the client in every session about what feels right for them on that day (Principles, point 5, *Ethical Framework*). Not all clients want to work with touch, and this is equally welcomed and named within our agreement.

Sessions uniquely reflect each client's embodiment in the present moment, and part of my role is to be responsive to what arises within the unfolding process. A client may request a light hand at their back where they notice muscles contracting in response to a painful experience, tracking the subtle somatic sensations of receiving touch and the softening within the body.

Relational consent

Consent with any micro practice is relational and may titrate throughout a session as we work slowly, supporting the client to consciously increase their capacity to be with their sensations at the pace and intensity which feels right for them.² My attention is with the client's nervous system and the somatic field of information, which inform me when the resource is no longer needed or when it is beginning to feel too much. When this information arises, I directly ask the client what they are noticing and if anything has changed for them, which supports them in naming their experience and witnessing the natural conclusion of the practice.

For some clients, there are moments when the offering of skilful touch may be the most appropriate and responsive way to support them in their somatic explorations. Touch can help clients to notice their experiences, it can support regulation, the release of habitual movement and holding patterns, and can facilitate creative expression. Whether in person or online, inviting a client to self-touch can support them to witness and care for the parts of themselves they are disconnected from, opening pathways for integration.

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Touch, or the absence of touch, is one of the most profound ways we as humans communicate how we feel. My hands, and their movements, are expressions of my heart, and through them I listen to and perceive information directly, enabling my practice to be cardio-centric, or led from the heart's knowing. I notice the moments I sit on my hands when a client is connecting with powerlessness, or when there is an absence of movement or impulse for connection when meeting a client's parasympathetic survival response. At other times, my hands make shapes, enhancing the words I speak, for they have a language of their own, more potent than any of my utterances alone.

Reclaiming touch in therapy

I acknowledge that, historically, touch within counselling is regarded with caution and controversy, and I invite you to notice how you meet or move away from my words. It is our obligation to safeguard clients from retraumatisation and abuse, and I hold my practice to the highest ethical and reflective standards as my foremost duty is to my clients, ensuring no harm comes from my actions or inactions, working courageously within my competences in service to clients and their healing.

Throughout lockdown, we were once again reminded of the vital importance of touch and how our lives depend upon it. With what some understand to be a shift in global consciousness towards reclaiming the feminine, perhaps

Sharing surfaces

there is opportunity to refresh our professional stance on the use of appropriate, non-sexual, healing touch for practitioners qualified to do so, naming it and reclaiming it within our ethical code of conduct. As more research is conducted and published on the healing benefits of touch, I imagine wider conversations and considerations shall arise around this [t]issue. For practitioners who are drawn to working in this way, I recommend sourcing in-depth and in-person trauma and somatic specialism courses which lead to registration and where touch is a central element of the training, working with a supervisor who is trained in touch, somatic practice and trauma and organising specialist insurance. These pathways shall support both the practitioner and the client, ensuring the relationship and the work is rooted in ethical, safe and effective practice.

In my own invaluable supervision, I carefully explore and unfold the ethical considerations and appropriateness of any touch and somatic resource I offer as a regulating and responsive witness, working within my competences and with the innate intelligence of the body, both mine and each client's. We also explore the innumerable ways I touch and am touched by clients.

Creating a container of presence

In preparation for any session, I take time to wake up bodily through authentic movement, enlivening my channels of perception, so I am present, regulated and ready for connection.

I purposefully and lovingly create a cared-for and ensouled container, so each nervous system can perceive a congruently welcoming space. I do this by channelling archetypal qualities of hearth and home through rituals which clear energies and support my presence.

Using Eugene Gendlin's practice of Focusing,³ I can locate my presence in a particular part of my body, channelling the wisdom of this place. Sometimes I speak from the gnosis of heart, gut, womb space, and other times I share the somatic sensations happening within me, so the client might feel resonance within their body. I am also deeply touched by what my clients share and how they reveal themselves with me. There is never a moment when we are not touching through the relational field.

Co-regulation

Eleven years ago, my darling dog Pablo began to teach me the healing capacity of touch. Throughout those years, on arrival, each client requested his presence within their session, as I would clarify that they had a choice, explaining that he could be in another room (Good practice, point 31a, *Ethical Framework*). Some clients specifically chose to work with me because of Pablo, as I had referenced this option on my website. Each client negotiated where he could nestle, which was usually atop their laps.

When clients vibrated viscerally with shame, his sleep and snoring were undisturbed. He was the embodiment of a loving mirror, for, in these moments, he remained calm, anchored in what polyvagal theory refers to as a 'ventral vagal' state.⁴ As a responsive witness, I invited clients to track their sensations while noticing how he yielded



Caroline's therapy room

his weight effortlessly into them, exploring what his embodiment offered theirs, supporting them into presence and the opportunity for conscious co-regulation as they processed shame from this somatically resourced place. Without doubt, that smelly little pug was one of my greatest companions and colleagues.

A move towards the earth

When he died, I decided to replace my furniture, trying out different kinds of chairs, but none ever felt right. After an enriching session with a client where they chose to lie on the floor in rest, I invested in back-jack chairs, so we could have spinal support during any floor-based sessions. This process inspired me to take my practice to the floor with all clients who chose to or who were able to comfortably join me there. And, had Pablo still been here, I know he would have loved for us to be on the floor with him as we work.

It emerged that most of my clients carry an unspoken longing to return to low ground, and the invitation to be there is met with wonder and voracity. As clients arrive, they choose where they want to be by tuning in to how they perceive the two spaces, discerning which feels comfortable and accessible for them, naming their preference. For the clients who choose the floor, it feels like the most natural place for us to be as we work, and it leaves me curious about how being on the floor supports our co-presence and connection.

The simple act of choosing ground, bending knees, lowering spine and pelvis as I push into my feet and allow gravity to co-deliver me to the floor has had transformational effects on who I am as a practitioner and how I invite others to come home to themselves.

Receiving information

Besides the novelty of not doing this as often as they would like to, clients express relief as holding patterns yield into soft release. This renewed, conscious relationship with the floor frees them to be present with ease as muscles mellow and spine finds its length,

both skyward and earth bound. We also notice our comfortable vulnerability, which has a childlike, organic quality. Layers of camouflage fall away like autumnal leaves making their descent, and we can sit in our authenticity, bearing witness to who we really are as we simultaneously receive the full support of the ground.

And just as those fallen leaves do, we also share the same surfaces. The backs of my legs touch the same ground that is in contact with the back of my clients' legs. We are co-regulating through the touch of the shared surface. Communities of trees nourish and nurture each other through their extensive, underground root system, and in these moments, we too are sensing, sending, and receiving information through the vessels of our bodies and the body of the wooden floor, which vibrates with the lineage and wisdom of bygone forests. For clients who need or prefer the other space, I support this process by inviting them to orient to our unique constellation and the surfaces we share of breath and air, allowing their chair to hold them as they tune in to the connecting floor between us.

Connection through the feet

In one floor session, my attention is drawn to the soles of my client's feet. They continually capture and recall my gaze as they tilt from side to side. I intuit an invitation and an impulse in my own feet, weighing up the information available to me while discerning the congruence of my potential response, before courageously asking if I have permission to push the soles of my feet into theirs. Without hesitation, they say yes, and in this moment, as our feet meet, we both experience a surge of energy and information, which the client names as reassuring and regulating. We are co-creating a potent connection, supporting deep, unprocessed material to come into our embodied awareness.

I am committed to congruent embodiment by listening to the subtle information my body receives. If I had ignored the signals broadcasting through the client's feet, an invaluable potential for healing might have faded into shadow while I supported dissociation, communicating through inaction my willingness to ignore a vital part of myself and of the client, engaging in the perpetuity of their childhood trauma. In this instance, I leaned into BACP's *Ethical Framework*, which names putting the client first and having courage alongside careful consideration of how to meet the client in the moment. I feel it would have been neglectful to choose fear over courage by incongruently withholding from the client. The offer of localised and discerning touch support was an ethical and accurate decision, which strengthened our therapeutic alliance, enabling the client to express their autonomy and verbalise an embodied need for the first time in their lives.

A feedback loop

Now in each session, the client has contracted with me to sit with them on the floor, legs outstretched, soles pushing into each other. This touch enables them to physically perceive my presence, the push activates the muscles, bones and tissue in their lower body, awakening spine,

opening up belly, heart and capacity to receive. Old stories fade, we are together and we both feel it.

As the client processes and explores, I hold dual attention to them and the feedback loop between our breathing bodies, how my beating heart and earthen state support blood flow and the intention to meet them in the moment. This intention eddies through my veins to their feet, migrating toward their heart. We are in cycle, my inhale becoming their exhale as one continuous motion.

The other day, my presence ebbed slightly, causing the extension of my thigh muscles to momentarily soften; the client noticed, immediately asking, 'Are you still here?', masking the gravity and meaning of this question with a laugh. I responded with push, re-establishing the quality of pressure connection they preferred, saying in all seriousness, 'I am here again'. This client is a generous teacher and I learned so much about presence and immediacy in this micro-exchange.

Reclaiming relationship

By choosing to consciously share surfaces, we are reclaiming what it means to be in relationship, co-creating connection which is authentic, congruent and courageous. Through somatic awareness, resourcing and processing, the client chooses how and where they want to work. Clients discern which space and dimension feel most comfortable for them, and for some, locating themselves on the floor simultaneously supports depth connection to their conscious embodiment and our relationship. These autonomous choices enable clients to bring their needs to the fore, amplifying their innate capacities for presence and conscious relationship. Alchemy is forged as our shared surface of wood becomes part of our eco-somatic system, co-conducting the stream of sensory information which flows within and between us.

Rooted in somatic dialogue, we are no longer two individuals sitting across from each other; we are unified, exchanging consciously embodied conversations beyond words. And as I sit, sharing these surfaces, I receive the gold we are unearthing.

Biography



Caroline Georgiou is a BACP registered counsellor, supervisor, registered somatic movement educator and therapist, inner dance facilitator and access bars practitioner. Caroline recognises the body as home, she is curious about what the body knows and she is passionate about helping people come home to themselves, interweaving the somatic and transpersonal into the essence of both her personal and professional practice.

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References

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