

Fingerholds for Emotions

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—Patricia Mathes Cane, Ph.D.

One of the effects of traumatic stress is the experience of strong emotions. During the fight-flight reaction in the face of danger or crisis, there is a rush of emotions and feelings pulsing through the body—fear, anger, rage, anxiety, etc. Emotions can be thought of as waves of energy passing through the body-mind-spirit. Emotions according to Daniel Goleman (1994) in *Emotional Intelligence*, are “impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us.” We have in common with many other animals the impulse to act or react in different situations. The strong impulsive reactions such as rage, fear, and cravings come from the primitive part of the brain or limbic system. With the development of the neocortex of the brain, we have the capacity to override impulses and make rational judgments and decisions about the way we will act. For example, in the morning we may feel a bit distressed and irritable. By midday because of circumstances this feeling may grow into a strong emotion like rage. At this point we can have the feelings of strong anger and perhaps the impulse to do something violent, like strike out physically or verbally at another person. If we act the wave of emotional energy passes through us and gets out of our system. With the higher powers of the brain we also have the capacity to deny our feelings and repress them, in which case the energy gets locked in the body-mind-spirit and can manifest later as a migraine, stomach ache, tight jaw, stiff shoulder muscles, or passive-aggressive behavior. Some people have so much repressed anger, that with time their body takes on a rigid arthritic shape. A third way to handle the anger is to acknowledge it and then do something that will release the wave of energy.

The following exercise is used in Indonesian culture to release and balance the energy of strong emotions. The Indonesian people also place their fingers and hands on the earth to discharge energy. The exercise consists of holding each finger for a few minutes wrapping the opposite hand around each of the fingers. You can do this seated quietly or during the day when you may find yourself experiencing strong emotions. This exercise is effective at night in bed to clear the energy of the day, so that you can sleep soundly. Or use in the morning to start the day clear and centered. The finger holds do not change the situation or the reality. However you are centered, not controlled by emotion, and are able to make clear decisions.

Finger Holds to Balance Emotional Energy

You may do the finger holds with either hand. The theory behind the practice is that through each finger runs a channel or meridian of energy connected with the different organs of the body. By holding each finger you are able to drain and balance the energy flow. As you hold a finger, usually within a minute or two you will feel an energy pulse or throbbing sensation. This indicates that the energy is flowing and balanced, and usually the strong feeling or emotion passes. Many of these finger holds are done naturally without consciousness. Begin to be aware of how you hold your hands and fingers at different times, and how this may relate to your feelings. It is fascinating to observe this in children and adults when they are fearful, anxious, or angry.

- **Thumb**

The Thumb is for tears, grief, and emotional pain. Often babies or small children suck their thumbs or hold it for comfort. The finger hold does not repress tears or sorrow, but allows the energy to move through you until you feel calm. Hold the thumb, breathe deeply and exhale all the grief and sorrow you feel. Breathe in deeply to fill yourself with peace and comfort. Hold until you feel a pulsation of energy.

- **Index Finger**

The Index Finger is for fear. It is important to listen to fear as one would listen to a guide. Fear can tell us many things about our environment, our physical well-being, our edge of growth. It is what we do with fear that is significant. If danger is present rather than being paralyzed by fear, hold the index finger so that a wise decision can be made in the situation—to flee, to stay, or to react. With traumatic stress a person may continually feel fear or panic in their body-mind-spirit. Use of the index finger is a good way to learn how to work with fear, rather than be a victim in the grip of fear. While holding the index finger, exhale and let go of fear, and inhale courage and strength of being.

- **Middle Finger**

The Middle Finger is for anger and rage. Appropriately in many cultures there is the custom of giving the finger. One mother in the midwest recently said “My kids are always giving everyone the finger. Now they gotta hold their finger!” Anger is a natural and normal emotion in many situations. Anger can result in violence toward others or ourselves. Acting with nonviolence means that we recognize the injustice and anger in a situation, and we choose instead to act with justice and peace. Repressed anger, or denial of our own depths of anger can result in passive-aggressive behavior or in many physical symptoms in the body, including arthritis, ulcers, migranes, and knots in the shoulder muscles or other parts of the body. Hold the Middle Finger, exhale and let go of all anger and rage, inhaling compassion, energy, and passion into your being.

- **Ring Finger**

The Ring Finger is for anxiety and nervousness. How many people unconsciously play with their ring fingers worried about many things, bothered by constant mental chatter. The ring finger can help to discharge unnecessary worry and anxiety, saving energy for action. Breathe deeply holding the Ring Finger. Exhale, letting go of all worry and anxiety. Inhale a deep sense of peace and security in the midst of life’s problems, knowing that you are held and cared for in spirit.

- **Small Finger**

The Small Finger is for self-esteem when feeling like a victim of circumstances. Holding the small finger is a way to take control of feelings of unworthiness and low self-esteem. To let go of being a victim, it is important first to recognize what one gets out of being a victim—attention, pity, others’ concern. To move to a state of power and self-appreciation brings many rewards and a true sense of worth in the eyes of others. Hold the Small Finger, breathe deeply, exhaling and letting go of insecurity and unworthiness. Breathe in gratitude and appreciation for the gift of life.

For Further Study

Books:

Burmeister A. & Monte T., The Touch of Healing: the Art of Jin Shin Jyutsu. NY: Bantam, 1997.

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