



**DR. NADINE MACALUSO**  
licensed marriage & family therapist

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## Learning to Stay Present Exercise

Close your eyes and go inside.

Think about a recent relationship experience you've had in which you were triggered.

Recall what happened.

Picture it in your mind's eyes in as much detail as possible. As you do, notice what happens in your body.

Find the place inside of you where you're feeling physically activated. Focus on it. Stay with it. Breathe into it and give it a lot of room. Allow yourself to feel whatever is there. Touch the quality of it. Describe it to yourself. Notice what happens as you do.

Let yourself get curious about what you're experiencing. Not from an intellectual place of trying to make sense of things, but from a place of openness and discovery, allowing for whatever comes. Listening to whatever is there.

Try to look beyond your distress to see what feelings might be underneath. Ask yourself, "What's coming up for me?" Just notice what reveals itself. Notice how it manifests in your body. See if you can identify and name what emotions you are feeling. Then, just do your best to stay present and allow the feelings to move through you. Surf the waves of energy inside you. Feel them move through you. Stay with them as long as it takes for them to begin to shift.

If you start to feel overwhelmed, pause and focus on your breathing for a moment. Take a few deep breaths and let them out slowly. Use your breathing and grounding tools to help regulate your experience and make it more manageable. Bring yourself back into your window of tolerance, where you're able to stay present to your felt experience without exiting in any way.





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Find a balance between leaning in enough so that you can be present with your feelings, but not so much so that you get ahead of yourself or feel overwhelmed.

If you're having trouble getting out of the story, putting your defenses to the side, you might wonder what you're afraid will happen if you do. Ask the fear, not your head, what it anticipates. Remember, your defenses developed to protect you. Ask the fear what it's protecting you from. Ask yourself what you might feel if you were to let go of your defenses. What might you do? What might you say? What might happen? Notice any resistance or tension in your body and breathe into it. Try to soften it and let it go.

Then, come back to your emotional experience and give it another try. Picture the triggering moment and notice what comes up for you now. If it's helpful, you can alternate between focusing on your breath (or some other neutral point of focus) and touching back into your emotional experience. Keep coming back to your emotional experience and staying with it until it shifts.

