

PUSH HANDS

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Preliminary Partner Exercises

1. Sensing

Two people stand facing each other a couple feet apart. Each person is in a shoulder-width stance with feet parallel. One person closes their eyes. The other passes the back of one hand close to the partner's torso—from dan tian to head—varying the space between the hand and the body, moving from place to place. The passive person tries to sense where the other's hand is. After doing this for a few minutes, both people report their perceptions. Change roles. (Using the back of the hand instead of the palm is less invasive.)

2. Yielding

Two people stand facing each other a couple feet apart. Each person is in a shoulder-width stance with feet parallel. One is the pusher, the other the pushee. The pusher uses their fingertips to apply gradual pressure to the shoulder of the pushee, pushing straight ahead with firm, consistent intention (no poking). By turning at the waist, the pushee dissipates the force until the pusher's fingertips are no longer in contact with the body. The pushee's body then turns back, like a swinging door. The pusher can push on either shoulder or on either hip. Whether getting pushed on the shoulder or the hip, the pushee absorbs and dissipates the force by turning the waist. It's useful for the pushee to have their eyes closed. This helps prevent anticipating a push by flinching or moving prematurely. It's important that the pushee stay vertical and avoid leaning back. The pushee must be relaxed and passive, allowing the pusher to move them. The pusher must push with intention, but can feint in order to challenge their partner. Switch roles.

3. Adhering

One person applies the palm of their hand to the partner's shoulder. The pressure is light but solid. The person with the palm on their shoulder moves—walking forward and backward; turning, rising, and lowering. The person whose hand is connected to their partner's shoulder tries to maintain a consistent pressure, responding to all the changes. (The palm can rotate on the shoulder.) The person with the palm on their shoulder gives the other a chance to adjust to the movement, then can make it increasingly difficult for their partner to stay connected and with a consistent pressure. Be kind to each other, but challenge each other. Switch roles.

Push Hands: One-Handed

Partners face each other in a comfortable bow stance (the forward foot facing straight ahead, the back foot offset at 45 degrees, with a shoulder-width space between

the feet front-to-back and side-to-side). In steps of the two participants' forward feet are together.

With the elbows bent and the fingertips up, the backs of the hands are lightly touching. One is the designated leader; the other the designated follower. The leader moves in a slow circle by shifting the weight back and forth and turning the waist. The follower's job is to maintain the light contact. Periodically switch roles.

Be sure to stay in the designated role. Being able to fill either role at the appropriate time stretches most people because everyone's personality tends to lean one way or the other. Thus this is an internal balancing exercise.

Keep the fingertips facing up and the elbows down; keep the circles round and slow. Avoid leaning backward or forward. Use the shifting of the weight and the turning of the waist to make the circle. Talk to each other—give each other feedback. Is one of you switching roles—trying to lead when supposed to be following or following when supposed to be leading? Moving too fast? Moving too erratically—not maintaining the circle? Work with each other; challenge each other; be kind to each other; help each other learn from this exercise.

Two-Handed

Add the second hand by applying the fingertips lightly to each other's elbow. Like the fingertips of the upper hands, these fingertips also point upward. Avoid trying to grab onto an elbow. Just maintain a flat pressure. Adding the second hand brings you in closer to each other—especially if the fingertips on the elbow are kept vertical. As with one-handed Push Hands, designate a leader and a follower. Proceed with moving in a circle by shifting the weight and turning the waist. Keep talking to each other, working with each other.