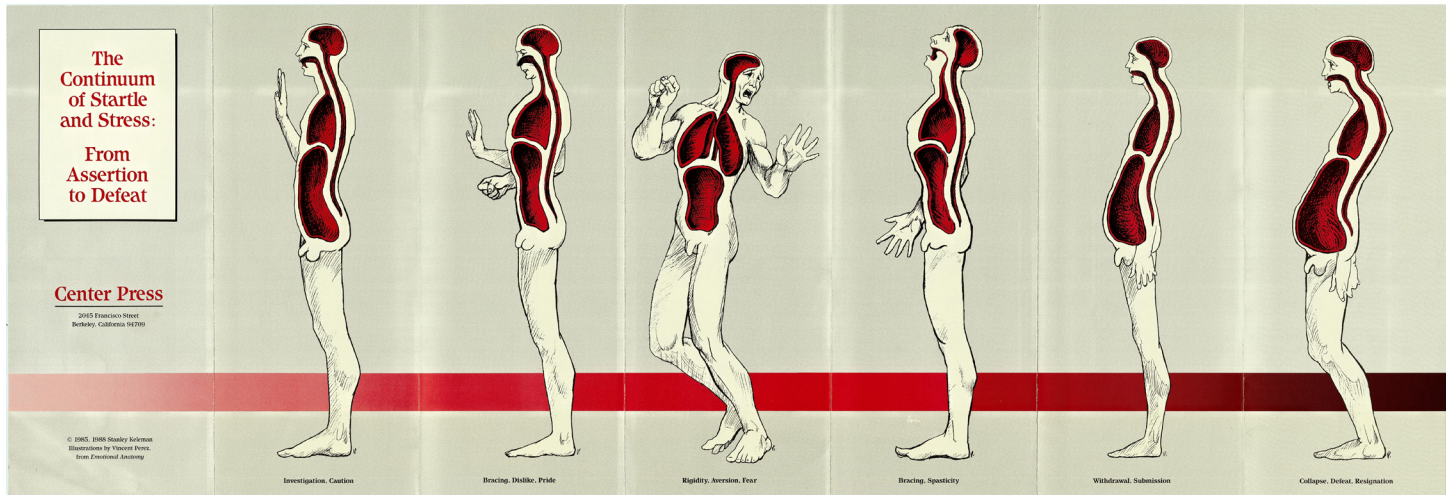


The Continuum of Startle and Stress From Assertion to Defeat

Stanley Keleman's Formative Approach



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The startle reflex is an organismic response to deal with emergency situations—danger, threat or challenge from outside the person or from within the person. It is a complicated process that begins with simple spontaneous responses to insults and involves a predisposition toward more complex shapes depending upon the timing, intensity and duration of the unknown. This response is meant to be temporary; when the danger passes the organism returns to normal. However, this same response can become a habitual state, so that its organization remains as we move from event to event. It becomes a continuous somatic pattern. Many people are always in a state of moderate brace against a danger that they cannot fully articulate. The word stress describes this ongoing state and startle the temporary state. The startle reflex begins with an investigative response, followed by assertion, annoyance, anger, or avoidance, and finally, submission and collapse. Each stage of intensification is based upon the ability of the organism to halt pulsation, create segmentation and recruit more and more layers of itself into its response.

It involves:

- change in the musculature and posture
- change in the diaphragm's shape
- thickening or thinning of the body wall
- increase in the separations between the pouches
- change in the body's relationship to the earth's gravitational line
- alteration of feelings, emotions, and thinking.

The startle response is usually progressive and moves along a continuum: however, it is not mechanistic nor does it continue in an invariable or sequential order. Each person has a unique pattern of startle and stress that is characterized by the number, timing, duration source and severity of the threat posed either physically or emotionally to the organism. In some instances the person may skip several stages and jump immediately to a more extreme response. These somatic patterns are processes of deep self-perception and ways of feeling and knowing the world. They affect all tissues, muscles, organ, and cells as well as thoughts and feelings. They are more than mechanical. They are a form of intelligence, a continuum of self-regulation. These patterns are layered and tubal phenomena that affect the entire organism. They are intrinsic and involve muscular states from the tip of the head to the toes. Muscles and organs are not just contracted. They are organized into a configuration. These organizations become the way we recognize the world as well as ourselves and, in turn, they become the way the world recognizes us.

For a more thorough discussion of the Startle and Stress Continuum, refer to *EMOTIONAL ANATOMY* (1985) by Stanley Keleman, "Insults to Form." pp61-102.