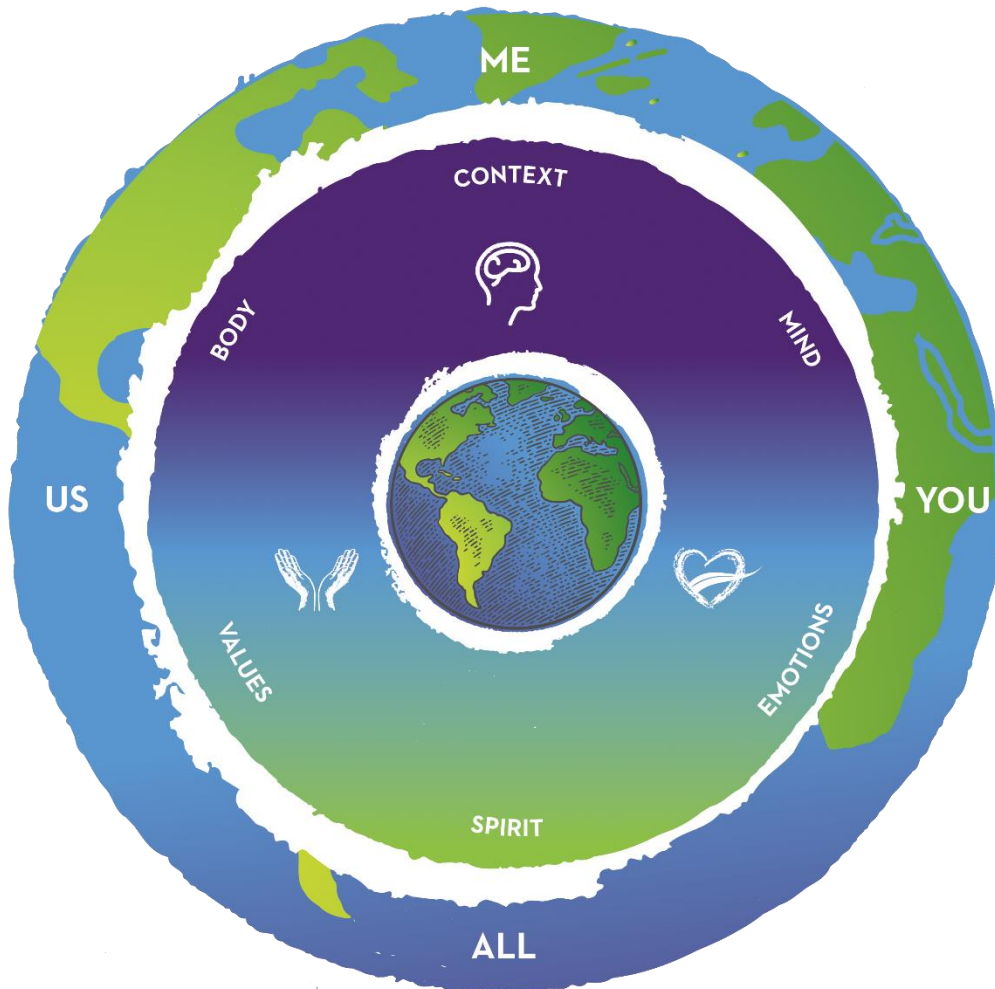


With the Earth in Mind



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“With the earth* in mind, looking at this image, what are you drawn to?”

* or with nature, biodiversity, what’s happening in our world.... whatever words you wish.

Introduction

We are in crisis on many levels. Climate change, environmental destruction and social inequality are seriously impacting the lives of millions of people and life forms all over the world, so much so that they threaten our very existence. Yet these are not generally topics of everyday conversation or at the front of people's minds in the (so-called) developed world. Whilst many are addressing the issues and making huge progress, many of us deny, disavow, distance ourselves, intellectualise the problems, or leap into action without processing the enormity of the situation. Why is that? The reasons are complex, often rooted in psychological and cultural processes that assuage the discomfort and fear we feel, deep down. The head and hands take over, bypassing the heart.

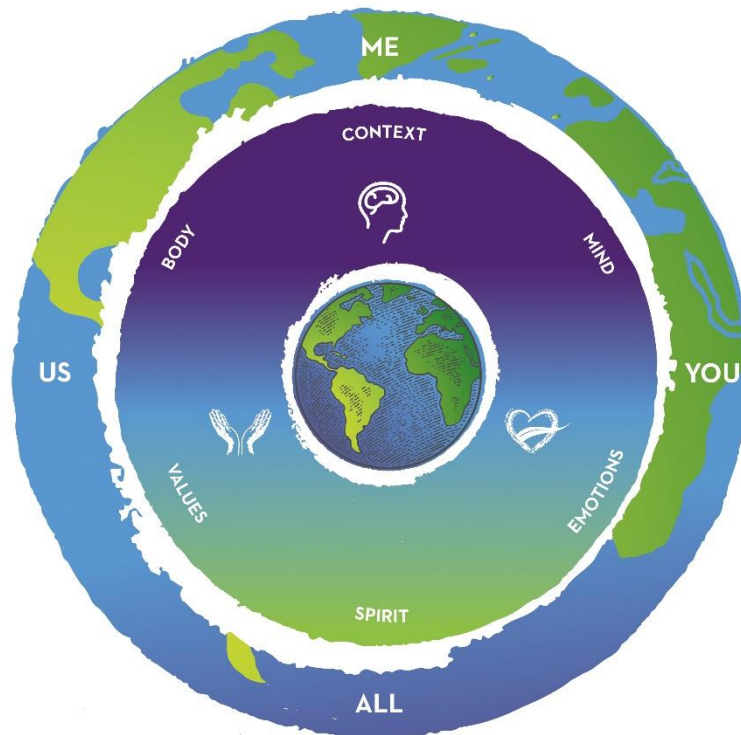
How do we approach such complex issues? Perhaps the first step is to fully acknowledge at a deeper level by engaging with our head, hands AND heart to tap into our fuller set of innate resources. These can help us to find ways to play a hopeful yet realistic part in securing a decent future for this and the next generations.

With the Earth in Mind is a systemic framework that invites people to explore what they think, feel and desire to do about climate change and the intertwined issues of social injustice and environmental destruction. It raises self-awareness and makes possible conversations that people might not otherwise have. It invites them to explore critical issues and brings potential for meaningful change, systemically or personally. It raises awareness of regenerative steps, giving cause for hope, and inspiring them to become more intentional, purposeful and proactive. With the Earth in Mind can be used by anyone involved in coaching, mentoring, facilitation, team building, community building, and more.

It could be useful for:

- personal reflection
- sustainability leadership conversations
- coaching
- coaching supervision
- individual, executive, team or group coaching
- team workshops and facilitated events
- community purpose-building
- awareness-raising / climate engagement in your organisation
- and more.....

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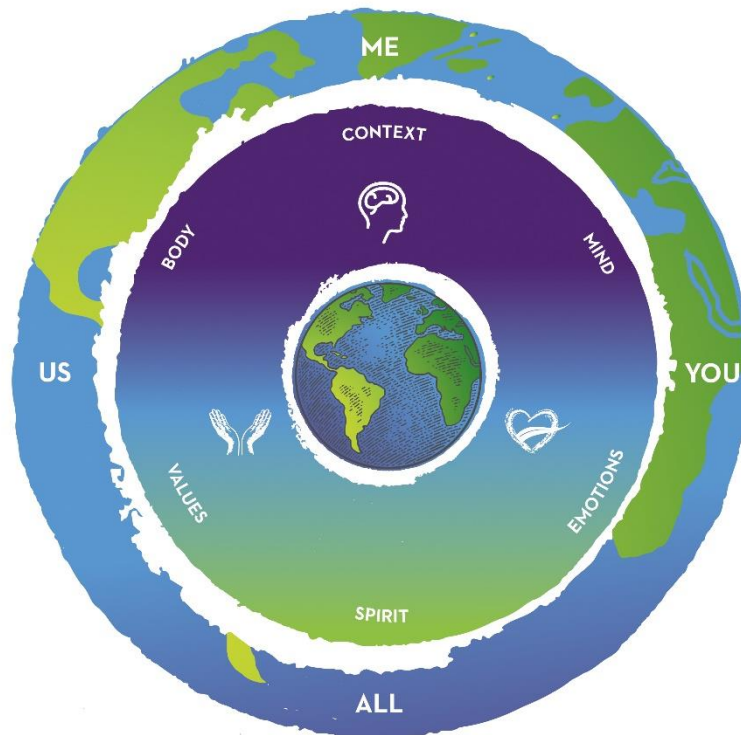
Overview of the Framework

The Earth sits in the centre of the image and around the outside because it we depend on it for life; it provides all we need, and we are held in space by it. The framework has 3 broad dimensions or lenses for exploration:

- a) The lens of ourselves (Me), or of another / others (You), or more widely (Us – a team, a community, a society, a country, all countries), or the whole of life (All – all living beings, the whole of nature of which we are part). I have called these four lenses the **Identities**.
- b) The lens of what we think, feel and do - or want to think, feel and do – our Head, Hands and Hearts, a familiar way of articulating aspects of ourselves. I have called these three lenses the **Integrators**.
- c) The lens of our lives. From the context (for example, what’s happening around us, or why are we having this conversation) through to how our bodies (human or nonhuman) are experiencing what is happening. I have called these six lenses the **Elements**.

These dimensions are explained more fully on the next pages, after which you will find some suggested ways of opening up conversations and using the model.

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The Earth

The Earth is central to us and all the creatures and life forms that we share it with. We are all part of nature. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, are all part of the complex web of life. Everything we think, do and feel is linked to the Earth and what happens to one of us happens to all of us, in some way. Covid-19 is just one recent example of that. There are many more.

The Earth has been around for 4.5 billion years, Homo Sapiens for around only 300,000 years. Yet our impact on the planet is huge, particularly in the last 200 or so years since the Industrial Revolution. We are now using up more resources than the Earth can provide for us, and “business as usual” is killing us. This time has been called the age of the “Anthropocene”, a new epoch in the Earth’s geological history, in which human beings have for the first time become the primary agents of change on a planetary scale.

So why “With the Earth in Mind”? Nature gives us feedback all the time but have we as species really been listening and looking? If we had, we may well hold the Earth in our minds in our daily lives, in our thoughts, feelings and actions, which would lead to wiser decisions about how we lead, live, consume, and respond to the climate and environmental emergency that we all face, and that for many around the world, are destroying lives and livelihoods. Having the earth in mind more centrally could help to heal our fractured selves and our fractured world.

The Identities, Integrators and Elements

The 4 Identities - Me, You, Us, All

We have many different identities as individuals and groups. One frequent criticism of life in the West today is that we have become individualised, failing to consider other species and other people, with divisions in society increasing and injustice all around.

When instead we consider the Earth, the climate, the environment, society, and ecology and our relationship with them from different perspectives of identity, whether self (Me), or of another (You), or as part of a group, community or society (Us), or of the whole of life (All) we bring connection and wholeness to our thinking.

The 3 Integrators - Head, Heart and Hands



We like to think that we have a completely free will, and yet there are aspects of ourselves that are not conscious. For example, when we become fearful and aware of danger, we can readily leap into action without understanding our responses or connecting with our emotions *and* with the wider picture. Equally, sometimes our actions are out of tune with what our hearts feel, yet we find ways to assuage the discomfort by telling ourselves stories so we can continue to do what we're doing. This happens at both systemic and individual levels.

Yet if we integrate the intellectual, the emotional and the action-oriented aspects of ourselves, we have deeper discoveries, greater acceptance, greater awareness of the wider system, and we make wiser decisions. If we are to rise to the enormous challenges of our time, we need a clear head, a brave heart and steady hands, working as one.

The 6 Elements

These Elements highlight key aspects of living and what it is to be alive and whole. Some may be conscious, others not. They may feel related to each other or not at times. These descriptions are mine – you may have your own that could be entirely different, and you can substitute Me for You or Us or All.

Context **Being aware of the surroundings, the social context, the environment, the agreements we have.**

What is happening in my immediate world and far away? In nature, in my environment, in this workplace or in industry? What am I seeing, hearing, sensing, reading about? What systems are influencing or directing my choices and what need to change so that I can make changes for the better? What is my purpose, intention, my agreement with you/others, with nature, with the Earth? Who are the other stakeholders?

Mind **Noticing and exploring the mind.**

What reactions to the climate, ecological and social crises do I notice in me? Are they enabling or inhibiting meaningful and useful responses? What might I be avoiding looking at and what defences am I using?

Emotions **Allowing feelings to surface without judgement.**

What emotions and feelings do I have in relation to the destruction of much of life on Earth? How am I honouring and expressing them? Am I suppressing or diverting them? What role are they playing? And if the Earth could express emotions, what would she be saying?

Spirit **The animated vital principles in being; the essence that give life & meaning.**

What brings me a feeling of being truly alive? What is my relationship to inner and outer worlds, to humanity, to the Earth? What is my relationship with the spirit of other beings? Where and how do I acknowledge something greater than just me?

Values **Valuing who and what we are and have and are in danger of losing.**

What do I value intrinsically? What are my values and how do I embody them? Who or what brings value to me and I to it or them? How do my choices resonate or not with my implicit or explicit values?

Body **Maintaining our physical and bodily awareness and health.**

What is happening in the physical space around us all to mine and other bodies, other life forms? How is the health of each being impacted now? How am I connected through my body to the rest of nature, and what feedback is the body of Earth giving me?

An important note

This framework is intended as a discovery tool and can be used in any way that works for you / the people you work with or the groups you belong to. It will naturally lead to other tools or frameworks that you already draw upon. It is not intended to be complete, but you may find it is.

It's a good idea to work through it for yourself on a personal level (ideally with a good listener / coach supporting you) before you introduce it to others, because you will then understand it better. And crucially, before working with others at a deep level around the subject of climate, the environment and the inter-related issues, it's important that we recognise that assimilating these truths is a constant and potentially painful process for each of us. We have our own griefs to handle, and when inviting people to think more deeply about this existential crisis we do not know how they will respond, or how we will respond to their responses. So we need to ensure we have proper self-care, support and reflective spaces in place for ourselves with a therapist, supervisor, coach, or peer group.

Introducing the framework

Those are the dimensions of the model. You can work through it yourself asking yourself questions that arise, as mentioned, ideally with support.

How you then introduce it to others depends on the context for the conversation. Is it coaching or facilitating a group? Is it working with a team or organisation that you lead? Is it bringing a community together? Have climate change or other related crises already been raised or are you the one bringing it? Are there cues from the person / people you're communicating with that this is something on their mind, but they are not speaking of it? Or cues that their other concerns and anxieties may be linked but not acknowledged, unconsciously or consciously? It's worth noting that even those who bring other issues to the table may at some level be aware of the existential scale of the problem but haven't yet connected to it.

If you are bringing it in when the topic has not been previously raised it is best when used as *invitational and not directive*. People rarely want to force a conversation or be forced into one about these issues. The key thing is to introduce it in a way that feels congruent for you, as then it's more likely to land well.

These sorts of questions might help when the subject of climate change is not yet on the table:

- How important is the climate / environment to you / this organisation in how you live / operate?
- What is your relationship with the rest of nature?
- How is what is happening in the wider world in relation to the climate and environment impacting on you / your team / organisation / community?

- I've been working with a framework called "With the Earth in Mind" that helps people to think about our wider world and how we live here, given that we're in a climate and ecological emergency. Would you be interested in seeing if it could be useful for one of our sessions / meetings?
- I have noticed that leaders are increasingly interested in incorporating climate change and environmental issues into their thinking, their strategies, their organisations. Are these areas you would like to explore in our work together, on personal or professional levels?
- You have contacted me to work specifically on (X issue). Given that we are part of a wider system that is likely to be impacting that / you directly or indirectly, would you like us to include that in our work together?
- What responsibilities do you have, official or unofficial, for sustainability and managing climate change risk in your organisation? (If none, "What do you think or feel about that?")
- As well as working with (X issues), I work with people around the climate and ecological crisis, particularly how they're dealing with it, personally and professionally. Is this something that's important to you?

Once agreement is reached to explore the subject:

Maintaining a psychologically safe environment is key – there are many ways to do this – my preferred approaches draw upon the Thinking Environment® (www.timetothink) and the Work that Reconnects (www.workthatreconnects.org).

With individuals it can be a case of just opening up the conversation by showing the image, and asking:

“With the earth in mind, looking at this image, what are you drawn to?”


Deep listening will be essential. With teams and groups, you can do all kinds of things, such as ask this or other questions in a round, or break people up to explore in pairs, or in smaller groups, each having one of the Elements or Integrators and bringing their feedback to the larger group. The possibilities are many.

Often the fewer the questions posed by the coach / facilitator, the better because it allows people time to think things through – early feedback about the framework is indicating that the image alone can be just the trigger they need because they will attach their own meanings to it. So often there is little need to explain the Integrators, Elements or Identities.

Here are some other questions that might be useful if you wanted to take a more focused approach. (You can replace “you” with “I” or we, depending on the context). And of course, there are many other coaching questions and models that can dovetail with the model.

- Would you like to explore this on a personal or wider level?
- What do these words mean to you if you consciously have the earth in mind?
- What do your Head / Heart / Hands say about each Element?
- What do you think or feel or want to do?
- How do they relate to or impact on each other?
- What is going well in this area for you?
- What are others doing about this that can offer hope and learning?
- Might you be avoiding something? Might that need your attention?
- What do you see happening around us, locally, nationally or globally and how do you feel?
- What can you learn from the feedback nature is offering us?
- What part can you play in restoring the Earth’s natural balance?
- How can you step more into leadership here?
- How might you want or need or offer support to others already impacted?
- How might you need to adapt to a different future than originally thought?
- If you knew you could make a difference, even if small, what would you do?
- What support might you need?
- What resources do you already have that you could draw on?
- If you knew, a year down the line, that you had acted wisely now, what you be seeing, doing, saying, feeling?

“With the Earth in Mind” is still in the testing phase and we welcome your feedback – please send your email address to linda@aspey.com and our Learning Circle team will be in contact.

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[Linda Aspey](#) is an executive coach, facilitator, psychotherapeutic counsellor, supervisor and writer working on culture, climate change and environment with progressive leaders and teams. She delivers workshops and keynotes on thinking cultures, climate psychology, climate coaching, climate leadership and the “Work that Reconnects”. She is also an Extinction Rebellion speaker, trainer and facilitator. Linda is global faculty member of Time to Think and has a long history of supporting individuals and groups to build resilience and process trauma. She is a Fellow of BACP, and a member of the Climate Psychology and Climate Coaching Alliances.