

# Reflections

on the states of coherence



Heart Coherence  
for yourself and for others

Reflections for Professionals

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Coherence Pro  
References in Heart Coherence

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## Reflections

To reflect, or to be reflected?

It is both the act of reflecting, of focusing one's thoughts, and the act of being reflected, as we say of light, a wave, a sound or an image.

Active thought and/or an image sent back to others?

While reflecting on the subject of this book, devoted to the practice of Heart Coherence, I told myself that my practice would only be genuine if there were coherence between who I am in my inner being and what I pass on in my personal, family and professional life.



The image sent back travels either inward, through my present reflection, or outward, through what I show others by reflection.

My own individual practice of Heart Coherence transformed my inner state and profoundly changed my relationships with others in my personal, family and professional life.

Heart Coherence is a holistic practice in the literal sense: it involves the whole being of the person who practises it, and it is then reflected and spreads to those around them.

That is the subject of the reflections that inspired this booklet: to make you want to adopt a personal practice whose effects will spread to those close to you, your family, your friends, your clients, your patients and all the other people whose well-being, health or education is in your care.



I invite you to a physiological, psychological and even philosophical re-centring and, in concentric circles, you will gradually influence the people around you.

Heart Coherence is a physiological state reached through a breathing, bodily, cognitive or emotional practice.

As I reflect on it, I realise that these personal and professional practices lead to several interconnected states of coherence.

I am sharing these reflections with you in the hope of enriching your view of Heart Coherence and giving you the taste and the desire to practise, for yourself, for your loved ones and for the people in your care.

Let there be Coherence! ;-)

Warmly,

David O'HARE



## Thank You

At its root, then, Heart Coherence is a particular physiological state induced, among other things, by voluntary breathing. The state of Heart Coherence is also reinforced by certain “social” feelings, including gratitude and appreciation.

When we say “thank you” for requesting this booklet, we also have a direct, beneficial effect on our own physiology, and on yours.

We will keep improving our physiological condition by confirming our gratitude for the trust you place in us when you give us the responsibility and the honour of training you in personal and professional Heart Coherence.



This booklet will help you discover, or deepen your knowledge of, the endless possibilities of Heart Coherence on the physiological and psychological levels.

Once you have gradually set up a personal, family and professional practice, you will probably say “thank you” to us too.

That is our dearest wish.

The Coherence Pro team  
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# Heart Coherence

## Definition

Everything starts with Heart Coherence.

To begin, I would like to try to define it, to pin it down and present it to you in all its forms.

Heart Coherence is hard to define; in fact, in more than fifteen years of research I have not found a concise, clear or complete definition. That is one of the problems with Heart Coherence: it is simple to practise but hard to define, which is still better than the other way around.



And yet, bear in mind that I am the author who has written the most books in French on the subject and who has taught it full time in France for the longest, and I still have not found a simple definition of this famous Heart Coherence.

To keep it simple, let us say that the so-called “Heart Coherence” state is reached through a personal breathing and/or emotional practice, with a return to neutral: an emotional, physiological and physical balance.

Even so, this definition is neither concise, nor clear, nor complete, but there it is. And it is fundamentally inaccurate, because Heart Coherence is not a practice but a physiological state.

Heart Coherence is indeed a physiological state of balance between the forces of adaptation, which spend energy for flight or fight, and the forces of recovery, which save and renew energy (rest, relaxation, restoration, digestion).



Nobody invented Heart Coherence. It is a particular physiological state shared by all vertebrates since before the dinosaurs.

Nobody invented fever or obesity... these are physiological states that we observe with measuring equipment.

The inventor of the thermometer did not invent fever, and the inventor of the scale did not invent obesity.

In physiology there are many states between health and illness that we observe with specific equipment; this equipment is called biofeedback equipment.

Heart Coherence began as an observation made with, and a use of, biofeedback.



## Biofeedback

Etymologically, “biological information fed back”.

Taking your temperature with a thermometer is an example of biofeedback: I want to know the value of a physiological constant (body temperature), and the thermometer gives me the answer.

The bathroom scale that tells me my weight is also biofeedback: I want to know the physiological constant “body weight”, and the scale gives me the verdict.

Now to Heart Coherence: the physiological constant observed is the heart rate and, more precisely, the variations in that heart rate, the variations of the pulse.

Heart Coherence was discovered because researchers observed a change in heart rate variation during certain voluntary breathing practices (discovered, not invented, since it is a reflex).



## Cardiofeedback

Etymologically: biofeedback of the heart.

This is the term I use for biofeedback of the heart rate and its variations. Heart rate variation and its study are the foundation of Heart Coherence.

## A little history

The first Chinese text to mention taking the pulse and its variations is the Huangdi Nei Jing, the Yellow Emperor's Classic, dating back to the 26th century BCE: the first treatise of an oral tradition written down more than four thousand years ago!

Using nothing but their skilled fingers, Chinese physicians had already noticed that the heartbeats of healthy people were more irregular than those of people in poor health.



Yes, you read that right, because that is exactly what I wrote: the heartbeats of healthy people are more irregular than those of people in poor health!

Hence a whole range of practices and treatises on Chinese pulses as a medical diagnosis made with the fingertips, without any equipment.

It was an 18th-century Italian physician, Antonio Valsalva, who observed the synchronisation of heart rate with breathing and laid the foundations of breathing-based Heart Coherence.

It took the arrival of “modern” equipment to confirm what the ancients had published. The first ECG (electrocardiogram) machine was built in 1887, but the first observation of a coherence state in the blood vessels dates back to 1865, before the ECG even existed.



Then, with the arrival of laptop computers and better pressure sensors in the 1990s, new confirmation came to support centuries of empirical knowledge: the heart is not regular.

And when we breathe at certain rates, the heart goes into resonance, into coherence, as Drs Traube, Hering and Mayer had written in 1865.

In the 2000s, a Russian respiratory physician, Evgeny Vaschillo, identified the specific resonance frequency between the heart and breathing when breathing is paced at 6 breaths per minute.

All this to say that Heart Coherence does not date from the 21st century, nor the 20th, nor the 18th, nor even from antiquity: it is a reflex physiological state induced by breathing or other voluntary practices, and it took special equipment to observe it.



Heart Coherence is therefore a physiological state that has always existed, but it took either expert fingers or electrical, then electronic, equipment to detect, measure and assess it.

Over the years and centuries, an accumulation of discoveries and intuitions has given us the understanding of Heart Coherence we have today.

Research continues : as I write these lines, the number of published studies on heart rate variability exceeds 19,800 official, recognised publications.<sup>1</sup> More and more studies are being published on the use and practice of Heart Coherence, derived from research on heart rate variability.

Heart Coherence has a wonderful history, and integrating it into any personal and professional practice is a wonderful story too.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: PubMed, the official database of medical publications.



## Physiology as the Reference

Heart Coherence has one major advantage over many well-being, health and personal development practices and techniques: it is entirely grounded in physiology.

As a physician, I am completely comfortable with all my demonstrations, explanations and recommendations to my patients or students: everything (absolutely everything) has a logical, physiological explanation.

It is through the physiology of the heart rate and its variation that Heart Coherence can be demonstrated and explained.



It is through the physiology of breathing that we can explain its effect on heart rate and on the nervous system.

It is by understanding the physiology of Heart Coherence that we can explain its effects and answer almost every question we are asked every day.

There is nothing esoteric about Heart Coherence: it calls for no belief, and it is not built on intellectual constructs or complex, unverifiable theories.

Heart Coherence is firmly rooted in observed, reproducible and stable facts.

As a personal and professional practice, Heart Coherence is very comfortable for any professional, scientific or not, thanks to the foundation provided by even a partial knowledge of basic physiology.



Basic training in physiology, accessible to everyone, is the foundation of any serious professional training.

Physiology is the universal language on which every practice is based.

Physiology also includes psychological and emotional effects. These mental or reflex adaptation effects are carried by the autonomic nervous system, whose functioning is a matter of physiology just like the mechanical, chemical, energetic or electrical functioning of the human body.



## An Irregular Heart

I have just referred to the notion of Heart Rate Variability as the basis of Heart Coherence.

The heart does not beat regularly!

I would go further: the more irregular it is, the better the sign of good health! That is precisely the subject of all the studies mentioned earlier.

Let me explain: the heart plays an active part in adaptation, speeding up in the presence of a threat and slowing down once the threat has been resolved. This is a shortcut through thousands of pages of physiology, but the foundations are solid.



We live in a changing, chaotic environment. When I speak of the environment, this also includes our inner being, with its emotions, thoughts, hormones, complex biological rhythms and a whole network of physiological functions.

We have a permanent, automatic and involuntary monitoring system: the Autonomic Nervous System. It regulates our adaptation to the environment constantly, day and night. Threat / Relaxation / Fear / Soothing / Activity / Calm / Energy spending / Energy renewal.

I think you have grasped the principle before I fill the page.

The heart constantly speeds up and slows down under the influence of the autonomic nervous system, which calls on it at the slightest perceived change.

Health means a powerful autonomic nervous system that adapts optimally and broadly. That is why the obedient heart constantly speeds up and slows down, and the more irregular it is, the better the sign of good health.



When we record the heart rate at rest with cardiofeedback equipment, we see these accelerations and decelerations; they are chaotic because they are adaptive. It is cardiac chaos, so to speak, and it is completely normal.

It is possible to take back control of this automatic regulation and turn this apparent, natural chaos into a curve where accelerations and decelerations follow each other periodically, with acceleration times equal to deceleration times. This is the state of Heart Coherence.

Since this state is not naturally present (fortunately), something voluntary has to be done to make the curve coherent.

We call this inducing Heart Coherence.

That is the subject of the next chapter.



## Respiratory Coherence

There are several ways to induce the state of Heart Coherence. Conscious, voluntary breathing is the simplest, because it relies on a reflex<sup>1</sup> present in all vertebrates (for 500 million years). Everyone can do it.

Each time you breathe in, the heart speeds up under the effect of this reflex; when you breathe out, the opposite happens and the heart slows down. The function of this ancient reflex is to synchronise the two essential systems that manage muscular energy for adaptation: the heart and breathing.

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<sup>1</sup> Baroreflex: an innate reflex that synchronises heart rate with breathing.



In the natural state, when we pay no attention, the heart and breathing synchronise to adapt to the demands of the environment. Since those demands are chaotic, so is the adaptation, hence an irregular heart.

If, through conscious breathing, we impose a rhythm where the inhale time is roughly equal to the exhale time, the heart speeds up and slows down in harmony, and the heart rate fluctuation curve becomes coherent. This is breathing-induced Heart Coherence.

At the base of any personal practice lies Cardio-Respiratory Coherence, or Breathing-Induced Heart Coherence.

The state of Heart Coherence is reached reflexively through voluntary breathing that equalises inhale and exhale times.

And when one full inhale-exhale cycle lasts ten seconds, variability is at its maximum.



This very special resonance frequency is the basis of the 365 method, which I created more than fifteen years ago and which has become the reference for personal practice.

To close this chapter on Respiratory Coherence, I would add that every professional in health, support, care, coaching, personal development and well-being has every reason to take the time to explain and set up a regular practice with all their clients / patients.

This is the foundation we teach in our professional training.

The 365 practice means

- 3 times a day
- 6 breaths per minute
- For 5 minutes

All of this is presented, detailed, argued and explained at length in our professional training. We hope to welcome you there soon.



## Personal Coherence

The physiological, psychological and emotional effects, and all those detailed in the following pages, can only be achieved through regular personal practice.

In the previous chapter I introduced my 365 method, which has become the reference for regular personal practice. Every day, three five-minute sessions of full, conscious breaths lasting ten seconds each (six breaths per minute).

I encourage you to set up this Personal Heart Coherence practice as soon as possible: it is the key to success. For yourself, for those around you and for your professional practice.



Start with yourself.

**Three times a day:** all it takes (though it is not always easy) is to make the sessions a ritual.

For five minutes: it is simple, with a watch or a phone, and it does not really matter if you do not breathe for exactly five minutes, as long as you have taken about thirty breaths during the session (6 breaths for 5 minutes).

**Six breaths per minute:** this is the only part of 365 that calls for precision. It is a resonance frequency at which the oscillation of our autonomic nervous system alternates with the greatest amplitude.

At this breathing rate the effects are consistent and maximal. Six breaths per minute is the optimal rate for a successful Heart Coherence practice.



To start learning your personal practice, we recommend using a breathing guide.

Natural breathing, the kind we do when we are not paying attention, is around ten to twelve breaths per minute at rest. Here we train to breathe six times per minute, which is below the usual comfort zone.

So this means starting to learn a slower breathing pattern that can sometimes feel slightly uncomfortable.

Many breathing guides are available online, in smartphone apps, on video platforms and in software.

Our website offers the [Breathing Library](#), our collection of breathing guides.

[coherencepro.com/resources/breathing-library](https://coherencepro.com/resources/breathing-library)



We now offer the RESPIROTEC.

This is our own smartphone app. It is derived from the [Breathing Library](#), so you can take it with you everywhere, at all times, while you are learning.

### **Respirotec**

A simple, free app with many adjustable breathing guides from the [Breathing Library](#), created and refreshed by our team.

### **Respirotec Premium**

An original, exclusive version that lets you create your own breathing guides from the photo library on your own phone.

You can create an unlimited number of guides.

Each guide includes five images or a video of your choice. You can group them by theme, by person, family, mountains, the beach... The possibilities are endless.



In a few pages we will look at Emotional Coherence; you will be able to strengthen it by creating a special guide for different situations.

The images you choose can reinforce and amplify your heart coherence session.

There are many uses for emotional Heart Coherence practice with the Respirotec.

[RESPIROTEC app on the App Store](#)

[RESPIROTEC app on Google Play](#)



## Bodily Coherence

The state of Heart Coherence induces a regular oscillation between sympathetic and parasympathetic activation: oscillations between a state of muscle tension (sympathetic), which favours action and energy spending, and a state of relaxation (parasympathetic), which favours rest and restoration.

This pendulum-like oscillation supports health, bodily resilience and the return to neutral.

Regular training, by increasing the amplitude of heart rate variability, a marker of the amplitude of the oscillation between sympathetic and parasympathetic, provides real training in resilience and in neurological, and also bodily, flexibility.



Although it is not relaxation in the physiological sense of the term (relaxation being purely parasympathetic), regular Heart Coherence practice has a relative relaxation effect.

No drowsiness, full attention while remaining calm: this relaxed bodily state induced by Heart Coherence is a practice that benefits any physical activity as regular training.

Heart Coherence changes body language in tense situations. Calm, ease, serenity, equanimity: that is the message the body will feel and convey.

For practices involving movement and the body (yoga, sport, meditation, Tai Chi Chuan, Qi Gong, dance, singing...), doing synchronous breathing sessions before each session will first release muscle tension, increase range of motion and improve tolerance to the discomfort of stillness or postures.



## Physiological Coherence

Physiological coherence underlies the effects of Heart Coherence.

I am devoting this paragraph to hormonal coherence. Hormones (and neurotransmitters) are the vehicles of change and adaptation. Hormones are chemical messengers that trigger a change that benefits the body.

Each hormone has a sympathetic or parasympathetic polarity, depending on the effect it produces at a distance. Almost every hormone therefore has an antagonist hormone, taking part in alternating physiological regulation.



The classic example is Cortisol (the stress hormone), fully sympathetic, and DHEA (the so-called youth hormone), fully parasympathetic. These two antagonist hormones take part in adaptation by alternating sympathetic stimulation toward action and movement and parasympathetic stimulation toward rest and restoration.

Heart Coherence practice helps balance the Cortisol/DHEA ratio and improve that balance.

The Cortisol/DHEA ratio is a recognised health marker, and it is positively affected by Heart Coherence practice.

This is just one significant example among others.

Practising Heart Coherence regularly benefits hormonal harmony and Physiological Coherence in general.



## Emotional Coherence

Emotions are bodily messages of change: they send muscular messages at a distance, to move away from danger and closer to what is favourable.

The word emotion actually comes from the Latin “e-movere”, a movement outward. Emotions send bodily messages at a distance, to others but also to ourselves.

Emotions, like hormones, are fully under the control of the autonomic nervous system and its two branches (sympathetic and parasympathetic, as you know). Each emotion, like each hormone, has a sympathetic (action) or parasympathetic (rest) polarity.



Heart Coherence practice induces a kind of “emotional weightlessness”<sup>1</sup>. When we are in Heart Coherence, the message the body sends is one of “non-emotion” for the duration of the practice.

This temporary emotional withdrawal is useful for re-centring, stepping back and letting go. The same state is observed during meditation or mindfulness practice.

Heart Coherence is an automatic, reflex state of physiological meditation or mindfulness.

The physiological effects are, in fact, comparable.

Practise Heart Coherence to enjoy these moments of emotional weightlessness

<sup>1</sup> Term proposed by David O'Hare at the AFTCC ~~Congress in Avignon~~ in 2006.



## Relational Coherence

The parasympathetic nervous system serves a function of social connection. The sympathetic system tends to drive a reaction of mistrust and social distancing. Is Cortisol not the hormone of fight and flight?

On the parasympathetic hormonal side, Oxytocin is one of the most powerful messengers of connection; it has even been called the hormone of love and attachment. This is the hormone that triggers childbirth and breastfeeding, together with a gregarious maternal reflex of care and attachment.



Feelings of gratitude, appreciation, empathy and consolation are powerful inducers of oxytocin, and also of Heart Coherence.

Heart Coherence practice has been shown to come with increased oxytocin secretion, which favours coming together and social emotions or feelings of connection.

For you, professionals in health, care, psychotherapy, teaching and related fields, regular Heart Coherence practice will be a powerful reinforcer of the therapeutic alliance. It also amplifies empathy while providing emotional protection from the sometimes very intense situations in your consultations or difficult sessions with clients and patients.

It is one of the first things professionals notice once they have introduced synchronous breathing with their patients, or empathic breathing in their patients' presence: the strange paradox of growing interpersonal



closeness while gaining emotional distance from the situations discussed in the session.

Heart Coherence can be communicated and passed on: it is “contagious”. This is, in fact, a hallmark of the parasympathetic system in general: yawning and fits of laughter are powerful parasympathetic messages, and they are “contagious” too.

Heart Coherence can be practised with and passed on to newborns and infants, and it can be induced in animals through the closeness of a human in Heart Coherence.

Setting up a personal Heart Coherence practice will affect the physiology and the emotional and psychological balance of the person who practises it, and also their family and professional circle.

Adding Heart Coherence to your professional toolkit may well be the most rewarding adventure you could have as a therapist or caregiver.



## Decisional Coherence

Stress and its sympathetic dominance do not support learning, memory or reasoned decision-making.

A sense of danger, and the sympathetic stimulation it triggers, calls for fast, automatic reflex reactions of withdrawal, flight or moving away from the danger.

These life-saving reflexes do not favour reflection, but a fight-or-flight reflex.

Meditation, mindfulness, calm and confidence are necessary states for reflection and decision-making. Heart Coherence, with its emotional weightlessness and the physiological, psychological and emotional re-centring it induces, is one of the simple strategies for training calm, serene decision-making.



Most people who practise one of the methods described above notice a gradual improvement in the quality of their decisions.

Don't we advise sleeping on a decision? Doesn't night bring counsel? And what is the main quality of the night: a fully parasympathetic polarity, with no Cortisol and maximum DHEA.

Reflection belongs to the parasympathetic, reflex to the sympathetic.

We do not advocate all-sympathetic or all-parasympathetic, but a balance between the two.

That is exactly what regular Heart Coherence practice makes possible.



## Professional Coherence

This brings us to the end of this modest booklet, which I wanted to devote to Coherence in all its forms and offer for your reflection.

The next step for you would be to decide to add it to your professional resources: one more tool in your already well-equipped toolkit, whatever your profession.

There are no contraindications to the personal, individual practice of Heart Coherence, and there is no profession that cannot benefit from it. Either way, you have nothing to lose.



Practising Heart Coherence in the presence of clients / patients / users / students has long been shown to make it possible to keep some distance during interviews and interactions.

The protection and insulation that Heart Coherence provides when facing difficult personalities, sudden anger, hurtful remarks, verbal violence and, generally, any professional situation involving individual or group interaction is an asset and a resource.

And when Heart Coherence is also shared with the other person through the practice of Synchronous Breathing, the benefits of this very simple practice extend to both people, and also to the therapeutic or professional relationship that connects them.



## Professional Training

Coherence Pro, the English-language platform of the Equilibios David O'Hare Training Institute, offers online courses for professionals in physical and mental health, care, support, coaching, personal development, human resources, mental and physical preparation, teaching and education, and related fields.

Available now:

[365 Breathing Zone, to discover Heart Coherence and build a daily practice.](#)

[The Basics of HRV, the complete professional training in heart rate variability.](#)

Coming soon:

[Complete Coherence, with an introduction to biofeedback software.](#)

[Essential Coherence, no equipment needed.](#)

## The 365 BREATHING ZONE Course

- A gentle, practical introduction to Heart Coherence and to the 365 method: 3 times a day, 6 breaths per minute, 5 minutes.
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- An ideal first step, for yourself and for your clients.
- All the details, registration conditions and the program are available on the website at:
- [coherencepro.com/courses/365-breathing-zone](https://coherencepro.com/courses/365-breathing-zone)

## The BASICS OF HRV Course

- The complete professional training in heart rate variability (HRV), from the physiology of the heartbeat to analysis in practice.
- 86 video lessons (about 10 hours), including hands-on use of the Body Health Analyzer (BHA) for tests and breathwork training.
- All the details, registration conditions and the program are available on the website at:
- [coherencepro.com/courses/the-basics-of-hrv](https://coherencepro.com/courses/the-basics-of-hrv)

## The [COMPLETE COHERENCE Course - Coming soon](#)

- Everything in Essential Coherence, plus a guided introduction to cardiac coherence software and how to read HRV curves.
- Open to everyone, no prerequisites. Software not included.
- 100% online, self-paced, with a certificate of completion.
- [Coming soon on coherencepro.com.](#)

## The [ESSENTIAL COHERENCE Course - Coming soon](#)

- A complete course to understand cardiac coherence and make it a lasting personal practice, using only your breath and attention.
- Open to everyone, no prerequisites. 100% online, self-paced, with a certificate of completion.
- [Coming soon on coherencepro.com.](#)

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