



RETURN TO REGULATION

Building resources for self regulation

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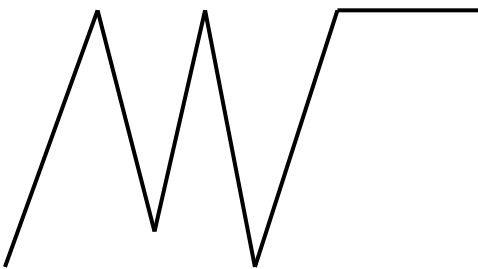
BreatheThrough
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WHAT DOES A REGULATED NERVOUS SYSTEM MEAN?

Nervous system regulation refers to our capacity to consistently move in and out of stressors, while still being able to return to the present moment.



Regulation doesn't mean being calm and peaceful all the time.



Regulation doesn't mean experiencing lots of high highs and low lows.



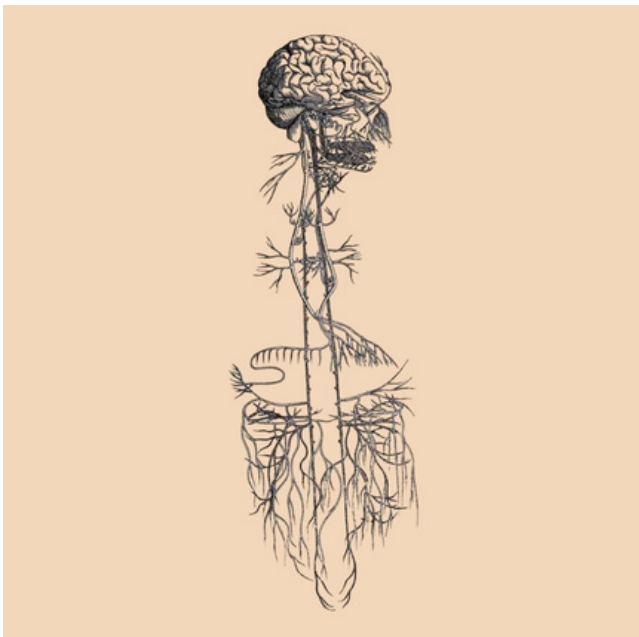
Regulation simply means that we have the ability to return to our baseline following stressors. It is like a wave rather than a slingshot or a flatline.



WHAT IS THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM?

The autonomic nervous system lives within our body and is part of our nervous system. It is responsible for all of our automatic responses, like our heart rate, digestion, respiration and blood pressure.

The main job and interest of this nervous system is to help us SURVIVE! It is always looking out for our best interest by protecting us from perceived threats.



These threats can be something as intense as a physically dangerous person in our presence or as subtle as someone's tone of voice or how we experience a relational commitment.

All of our past experiences are stored within our brain and nervous system as "data" that we draw from every time we encounter new and unfamiliar experiences.

Depending on our personal "data" and the circumstances, our nervous system will respond to a perceived threat in one (or more) of 5 protective ways: fight, flight, freeze, fawn or shut down.

In order to gain control over how much regulation we experience in our body, we need to become familiar with the internal states associated with our autonomic nervous system.



MAIN STATES OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Rest and digest - Parasympathetic - Ventral Vagal



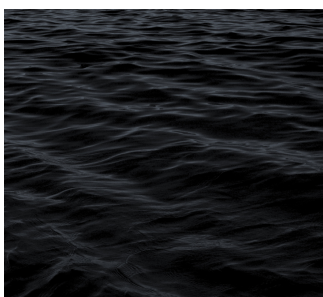
Feeling safe and social. Harmonious connection with oneself, others and the environment. Feeling safe in the body, peaceful, mindful, open and curious to the present moment.

Fight or flight - Sympathetic - Stress



Feeling of irritation, stress, anger, rage, frustration, fear, terror, panic, restlessness, anxiety or worry. Agitation or activation in the body. Avoidant, protective or defensive behaviours.

Shutdown - Parasympathetic - Dorsal Vagal



Feeling of not being able to cope: numb, dissociated, depressed, shut-down, collapsed, immobilised, hopeless or feeling shame or depressed life energy.

BLENDED STATES OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Fawn/People pleasing - Dorsal vagal + Sympathetic

Seeking safety by merging with the wishes, needs and demands of others

1. The part of us that has a boundary or need to express freezes and dissociates.
2. Another part performs the opposite of our need.

Freeze - Dorsal vagal + Sympathetic

Like a deer in headlights, lots of energy but unable to move. Procrastination, overwhelm, "I have to! I can't!"

Play - Ventral Vagal with a dip into Sympathetic

Energizing, fun, silly, social and safe.

When we experience stressors or traumatic events that are too much for our system to cope with, our beautiful brilliant nervous system will come to our aid to keep us safe.

The only issue is, sometimes our body remains in states of self protection for much longer than it needs to, and this is when we can begin to experience chronic distress, anxiety, chronic illness, emotional challenges and more.

The good news is that the nervous system is learning and responding to our experiences all the time. By engaging in regulating practices, the nervous system finds its way back to regulation and feeling at ease and present.



CAPACITY / THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Window of tolerance means our unique tolerance, the capacity we have to be with and process emotions, stressors and overall stimulus while remaining connected to our bodies and the present moment.

For those with trauma, chronic illness or suppressed emotions, our window of tolerance becomes smaller, making it easier for us to be pushed out of the window more often.

You can think of it like carrying a backpack: if your backpack is already full, it's going to be difficult to put much more in there, but if your backpack has been opened up and looked through, maybe some things were pulled out and you now have some more capacity to carry something else.

REFLECTION



How do I feel in my body and how do I breathe when I experience states of stress? (Sympathetic/Shutdown/Freeze/Fawn)
Dysregulation in my body and breath feels like:

How do I feel in my body and how do I breathe when I feel at ease and present (safe and social). Safety and ease in my body and breath feels like:

Which state do I find myself in most often? Which state do I resonate with the most?

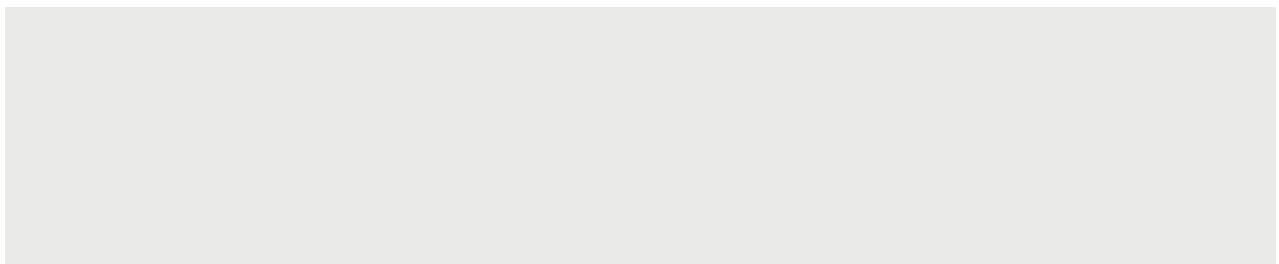
COLLECTING OUR RESOURCES

There are two types of resources we can turn to in times of stress and dysregulation: internal and external resources.

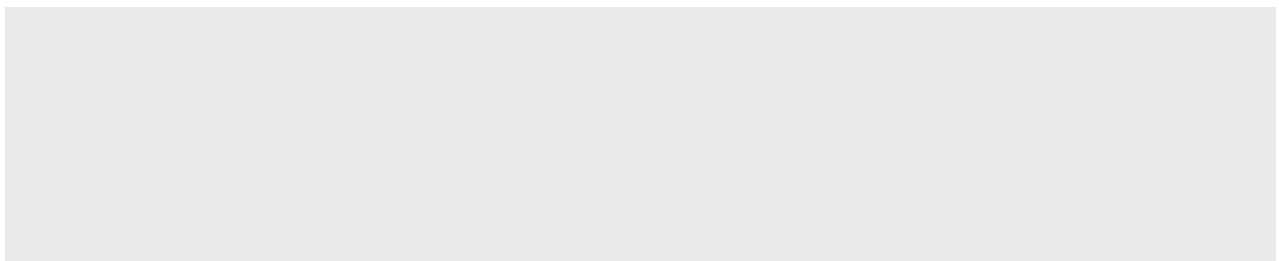
External resources are things outside of us, like going to therapy, watching a movie, or turning towards a tangible item like a child does with their teddy bear.

Internal resources refer to a greater capacity within us to be able to hold the weight of the stressor, and self regulate our emotions. Breathwork and mindfulness are examples of internal resources.

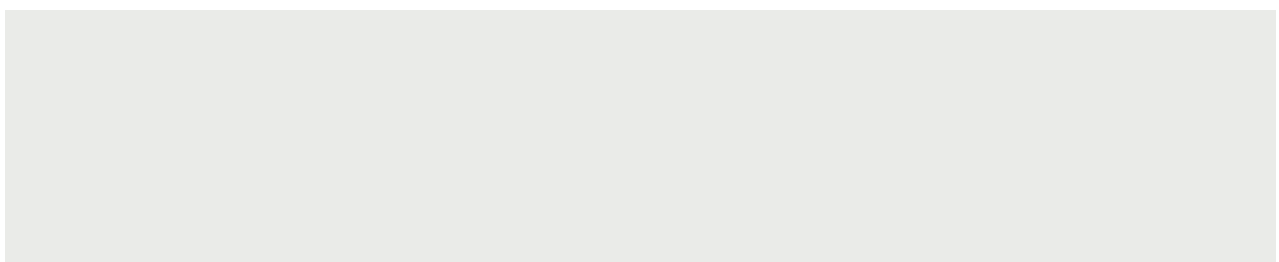
Write down any resources that you already have that come to mind. This could be as simple as going for a walk, calling a dear friend, or as personal as wearing your partner's sweater to feel closer to him or her. Note down anything that comes to mind:



Consider when you have turned towards any of these resources and a time when they helped you regulate and navigate a stressor:



If you could go back to that moment where you used a resource to support you, can you remember how you felt internally with that support? If so, describe it below:



COLLECTING RESOURCES: GLIMMERS

Now, let's consider some glimmers. **Glimmers are the opposite of triggers. They help you bring yourself into a place of ease and comfort.**

Can you think of moments in recent time or in the past where you experienced a felt sense of safety, ease, joy, love or connection? It could be just for a few seconds. Maybe it's a fond memory with your family, a moment when you held a baby, or sipped your hot coffee in the morning while listening to the birds sing.

What are your glimmers?

Can you remember the sensations you felt in your body during one or two of those glimmers? Did you notice your breath?

Can you recall any resources or glimmers from your childhood that you may have turned to then or you may be able to turn to now? Resource example: cuddling with your childhood pet. Glimmer example: the smell of freshly cut grass. **Can you describe these glimmers / resources and how you remember feeling?**

BULDING NEW RESOURCES

Working with the Sympathetic State - Return to calm

Whenever you find yourself anxious, irritable, restless, tense, nervous, activated or hypervigilant, you know that you have entered the sympathetic state. These are techniques that support your nervous system back into a state where you feel calm and connected.

Light Slow Diaphragmatic breathing: Place your hands on your belly and bring your breath consciously as low as you can. Feel the belly inflate as you inhale, and deflate as you exhale.

Physiological sigh: Double inhale through your nose followed by a long and slow sigh through your mouth. Pause after exhale until your body wants to take another breath. Repeat as many rounds as you feel that you need.

Extended exhale: Inhale gently to a count of 3 or 4 and exhale slowly to a count of 6 or 8. If it's difficult to extend the exhale, practice exhaling through a straw or pursed lips to help you slow down and extend the exhale.

Hum: Breathe in through your nose and hum until you need to breath again. Feel into the internal vibration as you hum.

Shaking: Think of the stress and activation as a charge in your body that you could shake off. Start with a gentle rhythmic bounce, let your knees bend like you're bouncing a baby, let your shoulders drop and your arms go loose. Wiggle your arms and find a tempo that feels good for your body.

Soothing self talk: I'm right here with you. You don't have to navigate this alone, I'm not going anywhere. I care about this suffering. Talk to yourself like you would talk to a dear friend.

Engage your senses: Use any of your five senses to connect to something in your environment. Notice that you are safe in this moment and place.

BULDING NEW RESOURCES

Working with the Dorsal Vagal state - Shifting from Shutdown

The dorsal vagal state might emotionally feel like overwhelm or helplessness. Physically, you might feel stuck and stagnant. Or perhaps it shows up as feeling not seen or heard. This can transform into dissociating, disconnecting and numbing. However your dorsal vagal state manifests, here are some ways that help your nervous system to shift towards regulation.

Light Slow Diaphragmatic Breathing: Place your hands on your belly and bring your breath consciously as low as you can. Feel the belly inflate as you inhale, and deflate as you exhale.

Butterfly hug: Interlace your thumbs and gently tap your palms side to side on your chest. Feel body and breath. This mimics our mother's heart beat that we hear in the womb and offers gentle bilateral stimulation.

Sway: Standing, sitting or lying on your back, begin to slowly shift your weight from side to side or rock from side to side if lying down. Let your body be weightless and fall into the rhythm of side to side movement.

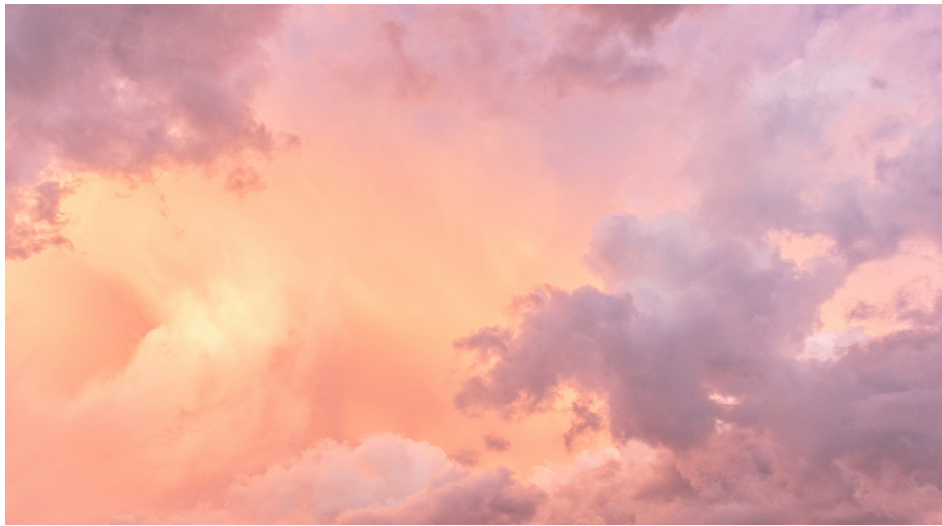
Self touch: When our system goes offline or begins to shut down, sometimes we need to physically feel our own body and limbs to come back into the here and now. Gently squeeze or tap your arms and legs for a quick 30 seconds.

Walk: Get out of your head by walking through your thoughts. Don't focus on the speed or distance, just let yourself go for a wander walk. Walking we naturally engage in bilateral stimulation, which helps to calm down the nervous system as well as engage the reasoning part of the brain.

Engaging in these exercises offers our nervous system the time and space it needs to realise that it's safe.

WHEN DO I USE MY RESOURCES?

Have you ever noticed trying to talk your way into calming down when you're stressed? Have you noticed how challenging it is to do so? The more activated we are, the more difficult it is to tackle the mind with the mind. This is because our body speaks a non-verbal language. We need to show, not tell, our systems that we are safe. This is why we use resources: to bring forward a sensory experience that our body can actually feel and translate.



We want to use the resources we just gathered in times that we feel that activation (stress), or overwhelm (shutdown) in our bodies. Don't worry if you're not sure how that feels yet! I'm inviting you to become curious about how your body feels and how your breath changes in times of stress and dysregulation. Soon your sensations will become more and more clear.

You can start learning about your own body and nervous system by just asking yourself, "How do I breathe? How do I feel? And how do I know I feel the way I say I do? What are the sensations that tell me that?" This is the information you can then use to help you track the initial entrance of stress, so you can turn towards your resources and gain more control over how you feel.

And as with any practice, consistency is the key. These techniques can certainly offer a shift in the moment, but the true potency comes from consistently using these tools to increase the overall resiliency and healing of the nervous system.

Want to learn more?

Book a 1:1 session or sign up for an upcoming workshop.

www.breathethrough.co

