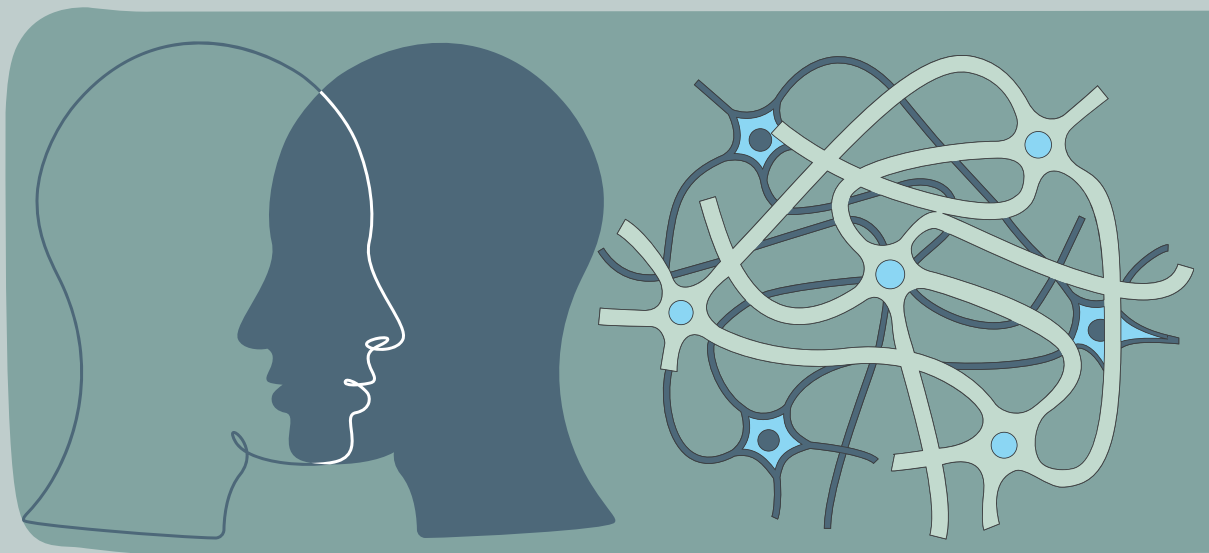


Nervous System Regulation

Worksheets and Techniques for Inner Balance



Hands-On Methods for
Stress Relief and Self-Regulation

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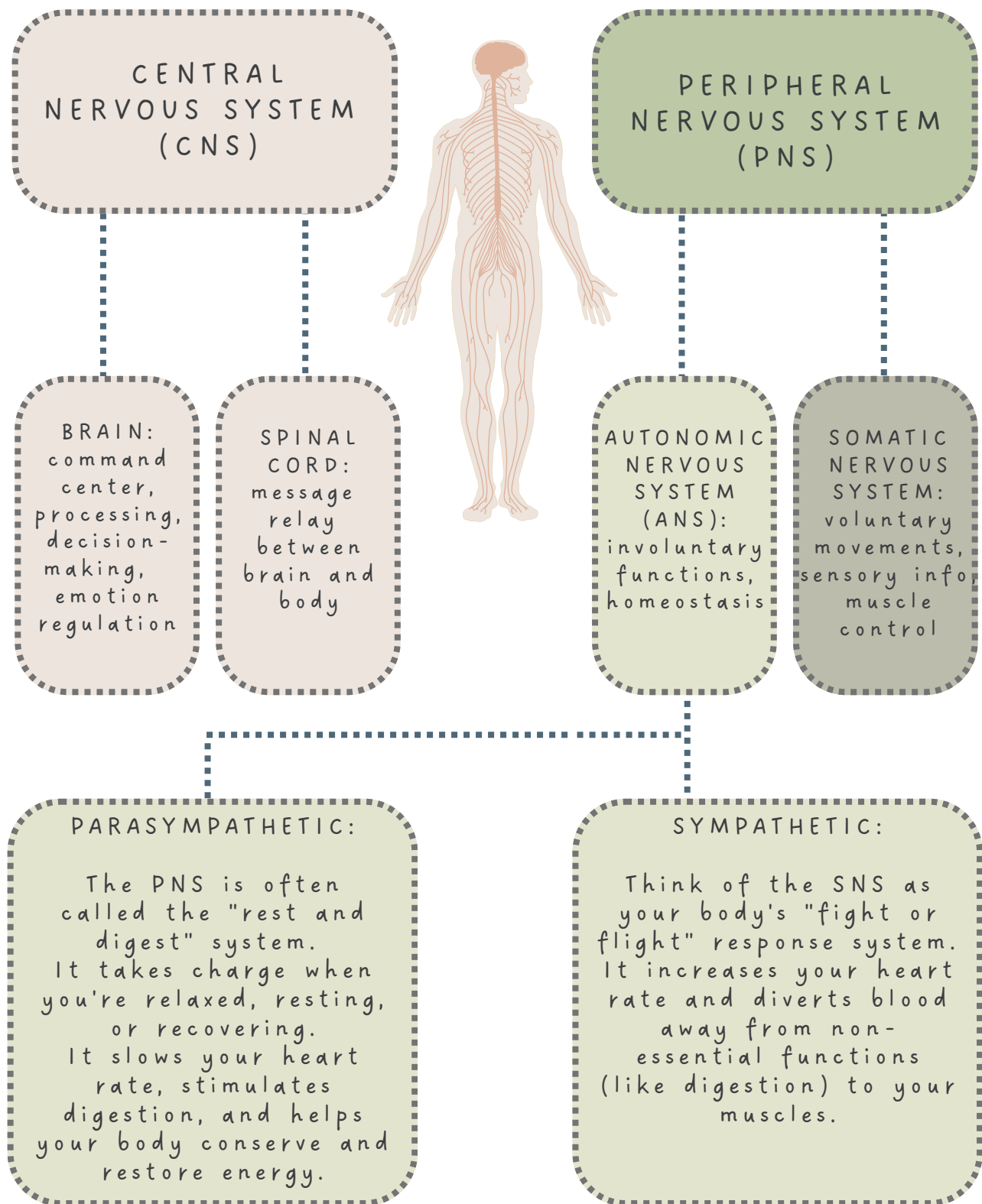
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THE HUMAN NERVOUS SYSTEM



THE PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

The Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) is like the calm, restful side of your body's control systems. It's the part that takes over when you're chilling out, helping your body to relax and recover after all the day's activities. It works hand-in-hand with the Sympathetic Nervous System, which is like the body's alarm system, getting you ready for action.

HOMEOSTASIS

Your body is always working to keep things stable, a state called 'homeostasis.' Homeostasis refers to the coordinated and largely automatic reactions that keep the body in a stable state, such as regulating temperature, oxygen levels in the blood, and pH balance.

Here's a more detailed look at how the parasympathetic nervous system supports various organs in maintaining homeostasis:

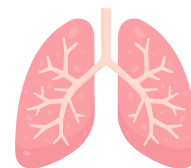
Digestive system:
Stimulates digestion & increases gut movement.



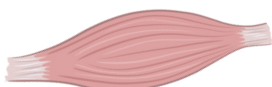
Heart:
Slows Heartbeat



Lungs:
Helps take big, deep breaths



Muscles:
Decreases muscle tension, promotes relaxation.



Brain:
Helps stay calm and peaceful.



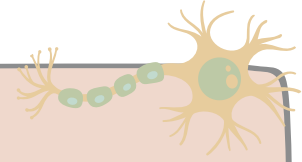
Eyes:
Makes your pupils smaller when it's time to relax.



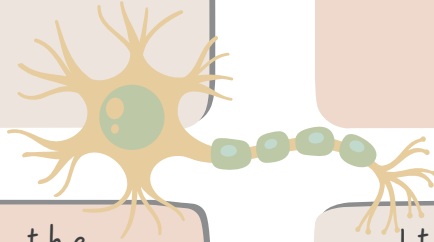
THE VAGUS NERVE



The vagus nerve is a part of the parasympathetic nervous system.



It is one specific nerve, also known as cranial nerve X, and is the longest nerve of the autonomic nervous system.



It starts at the brainstem and extends down through the body, innervating the heart, lungs, and digestive tract, among other organs.

It carries out many of the specific "rest and digest" functions by transmitting signals between the brain and the various organs it connects to.

In essence, the vagus nerve is a critical component of the parasympathetic nervous system. It is the main nerve that executes the calming and restorative functions that the parasympathetic system is known for.

When things get too intense or if past traumas start to weigh heavily, the vagus nerve helps activate the parasympathetic system, which is basically like hitting the "chill out" button for your body. It tells your heart to take it easy and your breathing to slow down, helping you find a moment of peace amidst the chaos.



POLYVAGAL THEORY

VENTRAL AND DORSAL VAGAL SYSTEM

The vagus nerve is essential in managing our physical and emotional reactions to stress and social behavior. Polyvagal Theory, introduced by Professor Stephen W. Porges in the 1990s, posits that our vagus nerve comprises two branches with distinct functions. The 'new' vagal system is adept at navigating stressful scenarios through social engagement and calming strategies. In contrast, the 'old' vagal system is associated with the body's restful states and digestion processes. This bifurcation underlines our complex physiological responses to our environment.

VENTRAL VAGAL SYSTEM

It responds to cues of safety and helps you feel socially connected and engaged.



Calmness



Safety



Social Engagement

DORSAL VAGAL SYSTEM

When it senses extreme danger, it takes over, disconnecting you from the world and plunging you into a protective state of collapse.



Anxiety



Numbness



Disconnection



POLYVAGAL THEORY

THE THREE STAGES OF RESPONSE

RED GEAR - IMMOBILIZATION (DORSAL VAGUS):

IMAGINE YOU ENCOUNTER SOMETHING REALLY SCARY, LIKE A LION! YOUR BODY MIGHT FREEZE, LIKE A POSSUM PLAYING DEAD. IT'S THE "DEER IN HEADLIGHTS" REACTION.

THINK OF SOMEONE FAINTING AT THE SIGHT OF BLOOD OR HAVING A PANIC ATTACK DURING A TRAUMA.



YELLOW GEAR - MOBILIZATION (SYMPATHETIC):

NOW, SAY YOU NEED TO RUN FROM THAT LION. YOUR BODY GOES INTO ACTION MODE, READY TO FIGHT OR ESCAPE. YOUR HEART RACES, AND YOU'RE ON HIGH ALERT.

IMAGINE BEING STRESSED OUT, FEELING ANXIOUS, OR HAVING TOO MUCH COFFEE - YOUR BODY IS IN THIS GEAR.



GREEN GEAR - SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT (VENTRAL VAGUS):

BUT WHAT IF YOU'RE WITH FRIENDS AROUND A CAMPFIRE, SAFE AND RELAXED? THAT'S WHEN YOUR BODY IS IN SOCIAL MODE. YOU CAN CHAT, LAUGH, AND ENJOY THE EVENING.

WHEN YOU'RE CALM, MAKING FRIENDS, AND HANDLING YOUR EMOTIONS WELL, YOU'RE IN THE GREEN GEAR.



POLYVAGAL THEORY

THE HIERARCHY LADDER

VENTRAL VAGUS - ENGAGED, SECURE, AND SOCIAL STATE

COGNITIVE PERCEPTIONS:

- "I FEEL AT EASE."
- "I FEEL SECURE AND PRESENT IN THE MOMENT."

EMOTIONAL STATE:

- FEELING CONNECTED AND AT PEACE
- EMPATHY AND CURIOSITY

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES:

- ENHANCED DIGESTION AND REST
- IMPROVED RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE
- STRONGER IMMUNITY AND BLOOD CIRCULATION

SYMPATHETIC - MOBILIZATION, ACTIVE DEFENSE STATE

COGNITIVE PERCEPTIONS:

- "I AM ON EDGE."
- "I FEEL AGITATED AND NEED TO PROTECT MYSELF."

EMOTIONAL STATE:

- FEELING OVERWHELMED OR CONFRONTATIONAL
- ANXIETY AND ALERTNESS

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES:

- INCREASED HEART RATE AND MUSCLE TENSION
- HEIGHTENED SENSES AND ALERTNESS

DORSAL VAGUS - DISCONNECTION, CONSERVATION STATE

COGNITIVE PERCEPTIONS:

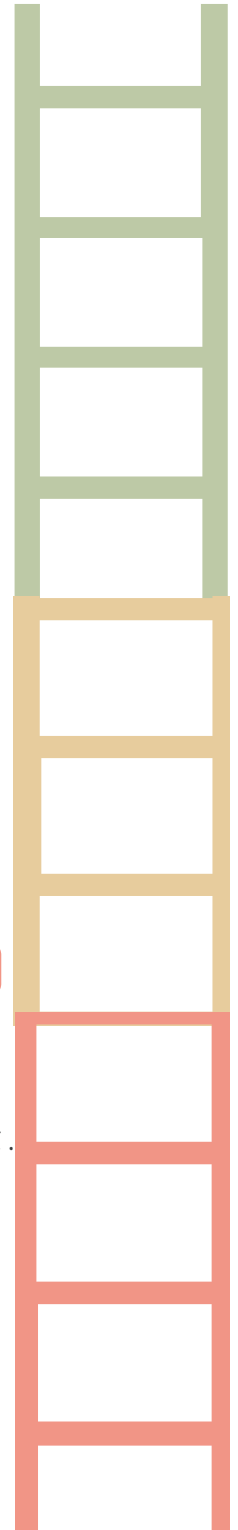
- "I AM INVISIBLE, DISCONNECTED."
- "THE WORLD FEELS OVERWHELMING AND INSURMOUNTABLE."

EMOTIONAL STATE:

- SENSATIONS OF HELPLESSNESS OR DISCONNECTION
- NUMBNESS OR DISASSOCIATION
- DESPAIR AND A PROFOUND SENSE OF SOLITUDE

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES:

- DECREASED METABOLIC RATE AND ENERGY
- LOW HEART RATE VARIABILITY
- ELEVATED STRESS HORMONE LEVELS
- REDUCED SOCIAL INTERACTION



NERVOUS SYSTEM ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET 1/3



UNDERSTANDING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM'S RESPONSES CAN BE KEY TO MANAGING YOUR WELL-BEING. ASSESS AND IDENTIFY ANY SYMPTOMS OF DYSREGULATION. PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME TO REFLECT UPON AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS—THIS IS ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.



1. IDENTIFYING SYMPTOMS: FOR EACH SYMPTOM LISTED BELOW, PLEASE INDICATE HOW FREQUENTLY YOU EXPERIENCE IT AND RATE ITS INTENSITY ON A SCALE OF 0-10, WITH 0 BEING 'NOT PRESENT' AND 10 BEING 'EXTREMELY INTENSE'. FILL IN THE START AND END DATES OF THE TIME PERIOD YOU ARE DOCUMENTING


DATE: ----- UNTIL -----

Symptom	Frequency (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely)	Intensity (0-10)
Headaches		
Muscle tension		
Stomach upset		
Rapid heartbeat		
Difficulty breathing		
Insomnia, excessive sleeping		
Fatigue		
Difficulty concentrating		




NERVOUS SYSTEM ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET 2/3

2. EMOTIONAL AWARENESS: IN THE PAST WEEK, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING EMOTIONS? RATE EACH EMOTION FROM 0 (NEVER) TO 10 (CONSTANTLY).

Emotion	Rating (0-10)
Anxiety	
Sadness	
Anger	
Joy	
----- 	


3. BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES: REFLECT ON HOW YOU TYPICALLY REACT WHEN FEELING STRESSED OR OVERWHELMED. CHECK THE BEHAVIORS THAT APPLY AND CONSIDER THEIR FREQUENCY.

Behavior	Often	Some- times	Rarely	Never
Withdraw from social activities				
Procrastinate important tasks				
Engage in compulsive behaviors (e.g., eating, shopping)				
Experience bursts of energy or agitation				
Use substances to cope (e.g., alcohol, drugs)				
----- 				



NERVOUS SYSTEM ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET 3/3

4. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL RELAXATION: WHICH RELAXATION METHODS HAVE YOU TRIED, AND HOW EFFECTIVE DO YOU FIND THEM? RATE EACH METHOD FROM 0 (NOT EFFECTIVE) TO 10 (HIGHLY EFFECTIVE).

Method	Rating (0-10)
Deep breathing exercises	
Progressive muscle relaxation	
Yoga or Tai Chi	
Meditation or Mindfulness practice	
Regular physical exercise	
----- 	

RATING THE METHODS WILL GUIDE YOU TO UNDERSTAND WHICH PRACTICES ENHANCE YOUR WELL-BEING. REVISITING THIS PROCESS REGULARLY ALLOWS YOU TO MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS AND REFINE YOUR PERSONAL TOOLKIT FOR MANAGING STRESS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE.



STRESS RESPONSE WORKSHEET 1/2



LOG YOUR STRESS RESPONSES OVER THE COURSE OF A WEEK. BY RECORDING YOUR REACTIONS TO DIFFERENT STRESSORS, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO OBSERVE PATTERNS IN YOUR PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE RESPONSES. RECOGNIZING THESE PATTERNS IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD MANAGING STRESS MORE EFFECTIVELY.

COGNITIVE TRIANGLE



1. SITUATION DESCRIPTION: BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE SITUATION THAT INDUCED STRESS WITH DATE AND TIME.

2. PHYSICAL RESPONSES: LIST ANY PHYSICAL REACTIONS YOU EXPERIENCED, E.G., HEART PALPITATIONS, SWEATING, MUSCLE TENSION.



STRESS RESPONSE WORKSHEET 2/2

3. EMOTIONAL RESPONSES: DESCRIBE YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE DURING AND AFTER THE SITUATION, E.G., ANXIETY, ANGER.

4. COGNITIVE RESPONSES: NOTE ANY THOUGHTS YOU HAD DURING THE SITUATION, INCLUDING WORRY, NEGATIVE PREDICTIONS, SELF-CRITICISM.

REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- ARE MY THOUGHTS ACCURATE?
- ARE MY THOUGHTS HELPFUL?
- WHAT COULD I SAY TO MYSELF THAT WOULD BE MORE ACCURATE, POSITIVE, OR HELPFUL?
- HOW WOULD I FEEL IF I TOLD MYSELF THIS?

DUPLICATE THESE PAGES FOR EACH STRESS RESPONSE YOU WANT TO LOG THROUGHOUT THE WEEK.



REGULATION, DYSREGULATION AND CO-REGULATION



REGULATION

REGULATION IS ABOUT MANAGING ONE'S EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL STATE, SHIFTING FROM HIGH STRESS TO A STATE OF CALM OR FROM LETHARGY TO BEING ALERT.

EXAMPLE: A STUDENT FEELING NERVOUS BEFORE AN EXAM TAKES DEEP, SLOW BREATHS TO CALM THEIR RACING HEART, ALLOWING THEM TO FOCUS AND REMEMBER THEIR STUDIES.



DYSREGULATION

DYSREGULATION MEANS STRUGGLING TO MANAGE ONE'S EMOTIONAL STATE, WHICH CAN CAUSE LONG-TERM HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS.

EXAMPLE: AN EMPLOYEE UNDER CONSTANT STRESS FINDS THEMSELVES UNABLE TO UNWIND IN THE EVENING, LEADING TO INSOMNIA AND IRRITABILITY THAT AFFECT THEIR WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE.



CO-REGULATION

CO-REGULATION IS WHEN PEOPLE SUPPORT EACH OTHER TO FIND BALANCE AND CALM, LIKE A COUPLE COMFORTING EACH OTHER AFTER A TOUGH DAY.

EXAMPLE: IMAGINE A COUPLE FACING A STRESSFUL SITUATION, LIKE A JOB LOSS. THEY SIT TOGETHER, SHARE THEIR WORRIES AND FEARS OPENLY, AND LISTEN TO EACH OTHER WITH EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING.



DYSREGULATION WORKSHEET



ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. THINK ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU FELT OUT OF CONTROL WITH YOUR EMOTIONS. WHAT TRIGGERED THIS FEELING?

2. DURING MOMENTS OF DYSREGULATION, WHAT PHYSICAL SENSATIONS DO YOU EXPERIENCE? (E.G., TIGHTNESS IN THE CHEST, RACING HEART, ETC.)

3. HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY PATTERNS OR COMMON FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FEELINGS OF DYSREGULATION IN YOUR LIFE?



CO-REGULATION WORKSHEET 1/2



ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. WHO IN YOUR LIFE HELPS YOU FEEL CALM AND SAFE WHEN YOU ARE STRESSED? WHAT DO THEY DO THAT IS HELPFUL?

2. DESCRIBE AN EXPERIENCE WHERE SOMEONE ELSE'S PRESENCE HELPED YOU REGULATE YOUR EMOTIONS. WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THEIR BEHAVIOR OR ACTIONS THAT ASSISTED YOU?

3. HOW COMFORTABLE DO YOU FEEL ASKING FOR SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED HELP RETURNING TO A STATE OF CALM?



EMOTIONAL REGULATION WORKSHEET 1/2



EMOTIONAL REGULATION IS A KEY COMPONENT OF MAINTAINING A BALANCED NERVOUS SYSTEM. THIS WORKSHEET IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY, UNDERSTAND, AND MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS MORE EFFECTIVELY.



1. CURRENT EMOTION

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU ARE FEELING RIGHT NOW. TRY TO BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE. FOR EXAMPLE, INSTEAD OF "BAD," YOU MIGHT SAY "FRUSTRATED" OR "ANXIOUS."

2. INTENSITY

ON A SCALE OF 0 TO 10, RATE THE INTENSITY OF YOUR EMOTION.

3. PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

NOTE ANY PHYSICAL SENSATIONS YOU ASSOCIATE WITH THIS EMOTION (E.G., TIGHTNESS IN CHEST, BUTTERFLIES IN STOMACH...)

4. TRIGGER

WHAT EVENT, THOUGHT, OR SITUATION TRIGGERED THIS EMOTION?



EMOTIONAL REGULATION WORKSHEET 2/2

5. THOUGHTS

WHAT THOUGHTS ARE GOING THROUGH YOUR MIND RIGHT NOW?

6. ACCEPTANCE

TAKE A MOMENT TO ACCEPT YOUR EMOTION. IT'S OKAY TO FEEL WHAT YOU'RE FEELING.

7. BREATHING EXERCISE

PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING FOR A FEW MINUTES TO HELP REGULATE YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE.

8. REFRAMING THOUGHTS

CAN YOU CHALLENGE OR REFRAME ANY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS INTO MORE BALANCED OR POSITIVE ONES?

9. PROBLEM-SOLVING

CAN YOU CHALLENGE OR REFRAME ANY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS INTO MORE BALANCED OR POSITIVE ONES?

AFTER YOU HAVE WORKED THROUGH THE STEPS ABOVE, REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: HOW HAS THE INTENSITY OF YOUR EMOTION CHANGED AFTER COMPLETING THIS WORKSHEET? WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT HOW YOU EXPERIENCE AND PROCESS THIS EMOTION? WHAT STRATEGIES WORKED BEST FOR MANAGING YOUR EMOTION IN THIS INSTANCE?



RESILIENCE: THE PATH TO INNER STRENGTH

Resilience is like an anchor for your mental well-being, helping you stay afloat during life's storms. It's your ability to maintain or quickly regain a sense of balance and well-being when faced with difficult situations.



Building a Brain-Friendly Life:
Embracing resilience involves understanding what strains your mental health (like traumas), recognizing what strengthens it (your personal resources), and observing the changes in how you think and act after overcoming difficulties.

DEFINITION

Resilience involves maintaining a positive mindset, perseverance, and the ability to learn and grow from adversity. This mental and emotional strength allows individuals to navigate difficult situations with determination and resourcefulness.

EXAMPLES

- Adaptability
- Optimism
- Self-Confidence
- Problem Solving
- Flexibility
- Emotional Regulation
- Determination



ENHANCING RESILIENCE IN YOUR LIFE



FOSTER SUPPORTIVE NETWORKS:

Invest in relationships that provide encouragement and comfort. Connections with family, friends, and community groups can serve as vital support systems. Contributing to your community or drawing strength from spiritual practices can also enrich your support network.



DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE:

Commit to daily pursuits that reinforce your sense of mission. Establish clear and achievable goals to foster an optimistic, future-oriented mindset, imbued with hope.



PRACTICE REFLECTIVE GROWTH:

Regularly revisit previous challenges and your reactions to them. Pinpoint the tactics that worked in your favor. Journaling can be an insightful tool to uncover patterns in your approach to difficulties, helping you make informed decisions in the future.



EMBRACE A POSITIVE OUTLOOK:

Allow the act of looking ahead to energize and inspire you. Accept changes and anticipate potential challenges as catalysts for personal development.



PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE:

Put your health and happiness first. Find pleasure in daily activities, stay active, ensure you get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet, and engage in stress-relieving practices such as yoga or meditation.

ACT PROACTIVELY:



Approach your challenges directly. Identify the steps needed to surmount hurdles, create an action plan, and take decisive steps. Although recovery may be incremental, consistent effort will lead to progress.

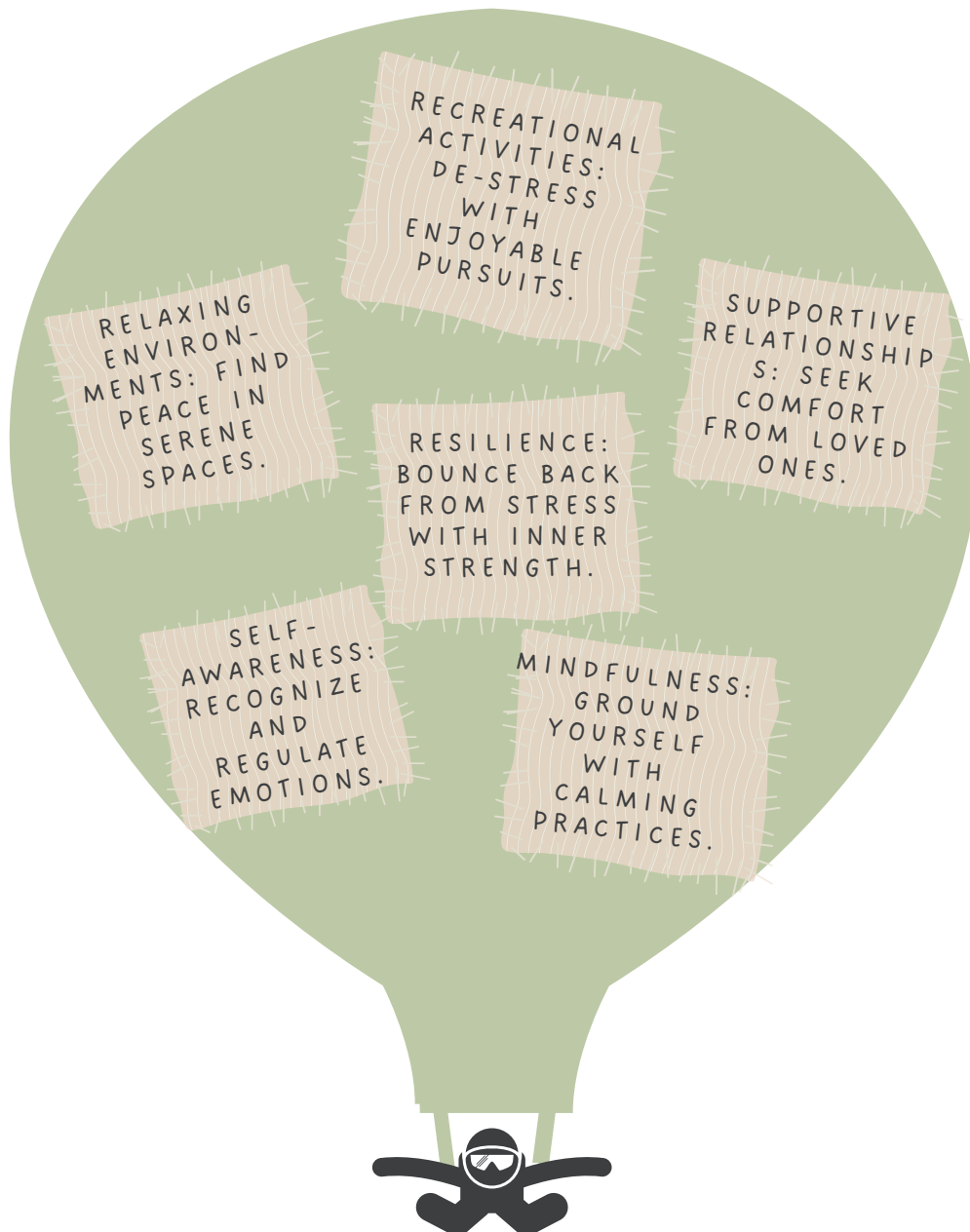
Integrating these resilience-building techniques into your life can significantly improve your ability to cope with the fluctuations of life, making the journey smoother and more manageable.



EXPLORING RESOURCES: BUILDING YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

i

IN THE CONTEXT OF NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION, RESOURCES ARE ANYTHING THAT HELPS YOU GROUND, CALM, AND BALANCE YOUR EMOTIONAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES. THESE CAN BE INTERNAL, SUCH AS PERSONAL STRENGTHS AND COPING MECHANISMS, OR EXTERNAL, LIKE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND RELAXING ENVIRONMENTS.



POSITIVE MOMENTS JAR

- OUR NATURAL TENDENCY IS TO OVERLOOK DAILY JOYS WHILE FOCUSING ON NEGATIVES, A THROWBACK TO SURVIVAL INSTINCTS.
- ACTIVELY ACKNOWLEDGING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES CAN BALANCE OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE AND ENHANCE OUR WELL-BEING.
- THIS PRACTICE SUPPORTS A HEALTHIER AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM BY REINFORCING A SENSE OF SAFETY AND POSITIVITY.

SETUP:

- PLACE AN EMPTY JAR IN A SPOT AT HOME YOU OFTEN SEE.
- KEEP SMALL PIECES OF PAPER AND A PEN NEARBY.

ACTION:

- WRITE DOWN JOYFUL MOMENTS OR POSITIVES AS THEY OCCUR.
- DEPOSIT THESE NOTES INTO THE JAR.

PURPOSE:

- THIS JAR BECOMES A TROVE OF HAPPY MEMORIES FOR REFLECTION.



MORNING GRATITUDE WORKSHEET



PRACTICING GRATITUDE IN THE MORNING SETS A POSITIVE TONE FOR THE DAY. BY EXPLORING YOUR RESOURCES AND INTEGRATING THEM INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE, YOU CAN ENHANCE YOUR WELL-BEING AND SUPPORT THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS OF VAGUS THERAPY.

START YOUR DAY BY THINKING OF THREE THINGS YOU'RE GRATEFUL FOR. THESE COULD BE ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE, PEOPLE YOU APPRECIATE, OR OPPORTUNITIES YOU HAVE.

01

02

03



DEEP BREATHING PRACTICE



DEEP BREATHING STIMULATES THE VAGUS NERVE. THE ACTIVATION OF THE VAGUS NERVE THROUGH DEEP BREATHING CAN LOWER HEART RATE AND BLOOD PRESSURE, INDICATING A SHIFT TOWARDS A MORE RESTFUL AND RESTORATIVE STATE OF BEING.

GUIDED STEPS:

- GET COMFORTABLE: SIT OR LIE DOWN IN A QUIET SPACE.
- HAND POSITION: ONE HAND ON THE CHEST, THE OTHER ON THE ABDOMEN.
- BREATHE IN: SLOWLY INHALE THROUGH YOUR NOSE FOR FOUR COUNTS, FEELING THE ABDOMEN RISE.
- HOLD: PAUSE YOUR BREATH FOR FOUR COUNTS.
- BREATHE OUT: EXHALE SLOWLY THROUGH THE MOUTH FOR SIX COUNTS, RELEASING TENSION.
- REPEAT: PERFORM 5-10 CYCLES.

TIPS:

- FOCUS ON YOUR BREATH AND USE A CALMING MANTRA IF HELPFUL.
- PRACTICE TWICE DAILY FOR BEST RESULTS.



FACIAL CONTOURING EXERCISE

i

WHEN WE TOUCH OUR FACES WITH OUR HANDS OR ARE TOUCHED BY OTHERS, WE ENGAGE OUR FACIAL AND MASTICATORY MUSCLES. THIS ACTION INFLUENCES NERVES, WHICH ARE ASSOCIATED WITH OUR EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS AND HAVE CONNECTIONS TO THE VAGUS NERVE, INFLUENCING OUR PARASYMPATHETIC RELAXATION RESPONSE.

Our emotional states often manifest in our facial expressions, and our faces can therefore reflect how we are feeling. By looking in a mirror, we can become aware of the expressions we are holding. During this exercise, you can become conscious of your emotions and playfully alter them.



GUIDED STEPS:

1. Assume a comfortable posture.
2. Warm your hands by rubbing them together.
3. Gently rest your hands on your face, feeling the warmth.
4. With your hands, playfully reshape your facial expressions, exploring movement.
5. Occasionally pause to notice the sensations.
6. Make faces, smile, and adjust your facial muscles lightly.

This activity recognizes emotions and can relax you by engaging facial nerves connected to the calming vagus nerve.



TONGUE RELEASE EXERCISES

i

OPENING YOUR MOUTH WIDE INITIATES A STRETCH IN THE THROAT'S POSTERIOR REGION, WHERE THE VAGUS NERVE RESIDES. THIS STRETCH CAN ACTIVATE THE NERVE, ENCOURAGING A TRANQUIL AND RELAXED STATE THROUGHOUT YOUR BODY. GENTLY CLOSING YOUR MOUTH AND USING YOUR TONGUE TO EXPLORE THE ORAL CAVITY ACTIVATES A NETWORK OF CRANIAL NERVES THAT SYNERGISTICALLY SUPPORT THE CALMING INFLUENCE OF THE VAGUS NERVE, CONTRIBUTING TO YOUR OVERALL WELL-BEING.



GUIDED STEPS:

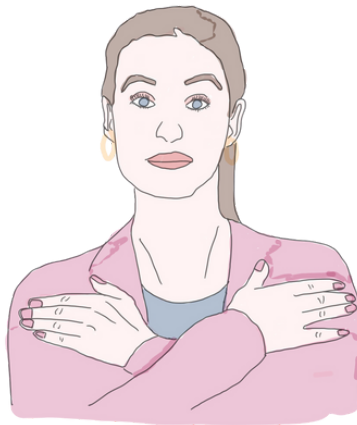
1. **Throat Stretch:** Sit comfortably, open your mouth wide as though holding a warm potato on your tongue to stretch the throat, activating the vagus nerve.
2. **Mouth Exploration:** With closed lips, use your tongue to explore inside your mouth, stimulating cranial nerves linked to the vagus nerve.
3. **Tongue Movements:** Rotate your tongue around your lips and teeth, promoting relaxation and vagus nerve activation.
4. **Tongue Extension:** Stick out your tongue, moving it in different directions to directly stimulate the vagus nerve.



BUTTERFLY HUG

i

THE BUTTERFLY HUG TECHNIQUE ACTIVATES THE CALMING PATHWAYS OF THE VAGUS NERVE THROUGH A PATTERN OF BILATERAL STIMULATION, AIDING IN THE REDUCTION OF STRESS AND ANXIETY. IT OFFERS A PHYSICAL ANCHOR FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION, ALLOWING THE BODY'S RELAXATION RESPONSE TO ENGAGE. THIS CAN BE ESPECIALLY BENEFICIAL FOR SOOTHING INTENSE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES.



GUIDED STEPS:

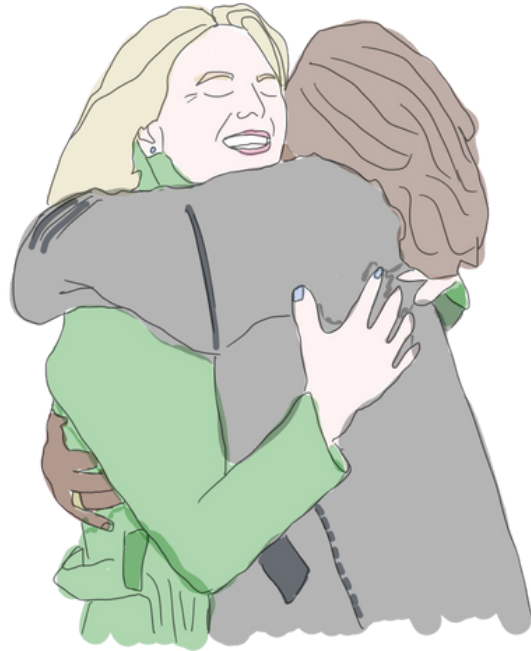
To practice the Butterfly Hug, follow these steps:

1. **Settle In:** Choose a quiet area and sit with a straight posture.
2. **Breathe:** Begin with deep, steady breaths, eyes closed or gaze soft.
3. **Hand Placement:** Cross your arms, placing each hand beneath the opposite collarbone, thumbs towards the chin, forming wings.
4. **Tap Rhythmically:** Tap your chest left and right, in a gentle, rhythmic pattern for eight counts while breathing deeply.
5. **Monitor and Continue:** Pause after each set of taps to check your feeling of calm. If you're more relaxed or unchanged, continue for additional sets until relaxation deepens.



THE POWER OF HUGGING

HEALTH BENEFITS OF HUGGING AND VAGUS NERVE ACTIVATION:



STRESS REDUCTION

WHEN YOU HUG SOMEONE, YOUR BODY RELEASES OXYTOCIN, OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE "LOVE HORMONE." THIS HORMONE IS ASSOCIATED WITH HAPPINESS AND LESS STRESS.

BOOSTED IMMUNE SYSTEM

HUGGING AND THE SUBSEQUENT OXYTOCIN RELEASE CAN IMPROVE IMMUNE FUNCTION BY REDUCING STRESS, WHICH CAN IN TURN DECREASE THE CHANCES OF BECOMING SICK.

RELAXED MUSCLES

HUGS RELAX MUSCLES BY RELEASING TENSION IN THE BODY. THE VAGUS NERVE COMMUNICATES BETWEEN THE BRAIN AND THE REST OF THE BODY AND CAN TRIGGER RELAXATION, REDUCING PAIN AND DISCOMFORT ASSOCIATED WITH MUSCLE TENSION.



SWALLOWING EXERCISES



STRESS CAN ALTER THE SIMPLE ACT OF SWALLOWING, TRIGGERING AN INSTINCTIVE REACTION THAT LEAVES THE MOUTH DRY. CONVERSELY, A RELAXED STATE KEEPS THE MOUTH MOIST AND SWALLOWING EASY, INDICATING A CALM PARASYMPATHETIC SYSTEM. BY SITTING COMFORTABLY, GENERATING SALIVA, GENTLY USING FACIAL MUSCLES, AND SWALLOWING MINDFULLY, YOU CAN STIMULATE THE CALMING PATHWAYS OF THE VAGUS NERVE, ENHANCING RELAXATION WITH EACH SWALLOW.



GUIDED STEPS:

1. Find a comfortable seated position, allowing saliva to gather in your mouth naturally.
2. Create a gentle suction between your cheeks and teeth to engage facial muscles.
3. Touch your tongue to your mouth's roof and swallow, activating the vagus nerve.
4. Keep your neck relaxed, chin down, to facilitate swallowing and stimulate the nerve.
5. Notice the movement of your larynx with each swallow, indicating vagus nerve engagement.
6. Practice this mindful swallowing up to 20 times to enhance the vagus nerve's calming effect.



HUMMING AND TONING

i

THE ACT OF HUMMING CREATES GENTLE VIBRATIONS THAT RESONATE THROUGHOUT THE BODY. THESE VIBRATIONS CAN STIMULATE THE VAGUS NERVE BECAUSE IT RUNS THROUGH THE NECK AND THORAX, WHERE THE VIBRATIONS FROM HUMMING ARE LIKELY TO BE FELT. THIS CAN HELP TO ENHANCE THE VAGUS NERVE'S FUNCTION.

This exercise can be done in any position, but lying comfortably on your back has proven to be most effective. In this position, the body doesn't need to work as hard to maintain posture, allowing the vibrations to spread more easily and be felt more deeply throughout the body.

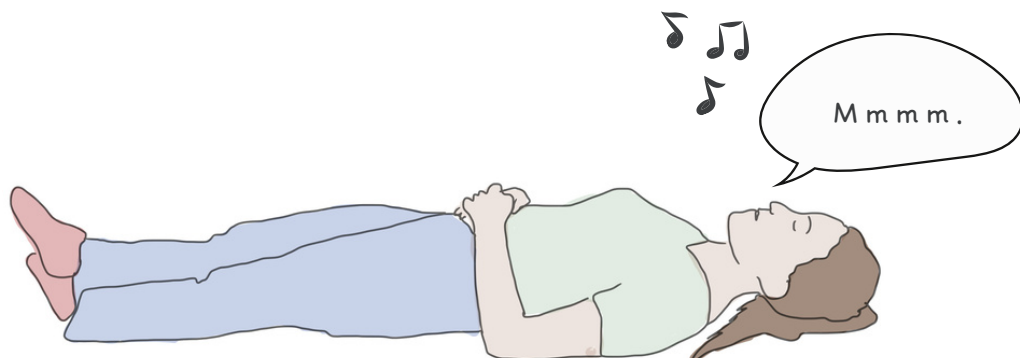
GUIDED STEPS:

Let a humming sound resonate from your voice, feeling it as a vibration moving through your body. Focus more on the sensation of the sound rather than how it sounds.

Over time, you can play with different vowel sounds like A, E, I, O, U.

If you need to take a break during the seven-minute exercise, that's okay. After humming for 7 minutes, allow at least 3 minutes for the vibrations to continue their effect.

Interoceptive stimuli, such as these vibrations, take quite a while to be integrated into the nervous system.



EYE MASSAGE

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OCULOCARDIAC REFLEX: A TREATMENT AS EXPLAINED BELOW PRODUCES A CARDIOVASCULAR EFFECT AND IS THE RESULT OF VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION; IT LEADS TO A DECREASE IN HEART RATE AND BLOOD PRESSURE. THE REFLEX ARC RUNS VIA PARASYMPATHETIC FIBERS BETWEEN THE TRIGEMINAL NERVE AND THE VAGUS NERVE



GUIDED STEPS:

GENTLY PRESS YOUR CLOSED EYELIDS WITH YOUR PALM, AS IF LIGHTLY FLOATING A PING PONG BALL IN WATER.

THIS SOFT TOUCH CALMS YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM, SIGNALING YOUR BRAIN TO ACTIVATE THE VAGUS NERVE, WHICH SLOWS YOUR HEART RATE AND REDUCES BLOOD PRESSURE, PROMOTING RELAXATION.



FIVE SOOTHING HAND POSITIONS



HAND POSITIONS CAN BE A SIMPLE YET PROFOUND WAY TO FOSTER CALMNESS AND REDUCE THE AROUSAL OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM. THESE GESTURES CAN PROVIDE A FEELING OF BEING EMBRACED AND SECURE WHILE SOOTHING YOUR INTERNAL STATE. EACH HAND POSITION HAS ITS OWN WAY OF OFFERING COMFORT AND STABILITY.

THE FIVE HAND POSITIONS:

PLACE EACH HAND GENTLY ON THE SIDES OF YOUR HEAD.



REST ONE HAND ON YOUR FOREHEAD AND THE OTHER ON THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD.

POSITION ONE HAND ON YOUR FOREHEAD AND THE OTHER OVER YOUR HEART.



LAY ONE HAND ON YOUR HEART AND THE OTHER ON YOUR ABDOMEN.



HOLD ONE HAND ON YOUR SOLAR PLEXUS AND THE OTHER AT THE BASE OF YOUR SKULL.

TO PRACTICE THIS RELAXATION TECHNIQUE:

1. START IN A COMFORTABLE SPOT WITH DEEP, MINDFUL BREATHS.
2. HOLD EACH OF THE HAND POSITIONS FOR A FEW MINUTES, AIMING FOR A 15-MINUTE SESSION.
3. FOCUS ON THE COMFORT OF YOUR TOUCH.

USE ANY HAND POSITION FOR 5-10 MINUTES DURING STRESSFUL TIMES FOR GROUNDING.



CONCENTRATION / BREATH MEDITATION

UTILIZE YOUR BREATH AS A FOCAL POINT TO CULTIVATE DEEPER CONCENTRATION AND MINDFULNESS.

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THIS MEDITATION TECHNIQUE IS DESIGNED TO SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS BY USING THE RHYTHMIC PATTERN OF YOUR BREATH AS A SINGLE POINT OF CONCENTRATION.



GUIDED STEPS:

1. Sit or lie in a quiet space, taking deep breaths to relax.
2. Focus on your breath's pathway, the movement of your chest or abdomen, or its natural rhythm.
3. Keep a gentle, steady attention on breathing; return to this focus when distracted.
4. If helpful, count each breath cycle, starting over if you lose focus.
5. Do this for 10-15 minutes daily for improved focus and stress management.



BREATHING

DEEP, SLOW BREATHS FROM YOUR CORE; EXHALE GRADUALLY.



VISUALIZATION

IMAGINE OR VIEW SERENE SCENES, SUCH AS BEACHES OR MOUNTAINS.



MUSIC

LISTEN TO SOOTHING OR UPLIFTING MUSIC.



COMFORT ITEM

SNUGGLE WITH A COMFORTING ITEM LIKE A BLANKET OR A STUFFED TOY.



MOVEMENT

SHIFT YOUR FOCUS BY ENGAGING IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.



RELAXATION

TRY MUSCLE RELAXATION, A WARM BATH, OR YOGA.



COPING SKILLS YOU CAN PRACTICE RIGHT NOW

IMAGERY

FOCUS ON CALMING VISUALS, REAL OR IN YOUR MIND'S EYE.



INTERACT

REACH OUT FOR ENJOYABLE CONVERSATIONS OR DO PLEASANT ACTIVITIES WITH OTHERS.



AMUSE YOURSELF

ENJOY LEISURE ACTIVITIES LIKE GAMING, PUZZLES, COOKING, READING...



REFLECT ON SUCCESS

RECALL YOUR EFFORTS AND ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.



ADDRESS CHALLENGES

CONSIDER STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO WORK THROUGH ANY ISSUES YOU'RE FACING.



SPIRITUALITY

FIND SOLACE IN PRAYER, MEANINGFUL RITUALS OR ACTIVITIES THAT CONNECT YOU TO A GREATER PURPOSE.



TRIGGERS AND COPING STRATEGIES WORKSHEET 1/2



UNDERSTANDING WHAT TRIGGERS YOUR STRESS RESPONSES AND HOW TO EFFECTIVELY COPE WITH THESE TRIGGERS IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF MANAGING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM. THIS WORKSHEET WILL HELP YOU IDENTIFY SPECIFIC TRIGGERS AND PAIR THEM WITH COPING STRATEGIES THAT WORK FOR YOU.



DESCRIBE A SITUATION OR STIMULUS THAT OFTEN LEADS TO A STRESS RESPONSE. NOTE HOW YOU TYPICALLY REACT TO THIS TRIGGER). LIST STRATEGIES THAT YOU HAVE USED OR PLAN TO USE & RATE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS FROM 0-10.

TRIGGER	COPING STRATEGIES + EFFECTIVENESS



TRIGGERS AND COPING STRATEGIES WORKSHEET 2/2



AFTER IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS AND COPING STRATEGIES, PLEASE REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING:

1. ARE THERE ANY PATTERNS IN THE TYPES OF SITUATIONS THAT TRIGGER YOUR STRESS RESPONSE?

2. WHICH COPING STRATEGIES ARE CONSISTENTLY MORE EFFECTIVE FOR YOU? ARE THERE NEW STRATEGIES YOU CAN TRY THAT MIGHT BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

3. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REMIND YOURSELF TO USE THESE STRATEGIES IN THE MOMENT OF STRESS?



SELF-CARE PLAN WORKSHEET

CATEGORY	COMMITMENT
Physical Activity: Choose one physical activity you enjoy. How many times a week will you do it?	
Relaxation Techniques: Identify one relaxation technique that helps you unwind.	
Social Interaction: Name one way you'll connect with others this week.	
Nutrition: List one nutritional goal for the week.	
Sleep: What time will you go to bed each night to ensure adequate rest?	
Enjoyment: Select one hobby or interest to engage in this week.	

I commit to incorporating the above self-care activities into my week to support my nervous system health.

Signature: _____

Remember, small steps can lead to significant changes. Keep this plan where you can see it daily as a gentle reminder of your commitment to self-care.



QUESTION CARDS - AWARENESS



Right now, how calm and grounded do I feel on a scale from 1 to 10?

What physical sensations am I aware of in my body at this moment?

Am I experiencing any tension or discomfort? Where is it located?

What are my current thoughts? Are they fast-paced, slow, positive, or negative?

How would I describe my emotional state at this moment?

When I take a deep breath, what changes do I notice in my body and mind?



QUESTION CARDS - REFLECTION



When was the last time I felt a strong emotional response, and what triggered it?

How did my body react to a recent stressful situation?

Can I identify a recent event where I felt particularly connected or joyful?

What are the situations that typically make me feel anxious or on edge?

Reflecting on the past week, when did I feel most relaxed?

Have there been moments where I felt disengaged or detached? What might have caused this?



QUESTION CARDS - ACTION



What is one thing I can do today to feel more connected and engaged with others?

Which relaxation technique can I practice to activate my ventral vagus and feel calmer?

How can I gently soothe my nervous system when I notice symptoms of dorsal shutdown?

What steps can I take to feel safer and more secure in my environment?

Are there any comforting activities that help me engage my parasympathetic nervous system?

What is one self-care practice I can commit to for improving my vagal tone this week?

