

MANAGING YOUR STRESS RESPONSE

SELF CARE

Nourish your nervous system

BECOME AWARE OF YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE

Check in throughout your day and notice what you are feeling in your body. Tightness? Shallow breath? Exhausted? Wanting to numb out or check out? Energized? Agitated? Scan your body and notice what you are feeling. If you are not in a calm, relaxed, presently engaged, and open to socially connect state, then you are likely in fight, flight, or freeze. Once you know your nervous system state, you may find a lot of relief in just knowing that your body has automatically gone into this state. From here, you can start to give it cues to get back to safety, by first asking: "What does my nervous system crave right now to feel safe?"

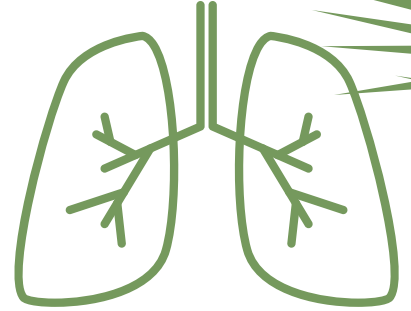


SING OR HUM

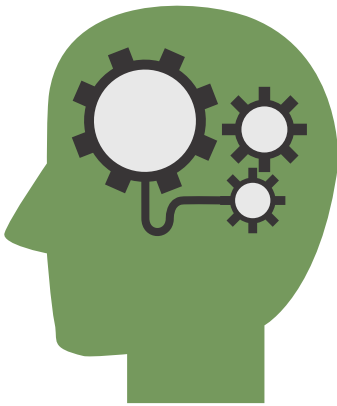
Singing automatically helps you to take longer, slower out-breaths. It changes your physiological state to feel calmer and happier and lifts your spirits. Throughout your day, find times to sing, or have singing time with your family or friends on a video call.

BREATH TO ACTIVATE YOUR VAGUS NERVE

Breathing is the simplest, easiest tool to help your nervous system to get to calm. When we breathe with a slower, longer out-breath then you activate the Vagus nerve, which is the calming nerve that goes from the brain to the organs. When we breathe into the belly and blow out through your nose or mouth) a longer, slower out breath, this activates the Vagus nerve to send calming messages back up to your brain. Take time throughout your day to practice this breathing to signal to your body and brain that you are safe.



NOURISH YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM



Knowing what nourishes your nervous system and helps you feel calm, relaxed and brings a smile to you face. Throughout your day, notice what makes you smile, what makes you feel safe and take in those moments consciously. Stay in those moments and stay with the feelings of them longer as this nourishes your nervous system. Make a list of these of these things so in future you can also intentionally bring nourishment into your day to help take you out of defense mode (fight or flight) and into safety and calm.

GET MOVING

At first, fear can create mobilizing energy in our system, nudging at us to flight or fight, but if for a prolonged period we cannot do anything, then we can go into an immobilized or shut down state. We want to prevent this from happening and movement can really help. In addition to exercising, you can create more opportunities to move throughout your day. I like to get up every hour and do some energizing movements or dance really helps to lift me out of any defence states! Moving also helps to release any trapped energy and agitation or frustration we may be feeling from the more mobilized defence states.



MAKE TIME TO LAUGH

Making time to laugh is also important! Bookmarking funny YouTube videos or your favourite comedy shows to lighten your day. Or try some laughing yoga; laughter yoga is a fantastic way of keeping fit and healthy whilst having fun. It is based on the principal that your body benefits from laughing even when we pretend to laugh. If you are willing to laugh you will get the psychological and physiological benefits of laughter. The good thing is that laughter exercises that simulate laughter soon turns into genuine, deep, and hearty laughter.



EXPAND SAFETY ENERGY



Take some time to get quiet and locate where in your body you may be feeling the energy of safety, kindness, and connection. This can be found in your heart, chest area, or somewhere else. Focus on that energy and let it grow to envelop your whole body. Be with this energy, letting your whole nervous system bathe in it until you feel nourished and safe. This can be achieved with practice through meditation and does not always happen the first time you try but with practice is so beneficial to your nervous system.



NOURISH YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

As humans, we are wired to connect with others. It is our biological we survive. Think of babies – they could not survive without that physical connection and co-regulation with another human being. Our nervous system craves connecting with others and we feel safe when we socially engage. Every day find a way to have meaningful connection with others. Whether it is making a conscious effort to hug your family or sit and hold hands and feel connected. Or, if you are alone, find opportunities to connect with others via videoconference or phone, where you can hear their voice and feel their support through their voice. Hearing a soft, caring tone of voice can be very regulating to the nervous system

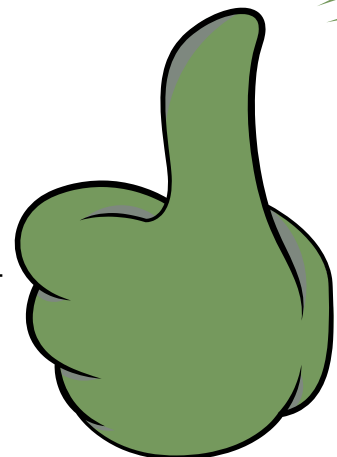


HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN TO FEEL SAFE

As parents, it is our responsibility to be messengers of the cues of safety and reduce the cues of danger. Our children look to us to regulate themselves. But in stressful times, we are likely finding ourselves getting agitated and angry a lot, or in fear and disconnection. As a result, our kids may be having more meltdowns or fighting more with us. It is natural. Our nervous systems are all feeding off each other! The key is to practice the steps above to get back to a regulated state once you notice you are in defence mode. From here, you can provide cues of safety to your children. The message you want to convey through your voice and body language is "I am a safe person to be close to...I am a comforter and you can co-regulate with me." The best cues of safety to children are using a soft calm voice, smiling more (as children read our faces all the time!), and having an energy of compassion for their behaviours (which are likely escalating right now), knowing it's just their nervous system reacting and it's not their fault. Keep in mind that HOW we communicate is more important than words as children's nervous systems will read your nervous system first and may bypass the words being said.

FEELING IN CONTROL

Moving from states of fear and defence to a more regulated, safe state involves getting to know your body and understanding the automatic reactions that occur in your nervous system. It is from this understanding that you can be back in a place of control and choice. Once you realize what state your nervous system is in, you can gently guide it back to where you want it to be – safety!





TIPS FOR COPING WITH HEADLINE STRESS

Start your day with a calming and enjoyable activity, not by looking at your phone. Seek out positive news, try to restrict your access to negative stories and when you do feel overwhelmed by bad news, focus on what you can control. Pick one reliable source of news to receive information from and watch for a limited amount of time and only once per day. Remember our brains have a natural negativity bias – a throwback to our cavemen days when we were constantly scanning the environment for threats – and this can mean we are predisposed to notice the bad stuff while good news tends to be filtered out. Taking media apps off your phone, turning off notifications and setting time limits for how long you spend looking at negative news stories. Do not allow yourself to be bombarded all day. When there is a crisis and they have non-stop coverage on every channel, put an alarm on your phone for half an hour and when that time's up you switch off the television and stop looking at your phone.

