



Staying Centered

A Polyvagal exercise in maintaining your own state in relationship to others and the world.

Neuroception is the monitoring activity of the nervous system which includes not only monitoring your internal state, your environment, but also includes detecting the autonomic state of others. This can be a calming experience or may make you feel agitated or uncomfortable if those around you are stressed. This can be felt within the body which then can create emotions and thoughts. Many sensitive people can feel the state and emotions of others. Sensitive people can also feel the energy of various aspects of their environment. This can be a beautiful experience but also can be overwhelming. Sometimes people can feel like they are merging into other people's energy or states and take this on as their own. This exercise allows you to sense other's energy and their ANS (Autonomic Nervous System) but stay centered in your own. This is about relationship – with yourself, others, and the world. We start with getting in touch with your own state and energy. The exercise then advances to your relationship with the world and others. You can practice alone using imagination to reinforce the learning.

With yourself:

Steps:

1. Choose a 5-10 minute period of time when you can just be with yourself without distraction.
2. Allow yourself to relax and slow down the breath. Become aware of your breathing.
3. Become aware of your body – you can scan the body from head to toe, simply noticing without the need to change or fix anything. Allow the body to release tension.
4. Feel the body as a whole. Sense into the body as a vibration. You may start with your hands or feet. The belly or heart area are also places to access this feeling of vibration.
5. As you spend time with this vibration, notice the tone – high pitch or low? Notice the speed – rapid or slow? Does a color come to mind? If you are musical – does a note come to mind? This is your tone or vibration. You can use this note or color to make this a tangible representation of your system or vibration. You can call this color or note to mind when feeling challenged by other's systems or your environment.
6. Do this exercise frequently and you can start noticing any shifts in this vibration depending on the state you are in. How does this vibration (color or musical tone) change when you are in ventral vagal or feeling good– at the top of the ANS ladder or fight or flight (activation) or dorsal, the freeze or immobile state at the bottom of the ladder?

In the world:

Steps:

1. Choose a setting where you will practice feeling your own energy while in the world. Perhaps it is on a walk or sitting in a park or a busy shopping area, concert, etc.
2. Prior to leaving your living space, spend a few minutes regulating your nervous system, coming to your calm center, tuning into your breath and the feeling of your own energy and vibration.
3. Become aware of your surroundings – the room you are in or wherever you are sitting.
4. Practice shifting your awareness back within you and then bringing the awareness to the space around you.
5. Can you maintain the awareness of yourself while you are also aware of the space or environment around you? Practice this for a few moments.
6. Set an intention to keep part of your awareness within while you are interacting with the environment.
7. While you are experiencing the setting of your choice, keep about 25% of your awareness within while you take in your environment with all of your senses.
8. Notice any shifts within. How does this particular environment make you feel? Calm, energized, agitated, overwhelmed?
9. What tools can you use to regulate if you notice agitation or overwhelm? For example, focus on the breath, feel your feet on the ground, relax the belly.

With other people:

Steps:

1. Follow the same steps for “In the world” but now your environment includes another person or a group of people.
2. Set the intention to maintain 25% of awareness within while you are with another. Practice with 50% of your awareness within and see if you can still engage fully.
3. Focus on feeling the energy of the other person or group. How does it feel different than yours?
4. Return focus to you, your breath, your body, feel your feet on the floor.
5. Choose to stay connected to the ventral vagal state (feeling calm and connected) even though you may sense cues of danger or stress from others.
6. Can you use your Social Engagement System to set a tone for the group? Use a prosodic vocal tone, eye contact, a smile and notice how that influences another.