

# Soften the Shell

## Enneagram Workshop

### The Body Center Part 1: Week 4

#### Why Map the Nervous System?

It is important to “map” your own nervous system so you can begin to know how you personally respond to your internal and external environment. Awareness is the first step to reshaping your system. When your system is activated towards protection, survival and safety will be your primary focus. When your system feels safe, you can learn, grow, connect, thrive and heal.

#### Mapping Ventral Vagal Regulation (relaxed, connected, engaged)

Remember a time you were in ventral vagal state. Call it to mind and begin to feel it in the body. **Remain as the objective witness of the event, don't engage the mind in any of the story or analysis of the event. Just get a feel for it.** You can get in the “green zone” or ventral vagal intentionally with a self-hug, slow breathing, gratitude and breathing with awareness focused on your heart.

#### Journal the following questions:

1. Where are you specifically feeling it in your body?
2. What's happening with your thoughts?
3. What is happening with your emotions? What are you feeling?
4. How are you interacting with others? What's the nature of the relationship?
5. Are there actions or behaviors that you do?
6. How is your sleep, eating and use of substances affected? (Caffeine, alcohol, marijuana, etc)
7. Complete the following sentences in a word or 2: I am \_\_\_\_\_  
The world is \_\_\_\_\_
8. Is there one word you can use to describe this state?

What's your plan to be in ventral vagal more often?

Things I can do myself:

Things I can do with others:

#### Ways to Shape our System to favor Ventral Vagal:

- Intend to be in this state more often – start your morning with the intention
- Breath work

- Mindful of senses, body and breath
- Be in nature daily and sync with nature's rhythms
- Movement – shake, swing arms, walk, tai-chi, yoga, dance
- Social connection – who are your anchors of safety?
- Self-compassion, allowing emotions, crying if needed.
- Awareness – interrupt old patterns
- Savoring/gratitude – 20-30 seconds
- Create cues of safety at home and at work
- Know your anchors
- Other things you find on your own

### SIFT to SHIFT

This exercise uses the power of the mind/imagination to create a link between the nervous system and a phrase that will act as a cue to the nervous system to relax. Use a brief phrase when prompted to journal on the sensations, images, feeling and thought this memory conjures. Be brief and get the essence of the felt experience.

- Begin with calling to mind a memory or image of a favorite place or event that is easy to conjure and will put you in “the green zone.”
- S – what sensations are available? (ex. Warm breeze, colors, etc.)
- I – what is the image that stands out (like a snapshot)
- F – what is the dominant feeling tone (job, peace, connected, free, etc.)
- T – what is a thought that might summarize this experience (living is easy, I love life, I am free, etc.)
- What one or two word phrase sums up this experience?
- Practice daily anchoring this SIFT in your system, experience it in your body, mind, heart and repeat the words.
- Imagine a stressful situation and use the words to practice relaxing in that moment.
- Use it in real time during a stressful situation – can practice waiting a red light, in line at the grocery, at work or waiting to get customer service on the phone!

### Week 4 Homework:

#### Shaping

- Practice the SIFT exercise
- Savor – find 1-3 ventral vagal moments to savor/day. Experience the moment with all your senses. Pause and savor for 20-30 seconds. Keep a savoring journal! Start with micro-moments if this is difficult. Build it in your daily routines like having a cup of coffee or a walk, etc.
- Be on the lookout for small moments that bring you into the green zone. Set a goal of noticing more than 3. Invite someone to join you on this challenge – compare notes.
- Daily movement
- Continue attending to your state and Emotions Journal
- Anchor in safety (see exercise below)
- Allow yourself to sit quietly with no tasks for 5 minutes. Eyes open or closed, be fully present, just Being – not doing.
- Listen to any meditation on Insight Timer (Ann Petrus Baker).

## Anchoring in Safety:

An “anchor” is something that serves to hold an object firmly, a reliable support.” An anchor for your ventral vagal state (the “green zone”) helps to hold the connection to the top of the ladder when experiences threaten to pull you into a sympathetic (fight/flight) or dorsal state (shut-down/freeze). The anchors will help you to find way back to regulation. These are also known as ***cues of safety***. You want to amplify your cues of safety. You can use the anchors by connecting to them or calling them to mind in memory. As with all of these exercises, practice makes them more effective. Start small and over time you will notice and add more anchors to your list. You can make a list, journal, sticky notes so you can remind yourself – whatever works!

Categories of Anchors:

- Who – make a list of people (or pet) in your life that bring you a feeling of safety and welcome. You can also include people who are no longer living and spiritual figures.
- What – these are small actions that feel nourishing or invite connections. Keep track of these micro-moments. For example, making a cup of tea, looking out the window, looking at photographs that bring you joy, listening to music.
- Where – Look around your home, neighborhood, community, workplace that gives you a feel of safety and/or spiritual connection.
- When – identify moments in time when you feel anchored in the ventral vagal energy. Maybe it’s first thing in the morning or as the sun is setting. Take note.

Some examples from my own life:

- Who – I have different people anchors for different states, a person that makes me laugh, another who really listens, another who challenges me.
- What – watering my garden, cooking, walking in nature.
- Where – the woods near me, the lake, my backyard.
- When – I meditate/connect with spirit first thing in the morning and again late afternoon. I also love to walk around sunset.