

Soften the Shell

Enneagram Workshop

Mapping the Nervous system

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.

What’s Your “home away from home”?

Ventral Vagal is our natural state, your “home.”

When reacting to distressing events I tend towards: (place an x on where you are on the continuum)

Sympathetic (mobilized)

Dorsal vagal (shutdown)

Personal Profile Map

For each state, remember a time you were in that 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.** It is important after you do this exercise you take action to get back to the “green zone” or ventral vagal. Do a self-hug, slow breathing, walk in nature, connect with someone.

1. Sympathetic hyper-arousal (activation/mobilization)

Circle the words that apply to you:

Anxious	Agitated	Restless	Tense	Irritable
Hypervigilant	Impulsive	Uptight	Rigid	Rage
Have racing thoughts		Feel your heart racing		
Rapid breathing		Unable to Focus		
Too much energy		Reactive	Stressed	
No time or patience to make conversation				
Other: _____				

Journal the following questions:

Sympathetic:

1. Where are you specifically feeling it in your body?
2. What’s happening with your thoughts? (racing, looping, etc)
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? (pushing away, clinging to, critical, etc.)
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?

Triggers:

What kinds of internal, external or relationship triggers activate this state for you?

Glimmers:

How do you pull yourself out of this state?

Things you can do on your own:

Things you can do with others:

Week 2 Homework:

1. Notice and Name: Choose a few times during the day/evening to tune into your ANS (Autonomic Nervous System) and just simply notice and name the state you are in.
2. Turn toward yourself with curiosity and compassion.
3. Check out meditations on Insight Timer under Ann Petrus Baker. The following meditations are good for week 1: Magic of Breath Awareness, Meeting your Suffering with Compassion, Short Awareness Practice.
4. Start a Journal or keep a folder to keep notes and reflections about this process. Reflection helps to solidify the learning.

Content from The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy, by Deb Dana

2. **Dorsal Vagal Response: Shut down, immobilized**

Mapping:

Remember a time you were in dorsal 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. If this starts to feel overwhelming stop the exercise. It is important after you do this exercise you take action to get back to the “green zone” or ventral vagal. Do a self-hug, slow breathing, walk in nature, connect with someone.

In Dorsal Vagal you may feel:

Low	Shut down	Shame	Numb	Overwhelmed
Frozen	Sad	Depressed	Lifeless	Sluggish
Heavy	Isolated	No or slow Energy	Want to curl up & hide	
Other: _____		Avoidant	Withdrawn	Disconnected

Journal the following questions:

1. Where are you specifically feeling it in your body?
2. What’s happening with your thoughts? (racing, looping, etc)
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? (pushing away, clinging to, critical, etc.)
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?

Triggers:

What kinds of internal, external or relationship triggers activate this state for you?

Ways to Move out of Dorsal:

- Voo breath
- Mindful of senses, body and breath
- Be in nature as the energy of flow
- Movement – shake, swing arms, walk, tai-chi, yoga, dance
- Social connection – who are your anchors of safety?
- Self-compassion, allowing emotions, crying.

- Other things you find on your own

What's your plan to move out of Dorsal?

Things I can do myself:

Things I can do with others:

Polyvagal Exercises

Attending

- See descriptions below for Short Attending and Long Attending exercises: Aim to do short attending twice and long attending once/day or 3 times/week.
- Continue with befriending with curiosity and compassion.
- Check out "Awareness practice for a Healthy Body-Mind" meditation on Insight Timer (search Ann Petrus Baker). That is the meditation done in class.
- Daily movement
- Emotions journal – see additional handout

Short-Duration Attending States:

Steps

1. Decide on 5-10 minute increments. Use the following prompts to check in 3 times during that span of time.
 - In this moment my autonomic state is...
 - And I am feeling...
 - Now my state is....
 - And I am feeling...
 - And now my autonomic state is...
 - And I am feeling...
2. Repeat this exercise a few times/day for several weeks.
3. Look for any patterns that emerge. Are there times of the day you get stuck? What is happening in your life? Are there changes over the course of the 5 or 10 minutes that you are observing?

Long-Duration Attending Steps:

1. Longer time periods offer an expanded, bird's eye view of your experience. Decide on a timeframe to use. You can experiment with doing the exercise in the morning, end of the day or even a few times/week.
2. Answer the following 4 questions:
 - Where am I? Begin by noticing your current state now.
 - Where have I been? Reflect back and notice any state changes.
 - What does this mean for where I might be heading? Use curiosity to see understand your movement - is there a pattern?
 - What do I want to do now? Is this a path you want to follow or a pattern you want to interrupt?

