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## **Somatic Embodiment and Mindfulness: Practical Strategies for Stress Relief and Regulation**

### Psycho-education/Talking Points

Nervous system and window of capacity

Different forms of regulation – up, down, co-regulation

Our nervous systems communicate!

Applications for kids, i.e. the impact of role modeling regulation; regulation breaks to foster optimal brain functioning

Being with discomfort plus resourcing to expand window of capacity slowly

Resourcing signals safety to the brain and grounds us in the present moment - mindfulness intersection

### Somatic Embodiment –

Resourcing – signaling safety to nervous system (NS) – use these at any point during today’s workshop!

### **Orienting**

to the environment/space, the 4 corners of the room, to each side of you, above and below you, in front of you and behind you, out the windows and towards the exits – do this with eyes and then body moving through the space

to the horizon, **soft eyes** – soften your gaze by looking towards the horizon and bringing awareness to area behind back of eyes/head (tension where head meets neck softens/relaxes)

Basic recalibration strategy to bring NS to ventral vagal:

**turn head** slowly from side to side

notice what emerges, perhaps a deep breath naturally emerges (phrenic nerve, vertebrae 3-5 back of neck connected to diaphragm and inspiration/inhalation)

allows NS to land in safeness (bridging gap between safety and internal experience of safeness through “find” response that’s ventrally mediated, connects us to capacity to create solutions with voice, choice, agency)

**Eye movement** exercise

Interlace hands over head – diaphragm expands – cradle head and release neck and shoulders  
or lean against wall or lying down

look with eyes only to 3 o’clock for 30-90 seconds while nose breathing if possible

back to center to recalibrate/pause then repeat to 9 o’clock for 30-90 seconds

We can’t stay in freeze state while looking to sides



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### **Owl eyes**

Wiggling fingers at peripherals

### **Gentle butterfly tapping**

Crossing arms over chest – hands tapping shoulders – if you like, turn your head slowly from side to side

If it feels okay, a gentle squeeze, scrunch face and slowly release and notice anything that emerges

Self-touch can bring us back into the body – hand massage, notice sensations in hand applying the pressure and the one receiving pressure

Gentle tapping on collar bone and below collar bone

Alternative: More vigorous tapping with fingertips on extremities, shoulders, back (avoid torso, can bring up emotion)

**Self-holding**/place hand on heart or any other vulnerable part of body, perhaps circular motion with hand

Self-hug, squeeze upper arms (Pressure point between deltoid and bicep, when squeezing it a breath emerges, connection to lungs)

**Gently pull on ears** – jaw releases

**Swaying/rocking/shake-it-out/wiggling/stretch/twist in both directions**

**Rolling shoulders**

**Cross body movement**

Reaching above and over in gentle “C” curve and other side/direction

**Gentle pressure on head:** on top/side of head/front and back of head (when arms are above head, diaphragm releases)

Gentle pressure that feels right; perhaps lengthen spine to release some muscles

**Making sounds/noise/singing**

Singing with others for co-regulation

ARGHH – explore open jaw or clenched

Ffff sound

**Squeeze** hand and move up forearm to elbow and back toward hand – switch sides

**Jumping up and down** if it feels okay

**Flap hands/shake** up and down body

**Rooster Crest**

Interlace fingers upside down and place them at crest of head, lengthen spine up and slightly back into hands and gentle pressure with finger tips



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### **Bi-lateral movement and stimulation**

Hands alternate squeezing (a stress ball, squishy, something soft, etc.)

Move one arm and then the other

### **Contra-lateral movement/neuroplasticity exercise:**

Thumbs and index fingers

### **Release psoas/diaphragm**

Lying on floor with feet/calves up on chair

This can be helpful before bed – can do this modified with pillow in bed – also works on side with pillow between legs in combination with eye exercises covered earlier

### **Yoga for spine: Cat cow**

Back bends for up-regulation, counter move to neutralize the spine

Other examples of back bend poses: dancer pose, wild thing, camel

Counter with down dog or child's pose

### **Joint dance – slowly wake up body**

Wrist dance, elbow dance, shoulder dance, spine dance, hip dance, maybe a figure 8, knees, ankles

Every joint has a bandha in yoga terms and its own diaphragm – when lock around each joint complex, start to stiffen up then diaphragm of each joint doesn't get to move and flow the energy through

### **The Shape of Joy**

Roll shoulders open, elbows lift, sternum, then forearms up and out overhead

Notice what emerges

Perhaps try with sound

Other techniques for sympathetic/ completing stress cycle:

#### **Hands pushing opposite knee/thigh (elbows involved too)**

Push knees into elbows and push elbows and hands into knees

Engaging deep core muscles and shoulders

Do this gently for dorsal; more intensely for sympathetic NS with face/jaw tense and growling



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Completing stress cycle continued:

**Running legs/feet tapping** (in chair, physical walk around space)

Running in place/chair – start slowly, then feet speed up, torso gets involved, big peak, pause, slow down, notice what emerges with in breath (this can either increase energy for dorsal or complete stress cycle for sympathetic NS), land back in ventral

**Contra-lateral movement (neuroplasticity exercises)**

**Arms to a T – activates vestibular system (for balancing) and away from limbic**

**Big arm/Shoulder circles** (do not do this one if you have should injury)

same direction forward, then reverse backwards;

Pause, right arm forward then start left arm backwards

Shake it out, then left arm forward then start right arm backward then shake it out

**Other regulating techniques to try on your own:**

Movement with music connecting with natural rhythms of body

Color by numbers, join the dots

Weighted blanket, compression clothing

Swinging, rocking chair

Essential oils

Warm bath, warm towel, warm PJs

Holding warm mug of hot tea

Small repetitive things – i.e. knitting, crocheting, coloring

Fidgeting can help with up-regulating for some

Physical support for body: Yoga ball (hugging, laying over); turning chair around and resting on back of chair

Mandala tracing with non-dominant index finger (start somewhere outside part of mandala)

Bilateral music/binaural frequencies (links in additional resources)



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**Tapping (taken from [www.thetappingsolution.com](http://www.thetappingsolution.com)):**

### The basics of the Tapping process are simple

- Always begin Tapping on the karate chop point while you repeat the setup statement to yourself. This allows you to be honest with how you feel and sets you up for the Tapping process (more on the setup statement below).
- Begin Tapping while focusing on how you feel or on the problem. By doing this you send a calming signal to your brain, allowing you to think of the problem without feeling stress in your body.
- When you feel better, you can move to more empowering thoughts. The same way you need to weed a garden before you plant seeds, you have to release the intensity of what you're feeling before more empowering thoughts can take root.

### Lets break down the steps:

- Identify the problem on which you want to focus. It can be general anxiety, or it can be a specific situation or issue which causes you to feel anxious.
- Consider the problem or situation. How do you feel about it right now? Rate the intensity level of your anxiety on a scale of 0 to 10, with zero being the lowest level of anxiety and ten being the highest.
- Compose a setup statement. Your setup statement should acknowledge the problem you want to deal with, then follow it with a phrase of acceptance. This helps neutralize judgements you have around how you feel and allow you to be more honest with your Tapping.
- **Setup statement examples:**  
"Even though I feel this anxiety, I accept how I feel"  
"Even though I'm anxious about my interview, I accept myself and how I feel."  
"Even though I'm feeling this anxiety about my financial situation,  
I honor my feelings and give my body permission to relax. "

### Relaxation techniques

**Breath** (17% more nitric oxide through nose, naturally calms nervous system)

Alternate nostril breathing

4-7-8 breathing

Physiological sigh – double inhale, slow exhale

Box breathing

Ocean breath (definition in glossary)

Yawning can reset nervous system



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### **Relaxation techniques continued:**

**Guided imagery** – paint a picture of a relaxing scene in your mind using 5 senses to bring the vision to life (what do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? Taste?)

**Progressive muscle relaxation** – a gentle to moderate tensing for 5 seconds (repeated twice) of each muscle group starting with your toes/feet, calves/lower legs, quads/hamstrings, all the muscles of core (pelvic area, abs, lower back), upper back, chest, shoulders, arms (biceps, triceps, forearms), hands/fingers, neck, face

**Meditation** – start with practicing in a relaxing/calming environment and bring awareness to the breath, perhaps the sensations associated with the breath (what is the temperature of the air as it flows through your nose? How does it feel as your lungs expand and contract? It is natural for your mind to wander, simply notice/observe thoughts non-judgmentally, let them come and go and bring attention back to breath.

### **Mindfulness/Grounding techniques**

**5, 4, 3, 2, 1** – name 5 things you can see in your environment, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste

Ways of activating prefrontal cortex for optimal brain functioning:

Categories (list movies, countries, animals, sports teams, colors, cities, books, cars, TV shows, cereals, fruits/vegetables, famous people), trivia, math (counting backward from 100 by 7s)

#### Body Awareness

Brings you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.

1. Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.
2. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.
4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.
5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.
6. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.
7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.
8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.



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## Glossary:

The vagus nerve – also known as the vagal nerves, is the longest cranial nerve in the body, and it controls many involuntary functions. It's the main component of the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps the body calm down after a stressful situation. The vagus nerve extends from the brainstem through the neck and thorax to the abdomen, and affects several organ systems and regions of the body, such as the tongue, pharynx, heart, and gastrointestinal system. (Google definition)

Sympathetic nervous system activation: controls “fight or flight” responses in body preparing the body for strenuous physical activity.

Parasympathetic nervous system activation: regulates “rest and digest”

Ventral vagal complex: safe, social, engaged

Dorsal vagal: overwhelm, immobilization, shut down

**Neuroception:** Outside of conscious awareness, the nervous system is scanning and assessing cues for safety and cues for unsafety, and cues for life threat.

**Interoception:** the collection of senses providing information to the organism about the internal state of the body. This can be both conscious and subconscious (Wikipedia definition)

**Ocean breath** – also known as Ujjayi Pranayama or Victorious Breath, is a breathing technique in yoga that involves constricting the back of the throat to control, slow, and extend inhalations and exhales. The sound is similar to waves crashing on an ocean shore. This technique is often used to support yoga postures, especially in the vinyasa style. (Google definition)

**Psoas muscle** – long, ribbon-shaped muscle in the lower back that connects the lumbar vertebrae (lower spine) to the femur (thigh bone). It's one of the core muscles in the abdomen, with one psoas muscle on each side of the spine. The psoas muscle is responsible for flexing the hip joint, lifting the upper leg towards the body, and strengthening the lower spine. It's used every day when standing, walking, running, jumping, dancing, and maintaining an upright posture. (Google definition)

**Neuroplasticity** – also known as neural plasticity or brain plasticity, is the ability of neural networks in the brain to change through growth and reorganization. It is when the brain is rewired to function in some way that differs from how it previously functioned. (Wikipedia definition)

## Pendulation

– touching on/tuning in/moving toward and moving away while resourcing to avoid overwhelm and expanding window of capacity

## Resources to peruse and references:

Linda Thai website: <https://www.linda-thai.com/>

<https://collectivelyrooted.com/clients/linda-thai/>

<https://www.linda-thai.com/12weekjanuary25> (Somatic Embodiment and Regulation Strategies training/certification program led by Linda Thai)



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Bilateral music/binaural frequencies:

1. Binaural frequencies

- o — Delta (for sleep):

— <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsfyb1pStdw&t=11106s>

— Isochronic delta: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGVrh1kuWSw&t=7347s>

- o — Alpha (for study, focus, creativity):

— <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPni755-Krg&t=1328s>

Breathing Pal/Mindfulness breathing light: <https://a.co/d/eKeLtUG>

The Tapping Solution website: <https://www.thetappingsolution.com/>

The Tapping Application: <https://www.thetappingsolution.com/#home-optin>

Tapping research: <https://www.thetappingsolution.com/science-research/>

Additional tools and resources for purchase: <https://traumarecoverystore.com/collections/all-tools?page=1>

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Nyqvist, R. (2016). Fidgeting for creativity. Lund University. <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/8888395>

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The phrenic nerve: <https://www.webmd.com/lung/phrenic-nerve-what-to-know>





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Stanley Rosenberg— The basic exercise

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y5TLNlKl38>— Twist and turn exercise
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrkmOHx4uKA>— The healing power of the vagus nerve and the need for neck rotation — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VQQPLYkfOQ>

podcast for parents of ND-children:

- <https://cindywangbrandt.com/podcast/episode-129-mental-health-series-neurodiversity-w-joel-schwartz-psyd/>

Neurodiversity Affirmative Therapists:

- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2219847184963504>

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A resource for ADHD: [www.additudemag.com](http://www.additudemag.com)

- Sensory Processing Disorder <https://www.additudemag.com/what-is-sensory-processing-disorder/>
- FB groups for learning about Sensory Processing Disorders:
  - The Sensory Spectrum <https://www.facebook.com/sensoryprocessingdisorder>
  - Parents with Sensory Processing Disorder Kids <https://www.facebook.com/groups/34449131777> — Project Sensory <https://www.facebook.com/projectsensory>
- FB groups for learning about neurodivergence:
  - Neurodiversity Affirmative Therapists <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2219847184963504>

Jo Ann Staugaard-Jones. (2012). *The vital psoas muscle: Connecting physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being*. Lotus Publishing & North Atlantic Books.

Liz Koch. (2019). *Stalking the wild psoas: Embodying your core intelligence*. North Atlantic Books.

- <https://coreawareness.com/>

Shelley Mannell. Core stability, breath holding and emotional regulation:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmV-FmhdWg4>
- Anatomy of the diaphragm and impact of respiration on the body:
  - [https://www.dovepress.com/front\\_end/cr\\_data/cache/pdf/download\\_1605585987\\_5fb34c430120a/JMDH-45443-beyond-the-breath---a-single-system\\_072413.pdf](https://www.dovepress.com/front_end/cr_data/cache/pdf/download_1605585987_5fb34c430120a/JMDH-45443-beyond-the-breath---a-single-system_072413.pdf)
- Dr Sam Webster. Anatomy video about the phrenic nerve: • [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UICjc\\_q3EYQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UICjc_q3EYQ)



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SMART: Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment — <https://smartmovespartners.com/>

— Play!

— [www.interplay.org](http://www.interplay.org)

— The International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association

— [www.ismeta.org](http://www.ismeta.org)

Thich Nhat Hanh's Ten Mindful Movements

— <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mz-dJFkmrk>

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Books:

— Mahler, K. J. (2015). *Interoception: The eighth sensory system*.

— Nestor, J. (2020). *Breathe: The new science of a lost art*. Riverhead Books.

van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.