

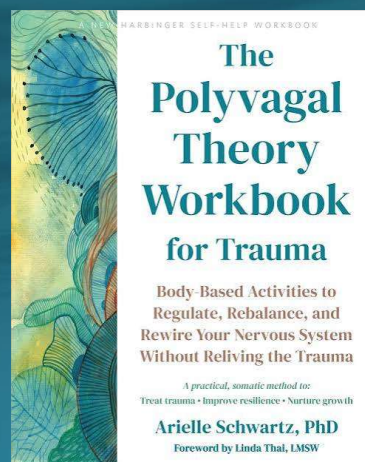
VAGAL TONING

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EXCERCISES FOR CREATING SAFETY



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CULTIVATING NERVOUS SYSTEM AWARENESS

EXERCISE

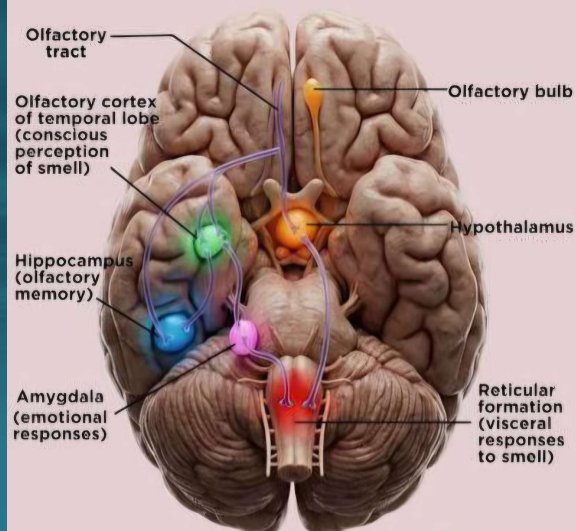
Check In with Your Body Symptoms

Circle or highlight how you are feeling now.

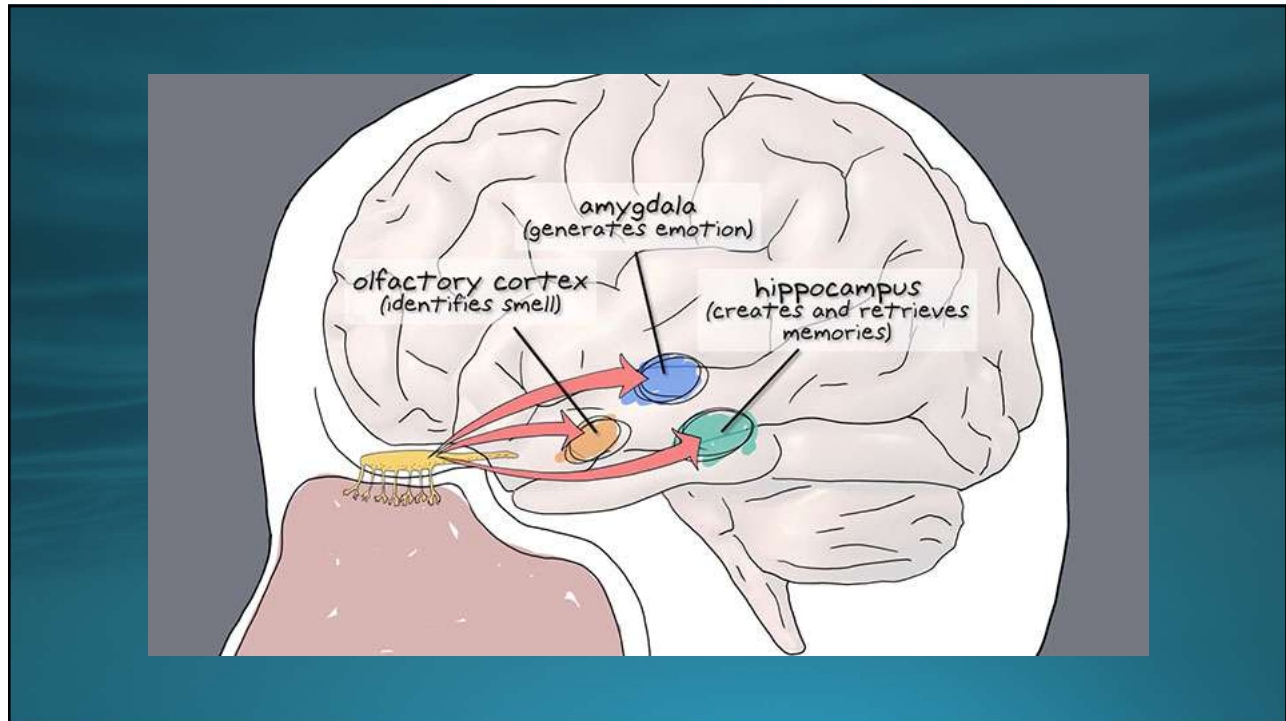
Ventral Vagal: Relaxation Response	Sympathetic: Stress Activation	Dorsal Vagal: Threat Response
<i>I feel connected to my body.</i>	<i>I feel acutely aware of my body.</i>	<i>I feel disconnected from my body.</i>
<i>My breathing feels relaxed.</i>	<i>My breathing is rapid.</i>	<i>It takes effort to breathe.</i>
<i>I can breathe fully.</i>	<i>I feel short of breath.</i>	<i>My breathing is shallow.</i>
<i>I can think clearly.</i>	<i>My thoughts are racing.</i>	<i>My head feels foggy.</i>
<i>My voice tone feels soothing.</i>	<i>My voice is strained.</i>	<i>My voice is flat and lacks energy.</i>
<i>I can communicate easily.</i>	<i>I am speaking rapidly.</i>	<i>It is hard for me to talk.</i>
<i>My face feels relaxed.</i>	<i>My jaw is tense.</i>	<i>My face feels tired.</i>
<i>My eyes are soft.</i>	<i>My brow is furrowed.</i>	<i>My eyes look dull.</i>
<i>I feel calm and at ease.</i>	<i>I feel agitated and irritable.</i>	<i>I feel withdrawn and shut down.</i>
<i>It is easy to rest in stillness.</i>	<i>I am restless and jumpy.</i>	<i>I feel lethargic.</i>
<i>I feel present.</i>	<i>I feel overwhelmed.</i>	<i>I feel far away.</i>

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OLFACTORY PATHWAYS IN BRAIN



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EXERCISE

Mindful Mobilization

You can explore this guided practice by listening to the audio track available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/54162>.

1. Wiggle your fingers and toes as you say to yourself, *I am free to move my body now.*
2. Slowly push your arms forward as if pressing a large rock or boulder off your chest. You can also push against a wall. Notice how it feels for you to begin with bent elbows and slowly lengthen out through your arms. With either action, say to yourself, *I am powerful and capable of protecting myself now.*
3. Take slow, mindful stepping movements with your feet, as if you are slowly walking in place, while saying to yourself, *I can walk away from anything that hurts me.*
4. Take in a deep breath and let out an audible sigh, roar like a lion, or find any other sounds that feels satisfying to you. You might also explore saying words like "no," "stop," or "stay away," as you use your voice to assert your boundaries. Accompany this release with the words, *My voice is loud and clear!*
5. Pick up a pillow and give it a tight squeeze with your hands and arms. Let this pillow represent anything that you are holding onto from the past that is no longer needed or that is not of benefit for your future. Hold on tight for about ten seconds and then let go. As the pillow falls out of your hands, say to yourself, *I am letting go and releasing anything that no longer serves me.*
6. Once again place a pillow in front of you. This time, let the pillow represent your future. Visualize yourself as strong, capable, empowered, compassionate, and kind to yourself. Extend your arms and hands out in front of you, and take hold of this version of you. Grasp the pillow with your hands and bring it into the very core of your being. Let yourself feel the power of your reach. Once you have the pillow close to your chest, allow yourself to embody this vision of yourself. Stand up tall, letting your face and body express your worthiness and dignity, as you say to yourself, *I know who I am!*

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EXERCISE

Vagus Nerve Stimulation Practices

You can explore this guided practice by listening to the audio track available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/54162>.

Self-Applied Massage to Your Face

The upper circuits of the ventral vagus nerve work closely with other cranial nerves, such as your trigeminal nerve and facial nerves, which are responsible for the sensations in your face and your ability to express emotions. Applying a gentle massage to areas of your face where these nerves come close to the surface of your face is another way to gently stimulate the vagus nerve (Szalai et al. 2015). Embedded within the skin of your face are specialized nerve cells that are sensitive to touch called *c-tactile fibers*. Stimulating these fibers through light touch helps reduce your heart rate, reduce pain, and increase positive emotions (Schirmer et al. 2023; Trullitt 2022). To explore this practice:

1. Place your fingertips at the center of your forehead and gently sweep them outward toward your temples. You can allow this movement to feel intuitive.
2. Perhaps pause for a moment in the space between your eyebrows with gentle circular movements.
3. You might also create circular movements around your temples.
4. Next, place your fingertips by the bridge of your nose and find sweeping movements along the tops of your cheekbones, outward toward your temples. Follow any intuitive movements that feel nourishing to you.
5. Last, place your fingertips by the bridge of your nose and create sweeping movements under your cheekbones, outward toward your ears.
6. Continue with these movements for as long as you would like, noticing the sensations in your face, along with any other sensations or emotions that you are aware of in your body.

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EXERCISE

Alternate Nostril Breathing

First is the yogic practice of alternate nostril breathing, as a tool to support the integration of left and right hemispheres of your brain. Modern research has studied the effects of breathing through alternating nostrils, which helps create balance in the autonomic nervous system (Mondal 2024; Telles et al. 2017). Breathing through your right nostril is associated with greater sympathetic activation, whereas breathing through your left nostril is associated with greater parasympathetic tone (Niazi et al. 2022). When you breathe in a manner that alternates between the two nostrils, you are bilaterally stimulating your brain.

1. Use the thumb of your right hand to close off your right nostril as you inhale through your left nostril.
2. Switch the position of your right hand, using your fingers to close off your left nostril as you exhale through the right. Now, inhale through the right and exhale through the left side.
3. Continue to breathe as you alternate nostrils. You will always move the placement of your hand at the top of the inhale.
2. As you breathe in, visualize a stream of light moving through your nostril, into your brain. As you exhale, that stream of light travels out through the opposite side. Inhaling and exhaling light, filling your brain with light. Continue to breathe as you visualize the light moving through the center of your brain.
3. When your timer goes off, exhale through the left nostril, release your right hand, and for the next two or three breath cycles, continue the same visualization. Picture the light from one side of your brain crossing the center, then exhaling out the other side.
4. Continue this practice for as long as you would like. When you feel complete, let the visualization go, and let go of the focus on your breath. Notice any sensations throughout your body.

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Self-Applied Massage to Your Ears

The ears are a common location for vagus nerve stimulation because there are high amounts of vagal fibers running through specific areas of your ear. These areas are called the tragus, the area of cartilage just in front of your ear canal, and the concha, which surrounds your ear canal. You can practice on both sides at once or one ear at a time.

1. Locate the tragus (see illustration) and place your thumb behind and pointer finger in front while gently squeezing this area of your ear.
2. Continue this gentle contact to your ears for about one minute, pressing and massaging.
3. Take the tip of your finger and move it around on the concha.
4. Explore these movements intuitively.
5. You might also explore rolling your earlobes between your thumbs and first fingers. This should feel good.
6. Another gentle release for your ears involves placing your middle finger in front of your ear and your pointer finger behind your ear, as you gently massage those areas. This can also offer a gentle release for the muscles of your jaw. Continue for another minute or two as you notice any subtle changes, such as a feeling of warmth or relaxation in your ears, face, or body.



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EXERCISE

The Butterfly Hug with Peaceful Place Imagery:

This exercise is the butterfly hug—a resource development technique that comes out of EMDR therapy (Parnell 2008). The brain doesn't differentiate between real or imagined experiences; therefore, visualization is a powerful healing tool that can awaken neural circuitry throughout your brain while helping you sense a deep feeling of relaxation throughout your body. If at any point you find that the bilateral tapping creates feelings of distress, simply stop the movement and reorient yourself to the cues of safety in your surroundings.

1. Bring to mind an image of a peaceful place that helps you feel calm and serene. This place might be a place that you have been or one that you simply imagine. Pay attention to the details of your peaceful place. Are you indoors or outside? What do you see, hear, and feel when in this space? Let this be a sanctuary for your body and mind—a place that allows you to be quiet and reflective. Are you alone or with others? If you invite others into your sacred space, be sure that they feel nurturing and protective.
2. Once you have a strong positive feeling, cross your arms across the center of your chest, in a butterfly hug, so that your hands land in front of the opposite shoulder.
3. Alternately tap left and right hands slowly, about ten times to fifteen times, and then pause to check in with yourself. If the feeling remains positive, you are welcome to tap for longer.
4. Find a pace for your tapping that feels natural and supportive. Let yourself be nourished by any positive feelings that arise in the process. Remember, you can stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable or lose that peaceful feeling.
5. Continue for three to five rounds of tapping, so long as it feels good.

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EXERCISE

Embodied Self-Compassion Practice

You can listen to the audio track of this guided practice available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/54162>.

Practice 1: Place your hands around your cheeks as you allow your face to rest in your palms. While holding your head in your hands, quietly say to yourself, "Even though I sometimes have negative or self-critical thoughts, I am willing to generate loving and kind thoughts toward myself." Repeat these words two more times while holding yourself.



Practice 2: Place your hands gently along the sides of your neck, so that the heels of your palms come together in front of your chin. With your hands lightly placed over your throat, quietly say to yourself, "Even though I feel hurt, I can acknowledge these feelings while being gentle with myself." Repeat these words two more times while gently supporting your neck and throat with your hands.



Practice 3: Place your hands over your heart, one palm over the other. Then, quietly say to yourself, "Even though I sometimes feel unworthy or unlovable, I recognize that all people including myself deserve compassion, love, and support." Repeat these words two more times while holding your heart.



Practice 4: Place both hands on your belly, over your navel or wherever feels right for you. Then, quietly say to yourself, "Even though I sometimes feel broken, weak, and powerless, I recognize the strength and courage it takes to build compassion for my pain." Repeat these words two more times while resting your hands on your belly.



Practice 5: Offer yourself an experience of holding yourself, like a hug, by placing each hand on the opposite shoulder. While hugging yourself, sense your breath as you quietly say to yourself, "With each breath, I grow in my ability to love and accept myself just as I am. As I receive this kindness and compassion, I reclaim my ability to sense myself as healthy and whole, one breath at a time." Sense your breath moving in and out of your heart as you repeat these words two more times.



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