



Self-Soothing Skills

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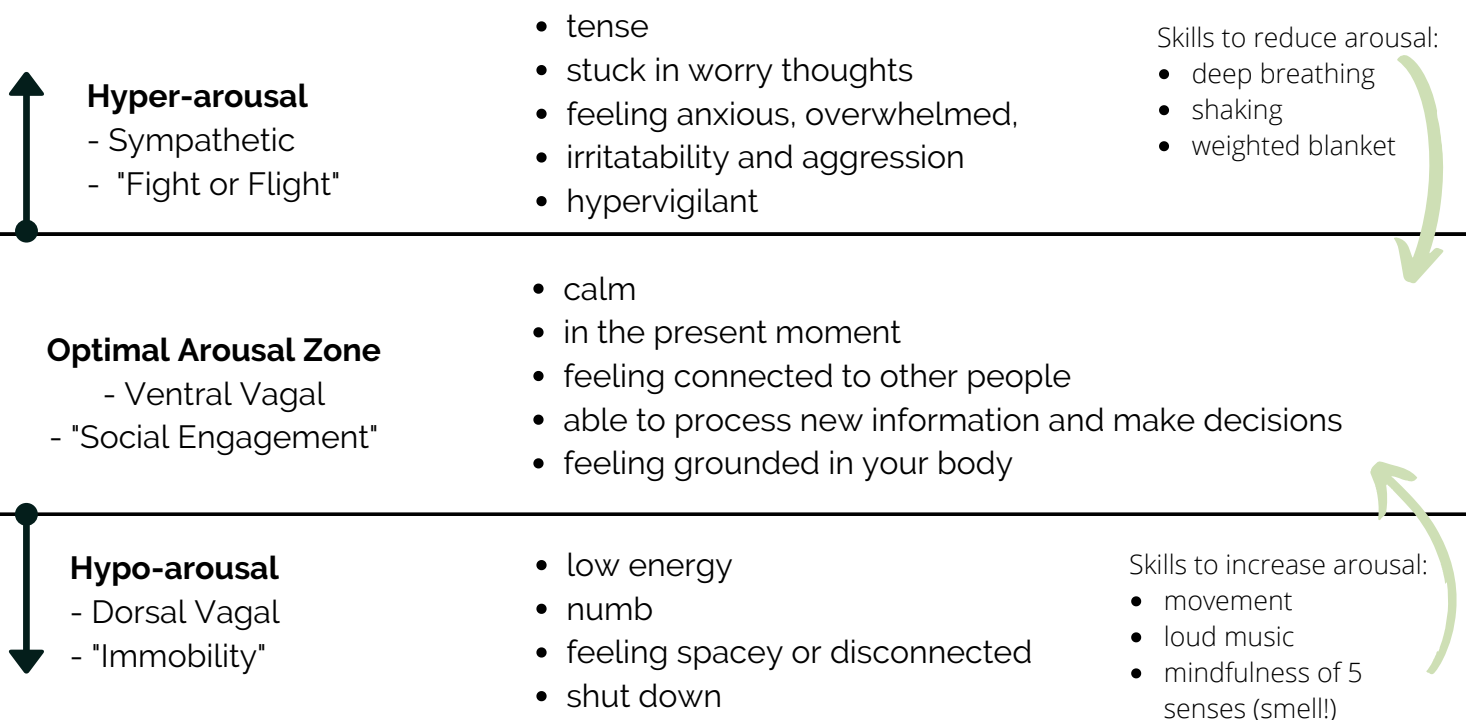
Below is a model of how our brain and body react as a result of stressors in our environment. It draws from Polyvagal Theory (Dr. Stephen Porges) and the model below is called The Window of Tolerance (Dr. Daniel Siegel). It can be used to understand both normal nervous system development and trauma. Depending on a variety of factors (i.e, our history of adversity and trauma), our "window" may be more wide or more narrow.

See **Page 2 and 3** for a list of internal somatic skills, external somatic skills, cognitive (thinking-based skills) skills, and mindfulness skills to help self-soothe.

Some skills are used to **decrease arousal (more calm)** and some are used to **increase arousal**.

- If we are more hyper-activated (in sympathetic nervous system) we want to identify skills that help decrease arousal and move us into ventral vagal state.
- If we are more hypo-activated (in dorsal vagal state) we want to identify skills that will help increase arousal to move us into a ventral vagal state.

See **Page 4** to create your own map for your nervous system.





Different skills are useful for different people. Try them out and put an upward arrow near ones that increase energy/arousal for you and a downward arrow near ones that decrease arousal (are calming).

External Somatic Skills

- Holding an object (i.e., stone, shell, ball)
- Walking
- Running
- Snuggling with a pet
- Snuggling with your favorite blanket or sweatshirt
- Smelling scents (candle, essential oils, while cooking)
- Creating art (coloring, painting, clay, pottery, beadwork, knitting, cross-stitch)
- Giving yourself a manicure/pedicure
- Rocking in a chair
- Lifting weights
- Push-ups/sit-ups/planks
- Taking a warm bath
- Taking a cold shower
- Dancing
- Listening to music
- Listening to new music you've never heard before
- Breathing fresh air
- Stretching
- Yoga
- Using a rice bag or sand bag
- Laying on the ground and feeling it under your body
- Rolling on the ground slowly, feeling all sides of your body
- Watch a candle flame
- Use a heating pad
- Use a cold pack
- Play with playdough in your hands
- Run your hands through a bowl of rice, dry beans, or sand
- Make your own bag of sand/rice/beans and use as a squishy stress ball
- Sit or lay in the grass, smell it and connect with the earth
- Watch the sunrise/sunset
- Watch trees sway in the wind
- Watch videos of cute animals, flowers, nature
- Walk in nature
- Kayaking, swimming, floating in water
- Paint your nails
- Do heel lifts (lift your heels off of the ground and engaging your calves, one or both feet at a time)
- Do squats (feel the ground under your feet and engage your quads)
- Do tiny bounces while standing up
- Jump up and down shaking tension out of your body
- Balance on one foot (use the other foot as a kickstand, increase intensity by removing kickstand, standing only on toes)
- Mindful walking
- Mindful eating
- Lie on your front and sense the ground through your belly
- Lean your back against a wall or chair and feel the pressure



Internal Somatic Skills

- Rocking/spiraling around on your sitting bones
- Stroking your hair
- Stroking your cheek
- Shaking your body (start with your feet and work your way up to your torso and out your hands)
- Feet firmly planted, swing your arms around your body, feel your center of gravity
- Hold your hand over your heart
- Pressing your hands together
- Give yourself a hand/foot massage with lotion or oils
- Wear fitted clothing or wrap yourself in a blanket snugly
- Give yourself a hug
- Take your time to really look around the room
- Alternate tapping opposite legs or alternate arms
- Press your feet into the floor while sitting, engage your quad muscles
- Rub the tops of your legs with your hands
- Rub your temples or other parts of your body holding tension
- Imagine a flower blooming in your chest
- Imagine the sights, sounds, smells of your favorite place in nature
- Use your hands to squeeze all of the muscles in your entire body, notice the boundaries of your skin
- Hold either side of your legs and push your legs outward into your palms, while exerting equal and opposite pressure
- Press your knees together
- Sing, hum, or chant
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Feel that each organ has weight and sense the pull of gravity on them

Cognitive (Thinking) and Mindfulness Skills

- Positive affirmations
- Lovingkindness statements ("May I be safe and secure, May all beings be at ease")
- Self-compassion
- Everyday mindfulness practices (activities of daily living, walking, eating)
- Mindfulness meditation
- Identifying cognitive distortions and reframing thoughts
- Identify and name emotions
- Gratitude lists



Fill in skills and create a map of nervous system regulation for yourself.



Hyper-arousal
- Sympathetic
- "Fight or Flight"

Skills that help me reduce arousal:

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Optimal Arousal Zone
- Ventral Vagal
- "Social Engagement"

- calm
- in the present moment
- feeling connected to other people
- able to process new information and make decisions
- feeling grounded in your body



Hypo-arousal
- Dorsal Vagal
- "Immobility"

Skills that help me increase arousal:

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Sources

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