

The Vocabulary of *Nervous System Regulation*

The human **nervous system** is an incredible creation. It is responsible for many of the involuntary functions of your body.

- Heart rate
- Respiration
- Body temperature
- Digestion
- Metabolism
- Stress hormones production

The healthy functioning of this system is necessary to maintain a high quality of life. However, many people experience signs of a dysregulated nervous system due to trauma and chronic stress.

In periods of stress or threat, the body's fight, flight, or freeze responses activate. These are **Survival States of the Nervous System**. A normally regulated nervous system experiences the stress but returns to normal when the threat has passed. This period, during which you have the ability to self-regulate, is called the **window of tolerance**, and most people move through several of these cycles daily.

Traumatic events and chronic stress can push the nervous system outside its ability to regulate itself. For some, the system gets stuck in the "on" position. The person is overstimulated and unable to calm. Anxiety, anger, restlessness, panic, and hyperactivity can all result when you stay in this ready-to-act mode. This physical state of **hyperarousal** is stressful for every system in the body. In other people, the nervous system is stuck in the "off" position of **hypo-arousal**, resulting in depression, disconnection, fatigue, and lethargy. People can alternate between these two survival states, spending little time with a regulated system.

10 SIGNS OF A DYSREGULATED NERVOUS SYSTEM

~Dr. Linnea Passaler

1. You're often on-edge and overwhelmed.
2. You're frequently snappy, irritable, and reactive.
3. You experience chronic pain and illness.
4. You have a history of traumatic experiences, adverse childhood events, or chronic stress.
5. You are easily overwhelmed by strong sensory stimuli and probably identify as a highly sensitive person (HSP).
6. You've tried talk therapy, mindfulness, meditation, and other techniques with minimal relief.
7. You experience sleep problems and daytime fatigue.
8. You suffer from chronic attention and concentration problems.
9. You experience cravings and appetite changes.
10. You're highly sensitive to other people's emotional states.



The **vagus nerve** is a cranial nerve, originating in the brain stem and traveling through the face, neck, lungs, heart, diaphragm, and ends in the pelvis. Vagus is Latin for “wanderer,” an appropriate name for the longest cranial nerve in the body that wanders into so much of the body. The vagus nerve is intricately connected to mood, immune response, digestion, and heart rate. This nerve is responsible for carrying 80% of sensory information from the body to the brain, with only 20% of information going from the brain to the body.

Compassionate Self Awareness is intentionally paying attention with kindness and is foundational to the process of nervous system regulation, which I also refer to as Trauma Recovery.

“**Curiosity** is using our attention to have an experience as it is directly. Whether you’re feeling frustrated or stuck, curiosity can help you explore what that feels like in your body and mind (instead of trying to fix or change it).”

~ Kimberley Johnson, Meditation Teacher

SENSES AND SENSATION

“The vocabulary of the nervous system is sensation” our body talks to us, gives us information through sensation. Awareness of sensation within the body and putting descriptive sensory words to sensation gives us the clues and cues of what we are experiencing in the moment.

OUR MANY SENSES

We experience our world through the many sensory abilities God has given us. The human body receives sensory information through **External Senses and Internal Senses**.

External Senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch.

“Curiosity can help you stay present in a non-judgmental way to whatever your experience is.”

Mindful.org

“The body is the container of all feelings sensations and emotions.”

Dr. Peter Levine, founder of Somatic Experiencing



Proprioception is your body's sensory system that supports your ability to sense where you are in space, in relation to other things and to itself. It's knowing which parts of your body are where without looking.

Interoception is the perception of sensations from inside the body and includes the perception of physical sensations related to internal organ function such as heartbeat, respiration, satiety, as well as the autonomic nervous system activity related to emotions.

Neuroception is the sensory system that is constantly running in your subconscious, scanning for cues of threat or safety.

Triggers are essentially cues of danger that can disrupt mental stability and nervous system regulation due to trauma or negative previous experience. Certain sounds, smells, people, and places can be triggering.

"Glimmers," coined by researcher Deb Dana, act as the opposite of triggers. These are cues of safety that bring us back to calmness. A certain perfume, a picture of a loved one, a favorite retreat: imagining and revisiting these things bring calm to a dysregulated system.

Felt Sense of Safety is a subjective experience based on cues you receive (below conscious awareness) from our inner experience, the environment, and the person, people, or relationship.

Having a felt-sense of safety means you have a visceral feeling that nothing bad is going to happen to you (literal safety); that you feel safe (cognitive /psychological safety), and, most importantly, that your body feels safe (physiological safety).

As we learned, traumatic or chronic stress is experienced as a state of your nervous system and, while your nervous system does respond with automatic survival reactions, which you need to keep you safe (Fight, Flight and Freeze), YOU ARE NOT POWERLESS IN THIS PROCESS.

This “visceral sense” or “felt sense” of safety is a foundational and transformative piece to Trauma Recovery.

