



SOMATIC TOOLS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

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WHY ARE SOMATIC TOOLS IMPORTANT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY?

- Psychological pain and trauma sever our connection to the body.
- To the extent we don't have access to our body's experiences, to that extent healing is hampered.
- While insight and cognitive understanding are sometimes necessary to heal, they're not enough. We need to have an embodied sense of our experiences so that they can metabolize and heal.
- In order to return to resilience we need to come back to our senses.
- With increased capacity for the felt sense in the body (sensations and emotions), healing and transformation will be deeper and more lasting.
- We call this healing embodied resilience





SOME GOALS OF ACCESSING SENSATION

- To Slow the nervous system
- To broaden awareness of bodily experience
- Brings us into the here and now
- Where there is a tendency to narrow on difficulty—broaden out, or draw awareness to another area of the body or outside the body that feels better or neutral.
- When we access sensation, it both touches into activation, touching into the trauma, and provides a way to metabolize experience—both need to be attended to.
- Experience what's most in evidence—then shift when it makes sense to, either to support emergence of regulation, or to avoid overwhelm.



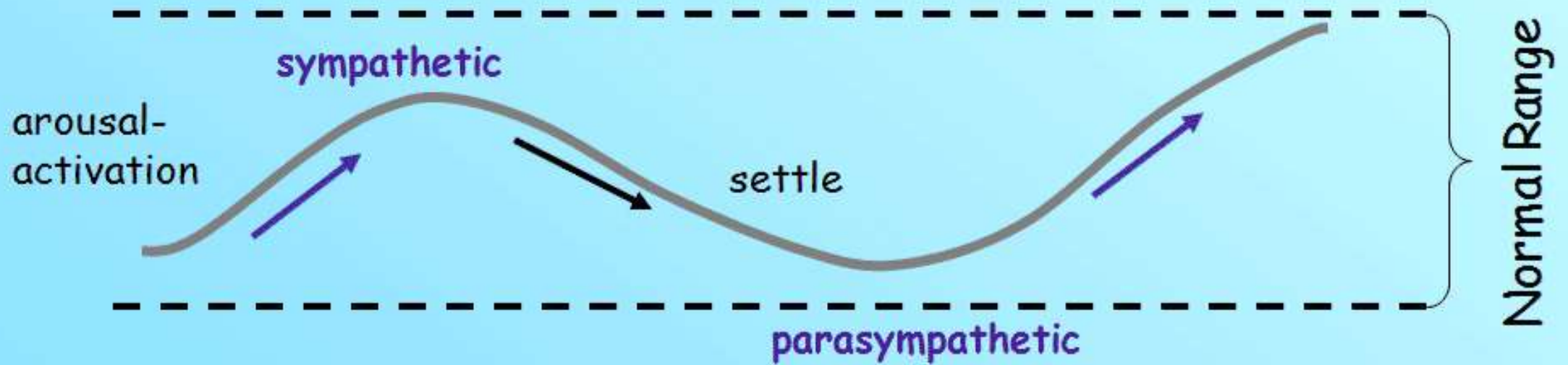


A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS
SYSTEM
(ANS)

THE ANS IS LIKE A CAR ...



A Healthy Nervous System

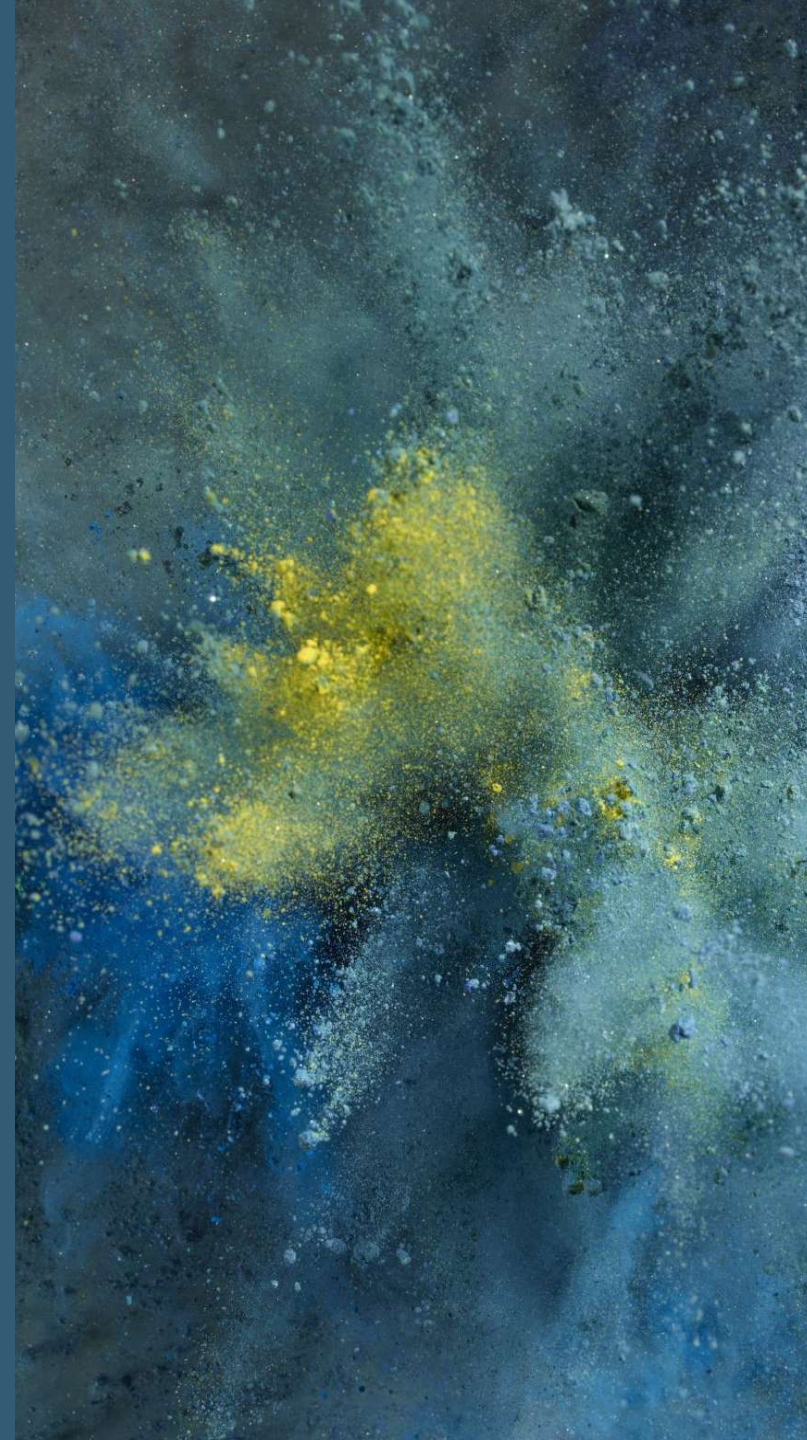


SIGNS OF A REGULATED NERVOUS SYSTEM

Within window of tolerance:

- In the here and now
- Connected
- Feeling safe
- Responsive, curious
- Aware of our boundaries
- Playful

- Breath is even
- Heart rate is within its normal range
- Skin has a healthy tone
- Muscles are relaxed and alert
- Eye contact is engaged. Eyes are not fixated nor darting about
- Voice is open, not constricted arising from deeper in the throat and torso





THE ANS STRESS RESPONSE

SIGNS OF A DYSREGULATED NERVOUS SYSTEM

Stuck on High

- Hypervigilance
 - Tension/Constriction
 - Racing Thoughts
 - Feeling Unsafe
 - Overwhelm
 - Anger/Defensiveness
 - Impulsivity
 - Reactivity
-
- Breath is shallow
 - Eyes may be darting about
 - Restlessness in the body (legs, extremities)
 - Muscles are tight, braced
 - Voice is shallow, constricted, high-pitched



SIGNS OF A DYSREGULATED NERVOUS SYSTEM

Stuck on Low

- Numbness
 - Low Energy
 - Feeling Disconnected/Drifting
 - Apathy/Lack of Motivation
 - Passivity/Shut Down
 - Inability to Self-Protect
 - Inability to Think or Respond (“going blank”)
 - Flatness of affect
-
- Breath may be barely noticeable
 - Eyes are blank, distant
 - Shoulders are collapsed, torso caved in
 - Words are hard to find
 - Voice feels distant, disconnected



ON-THE-SPOT SKILLS TO COME BACK TO OUR
SENSES AND INTO EMBODIED RESILIENCE

Coming back into here and now = Coming back to our senses = ANS regulation

- Orienting: Eyes, Ears (sound). Brings the ANS into the here and now, engages the social engagement system of the PNS
- Nose: e.g. Scent of lemons. Gently awakens the ANS into a regulated state. Especially helpful for shut down states such as depression.
- Focusing on what already feels settled in the body. Feet on the floor. Support of the seat beneath the legs. Length of the spine.
- Touch: Object/self-regulating touch:
 - Supportive touch: Hand on heart and belly
 - “Deltoid hug”: One hand below the opposite arm in the armpit; the other hand hugging the opposite shoulder. Experiment with what pressure feels best for your nervous system
 - Touch a soothing texture such as velvet, a pet, a blanket. Check in with sensations in the body.

Coming back into here and now = Coming back to our senses = ANS regulation

- Tapping the body or squeezing: starting with the arms, then torso, then legs. See which your body prefers.
- One hand on the forehead, the other on the back of the neck just below the skull. Notice the rest of the body as you do this.
- “Guppy breath”. Slowly open and close the mouth. Check in with the rest of the body and the belly.
- Voo sound. Focus on sensations in the belly.
- Voo-Aaahh sound. Focus on sensations in the belly.
- Push-Hands. Standing in front of a wall, grounding into the legs and feet, feeling the belly. Putting both hands on the wall ahead and pushing with arms outstretched. Feeling the activation in the arms, feeling the floor. After, checking in with the whole body.

Coming back into here and now = Coming back to our senses = ANS regulation

- Movement
 - SLOWLY move your arms out, opening the chest, moving your arms slowly and gently. Track your body. You might then move your legs in the same way. Track your body. This is helpful for anxiety that's stuck in the chest.

Movement (Cont'd)

Joints: This exercise can be done before your sessions or at the beginning of session with clients to regulate the nervous system and safely open up the body's receptivity to experience:

Can be done seated or standing.

- Move your right ankle around in a way that feels good. Take time with it.
- Do the same with you right knee, then your hip.
- Pause. Notice the difference if any between your right and left legs.
- Repeat with your left leg.
- Move your right wrist around in a way that feels good. Take time with it.
- Do the same with your right elbow, then shoulder.
- Pause. Notice the difference if any between your right and left arms.
- Repeat with your left arm.
- Move your neck, slowly and gently, look around.
- Close and open your eyes.
- Pause and listen to the farthest sound you can hear.
- Cough/Swallow.
- Make faces and sounds.

Pause. Track the body.

THE LANGUAGE OF
SENSATION





achy
airy
alive
bloated
blocked breathless
brittle
bubbly
burning
buzzy
chilled
clammy
closed
cold
congested
constricted
contracted
cool
cozy
crampy
damp
dense dizzy
dull

elastic
electric
empty
energized
expanding
faint
flaccid
fluid
flushed
flutter
frantic
frozen
full
furry
goose
bumpy
gurgling
hard heavy
hot
Icy
Intense
Itchy

jagged
jittery
jumbly
jumpy
knotted
light
loose
moist
moving
nauseous
numb
open
paralyzed
pounding
pressure
prickly
puffy
pulled
pulsing
quaking
quiet
quivering
radiating
ragged
raw
rolling

shaky
sharp
shimmering
shivery
shudder
silky
smooth
soft
spacious
spacious
breathing
spasming
spinning
sticky
still
stretchy
stringy
strong
suffocating
sweaty

tender
tense
thick
throbbing
tickly
tight
tightness of skin tingling
trembly
tremulous
twitchy
vibration
warm
wobbly

