



Relaxed Presence:

Understanding your nervous system
as a path to presence

by Heidi Fischbach

The International Focusing Institute (Highlight Series)



“I want to start with the most important thing I have to say: The essence of working with another person is to be present as a living being.”

Eugene Gendlin, PhD

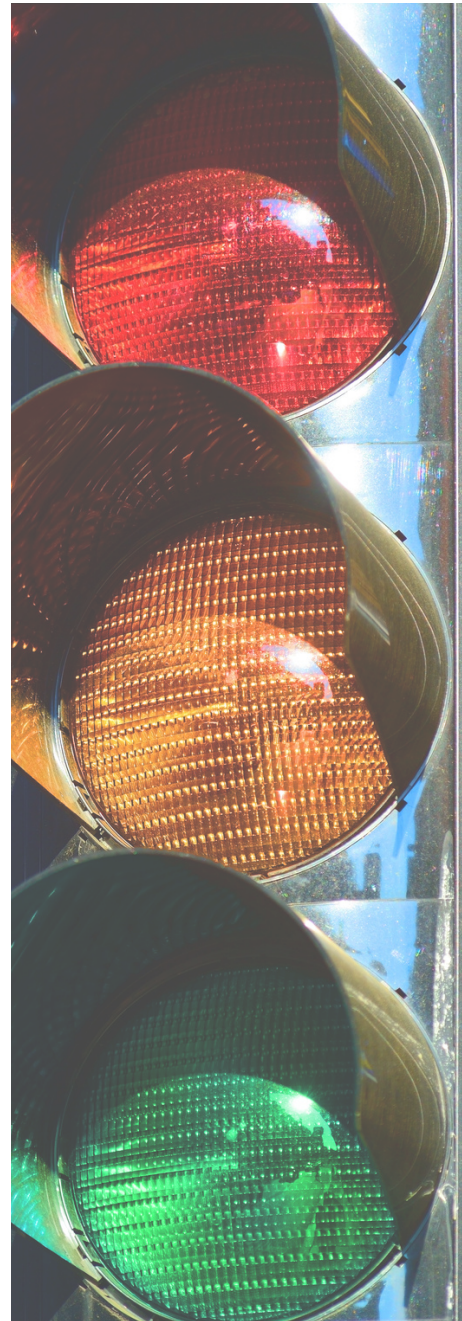


“It is clear to me that Eugene Gendlin was intuitively polyvagal [theory] informed.”

Stephen Porges, PhD

3 NERVOUS SYSTEM STATES

THROUGH THE LENS OF POLYVAGAL THEORY



dorsal vagal
(shutdown) immobilization

500 million years old



sympathetic
(fight or flight) mobilization

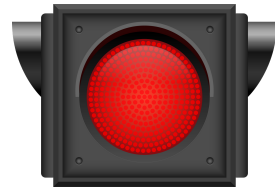
400 million years old



ventral vagal
(engagement) connecting & relating

200 million years old



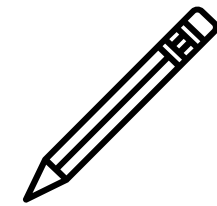


Dorsal State

(SHUTDOWN)

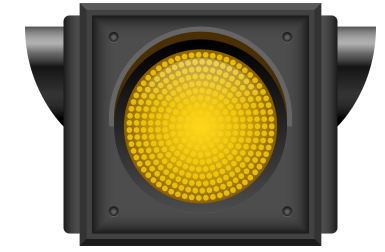


- feeling numb or disconnected
- shutting down / withdrawing
- sluggish/low energy / depressed
- collapsed posture
- averting eye contact
- monotone voice / flat facial expression
- zoning out
- unhealthy digestion (very loose stools or diarrhea)
- Inhibited by thoughts like: "i can't" / "i don't know" / "what's the use"
- inability to feel motivated
- difficulty processing auditory or visual input
- lights too bright / sounds too much
- feeling lost from yourself
- feeling lost from your sense of purpose





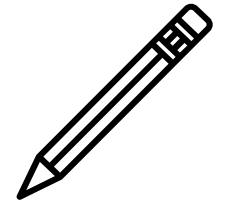
Sympathetic State

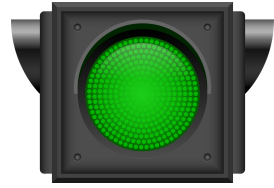


FIGHT | FLIGHT



- anxious (possibly hyper-alert / hypervigilant)
- always on the go
- hard to relax and be still / fidgety
- racing heart
- over-reactive / irritable
- rapid breathing
- teeth clenching or grinding
- unhealthy digestion (may be constipated)
- feeling like you have to control and "fix" things
- driven by thoughts like "I have to..." / "I shouldn't..." / "I should..."
- rigid posture
- chronic muscle tension, especially in neck & back



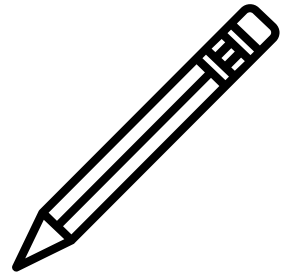


Ventral State

ENGAGED / CONNECTED



- relaxed and present
- safe and secure
- alert, attuned, connected
- content and engaged
- grateful
- self-motivated
- energetic without anxiety
- at ease in your body
- able to energize or relax at will
- healthy digestion
- healthy immune system
- can easily connect to feelings of playfulness
- confident and curious
- affectionate
- sense of agency
- advocating and doing things for yourself



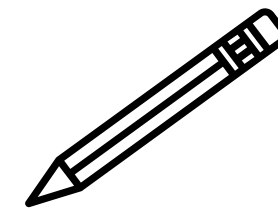


Friendly Awareness

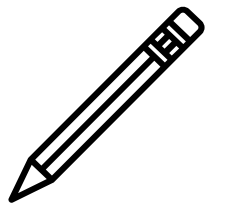
TURN FRIENDLY CURIOSITY ONTO YOUR VERY OWN SELF!



Bringing moments of dysregulation into friendly awareness increases your sense of safety.



When you're "stressed out," what happens? In other words, how do you know you're stressed out?

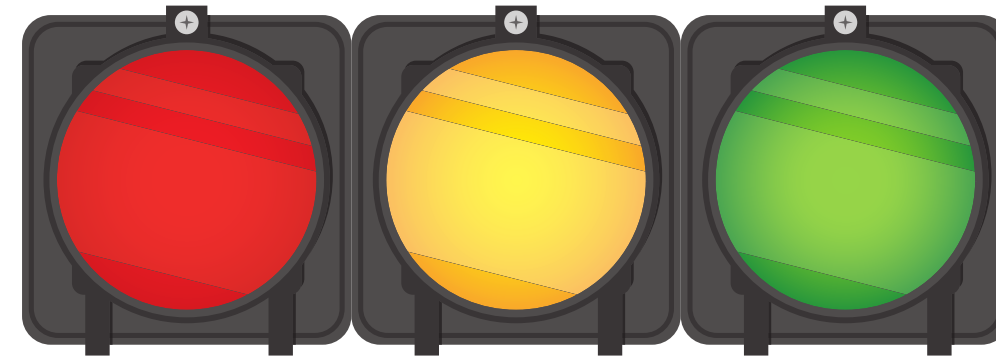


What nervous system STATE do you tend to go to?



Dorsal (shutdown)

- feeling numb or disconnected
- shutting down / withdrawing
- sluggish/low energy / depressed
- collapsed posture
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- monotone voice / flat facial expression
- zoning out
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Sympathetic (fight or flight)

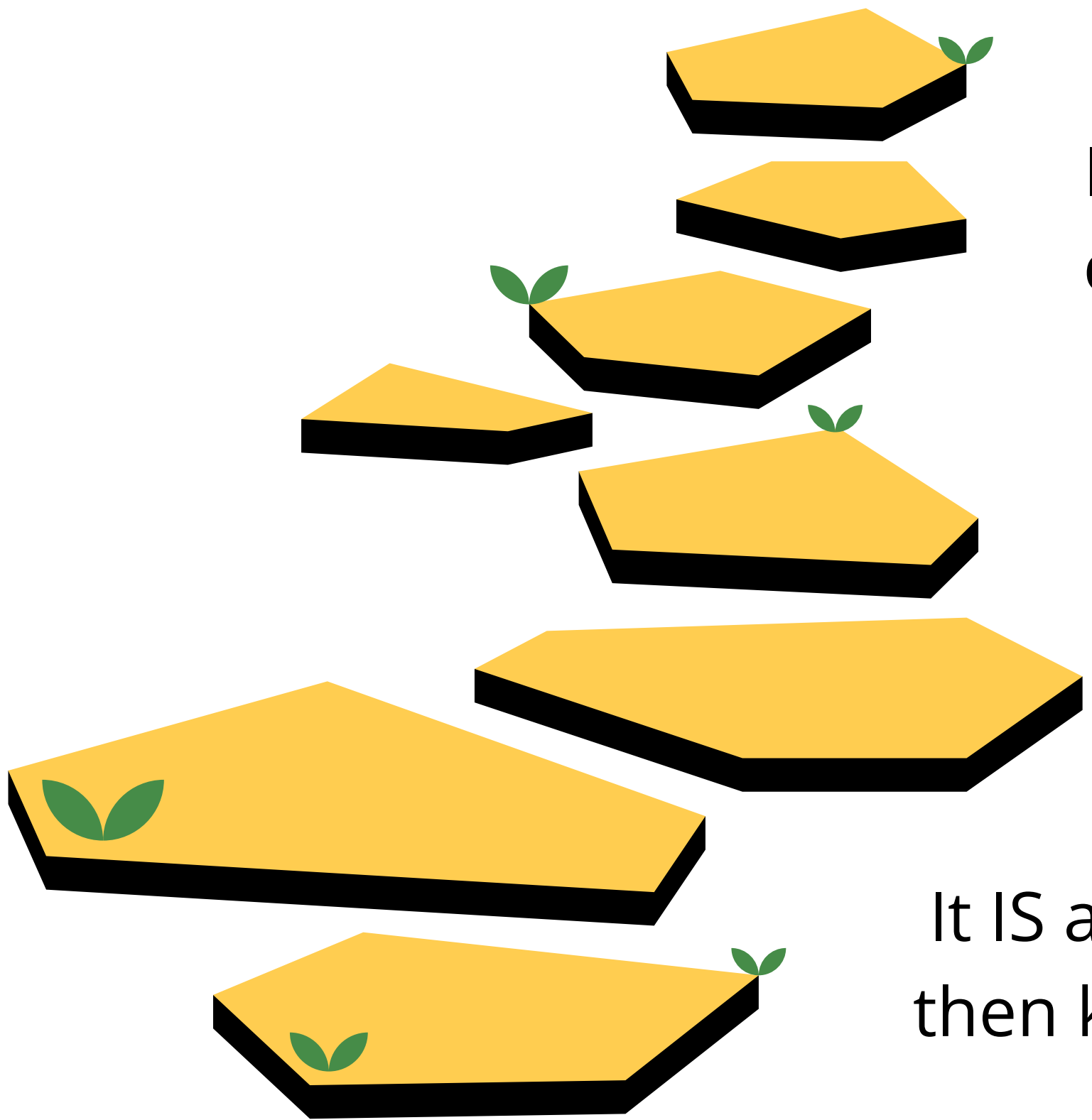
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Ventral (engaged/connected)

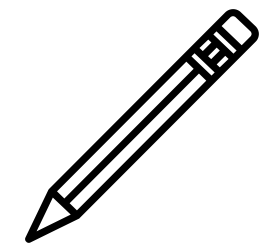
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It's *not* about always being in the green zone /
connected / ventral vagal state...

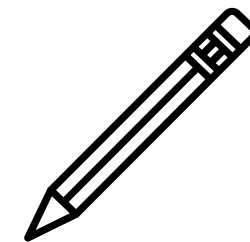
It IS about recognizing you have left and
then knowing how to find your way back.





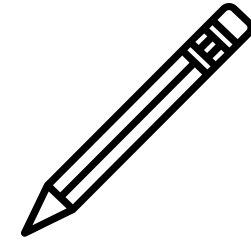
What are your "cues of safety"?

What places, spaces, faces, expressions, colors, textures, activities, words... signal that you are safe (or "safe enough")

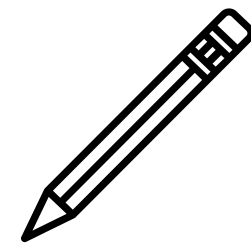




Think of a person (or creature!) you love...

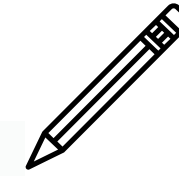


Notice what happens inside you when you bring them to mind...

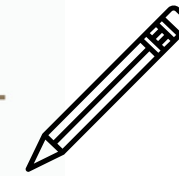


Think of a moment when ____ was "stressed out"...

Can you make a guess about what nervous system **state** they were/are in?



What behaviors, expressions, posture, gestures...clue you in?





Martha's text to Heidi after 8 weeks working together

(QUOTED WITH PERMISSION)

11/23/21, 21:16

heidi. you have so been on my mind. i am feeling great. annoying stuff that would normally ruin my mood and my day hasn't touched me. it doesn't feel like it's mine. i am sleeping great, my belly feels amazing (i have a long history of bellyaches, especially at night), and i just feel present in my body. it is so wild. even my therapist noticed it today. also, under my pcp's guidance, i'm slowly coming off of the lexapro. i would think this would give me some rocky effects, but nothing. i didn't even have bad pms, emotionally (still had some of the regular physical stuff there). i can't remember ever feeling this much or this good in my body. i was dancing in the kitchen the other night with [REDACTED] and the cats. heidi, i don't dance. it's crazy.

I'm so delighted by what you are writing!

also i have a few friends who might totally be interested.

same. i can't believe it. work has been an utter shitshow. stuff with the

Schedule a **FREE** **Relaxed Presence Breakthrough** with Heidi to:

- discuss your biggest challenge in being in relaxed presence as you'd like
- create a mini-plan for when you get dysregulated
- explore the possibility of working together to reset your nervous system



Schedule YOUR session here:

www.calendly.com/heidistable/relaxed-u



REFERENCES, RESOURCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Polyvagal theory: the science of feeling safe

<https://integratedlistening.com/science-of-feeling-safe/>

An interview of Dr. Stephen Porges on Polyvagal Theory:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZByV_QBEUY

Deb Dana's Rhythm of Regulation Resource:

<https://www.rhythmofregulation.com/resources/>

Jan Wynhall's book: ["Treating Trauma and Addiction with The Felt Sense Polyvagal Model \(A Bottom-Up Approach\)"](#)

Serge Prengel's podcast: [The Active Pause](#)

The International Focusing Institute (based on the work of Gene Gendlin): <https://focusing.org/>

Special thank you to Sukie Baxter (Functional Balance) for permission to use her movement and posture-related symptoms in nervous system states (from "*How to Train your Nervous System: Applying the Science of Pain, Stress, Trauma, and Social Connection*")

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH



Join Ready Set Pause, a friendly, private group on Facebook where you can practice pausing and noticing



Subscribe to Heidi's YouTube channel

Thank you for all the ways in which you take care of your dear self. I hope what you've learned about your nervous system will give you more ideas and friendlier ways of tending and caring for yourself and those you love.

Thanks for doing your part to help our world be and feel like a safer place, one nervous system at a time... because, when we feel better, we love better!

xo Heidi

P.S. Have you booked your **FREE Relaxed Presence Breakthrough** with me yet?!