

MINI-TOOLKIT

BEFRIENDING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

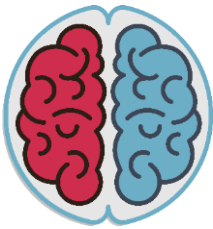
For Children, Youth, and Adults

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This mini-toolkit provides an overview of techniques we practice in my skill-building workshops. These tools recruit the vagus nerve to change our physiological state—a portal to building a resilient nervous system for self-regulation, managing emotions, healing, and well-being. These tools are adaptable for different ages, settings, and traditions. Working with school districts, health care facilities, mental health clinicians, tribes, non-profits, and other organizations, these tools are being integrated into daily life across the lifespan.

- These techniques have deep roots in cultural traditions and people’s ways of knowing
- Integrate your own traditions to create your personal toolkit; your nervous system is unique and you know what feels right in the moment and circumstance
- Regular practice is key to retraining the nervous system
- A little can mean a lot and make a difference; create a mini-snack menu of tools to practice when things are good, when things are challenging, and on-the-go in daily life

1



CONNECT, COMMUNICATE, & CO-REGULATE

- We are wired for social connection; connecting face-to-face with someone that you trust and helps you feel at ease is essential to building resilience; bringing someone special to mind, being with a pet or animal you care about can be helpful too

- **PAUSE**—a brief pause, even 20 seconds or so, helps to reset the nervous system; noticing your breath, bringing your hands to your heart, feeling your feet on the ground, and noticing sounds around you are ways to ground the nervous system
- **Check-in with your nervous system and ask “how am I feeling right now?”** Choose a word, an animal or an image that connects with how you are feeling... be curious, like a child with no judgment

2



MOVEMENT

- **Dancing, drumming, games, play**
- **Gently turning the head side-to-side**
- **Rocking the body and rocking chairs**
- **Gently moving the spine—flexion/rounding, extension/sitting tall and side-bends**
- **Changing postures such as standing up & sitting down several times, moving legs as if you are running in place, standing or seated**
- **Walking around the room or outside**
- **Balancing exercises like standing on one leg, raising one knee...**
- **Cross-lateral movements such as swinging arms from side to side, sweeping the floor, paddling a canoe**
- **Movements that compress the body such as hugging knees into the chest while seated, or squatting**
- **Smaller movements are a good place to start, especially if you feel disconnected, numbing out—making fists & releasing, circling hands/wrists, nodding the head**

3



BREATH

- Extend the exhale by pretending to blow bubbles or blowing an imaginary cup of cocoa/tea
- Straw breath (exhaling through pursed lips to slow the exhale)
- Combining breath with movement such as cactus arms shifts focus from the breath to movement and opens the body to the breath
- Alternate Nostril Breathing (<https://livingwell.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/12-AlternateNostrilBreathing.pdf>)
- “Dr. Jud” Brewer’s 5-finger breathing (integrated into treatment for mental health challenges and addiction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QVqMaWrP-s>)

4



VIBRATION/SOUND

- Sing, hum, make a favorite sound, buzz like a bee, howl like a husky (<https://howlingwithhuskies.com/>)!
- Rhythm (clapping fast and slow, drums, music...)
- Playing a whistle, recorder, kazoo, or wind instrument



SENSATION AND SELF-TOUCH

- Swallowing, sips of water; chewing
- Tap on body, brush down arms with open hand, hand(s) on heart, butterfly hug (may use pillow)
- Massaging face and ears
- Gentle pressure such as pressing palms of hands on a table or wall
- Calm/sensory box and expressive arts (with different textures such as fabric, brushes, clay, kinetic sand, sensory calm stickers)
- Splashing cool water on face, hands under running water



SELF-COMPASSION AND LOVING KINDNESS

- Being kind to yourself and others activates the vagus nerve; self-compassion is an antidote for shame (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTFN8t9SXiQ>)
- “Howling with Huskies” closes with a breath and movement practice focusing on self-kindness and compassion (<https://howlingwithhuskies.com/>)
- Free resources online at the Center for Child and Family Wellbeing at the University of Washington: <https://ccfwb.uw.edu/resource/the-peace-kindness-practice-for-children/>

EXERCISES

SENSORY SNACK FOR ME

Select three different categories of tools/practices to create a daily practice that you can do in a few minutes. Within each of the three categories, select or substitute a cultural tradition or personal preference that you have. Please list and/or describe your choices below:

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>PRACTICE</u>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

SENSORY SNACK FOR CLIENTS

Repeat instructions above, now creating a sensory snack for your classroom, client(s) that you work with, a family, or friend.

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>PRACTICE</u>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

SENSORY SNACK FOR STAFF MEETING

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>PRACTICE</u>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____