

Emotional Regulation is a Myth!



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About Your Facilitator



Jo Lockhart has spent the last 20 years studying a combination of Human Behaviour, Psychology, Spirituality, Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication, Personal Growth, Energy and Human Dynamics from many and varied perspectives. She has achieved qualifications in both the traditional institutions of University and Tafe, and also from alternative educational institutions. Her passion has always been to help people live their best life.

Jo has assisted hundreds of families. Working predominately in the mental health sector specialising in working with children, teens and parents in her early career, she then moved into the birth industry, supporting families through pregnancy, birth and the early days of family life.

Back in therapeutic private practice Jo has worked with people from all walks of life, supporting them to let go of a variety of problems, such as addictions, anxiety, past trauma, being neurodiverse, dysfunctional relational patterns, and more. Jo also has experience in teaching and mentoring at Curtin University and private training organisations, to support the next generation of therapists.

However, the greatest challenges and learnings for Jo have come from within her own family. With her late diagnosis of autism, while being a mother to three autistic children, she has experienced first-hand just how tough life and parenting can be. Ultimately it is the combination of Jo's professional learning and personal journey that has led her to become an expert in her field - supporting individuals and families to live and love in individual and shared harmony.

What's the truth?

Emotional regulation – the ability to regulate one's own emotions independently, is a myth.

The emotions that we experience, both positive (enjoyable) and negative (not enjoyable) are the result of external triggers and internal triggers. External Triggers include things such as other people's behaviour or circumstances beyond our control. These could include someone doing something kind for us, the traffic being bad, the sun shining, financial markets crashing etc. Internal triggers are things such as our thoughts and beliefs, or sensations within the body. Sensations could include a rapid heart rate, hunger, muscle tension. Often our internal triggers are responding to external triggers.

Regulation is not about emotions, it is related to what mode our nervous system is in: Parasympathetic mode (rest and digest), or Sympathetic mode (Fight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn). When our Parasympathetic nervous system is active, our body is relaxed, it can preserve energy, our digestion is good and we sleep well. We also have our whole brain 'online' and our emotions are more manageable.

When our sympathetic nervous system is triggered, we go into a Fight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn reaction. We are functioning from our reptilian brain. We are tense in our bodies, hyper-alert, agitated and unable to rest or sleep soundly. We are primed to see danger and jump into action. We are reactive. We are basically walking crocodiles! When we are like this it is impossible to control our emotions.

Emotions don't need regulating – nervous systems do!

Human Brain (Neocortex) Language & Creativity Self-Awareness Logical & Abstract Thoughts
Mammalian Brain (Limbic) Learning Memory Emotional Responses
Reptilian Brain (Brain Stem) Instincts Fight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn Homeostasis & Survival



How we learn to regulate the nervous system?

When we are babies, we can't do anything for ourselves, including regulate our nervous system. Babies are completely reliant on the people around them. Not just for their practical needs, but their emotional needs too.

A baby feels uncomfortable, cold, hungry (internal triggers) or scared by a loud noise (external trigger) and they cry. When they are picked up by a safe person who is calm, and have their need tended to, the distress they were feeling is replaced by feelings of care, warmth and love. Safety! As a result, their nervous system gets the message "I am safe, I am taken care of, everything is ok". This process of being calmed by someone else is called co-regulation

Repeating this experience again and again through childhood and adulthood creates a pattern in the neural pathways of the brain and body. This pattern creates a nervous system that can be calm most of the time and can easily go back to being calm after an emergency or fright. We would say a person like that is just "wired" that way but it didn't happen by itself. The nervous system was trained to be like this. This person would have emotions and reactions because they are human, but they would on-the-whole be manageable, and this person would be able to be "emotionally regulated".

Unfortunately, not many of us had a childhood where our emotions and needs were consistently attended to. Even in 'good' families a lot of us had parents who were emotionally unavailable, busy, anxious or dysfunctional. They were parenting in a world of social norms like children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard, tough-love and boys-don't-cry. Our parents most likely in turn likely had parents who were unable to attend to their needs, so they had unmet needs within themselves while parenting us.

It makes sense that few of us now have stable nervous systems. The optimal neural pathways for regulation were not laid down in childhood. As a result, our emotions feel out of control quite often, and sometimes they control us.

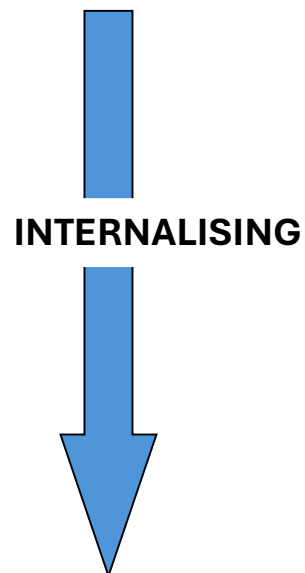
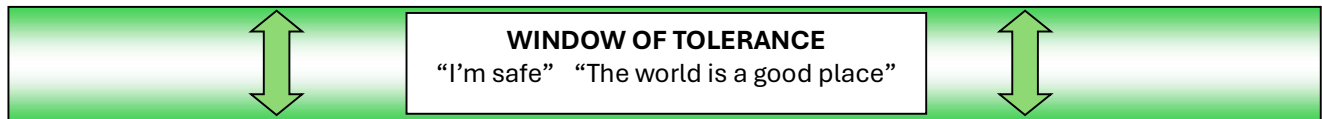
To our great benefit, the nervous system and brain are highly plastic, meaning they have the ability to grow, develop and change. Old dogs, and people, can absolutely learn new tricks!

Understanding Your Unique Dysregulation Pattern



FIGHT & FLIGHT

This page is deliberately left without most detail as it needs to be explained and worked through. You can contact Jo to go through the content.



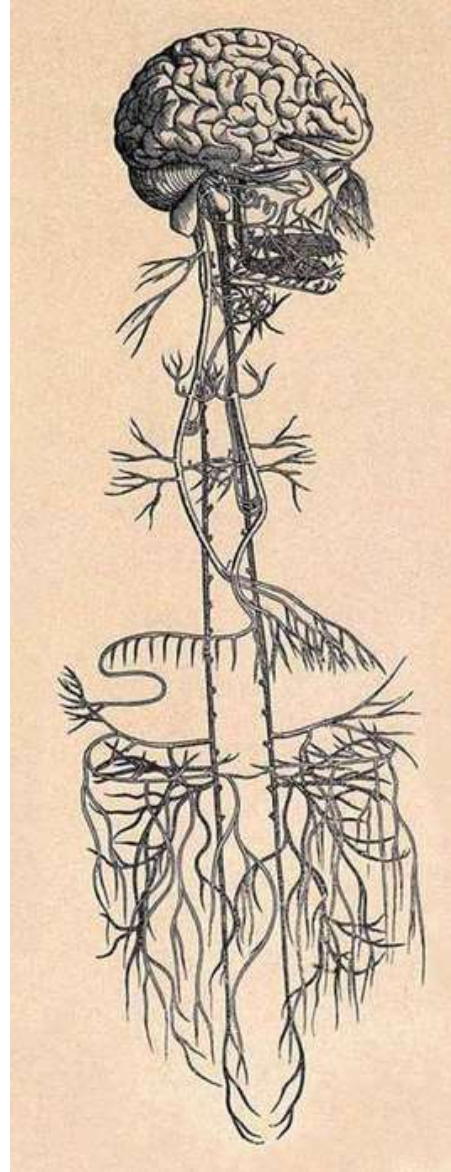
FREEZE & FAWN

Learning to Regulate Our Nervous System

The key to switching from the Sympathetic Nervous System (Flight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn mode) to the Parasympathetic Nervous System (Rest and Digest) is the Vagus Nerve.

The Vagus Nerve is the largest Cranial Nerve in the body. It runs from the brain, through the face, throat, heart, lungs, down through the organs in the gut, reproductive organs and also the skin and muscles. It oversees a myriad of bodily functions such as heart rate, respiration, mood, digestion, immune response, swallowing, vocalisation, liver function and is the primary communicator between the gut and brain. It conveys our 'gut-feelings' of fear and anxiety to our brain. It is in charge of calming the body. When the Vagus Nerve is stimulated it tells your body "you are safe".

Much like going to the gym to train our muscles to be strong, we can train our Vagus Nerve Network into being 'toned'. Exactly like going to the gym, doing these toning exercises regularly is more effective than once in a while. In fact, if you only do these exercises when you are stressed you can create a pattern and teach your nervous system to yo-yo between regulation and dysregulation. For effective retraining of the nervous system, we need to do these exercises when feeling calm as well as stressed. Over time that teaches the nervous system that it is safe to be regulated.



Those with good vagal tone typically identify as having good physical and psychological well-being. Those with poor vagal tone experience higher rates of inflammation, depression, anxiety, loneliness, heart attack and stroke.

Vagus Nerve Stimulation Strategies

Bilateral Stimulation

- Butterfly
- Bilateral music and tapping
- Walking, skipping, running, crawling, climbing a ladder, swimming, cycling
- Clapping games

Vagal Tone Exercises

Loud Singing – Using the voice deliberately can stimulate the Vagus Nerve mechanically through the vocal chords. Sing, hum, chant or “OM”. Adding deep breathing will enhance the stimulation. Adding loud volume additionally stimulates the Vagus Nerve through the throat muscles

Loud gargling with water – This stimulates the Vagus Nerve in a similar way to loud singing.

Balancing the Gut Biome – The presence of healthy gut bacteria creates a feedback loop to the Vagus Nerve, increasing Vagal Tone. Take pre/probiotics if needed and eat high fibre bacteria rich foods.

Cold Showers and Ice Baths – Regular cold exposure increases Vagal Tone.

Laughter – How laughter may stimulate the Vagus Nerve is unclear, perhaps vocal chords, throat muscles and facial muscles. As well as improving Vagal Tone, Laughter releases endorphins and has many physiological benefits. The body cannot tell the difference between real or pretend laughter so fake it until you make it!

Chewing Gum – chewing releases a gut hormone which directly activates the Vagus Nerve. It also triggers saliva release which stimulates the Vagus Nerve. Be sure to use chewing gum with natural sugar-free sweeteners as high sugar and artificial sweeteners are detrimental to gut health.

Eye Movement Exercises – keeping the head still, move the eyes to look in one direction as far as is comfortable and hold the position for about a minute. Rest for a moment, then do the other side. The strain on the occipital muscles through the back of the skull activate the Vagus Nerve.

EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique)

EFT is a process of tapping on particular meridian points in order.

A free workbook for this is available on my website here under the Resources tab