

Understanding Your Nervous System

A Free Resource from WildRise

Your nervous system is constantly working behind the scenes to keep you safe. Sometimes, though, it gets stuck in patterns that were protective once but now get in the way of living fully.

The Three States of Your Nervous System

Ventral Vagal (safe & social)

Calm, connected, present, able to think clearly, open to others, grounded in your body

From here you can:

- Engage in meaningful conversation
- Feel your emotions without overwhelm
- Make decisions from a centered place
- Rest, digest, and heal



Sympathetic (fight or flight)

Anxious, agitated, jittery, racing thoughts, heart pounding, irritable, restless, hyper-focused on threats

This state activates when:

- You perceive danger (real or imagined)
- Old trauma patterns get triggered
- Stressed, overwhelmed, or under pressure

Your body is trying to: Mobilize energy to fight or flee to safety.



Dorsal Vagal (freeze & shutdown)

Numb, disconnected, exhausted, foggy, hopeless, "going through the motions," hard to care, dissociated

This state activates when:

- Fight or flight didn't work or wasn't safe
- You're chronically stressed or depleted
- Emotions feel too overwhelming to process

Your body is trying to: Conserve energy and protect you from overwhelm.



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What Your Body Might Be Telling You

SYMPATHETIC ACTIVATION

- ☐ I feel anxious or on edge
- ☐ My mind races, especially at night
- ☐ I startle easily and/or scan for danger
- ☐ I have trouble relaxing even when nothing's wrong
- ☐ My jaw, shoulders, or neck are always tense

DORSAL VAGAL SHUTDOWN

- ☐ I feel numb or disconnected from my emotions
- ☐ Everything feels exhausting even small tasks
- ☐ I zone out or lose time
- ☐ I feel like I'm watching my life from outside
- ☐ I struggle to feel motivated or care about things

VENTRAL VAGAL CAPACITY

- ☐ I can calm myself down when I'm upset
- ☐ I feel connected to my body most of the time
- ☐ I can be present and sit with difficult emotions
- ☐ I have people I feel safe with
- ☐ I know what helps me feel grounded

When To Seek Professional Support

If your nervous system feels chronically stuck in activation or shutdown, somatics paired with clinical mental health support can help.

Somatic practitioners work with the nervous system through gentle, trauma-informed practices that help you:

- Understand and work with your unique nervous system rhythms
- Show up authentically, with dignity and presence
- Release trauma and stress held in your body
- Build capacity to be with difficult emotions and sensations
- Reconnect with your body as a source of wisdom, power and safety

Want to learn more?

WildRise Collective offers somatic integration sessions and bodywork for stress, trauma, and nervous system regulation.

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Free 20-minute consultation calls available

