

Nervous System 101

gentle, plain-language regulation — a free workbook from Heart of Care

Your nervous system is not broken. It is doing exactly what it was built to do — keep you safe. This little workbook is a soft, no-jargon tour of what is happening inside you when life gets loud, and a handful of small, kind tools you can use today.

Read it at porch-pace. Skip anything that doesn't fit. Come back to the parts that do.

What's inside

- 1 — The three gears of your nervous system
- 2 — How to notice which gear you're in
- 3 — Tiny tools to come back to yourself
- 4 — A 5-minute daily check-in
- 5 — When to ask for a hand

1 · The three gears of your nervous system

Forget the long Latin words for a minute. Your nervous system mostly works in three gears. You move between them all day, every day — and that is healthy.

Green — safe & social

Shoulders down. Breath easy. You can listen, laugh, plan dinner, hold a hard conversation without falling apart. This is the gear where rest, connection, and creativity live.

It feels like: warm, curious, here.

Yellow — fight or flight

Your body has decided something needs handling, fast. Heart speeds up. Jaw tightens. You snap, pace, clean the whole kitchen, scroll without seeing. This gear is not bad — it is fuel. The problem is when we get stuck here.

It feels like: revved, irritable, can't sit still.

Blue — shutdown

When yellow runs too long or the threat feels too big, the system pulls the emergency brake. You go quiet, heavy, foggy. Hard to text back. Hard to care. This is not laziness. This is your body protecting you by going still.

It feels like: numb, far away, too tired for tired.

The whole point of regulation is not to stay in green forever. It is to move between gears on purpose — and to know how to come home when you've been gone a while.

2 · How to notice which gear you're in

You can't change what you can't feel. Most of us were taught to ignore our bodies until something breaks. So we start small — three soft questions, no judgment.

The 3-question body scan

- **Where are my shoulders?** Up by my ears, or down where they live?
- **How is my breath?** High and shallow, or low and slow?
- **What's my jaw doing?** Clenched, loose, or somewhere in between?

That's it. No fixing yet. Just noticing. Naming the gear is already a small act of regulation.

Cheat sheet

- Shoulders soft + slow breath + loose jaw → probably **green**.
- Shoulders high + fast breath + tight jaw → probably **yellow**.
- Shoulders heavy + shallow breath + slack everything → probably **blue**.

3 · Tiny tools to come back to yourself

These are not magic. They are small, repeatable cues that tell your body: *we're okay right now*. Pick one. Try it for a week. Trade it for another if it doesn't fit.

If you're in yellow (revved up)

- **Long exhale.** Breathe in for 4, out for 8. Do it three times. The long out-breath is the brake pedal.
- **Cold water on the wrists or face.** Tells the body the emergency is over.
- **Push a wall.** Hands flat, lean in, push hard for 20 seconds. Burns the fuel.
- **Name 5 things you can see.** Out loud. Boring colors count.

If you're in blue (shut down)

- **Move one inch.** Wiggle toes. Roll shoulders. Tiny is enough.
- **Warm something.** Tea, a shower, a blanket out of the dryer.
- **Hum or sing.** Even badly. Especially badly. Vibration in the throat is a gentle wake-up.
- **One small kind thing.** Drink water. Open a window. Pet the dog.

If you're in green (good — keep it)

- Notice it. Out loud, if you can. *"Oh — I feel okay right now."*
- Anchor it: who, where, what helped? Write it on the next page.
- Do one thing that future-you will thank you for. Just one.

4 · A 5-minute daily check-in

Same time every day if you can. Coffee. Lunch break. Right before bed. Five minutes. No phone. Pen and paper if possible — the body listens differently when the hand is moving.

Ask yourself

- What gear am I in right now — green, yellow, or blue?
- What gear was I in most of today?
- What helped me move between gears? (food, a walk, a friend, the dog, a cry)
- What knocked me out of green? (no judgment — just data)
- What is one tiny tool I'll try tomorrow?

A note from the Honey Badger

You are not behind. You are not failing. A nervous system that has lived through hard things takes longer to trust safe ones. That is not a flaw. That is a wise body. Be patient with it the way you'd be patient with a rescue animal learning the porch is theirs.

5 · When to ask for a hand

Regulation tools are real, and they are not a replacement for human support. Please reach for a person — a peer, a counselor, a hotline — when:

- You've been stuck in yellow or blue for days and the small tools aren't reaching you.
- You're using something (substance, screen, food) to come down, and it's costing you.
- You're having thoughts of hurting yourself or not being here.
- You just want a witness. That counts. That is enough.

In the U.S., you can call or text **988** any time — Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Outside the U.S., search "crisis line" plus your country.

Where to land next

- **The Academy** — peer support basics, more free workbooks, gentle courses.
- **Resources** — printable check-ins, scripts for hard conversations, reading lists.
- **The porch** — daily check-ins and people who get it, at heart-of-care.life.

— Briana F. Harden, CPS-MH, PBT

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