

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Our bodies take a reliable path when we are facing stress and trauma. We are presented with a stressor, a threat, or a memory of a threat, our bodies can jump to any of the steps below to try to keep us safe. This is unconscious and meant for survival. If we don't get the care we need, or if the traumas are ongoing, then we can get stuck on one step or straddling a few. The good news is that our nervous systems is adaptable, always capable of learning, healing, and getting updated. Our bodies come out of a trauma response the way that we went down it. **Our bodies can be trusted to know the way out, they never skip a step.**



## WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

(aka ventral vagal, social engagement system, safety and connection, health, growth, restoration, wellbeing)

presence, optimal arousal zone, workable range of resiliency, grounded, calm, regulated, managing stressors well, curiosity and engagement, able to connect with others, normal breathing, eye contact



## HYPERAROUSAL

(aka sympathetic nervous system, mobilized with fear, fight or flight response, adaptive protection through action)

panic, overwhelm, rage or irritability, hard to think clearly, emotional reactivity, hypervigilance, intrusive imagery, rapid thoughts, constriction and bracing, tension and rapid breathing, increased response to sensation, startle, increased heart rate, impulsivity, less able to connect with others



## HYPOAROUSAL

(aka dorsal vagal, collapse, immobilization with fear, freeze response, disconnected, adaptive protection by disappearing, conserving energy and resources)

withdrawn from self and others, collapsing posture, poor eye contact, difficulty tracking conversation in the moment, reduced or slowed movement, muscles slack, difficult to focus or think clearly, feeling dull, lessening of awareness and sensations, numbing emotions



# MAPPING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Develop a personalized map of your physiological and psychological  
“landmarks” of the different pathways of your nervous system.



## WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

sensations: \_\_\_\_\_

thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

beliefs about self: \_\_\_\_\_

beliefs about others and world: \_\_\_\_\_

When have I felt this way  
in the past?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can I connect to this state  
with skills, activities, objects,  
or people?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## HYPERAROUSAL

emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

sensations: \_\_\_\_\_

thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

beliefs about self: \_\_\_\_\_

beliefs about others and world: \_\_\_\_\_

When have I felt this way  
in the past?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can I move out of this state  
with skills, activities, objects,  
or people?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## HYPOAROUSAL

emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

sensations: \_\_\_\_\_

thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

beliefs about self: \_\_\_\_\_

beliefs about others and world: \_\_\_\_\_

When have I felt this way  
in the past?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can I move out of this state  
with skills, activities, objects,  
or people?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_







Triggers on the other hand are cues that signal potential threat. It gives us a cue to danger and can make us feel antsy and withdrawn. Our body then releases stress hormones (adrenaline, cortisol) to mobilize us in response to perceived threat: fight, flight, freeze, and fawn:

- Fight: facing any perceived threat aggressively.
- Flight: running away from the danger.
- Freeze: unable to move or act against a threat.
- Fawn: immediately acting to try to please to avoid any conflict.

Glimmers give us a calm, peaceful and joyful state. They are micro moments of goodness that help our body to return to our thriving state of being. They reduce emotional distress and can help us be more in our learning zone. This could be petting animals, being in nature, rocking the body, wrappings ourselves in a cozy blanket, freshly baked cookies, or singing.

In the same way that certain sights, sounds, scents, people, or actions can trigger us, these can also be sources of glimmers as well. Understanding our glimmers and knowing the glimmers of others can promote not only feelings of joy and peace but also a greater sense of connectivity with those we engage with.





# TRIGGERS INVENTORY

What are some things that bring you to a  
survival state or panic / danger zones?



PEOPLE

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PLACES

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SITUATIONS

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THOUGHTS /  
BELIEFS

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SENSORY  
CUES

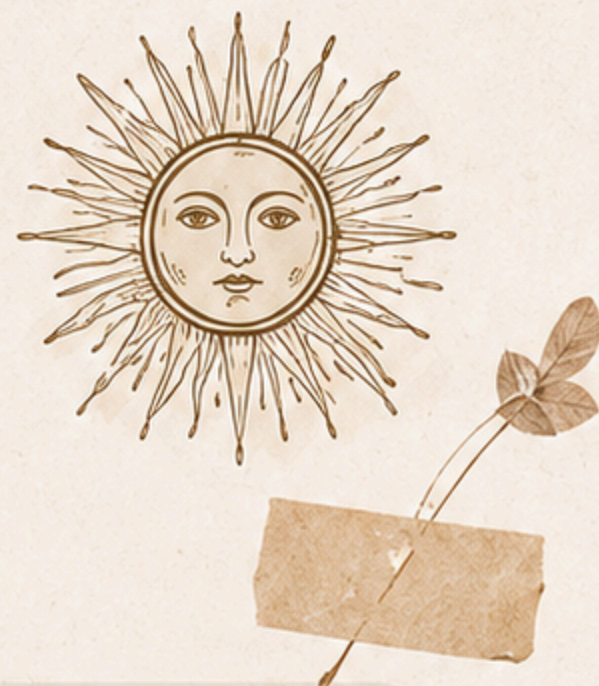
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# GLIMMERS INVENTORY

What are some things that bring you to an anchored state, comfort, and moments of goodness?



PEOPLE

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PLACES

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ACTIVITIES &  
EXPERIENCES

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THOUGHTS /  
AFFIRMATIONS

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SENSORY  
CUES

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