



**AN EMBODIED GUIDE TO  
IDENTIFYING TRAUMA TRIGGERS &  
REGULATING THE NERVOUS  
SYSTEM**



**BALANCEWISE**  
SOMATIC THERAPY & COACHING



# HEY, I'M BRIDGET

I'm so glad you're here and taking steps to feel more at home in your body.

This detailed guide is designed for you to take your time before moving on to each new stage. Take a moment to breathe and ground in as you read this. Ground into the intention that you are already whole and complete; there is nothing to fix.

Come as you are, removing the urgency and allowing the time for your desired integration.

Come as you are with curiosity and self-compassion because it is here that you will naturally evolve and transform.

I'm here to be part of your support system and help you break free of feeling stuck and overwhelmed and start stepping into your purpose.

*Bridget xoxo*





# WHAT WE'LL COVER

DEVELOPING A SOMATIC AWARENESS PRACTICE

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRIGGER AND A WARRANTED EMOTION

IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS

IDENTIFYING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE

PRACTISING REGULATING RESOURCES DAILY ACCORDING TO YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE

*LET'S DO IT!*



# SOMATIC AWARENESS

*When you connect to your body, your body begins to speak to you*

Somatic awareness is the process of bringing our attention to the life of the body to see what is present there. By doing this, we can then take action to transform ourselves.

To explore your triggers, you must be connected to your body rather than living in your mind. When we understand somatically how we've learnt something, we can then unlearn it.

## **PRACTICE CONNECTING TO YOUR BODY**

Set a timer for 1, 3 or 5 minutes. The key here is not to feel overwhelmed. This means that whatever is manageable to you, we want to show our bodies that this exploration and healing work can feel safe and be a beautiful experience. If this means you start by doing it for 30 seconds and work your way up, then listen to your body.

Close your eyes, first focusing on your breath as you gently start to sense your body.

Generally, we house our emotions and stored survival stress in the jaw, throat, diaphragm and pelvic floor. See if you can explore these areas. All you need to do is sit and notice.

Practice this every day, exploring with curiosity. Keep practising until you feel relatively comfortable and connected to your body before exploring your triggers.



We experience somatic awareness through bodily sensations and their qualities.

Examples:

- My chest feels open, warm and light, like a cloud moving
- My throat feels constricted, tight, tingly and red
- My shoulders feel tense; grey, like a rock

## YOUR NOTES:

*Take a moment to journal your somatic awareness experience*

Where is it located?

Is there a shape to it?

What is its intensity(1-10)?

Does it have a colour?

Is it moving or stationary?

Does it have a density?

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# WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRIGGER AND A WARRANTED EMOTION?

## TRIGGER

A trigger will leave your nervous system feeling activated, afraid, overwhelmed, frozen, drained, panicky or enraged.



## WARRANTED EMOTION

A warranted emotion will leave you feeling more empowered.

Even if you are activated, you will have more agency.

# IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS

Our neuroception (internal threat detector) is looking out into the world every second of every day to decide if something we encounter is safe, dangerous or life-threatening. It looks at our internal database of past information, checking every experience we have ever had, and it picks up on the most subtle cues. The smell of something baking in the oven, raised eyebrows or a single word spoken.

**If our neuroception detects:**

**Danger** = Our nervous system becomes **dysregulated**

**Safety** = Our nervous system becomes **regulated**


**When we encounter a trauma trigger, we feel a strong emotion, and a behavioural reaction often takes over.**

***It sets off a memory, feeling, sensation or flashback. \*Even when triggered, we won't always consciously know the source of the trauma.***

One or more of the five senses activate our triggers. Use the below as a guide to begin exploring your triggers and list them in the appropriate spaces below.

## Specific Situations/Behaviours

**EXAMPLE:** When someone corrects my speech/words used or laughs at my country slang. It makes me feel stupid and i get angry, and begin to completely overthink the situation.

**\*REMINDER:** You may or may not be able to identify the source of the trigger. 

As a child, when I moved schools, I was teased for how I spoke, and as an adult entering the workforce, a co-worker constantly corrected me for using the 'wrong' words.

## Sounds

## Emotional State

# IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS

## Smells

## Specific Words

## Thoughts

## Facial Expressions/Body-Language

## People

## Places

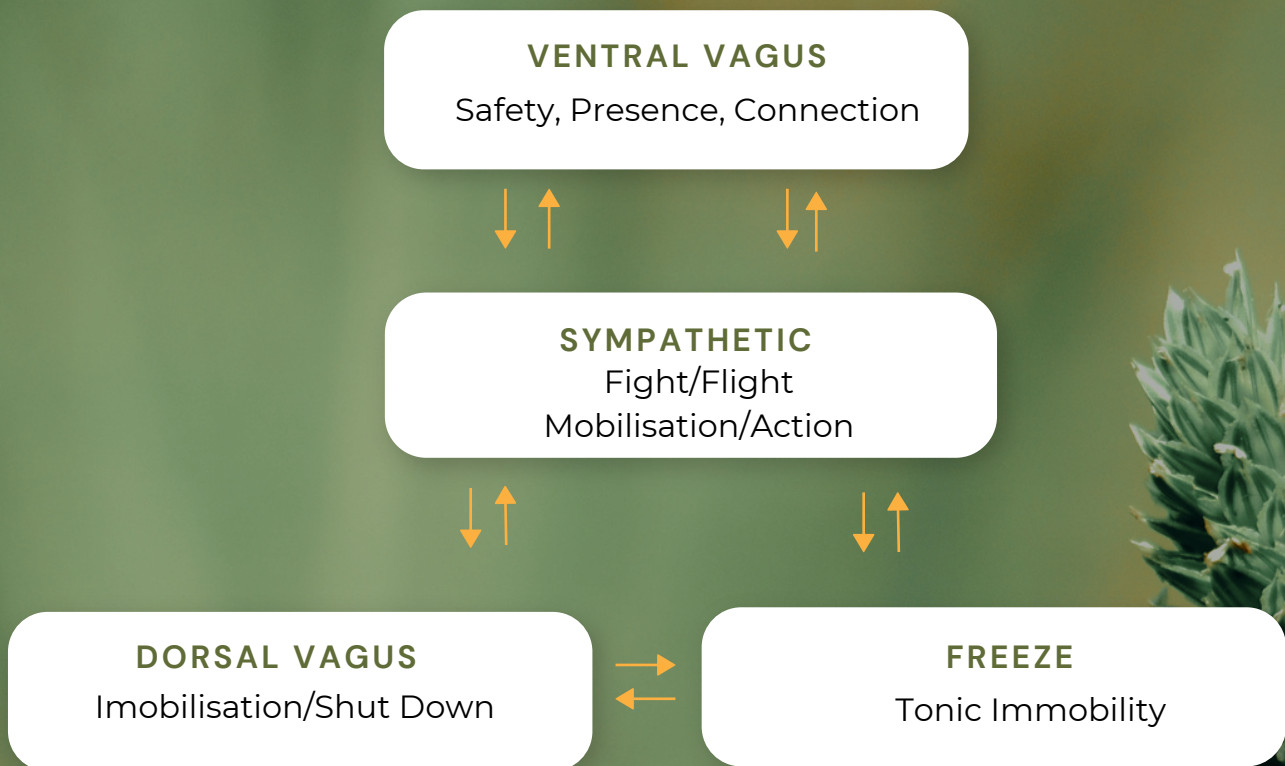




# IDENTIFY YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM STATE

Many of us have heard of the parasympathetic NS (rest & digest) and the Sympathetic NS (Fight/Flight). Still, there are so many more amazing things happening within our systems to keep us safe! Education/ having a basic understanding of how your NS works and what is happening in your body at any given moment goes such a long way towards healing and knowing you are not alone.

## POLYVAGAL THEORY HIERARCHY OVERVIEW



Now that you have identified your triggers, look at the 4 NS states in more detail on the following page.

Take your time to read through the different states and see if you can begin to identify which state you might be in when you are triggered.

\*NS = Nervous System

## VENTRAL is an "I can" experience

FEELINGS	SENSATIONS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOURS
Curious, safe, embodied, present, happy, content, open, self-compassionate, engaged.	Relaxed, energy levels feel 'just right', sense of ease, warmth.	"This is nice" "I'm excited to try new things" "This pace feel right" "I can do this" "There is no rush, there is enough time".	Connections to self, others and the world, able to tune out distractions and remain focused, supporting others, showing flexibility, purpose.

## SYMPATHETIC is an "I must now" experience

FEELINGS	SENSATIONS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOURS
Alarmed, annoyed, burnout, hypervigilant, confused, agitated, aggressive, anxious, fear, out of control, too much.	Needing to move, sweaty palms, tunnel vision, fidgety, heightened alertness, shaking, heavy breathing, rapid breath	"There's not enough time!" "I have to do this now" "Everyone is so annoying" "Everything will fall apart if i slow down".	Somewhat cut off and disconnected from others, self and the world. Can't relax or slow down, always on the go. Needing to move, disrupted sleep, need to be in control, overworked.

## FREEZE is an "I must but I can't" experience

Blended state equal parts sympathetic (activated) met with dorsal (shutdown)

FEELINGS	SENSATIONS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOURS
Stuck, confused, overwhelmed, fearful, on edge, anxious	Shallow breath, holding the breath, tired/fatigued, unmotivated, trapped, rigid/tense muscles, brain fog,	"I should go to work, but I can't" "This must be completed right now, but I can't" "I should respond to that email/text, but I can't" "This is too much"	Procrastination, avoidance, lack of eye contact, cancelling plans, unmotivated. Dancing around something but unable to make steps to move towards it, getting lost scrolling socials, tired but wired

## DORSAL is an "I can't" experience

FEELINGS	SENSATIONS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOURS
Hopeless, in a funk, shut down, apathy, removed, alone, depressed, dissociated.	Numb, foggy, floating, fatigued, cold, limp, weightless, wobbly, low energy, slow shallow breath.	"I just want to go to sleep" "I'm not good enough" "I'm invisible, no one really sees me" "What's the point" "I don't care" Safety, hope and connection feel unreachable.	Difficulty stringing a sentence or thought together, unable to focus, socially withdrawing

# LET'S REGULATE!

Did you recognise some of your feelings, sensations, thoughts, and behaviours when triggered as belonging primarily to one of the four nervous system states?

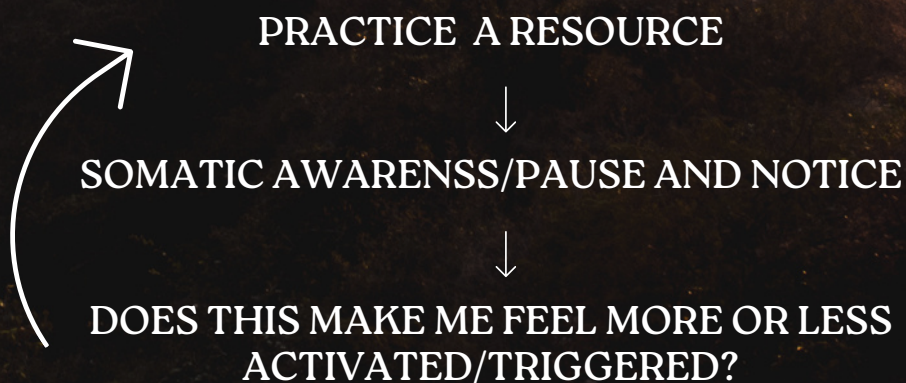
I invite you to try some regulating resources listed on the following page.

**A regulating resource is anything that registers as good to you.**

You'll note that each state requires different levels of activity. For example, if we are in sympathetic, a seated/closed-eye meditation will send us deeper into dysregulation because the body wants to move when in this state. Similarly, our breath is already relatively rapid, so we want to slow the breath down by extending the exhale.

All of these resources are things that **bring us back to presence** and help (*with consistency*) to regulate the nervous system. **A healthy nervous system can move through all four states and find its way back to ventral with ease.** If you are experiencing chronic stress or the effects of trauma, you may find that you are predominately living in a state of sympathetic, freeze or dorsal and have lost the ability to navigate back to ventral.

A key difference with our state of ventral is that we are practising the resources to **stay in ventral**, whereas when we are in sympathetic, freeze or dorsal, we are practising the exercises to work our way out of that state and back to ventral.



# LET'S REGULATE!

## VENTRAL

Any exercise you enjoy!

Enjoying a tasty home cooked meal

Connecting with others (sport, conversation, dinner, meetings, online platforms etc...)

Feeling the morning & evening sun

Spending time with friends

Massage

## SYMPATHETIC

High intensity exercise. Allow the body to move however it wants!

Pottery/wood working

Breath. Inhale 4 seconds, exhale for 8

Attend or watch a concert or comedy show, laugh, dance & enjoy!

Run errands/mow the lawn

The Voo sound   Shaking

## FREEZE

House chores like putting on a load of washing or making the bed

Giving the dog a bath or taking them for a walk

Breath. Inhale 4 seconds, exhale for 8

Lifting weights or swimming

Smell things! Engage the senses

The Voo sound   Shaking

Self Hug

## DORSAL

Shaking

Yin yoga

Holding ice

Petting an animal

The Voo sound

Self Hug

Going for a walk and saying hi to people who walk by

Drawing, weaving, painting

Breath, 2 part rapid breath. In out, In out. 1-2 rounds only. Pause and notice.



*The body always leads us home...*

If we can simply learn to trust sensation and stay with it long enough for it to reveal appropriate action, movement, insight or feeling.

*- Pat Ogden*

The more we regulate and build safe experiences for ourselves, we build our capacity, and the easier it becomes to move through those moments of dysregulation and get ourselves unstuck again.

My hope is that you found this guide to be a helpful beginning to understanding your nervous system; coupled with the practice of somatic awareness and regulating resources, you are better able to pause, notice and get curious about your triggers.

*If you have any questions or feedback all the important links are on the following page. If you'd like to explore your triggers in more detail and how they are affecting your life I offer 1:1 support.*



# NEXT STEPS

## UPON COMPLETION OF THIS WORKBOOK

### 1:1 SUPPORT

As your coach and confidant, we work together to create a profound, felt sense shift within your nervous system and build your capacity so you show up more powerfully for yourself and truly enjoy life.

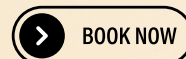
### SAY GOODBYE TO:

Trauma Triggers limiting your capacity for growth  
Chronic stress  
Self-sabotage  
Limiting beliefs  
The feeling that life is passing you by  
Feeling Stuck/Overwhelmed

### SAY HELLO TO:

Practical somatic tools for you to release the past and live the life you desire  
Creating flexibility within your nervous system, your foundation to build and sustain long-lasting change

**Book a free clarity call with me**



BRIDGET CANTARELLA  
**TRAUMA TRAINED  
SOMATIC PRACTITIONER  
& COACH**

