

November Issue: Week One

Know Your TRIGGERS

Complete this month's lead-o-meter.

It is fair to say that we are all under incredible stress this Fall. While we may cringe when someone coughs, how we each perceive this situation defines the level of stress we experience. In other words, what may be really stressful for one individual, may barely register on the stress meter for another.

What are your triggers? Getting one step ahead of our stress, and improving our coping skills, starts with being aware of what lights up our own **Automatic Nervous System (ANS)** – frankly, what ‘sets us off’ or stresses us out.

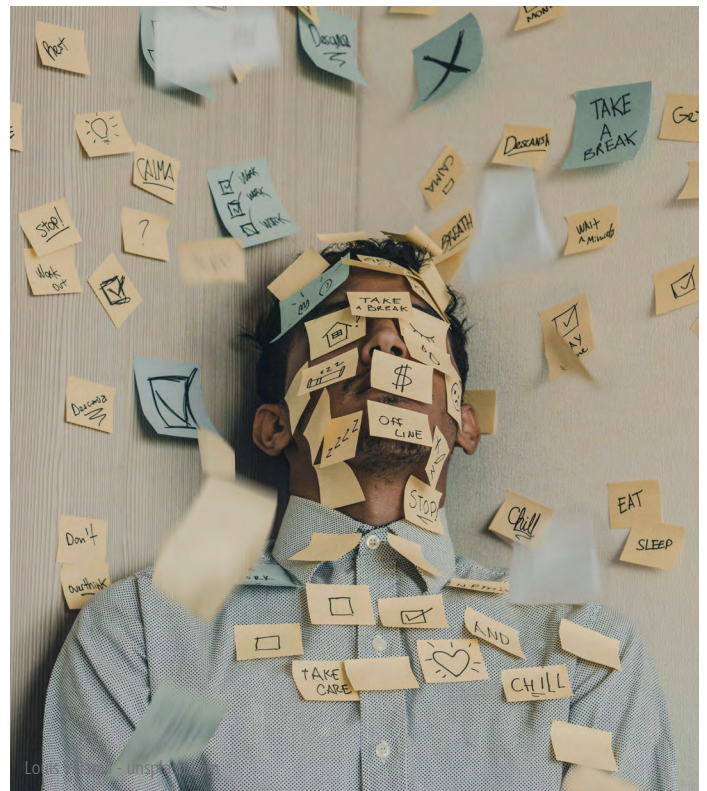
Since birth, we have been intuitively scanning our environment for cues of safety and danger. Every day, we read thousands of social cues in our environment. While interacting with others, we pick up facial expressions, tones of voice, bodily movement, and other cues. Our brains and bodies are constantly busy observing and interacting with the world and others as part of the human experience.

We are wired for connection and to help us survive, our bodies are designed and

prepared for observing, processing, and responding to our environment.

The terms 'fight or flight' and 'freeze' are typically used when discussing our ANS. However, there is a deeper view of the nervous system referred to as the *Polyvagal Theory* developed by Dr. Stephen Porges, which focuses on the vagus nerve (see the diagram on page 3).

Our ANS is comprised of two systems: the **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)** and the **Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)**.



The **vagus nerve** is one of the longest nerves in our body. It is a cranial nerve that originates in the brainstem and innervates the muscles of the throat and the circulation, respiration, digestion and elimination systems.

The vagus nerve is a major component of the PNS. 80% of its nerve fibers are sensory, meaning its major role is to bring information from the body to the brain. The continuous brain-body feedback is critical for the body's homeostasis.

When we are in a stressed or potentially anxious state, we are unable to be curious or empathetic. We are also unable to engage our prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain responsible for executive functioning, communicating, and coordinating the different functions of our brain. This essentially means we are not able to regulate our attention nor focus.

Now, let's talk about the three different nervous system states within our ANS.

Cool fact: Breathing out with a long breath is calming, as it stimulates the vagus nerve!

3 NERVOUS SYSTEM STATES

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Fight or flight is a response from the sympathetic nervous system – it's our **survival strategy**. For example, if you're running away from a cougar, this response could save your life!

The fight response can look and feel like: anger, rage, irritation, and frustration.

The flight response can look and feel like: anxiety, worry, fear, and panic.

Physiological Response:

- blood pressure, heart rate, and adrenaline increase
- digestion, pain threshold, and immune response decrease

FREEZE

Our 'freeze' state (dorsal vagal state), is part of our parasympathetic nervous system and is our most primitive system and often referred to as our **emergency state**. In this state, we completely shut down and feel hopeless.

The freeze state can look and feel like:

- feeling depressed
- conserving energy
- dissociation
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling stuck

Physiological Response:

- fuel storage and insulin activity increase
- pain threshold increases

REST & DIGEST

Rest and Digest (aka Social Engagement) state is a response from the parasympathetic system, also known as a ventral vagal state. It is our **state of safety and homeostasis**.

The rest and digest state can look and feel like:

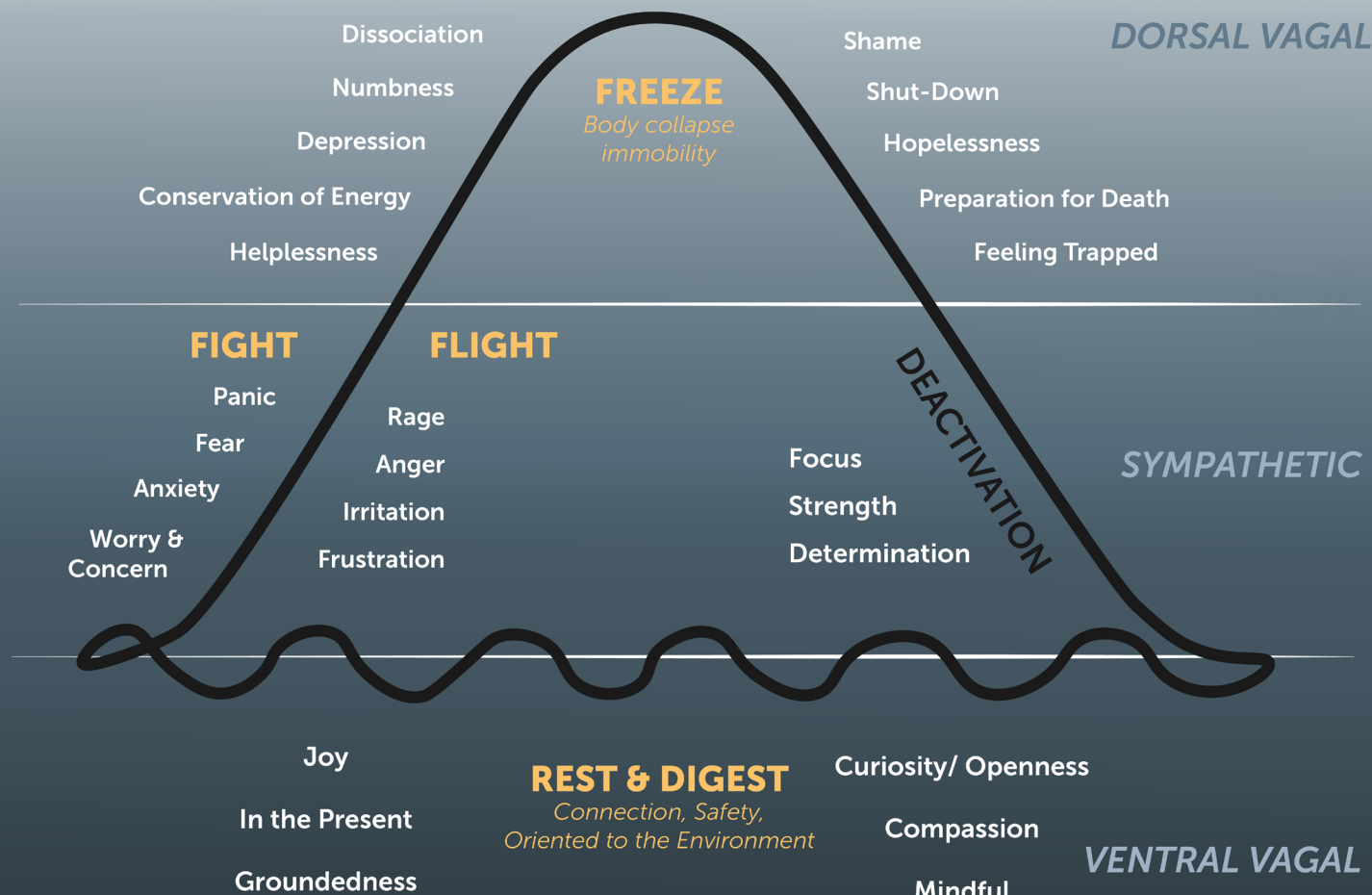
- grounded + mindful
- joyful
- curious
- empathetic + compassionate
- connected to ourselves and the world

Physiological Response:

- digestion and circulation
- resistance to infection
- immune responses
- improved ability to connect

Polyvagal Theory by Dr. Stephen W. Porges

AROUSAL INCREASES



What are your triggers?



Please take 30 seconds to complete our monthly, self-awareness questionnaire. Follow the link or scan the QR code by opening your phone camera and pointing at the code.

Complete November's Lead-o-meter!

We'll release a new lead-o-meter on the first week of every month, and at the end of the month, we will report the anonymous results!



How did you like this issue of ReCharge?

We welcome and appreciate your feedback and suggestions! [Fill out our feedback form](#) or contact [Rochelle Morandini](#).



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