

NERVOUS SYSTEM WORKBOOK

NERVOUS SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

&

HOW TO CREATE TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSES

By Vera Rother & Holystica School



Part 1

THE ASSESSMENT

Here's a fun way to learn about the Nervous System AND about yourself at the same time. Find out which State of the Nervous System (Calma, Fight, Flight, Freeze or Fawn) you may be experiencing at the moment or more generally in your life.

Instructions

Option one:

Notice how your body and mind feel right **now**

Option two:

For a more general assessment, rate what you mostly experienced in the **last few months**.

For each state, rate how well it describes your experience on a scale from 1 to 4:

1 = Not at all/Never

4 = Very strongly/Always

Trauma Responses



Fight: Confront the threat.
anger
rage
confrontation
high energy



Flight: Run away from the threat.
anxiety
panic
avoidance
high energy



Freeze: Shut down to block out the threat.
dissociation
numbness
shutdown
low energy



Fawn: Appease the threat.
people-pleasing
codependency
lack of boundaries

LET'S ASSESS

1.) Optimal Arousal - Ventral Vagal

Calm & Connected

How you might feel...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
<input type="checkbox"/> Calm, relaxed, grounded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Open and connected to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear-headed and present	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Curious, creative, or playful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Safe and at ease in my body	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Engaged and confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The signs of the body:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Steady heart rate and breathing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relaxed face, eye contact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comfortable digestion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Balanced energy levels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At peace with the world/ in flow	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SUBTOTAL FOR VENTRAL VEGAL: _____

EMOTIONAL
PHYSICAL

2.) High Arousal — Sympathetic



How you might feel...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Stressed, anxious, or irritable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Restless, on edge, difficulty to focus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wanting to move, act, or escape	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty trusting and letting go of control	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The world feels harsh or unsafe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alert, reactive, defensive or overwhelmed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The signs of the body:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Fast heartbeat, shallow breathing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Muscle tension or clenched jaw	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sweaty palms or tight chest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trouble digesting or relaxing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scanning the room, fidgeting or pacing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SUBTOTAL FOR FIGHT OR FLIGHT: _____

EMOTIONAL

PHYSICAL

3.) Low Arousal — Dorsal Vagal

a) Freeze or Shutdown



EMOTIONAL

How you might feel...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Tired or heavy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Numb, disconnected, or "spaced out"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hopeless, withdrawn, or unmotivated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hard to think clearly or care about things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World feels overwhelming, far away or muted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty making decisions/take action	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PHYSICAL

The signs of the body:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Slow heart rate or shallow breath	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Slumped posture or stillness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cold hands/feet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flat or blank facial expression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shut down, detached, or frozen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SUBTOTAL FOR FREEZE: _____

b) Fawn

Please note that “Fawn” is more of a Mixed state: sympathetic activation (anxious energy) & dorsal vagal shutdown (appeasement/freeze).

Energy goes toward monitoring others instead of internal awareness (hypervigilance to others’ moods).

This is one of the most important states, since often overlooked but common, especially in women. Please take your time and check-in honestly:

How you might feel or behave...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Trying to fit others’ moods or expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hide feelings/opinions to avoid conflict	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Over-apologize/trouble saying “no”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Focus on fixing or rescuing others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Denying own pain, needs, or discomfort	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling safest when invisible or agreeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The signs of the body:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Tightness in the chest, shoulders, jaw, or throat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collapsed posture (making yourself “smaller”)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dissociated but performing (nodding, smiling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty maintaining authentic eye contact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chronic pain/fatigue or autoimmune issues linked to constant self-suppression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SUBTOTAL FOR FAWN: _____

THE RESULTS

- Add up your scores for each category.
The category with the highest score reflects your dominant state.
- Consider if the scores in other categories also resonate; many people experience a blend of responses.

Your two highest scores: _____ & _____

Reflection

It's important to identify our subconscious ways to secure survival or security and learn that these survival resources outside of a true threat may no longer be serving us. So take a little time now to think about how you've experienced these states; then complete the following statements for each:

When _____ happens, I feel _____,
which tells me I'm in a state of _____.

When _____ happens, I feel _____,
which tells me I'm in a state of _____.

When _____ happens, I feel _____,
which tells me I'm in a state of _____.

When _____ happens, I feel _____,
which tells me I'm in a state of _____.

THE HEALING

Did you know? Depression and burnout are often forms of chronic freeze - a manifestation of an overwhelmed nervous system that has been too long in fight or flight. Chronic freeze serves as a protective mechanism against the debilitating effects of constant stress and adrenaline overload. The body is shutting down to enforce the need for rest and recalibration. By implementing gentle somatic practices and supporting energy levels through nutrition and lifestyle adjustments, individuals can gradually emerge from the frozen state and reclaim a sense of vitality and well-being.

What usually helps me return to balance? (e.g.: connection, rest):

ACTION

-
-
-
-

Small things that I can easily do right now to support my nervous system:

ACTION

-
-
-
-

Wellness

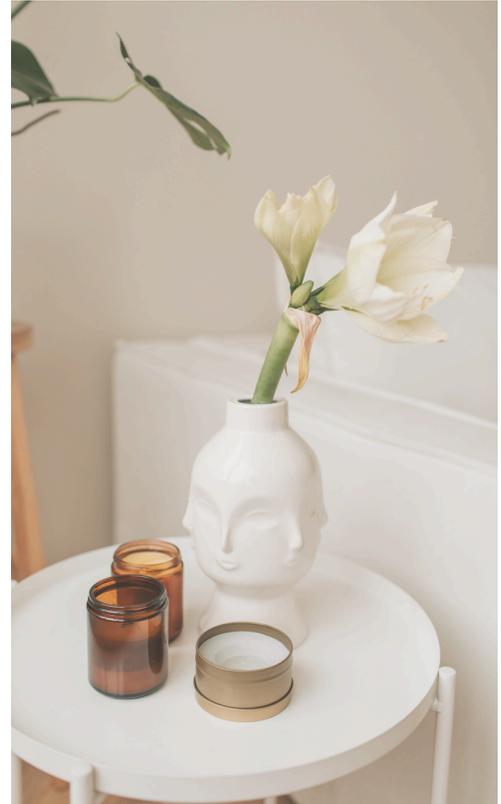
CHECKLIST

Physical activities for the week

- Somatic Movement Practice
- Dance, Sing or Humm
- Get 8 hours of sleep per night
- Yin Yoga & Myofascial Release
- Spend time in nature

Emotional activities for the week

- Journal or Morning Pages
- Tapping (EFT)
- Spend time with family/friends
- Practice Somatic Experiencing
- Do something silly, playful or creative



Commit to at least 2 activities per week. It should be something you enjoy doing - not another task on the To-Do List. Rather take small but steady baby steps, instead of pushing yourself too much.

Part 2

TRAUMA-INFORMED, SOMATIC TEACHING PRINCIPLES

- **Welcome different experiences** – remind students/clients that all physical, emotional, and energetic responses are valid. Each person's process is unique.
- **Use other somatic tools** – Soothing touch, gentle breath awareness, soft rocking, self-massage, self-hug
- **Invite curiosity rather than compliance** – encourage exploration and self-awareness instead of perfection or performance. Focus on internal experience rather than external form.
- **Prioritize safety before depth** – emphasize grounding, stability, and comfort before inviting intensity, challenge, or emotional depth. Always start your class/session with a grounding cue.
- **Offer choice and agency** – empower people to decide what feels right for their bodies. Present poses and transitions as options, not expectations.

- **Use invitational, non-directive language** – say “if it feels comfortable, you might try...” instead of “do this.” Keep cues gentle, spacious, and permission-based.
- **Maintain a neutral, non-judgmental tone** – keep feedback descriptive rather than evaluative. Avoid hierarchical praise and support self-trust and curiosity instead.
- **Encourage interoception** – guide people to notice their internal sensations, breath, and boundaries rather than striving for specific shapes or outcomes.
- **Validate emotional and somatic responses** – acknowledge what arises without trying to fix, interpret, or minimize. Allow emotion to be part of the practice.
- **Model self-regulation and calm presence** – your grounded tone, pacing, and energy can co-regulate the room.
- **Create predictability and transparency** – describe what’s coming next so students can orient and feel safe during transitions or closings.

- **Center consent and autonomy** – make touch, assists, or partner work always optional and clearly communicated. Before and during the class!
- **Minimize potential triggers** – be mindful of sensory input (lighting, sound, proximity) and avoid sudden or invasive changes.
- **Encourage connection over correction** – focus on cultivating presence, awareness, and relationship rather than perfect alignment/performance.
- **Reflect on Your Own Patterns & Commit to your transformation** – students/clients mirror your nervous system. Authentic embodiment is key.
- **Close class/sessions gently and supportive** – allow time for grounding, integration, and reorientation before students/clients leave the space.

OPTIONAL PRO TIPS:

- **Suggest to stay in End-Relaxation**/Grounding Practice or Meditation longer (if you have time)
- **Offer support and availability** for questions after the class if emotions came up (in person or via message)
- **Honor your boundaries:** Answering some questions is fine. Yet, for extended emotional support, students should be invited to book private sessions (with you or a therapist)
- **Give tips on how to integrate** the experience: Journal, Co-regulation (Hugs or Self-hug in Embryo Pose)
- **Invite them to stay present** with what is and recommend to not use the phone/talk right away etc.
- **Refer if necessary** – Know your limits. If a student/clients shows signs of deep distress or shares experiences beyond your education, encourage them to seek additional support from a qualified therapist.

CUEING FOR TRAUMA RESPONSES

Trauma often shows up in the body through the protective survival responses:

Fight, Flight, Freeze or Fawn.

As a Facilitator in any Health related setting, it is crucial to notice the signs of these responses early. By tuning in and responding mindfully, you can help students or clients return to a sense of safety and reduce the risk of deeper dysregulation or retraumatization.

1.) Fight Response

Might show up as:

- Physical Tension (clinched Fists, Jaws or furrowed brow)
- Frustration, Resistance, Need for Control, Complaining
- Forcing themselves deeper into a pose, often beyond their physical limits

If you notice students in one of these states, try using following cues:

CUEING FOR FIGHT/FLIGHT RESPONSE

1

“Avoid activating your muscles. No forcing, pushing or controlling. There is nothing to do, nothing to plan, nothing to analyze.
Just be. Be here now.”

2

“Notice the sensations in your body. Without labeling as good or bad, just observe the qualities: is it pulling, tingling or tensing?
What happens if you accept these sensations...maybe you can surrender to what is and soften a bit more into the pose?”

3

“Feel free to express whatever you feel inside. Let it out with a sigh. You can even voice frustration.”

4

“Instead of going deeper, see what happens if you let the shape come to you. Allow gravity to do the work. Notice where you can soften your jaw, your hands, or the space behind the eyes. Even a small release can shift everything.”

2.) FLIGHT RESPONSE

Might show up as:

- Restlessness, can't be still or relaxed in the pose
- Can't keep the eyes closed/ urge to look around sometimes
- Frequently changing poses or coming out early

1

"If you feel restless, try to deepen your breath. Make the exhales longer."

2

"You're welcome to close your eyes, or keep your eyes open eyes to orient yourself in the space—if that feels more safe."

3

"Slow, conscious movement can also be an option if stillness feels too much."

2.) FREEZE RESPONSE

Might show up as:

- Dissociation, Dreamy/Spacey, Numb
- Delayed reaction to cues
- Blank eyes, zoned-out expression
- Not adjusting pose despite discomfort

1

“If you feel overwhelmed or stuck you can slowly move your fingers or toes.

Then put your hands on the chest and/or belly to remind the body that you are safe.

Once you feel ok again you can move back to the pose/next pose.”

2

“If it feels safe, you can create more space in your body through your inhale. Allow anything to come up. Whatever emotion, sensation or memory arises is welcome here. Just witness it neutrally.”

2.) FAWN RESPONSE

Might show up as:

- Trying to please teacher or other students (Nodding or smiling even when in visible discomfort)
- Adapting to perceived group dynamics
- Suppressing needs/sounds to not disturb
- Trying to stay in positions that they are clearly not comfortable with

1 “Check in: Are you really comfortable? What do YOU need right Now? The master is inside you and you can adapt the poses to your own physical needs.”

2 “This is a safe space. Please express what is coming up. You can use your voice to sigh or cry. If you need a break you can always get out of the pose, come to me for extra support or leave the room for a moment.”

3 “Trust yourself—come out of the pose whenever you feel ready.”

WHY SOMATIC TRAUMA-INFORMED FACILITATION MATTERS NOW?

The truth is: safety and deep transformation is rare to find in classes. It takes both knowledge and true embodiment.

In a world where stress, disconnection, and unresolved trauma manifest in both the mind and body, the need for trauma-informed, body-based healing approaches has never been greater.

Traditional talk therapies and cognitive approaches, as well as fitness-oriented Vinyasa classes, while valuable, often fail to address the deeply stored imprints of trauma within the nervous system and body.

We must learn how to process emotions physically, not just by talking about them intellectually.

At the same time, it's essential to avoid forcing emotions to surface through intense methods (like holotropic breathwork) without knowing how to handle them.

This is why a trauma-informed, somatic education is no longer optional — it's essential.

Yin Yoga Classes are often the first space where students realize, that they carry something that needs more attention. It is common to have at least one person crying in a class – if you are able to guide them deep into the body while at the same time making them feel safe enough to open up. Offering students additional support is not only professional but necessary in Yoga Classes that go beyond a “Workout”. This isn't just about teaching. It's about creating spaces where people can heal, reconnect, and thrive.

When to use the tools?

While these somatic tools are designed to support students who may be carrying trauma, they are just as powerful in any group class. With some practice, you will seamlessly weave them into your classes to create an atmosphere of calm and safety for everyone. This means you don't have to single out students or change your entire teaching style.

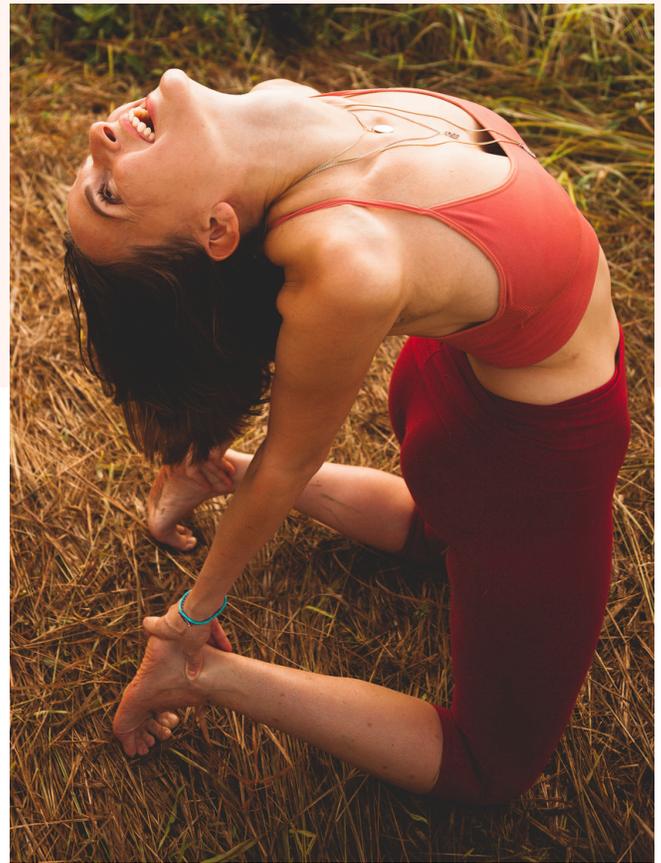
Don't worry about reading the room right: Any of the given Cues will have a positive effect on the entire group.

About THE AUTHOR

My name is Vera. I am a certified psychosomatic counselor, movement/yoga therapist, and bodyworker with 10+ years of professional experience (working both in groups & 1:1). My personal healing journey spans 15+ years, having received countless hours of deep somatic therapy myself.

As one of the first step I help you regulate and stabilize your nervous system, so your body feels safe enough to transform:

- Trauma & Childhood Wounds
 - subconscious emotions
- old programming & negative thinking patterns
 - ancestral baggage



My approach is body-based and holistic, using:

- EFT (tapping)
- Intuitive movement & voicing
- Meditation, breathing techniques & spiritual practices
- Psychological interviewing techniques
 - Integrative Shadow Work
- Fascial yoga & fascial release massage

DO YOU NEED
MORE HELP?

SCHEDULE A CALL



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