

How to Create a Pathways to Regulation Menu

Adapted from Deb Dana, LCSW

We've all been hearing a lot of suggestions about how to manage life during the pandemic. Some ideas will be helpful, others will not be. The key is to learn to listen to your own nervous system and find out what it needs.

Whenever you hear a new idea or suggestion about what you "should" be doing, stop, say the idea out loud, and listen to what your nervous system has to say.

When you consider a suggestion, does your nervous system say YES, NO, or MAYBE?

Anything that's a YES or a MAYBE can go on your personal menu.

Now, each idea can go into one of three categories on your menu, which are the three states of the nervous system:

Dorsal Immobilization

This is when you're feeling hopeless, out of energy, a sense of despair, or like you want to give up



Sympathetic Mobilization

This is when you're feeling a flood of energy, and you're driven to do something



Vagal Regulation

This is when you're feeling connected, creative, and compassionate.



The idea is to have a list of helpful ideas at-the-ready for each state of your nervous system.

Here are questions that you can ask yourself to figure out where each activity belongs on the menu:

- Does this idea feel like it could bring a gentle return of energy? Then put it in dorsal.
- Does this idea feel like it could help me discharge energy in a safe, organized way? Then put it in sympathetic.
- Does this idea feel like it could help me savor and deepen a safe, connected, or creative experience? Then put it in ventral.

Once you start adding ideas to your menu, keep it in a place where you'll see it and remember to use it (like the refrigerator).

Now let's get started . . .

My Pathways to Regulation Menu

States of Your Nervous System

Dorsal Immobilization

Sympathetic Mobilization

Vagal Regulation

What Each State Feels Like

Lack of energy, despair, hopelessness, giving up

Flood of energy, driven to do something

“I’m OK, and I can manage right now.” Connected, creative, compassionate

Question to Ask Yourself When Placing an Idea on Your Menu

“Does this feel like it will bring a gentle return of energy?”

“Does this feel like it will help me discharge energy in a safe, organized way?”

“Does this feel like it will help me savor and deepen a connected or creative experience?”

My Menu