

Therapist Nervous System Regulation Toolkit



Before, During, and After Sessions (Because You're Part of the System Too)

Focus: nervous system regulation in therapy

Let's Say the Quiet Part Out Loud

You are not a neutral container.

You are a **nervous system in the room**.

Which means:

- Clients feel you before they fully hear you

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- Your pace shapes their pace
- Your regulation (or lack of it) influences the entire session

No pressure.

Just... awareness.

This isn't about being perfectly calm or endlessly grounded.

It's about being **aware enough to return to yourself when you drift.**

BEFORE SESSION

Set the Ground (Not the Performance)

You don't need a ritual.

You need about 30–60 seconds of intentional presence.

1. The 30-Second Reset

AKA: Arrive in Your Own Body

- Feet flat on the floor
- Inhale through your nose
- Exhale slightly longer than you inhaled
- Drop your shoulders (they're probably already tense)

No deep breathing marathon required.

Just enough to let your system know: *we're here now.*

2. Orient to Reality

AKA: You Are Not in Your Last Session

Look around your space and quietly note:

- Where you are

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- What time it is
- One thing that feels neutral or steady

Your nervous system responds well to facts.

Give it some.

3. Set an Intention (Not a Goal)

Ask yourself:

“What kind of presence do I want to bring into this session?”

Not:

- “What do I need to fix?”
- “What insight do I need to land?”

Just presence.

That’s enough.

DURING SESSION

Stay With Yourself While You Stay With Them

This is where things get real.

Because no matter how grounded you felt before the session...

something will shift.

1. Track Your Own Cues

AKA: Your Body Is Giving You Data

Notice:

- Are you holding your breath?

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- Did your jaw just tighten?
- Are you leaning forward like you're about to solve something?

That's not a problem.

That's information.

2. Micro-Regulation (Keep It Subtle)

You don't need to pause the session and announce your breathing technique.

Try:

- Slowing your speech by about 10%
- Letting your exhale land fully
- Softening your tone instead of increasing it

Clients will feel this shift immediately... even if they can't name it.

3. Watch the Urge to Fix

This is the big one.

When a client becomes dysregulated, there's often a pull to:

- Ask more questions
- Offer insight
- Move things forward quickly

Pause.

Ask instead:

"What's happening in the nervous system right now?"

Sometimes the most regulating thing you can do...

is stop doing.

4. If You Get Activated Mid-Session

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Because you will.

Here's your reset:

- Feel your feet on the ground
- Take one slower breath
- Widen your awareness (include the room, not just the client)

You don't need to disappear your activation.

You just need to stay **present enough not to lead from it.**

5. Co-Regulation Without Overfunctioning

You are not responsible for regulating your client.

You are responsible for **not dysregulating the space further.**

That's a very different job.

Stay steady.

Stay present.

Let their system borrow what it needs.

AFTER SESSION

Close the Loop (So You Don't Carry It All Day)

This is the part most therapists skip.

And then wonder why everything blends together by session five.

1. Physically Reset

AKA: You Are Allowed to Move

- Stand up

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- Stretch
- Roll your shoulders
- Shake out your hands

Your body needs a clear signal that something just ended.

2. 30-Second Debrief

Keep it simple. No over-analysis.

Ask:

- What state was the client in?
- What state was I in?
- What shifted (if anything)?

Done.

You're not writing a thesis.

You're building awareness.

3. Transition Ritual

AKA: Tell Your Nervous System "We're Done Here"

Pick one:

- Sip water slowly
- Step outside for a minute
- Wash your hands
- Look out a window

Something small. Something consistent.

This matters more than it seems.

When You Start Overthinking This

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Because you will.

Bring it back to this:

👉 **Pace** – Am I rushing or stuck?

👉 **Presence** – Am I here or drifting?

👉 **Pressure** – Is this too much, too little, or just enough?

That's your anchor.

Not perfection.

Not performance.

Just awareness.

A Note for Neurodivergent Therapists

This matters.

Your regulation may not look like:

- Stillness
- Slow speech
- Minimal movement

And that's okay.

Regulation is not conformity.

If your system regulates through:

- Movement
- Fidgeting
- Shifting posture
- Pausing and re-engaging

You're not doing it wrong.

You're working with your system—not against it.

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Final Note

You don't need to be perfectly regulated to be effective.

You need to be **aware enough to come back**.

Again and again.

Because your presence is not something you perform.

It's something the client's nervous system feels.

And that?

That's part of the work.

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