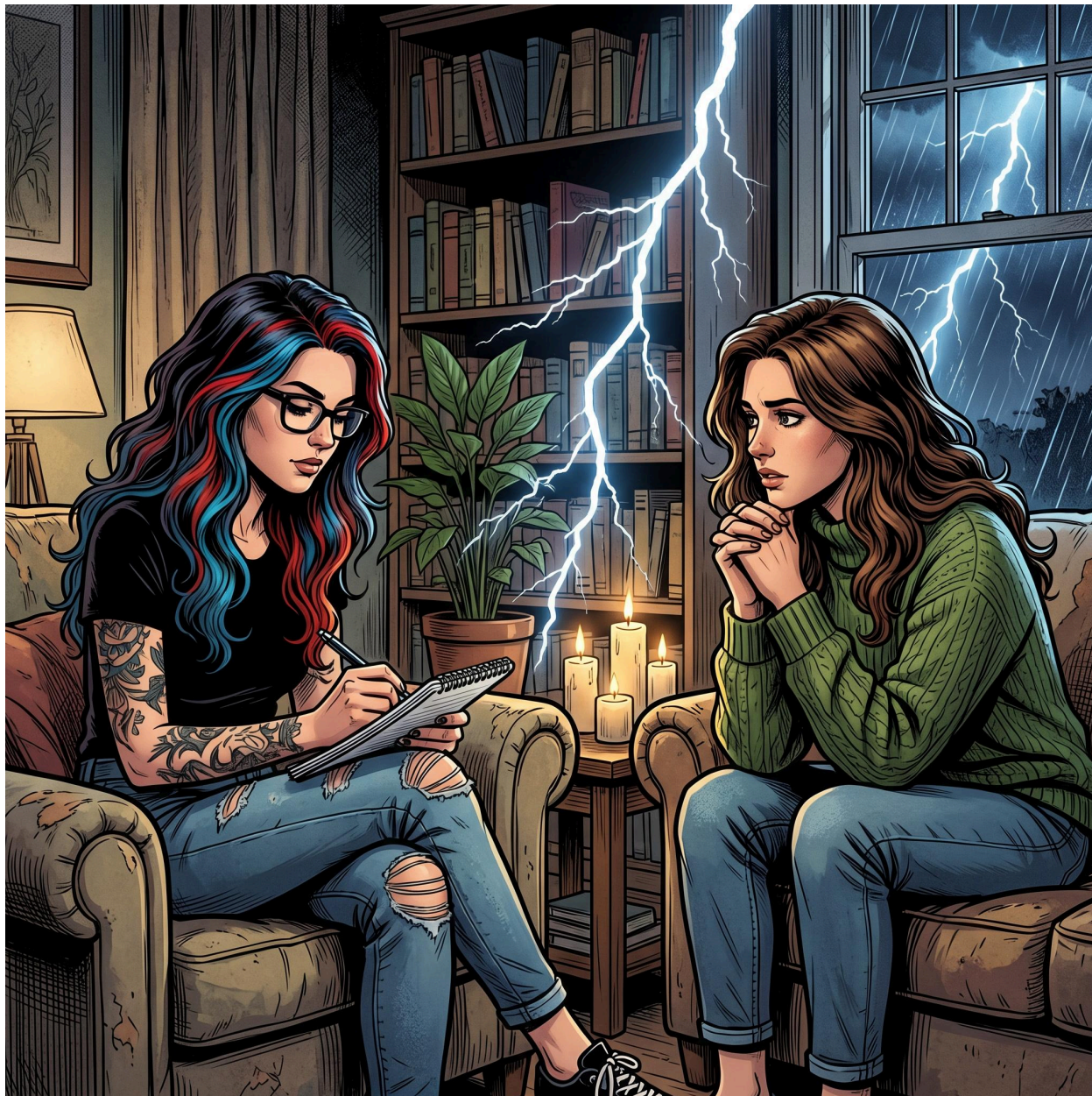


Listening Beneath the Words



Jen Hyatt, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist #99355

www.stormhavenwellness.com | www.thenerdietherapist.com

A Therapist Nervous System Reflection Guide

Therapy was never only verbal.

Long before insight arrives, nervous systems begin speaking through breath, pacing, silence, posture, activation, shutdown, tension, humor, eye contact, movement, stillness, and the thousand subtle physiological shifts unfolding beneath language every day inside the therapy room.

Many therapists are trained to track cognition first. Symptoms. Patterns. Conceptualizations. Interventions. Meanwhile, the body continues participating in the conversation whether anyone acknowledges it or not.

Over time, many clinicians begin realizing something both illuminating and deeply unsettling:

The room is not shaped only by what is being said.

It is shaped by what is being carried.

This reflection guide is not designed as a productivity tool or a checklist for becoming a “perfectly regulated therapist.” Human nervous systems do not operate with permanent elegance. The goal is not flawless attunement.

Instead, the invitation is noticing.

Noticing when presence remains available.

Recognizing the moments you quietly leave yourself.

Learning to hear what your body communicates before the mind fully explains it.

Becoming aware of the relational ecosystem unfolding underneath the words.

Move through these prompts slowly. Return to them between sessions, during supervision, after difficult clinical days, or whenever the work begins feeling more performative than inhabited.

Before Entering the Room

What state am I entering this session in?

Jen Hyatt, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist #99355

www.stormhavenwellness.com | www.thenerdietherapist.com

Pause before opening the door.

Not as performance.

Not as forced mindfulness.

Simply as honesty.

- What is happening inside my body right now?
- Which emotion feels closest to the surface?
- Am I grounded, activated, distracted, exhausted, numb, rushed, emotionally open?
- What am I carrying into this room that does not belong to the client?
- Which sensations have I ignored today?
- Am I arriving fully, or only professionally?

Sometimes awareness alone changes the quality of presence.

Listening Beneath the Narrative

What is the body communicating alongside the words?

As sessions unfold, begin noticing what exists underneath the content itself.

- What happens in the client's breathing during emotionally charged moments?
- Does the body freeze, collapse inward, mobilize, disconnect, fidget, brace, or become unusually still?
- Which shifts appear right before vulnerability emerges?
- What emotions seem easily accessible?
- Which emotions disappear the moment they begin surfacing?
- Which physiological patterns repeat across sessions?

The nervous system often tells the story before language fully catches up.

The Therapist's Nervous System

Jen Hyatt, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist #99355

www.stormhavenwellness.com | www.thenerdietherapist.com

What happens inside me while sitting with this client?

Therapists are not detached observers floating outside the relational field. Your nervous system enters the room too.

Without judgment, notice:

- When does urgency appear?
- Which dynamics make me over-function?
- What client presentations cause me to speak faster?
- When does silence become difficult to tolerate?
- Which moments pull me toward fixing instead of witnessing?
- Which clients feel easiest to stay embodied with?
- Which interactions make me quietly leave myself?

Awareness is not failure.

Awareness is information.

Pacing and Protection

Am I following the nervous system, or trying to outrun it?

In nervous system-informed work, pacing becomes deeply ethical.

Sometimes therapists unintentionally move faster than the body is prepared to go because activation creates anxiety in the room. At other times, clients move toward vulnerability while simultaneously needing protection, pause, orientation, or choice.

Reflect gently:

- Am I slowing down enough to notice what is happening physiologically?
- Did I follow the client's process, or my own discomfort?
- Was grounding offered collaboratively or reactively?
- Did this session feel expansive, overwhelming, avoidant, connected, fragmented?
- Which signals suggested the nervous system needed more time?

Not every silence requires interpretation.

Jen Hyatt, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist #99355

www.stormhavenwellness.com | www.thenerdietherapist.com

Certain forms of activation do not need immediate deactivation.

Some defenses are not ready to be dismantled yet.

Protection exists for a reason.

Repair After Misattunement

What happens when I miss something?

Therapists misattune sometimes.

A moment gets rushed.

Activation becomes misread.

Assumptions replace curiosity.

Emotion gets interrupted unintentionally.

The body communicates something important while the conversation moves past it.

Rupture is not the failure.

What happens afterward matters far more.

Reflect honestly:

- Which moments in session felt slightly off?
- Did defensiveness emerge internally?
- Was I able to return with curiosity?
- Did I acknowledge the rupture directly or quietly move past it?
- How did the room shift after repair?

Repair teaches the nervous system something many clients rarely experienced growing up: conflict does not automatically end connection. Misattunement does not always become abandonment.

Jen Hyatt, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist #99355

www.stormhavenwellness.com | www.thenerdietherapist.com

After the Session Ends

What is my body still carrying?

Sometimes the nervous system leaves session long after the session itself ends.

Pause before moving immediately into the next task.

- What sensations remain inside my body right now?
- Which emotional residue am I carrying?
- What activation belongs to me?
- What activation belongs to the work itself?
- What does my nervous system need before continuing?
- What have I normalized that my body may quietly be struggling to sustain?

Human physiology was never designed to metabolize endless emotional intensity without recovery.

Returning to Yourself

Therapists spend years helping other people reconnect with themselves. Somewhere along the way, many quietly drift away from their own bodies in the process.

This work is not about becoming perfectly regulated, endlessly calm, or emotionally invulnerable. Human nervous systems were never designed to operate with permanent grace under pressure, no matter how polished the profession sometimes expects clinicians to appear.

Instead, embodiment asks something quieter and far more difficult: remaining inhabitable to yourself while sitting beside the suffering of others.

Healing rarely requires perfection. More often, the nervous system responds to enough safety, pacing, honesty, repair, curiosity, and presence that neither person inside the room has to disappear from themselves in order to stay connected.

Perhaps that is the deeper invitation beneath nervous system-informed work after all.

Beyond learning how to listen differently to clients, therapists slowly begin learning how to stop abandoning themselves while they listen.

Jen Hyatt, LMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist #99355

www.stormhavenwellness.com | www.thenerdietherapist.com