



The Nervous System Advantage

Toolbox

THECHANGELAB

FROM THE MICHELLEMCQUAID GROUP

THE NEW NORMAL

You know that feeling when everything seems to be changing at once? When you can't quite put your finger on why work suddenly feels different, relationships have started to feel strained, and nothing seems as predictable as it used to be? You're not imagining it.

We're living through a supercycle of change - where technological, social, geopolitical, climate, and economic shifts are colliding and amplifying each other

It's not just the pace of change that's overwhelming us. It's the pace AND the complexity, interacting in ways we've never experienced before. And we're only at the start of a long period of change that will challenge us all.

Traditional ways of managing change weren't built for this kind of interconnected chaos.

This is creating constant "Oh FUD!" moments—those overwhelming waves of fear, uncertainty, and doubt that are causing many of us to quietly crack. Where we're doing okay on the outside but inside increasingly feel like we're falling apart. We say "I'm fine" when we're anything but. We say "I'll take care of it" when we're already drowning.

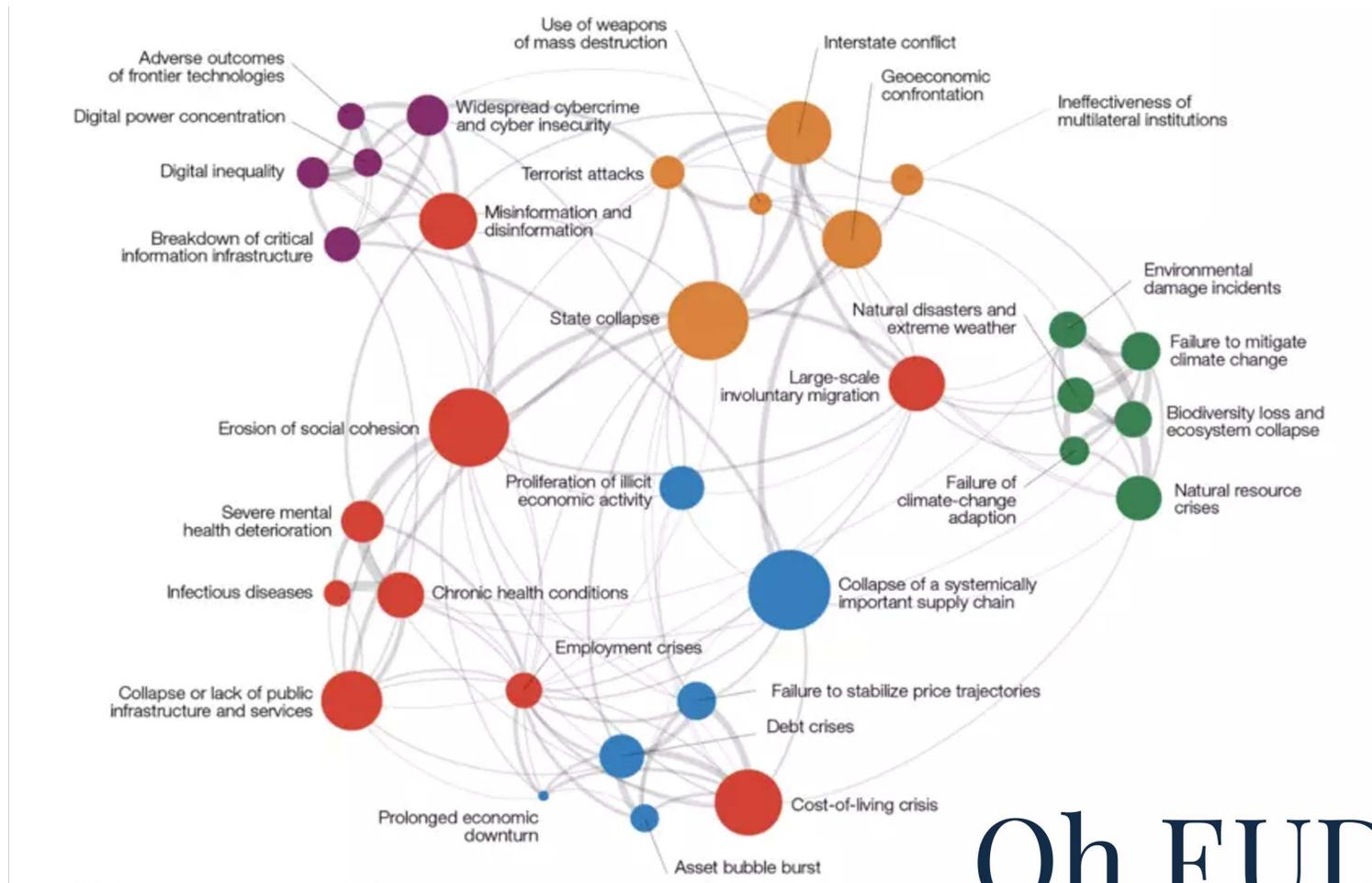
This isn't a personal failing. It's not that you're not resilient enough or not trying hard enough. It's a healthy nervous system response to an unprecedented situation. And your feelings about all of this? They're not problems to suppress or fix. They're valuable data about what's working and what isn't—about what you need to navigate what's ahead.

This playbook will teach you three skills to honor your feelings so you can navigate change without quietly cracking:

- **SEE:** Learn to decode your nervous system signals—why you react the way you do, and what your brain is trying to tell you about safety.
- **SOOTHE:** Build a take-anywhere toolkit of body-based practices that help you calm your nervous system when it's activated—because your body has to settle before your thinking can follow.
- **SETTLE:** Learn to trust yourself when challenged—to stay with yourself instead of abandoning yourself when things get hard.

These aren't feel-good practices. They're neurological necessities for navigating the complexity and pace of change without breaking under it. And what you learn here, you can use for yourself and share with others.

The Supercycle Of Change



Oh FUD!

The World Economic Forum, Global Risks Perception Survey 2022 2023

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

What you'll find in this playbook is a process. **SEE** helps you notice what's happening in your nervous system. **SOOTHE** gives you body-based tools to calm it. **SETTLE** helps you trust yourself when things get hard. Each step makes the next one possible.

The tools themselves are tiny—things you can try in meetings, at your desk, during difficult conversations. No one needs to know you're doing them.

There are two ways to use them:

- **REACTIVE:** When you're already stressed or overwhelmed. You notice something's off and you reach for a tool. Sometimes it helps. Sometimes you'll have "I wish I'd done that" moments afterwards. Both count. Even noticing you needed something is training your brain.
- **PROACTIVE:** Before you need them. You explore the tools when you're calm so they become familiar. Then when things get hard, reaching for them feels more natural. You're building the muscle before you need it.

Learning to work with your nervous system is like learning any new skill. It takes practice. It takes repetition. It takes patience. Some days you'll nail it. Some days you won't. Some days you'll completely forget. Keep going. Your nervous system learns through experience—every small attempt is teaching it that there's another way.

When you get stuck, it helps to know what's actually going on underneath. Dr James Prochaska found three predictable factors that derail change. We call them the three derailers.

"I DON'T WANT TO..."

This isn't laziness—it's how our brains work. We invest energy in what feels meaningful and conserve it for everything else. Until these practices feel like something you want to do rather than should do, there's no real forward movement.

Ask yourself: Why is this worth doing well?

"I DON'T KNOW HOW TO..."

This isn't incompetence—it's our brain's need for certainty. When we can't see the whole path, we stall. We wait for clarity that rarely comes. Sometimes the only way to figure out what works is to try something small, see what you learn, and then keep building on it.

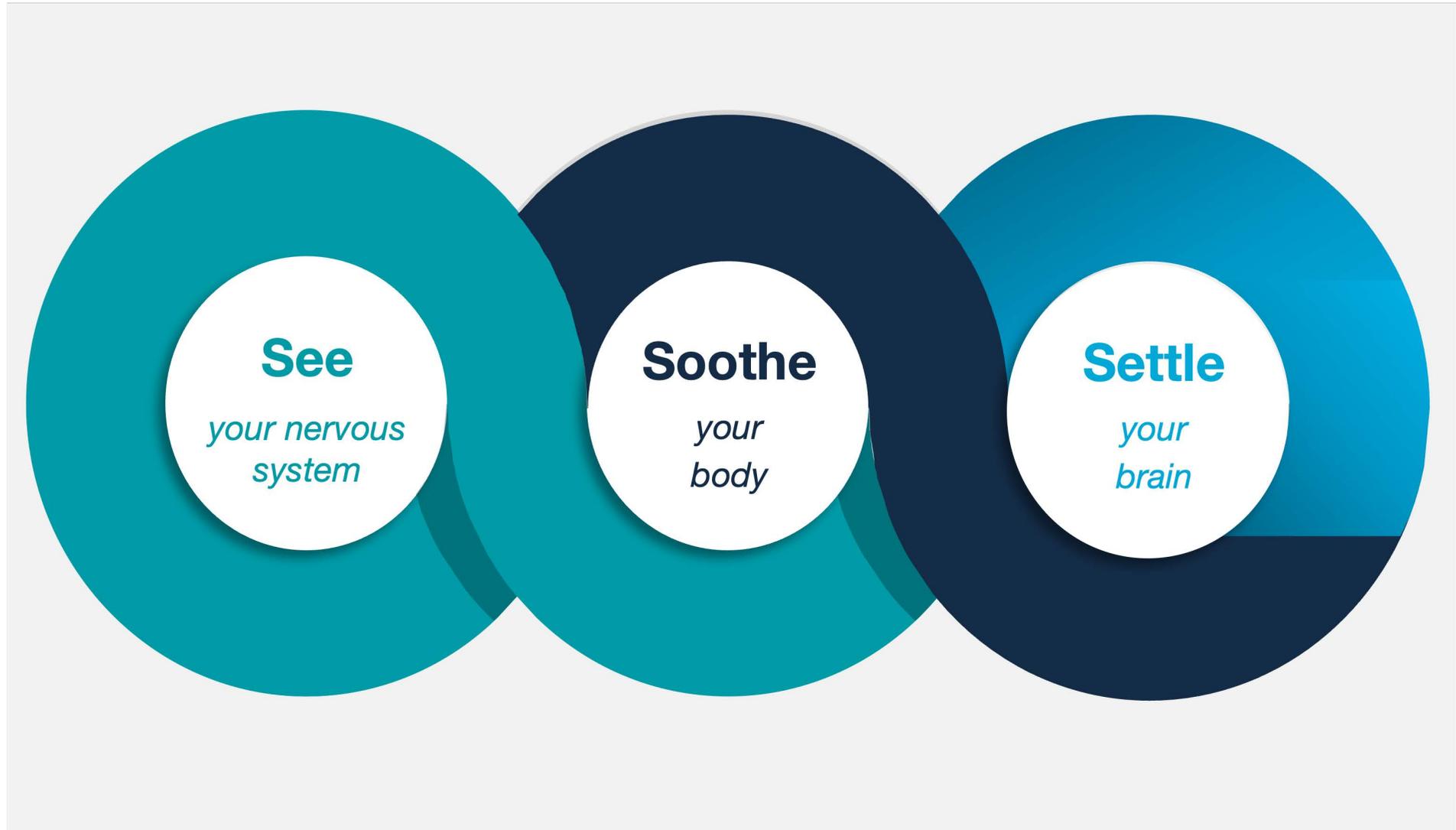
Ask yourself: What is the next small step?

"I DON'T THINK I CAN..."

This isn't a lack of commitment—it's what past disappointment does to confidence. When we've tried and failed, it's easier to stay in "maybe one day" than to risk finding out we're not good enough. Your strengths—the things you're good at and enjoy doing—are evidence you can do hard things.

Ask yourself: Which of your strengths can you draw on?

The Nervous System Advantage



SEE: WHAT YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM KNOWS

Your brain's number one job is to keep you alive. One of the ways it does this is by constantly taking in information—from the world around you and from inside your body—and asking: Am I safe enough or not safe enough to handle what's happening right now?

Your nervous system spreads the word throughout your body. It connects your brain to your heart, your gut, your muscles, your breath—and depending on the answer, it changes how they all work together. For example, when your brain decides you're:

- **Safe enough**—your nervous system switches on its *connection circuit*. Your heart beats steadily. Your breathing stays calm. Blood and oxygen stay available to the thinking part of your brain. It's like all the lights are on upstairs making it easier for you to be curious, creative, compassionate, calm, and courageous. This draws you toward exploration, bonding, and belonging.
- **Not safe enough**—your nervous system switches on its *protection circuit*. Your heart beats faster. Your breathing quickens. More of your blood and oxygen move out toward your arms and legs, ready to fuel your stress response. It's like the lights upstairs have dimmed making it hard to do our clearest and calmest thinking.

By learning how to see and support your nervous system as it fluctuates between these two circuits, you can build the self-awareness and skills you need to stay grounded, connected, and resilient as you navigate life's challenges. To better understand how your nervous system is functioning, Dr. Ann Kelley and Sue Marriott suggest imagining yourself moving between zones that exist on a continuum—becoming more intense the less safe you feel.

GREEN ZONE: Trust Yourself

When you trust that you'll show up for yourself, advocate for yourself, and ask for help if you need it—your connection circuit is fully online. In this zone, you can tolerate distress and navigate difficult emotions while maintaining connection—to yourself, to others, to the present moment. Your ability to stay grounded when things get difficult creates the psychological safety that allows real collaboration, honest feedback, and creative problem-solving to flourish.

BLUE ZONE: Avoid Vulnerability

When the risk of vulnerability becomes too high, your nervous system down-regulates into freeze and flight mode. You perfect the art of being 'fine'—dismissing help, intellectualizing feelings, and maintaining rigid independence. Tasks get done, boxes get checked, but authentic needs go unmet. In protecting yourself from the discomfort of vulnerability, you also cut yourself off from the connection and support that could actually help you feel safer.

RED ZONE: Avoid Abandonment

When you fear not being respected, valued, or included, your nervous system up-regulates into fawn or fight mode. You become hypervigilant to any sign you don't matter or are a risk—a delayed response means rejection, a neutral expression means disapproval, a 'no' means you're not valued. This drives you to exhaust yourself trying to earn your place through people-pleasing, controlling outcomes, or provoking confrontations to ensure you're still needed. In your frantic efforts to secure belonging, you often overwhelm the very people whose acceptance you seek.

How Does Your Nervous System Respond?

| | BLUE ZONE <i>Avoid Vulnerability</i> | GREEN ZONE <i>Trust We're Safe Enough</i> | RED ZONE <i>Avoid Abandonment</i> |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| SOUNDS LIKE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I'm fine!○ I don't mind.○ Just leave me be. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I'm feeling ...○ I'm hearing you say ...○ Could we ... | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I'll take care of it!○ We need to talk now!○ You never/always... |
| FEELS LIKE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Being reasonable○ Getting on with things○ Being independent | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Clear + calm○ Compassionate○ Connected | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Being preoccupied○ Urgent high stakes○ Scared + anxious |
| LOOKS LIKE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Disengaged/withdrawn○ Distrustful○ Disconnected | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Curious + confident○ Creative○ Courageous | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ People pleasing○ Prodding/controlling○ Provoking others |

SOOTHE: CALMING YOUR BODY

When you notice your protection circuit has taken over, most of us try to think our way back to calm. "Just relax. You've got this." But it rarely works. Here's why: your body has to settle before your thinking can follow.

Think of your nervous system like a toddler having a tantrum. You wouldn't tell a distressed toddler to "reframe your perspective." That would be ridiculous. A toddler needs to be soothed—held, rocked, calmed—before they can hear anything you're saying. Your nervous system is the same.

This is why body-based (somatic) practices work when thinking alone doesn't. Physical signals—movement, sound, touch—activate your vagus nerve, your body's natural calming mechanism. They're direct communications to your nervous system that you are safe enough.

What makes these tiny nudges so powerful is their availability—you can use them anywhere, anytime. In a tense meeting. During a difficult conversation. At your desk when you're overwhelmed. No one needs to know you're doing them.

Try these when you need to signal safety to your nervous system:

- **BREATHE SLOWLY:** Take a slow breath in for about six seconds, then out for six seconds. This rhythm brings your brain, lungs, and heart into sync—like a remote control for your nervous system. If counting feels stressful, just breathe naturally and pause gently at the end of each exhale.
- **LOOK AROUND:** When you're stuck in protection mode, your vision often narrows. Gently broaden your peripheral vision by slowly looking around your space. This simple act signals to your nervous system that you're safe enough to take in your whole environment, immediately beginning to calm your threat detection system.
- **HMMM SOUND:** When stressed, your vocal cords tighten. Making a gentle "hmmm" sound creates a reflective pause while the vibration loosens your throat and resonates in your chest, soothing your vagus nerve. This simple sound can help you step out of worry loops and invite curiosity back in.
- **HOLD YOUR WRIST :** Place one hand gently over the opposite wrist and breathe slowly for at least six seconds. This simple self-touch reduces stress hormones while increasing oxytocin, your body's natural calming hormone. You can do this seated, standing, with arms crossed in front or clasped behind—whatever feels most comforting to you.
- **CURL YOUR TOES:** When anxious, your body wants to move but fighting this urge creates more tension. Try this small, slow movement: inhale and gently stretch your toes wide, then exhale and slowly curl them tight. The smaller and slower the movement, the more your brain must focus on it, naturally interrupting anxious thoughts and bringing you back to your body.
- **SHAKE YOUR BODY :** Gently shake your body like your favorite animal—maybe a dog shaking off water or a bird ruffling its feathers. This primal movement helps complete the stress cycle and release tension. Animals naturally shake after threat; we can learn from their wisdom.

Just remember, ambition has no place here. You're not performing—you're just listening to what your body needs and learning about what soothes your nervous system. Your inner toddler doesn't need you to be perfect. It just needs you to show up and not abandon yourself.

Do You Need A Tiny Somatic Nudge?



SETTLE: LEARNING TO TRUST YOURSELF

Even when you've learned how to calm your nervous system, often the relief is short lived. Something happens—a comment, a memory, a deadline—and your protection circuit fires right back up. You soothe, you settle, you tip back into protection mode. Understanding why this keeps happening is the final step to learning to trust yourself in any situation.

Often, the trigger isn't outside you. It's inside. When your brain decides you're not safe enough, it turns your stress response inward—attacking yourself with criticism, fleeing into shame, freezing in rumination. Right when you most need to stay with yourself, you abandon yourself instead.

Settling your brain means learning to stay. The way back is curiosity—it signals to your brain that you're safe enough to get interested instead of defensive. Three tools can help.

PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

Why does your brain turn on you? Because it thinks self-criticism is the fastest way back to safety. If it's hard enough on you, you'll get back in line. You won't make that mistake again.

But your brain isn't calculating the long-term cost. Research across every domain—work, school, relationships, health—found the same pattern: the more people criticized themselves, the slower their progress and the less likely they were to reach their goals. Self-criticism doesn't keep you safe. It undermines your confidence and wears you down.

So what helps your brain feel safe enough to keep your nervous system connected—even as you bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals, or fail?

Self-compassion—being a wise and kind friend to yourself. Someone who helps you see what happened clearly, without shame. Who holds you accountable, without attack. Who believes you're capable of learning and doing better—because falling short doesn't mean you're broken. When you offer yourself this, your brain feels safe enough for your nervous system to stay connected. Studies show the practice of self-compassion reduces anxiety and self-doubt while improving motivation and performance.

Here's how to practice: Start by acknowledging the struggle—"this is hard." Remind yourself that everyone falls short sometimes—you're not alone in this. Then ask one question: what would I say to a good friend who was going through the exact same thing? Offer yourself that.

LISTEN TO YOUR INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEM (IFS)

The good news is that when your connection circuit is on—and you're hanging out in the green zone—it's easier for your brain to be clear and calm, curious and creative, compassionate and connected, confident and courageous. Internal Family Systems (IFS) research calls this Self-energy.

Self-compassion draws on this Self-energy to respond to your inner critic with wisdom and kindness. But Self-energy can do something more—it can help you understand what's driving that critic and why it keeps showing up.

So what helps your brain feel safe enough to keep your nervous system connected—even as you bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals, or fail?

Can You Cultivate Self-Compassion?

SELF-CRITICISM



Self-judgment

We berate ourselves about what failures we are.



Isolation

We hide ourselves away so others can't witness our humiliation and unworthiness.



Over-identification

We take things very personally and believe our struggles are pervasive and permanent.

NOT SAFE ENOUGH - PROTECTION CIRCUIT ON

SAFE ENOUGH - CONNECTION CIRCUIT ON

Self-Kindness

We acknowledge our shortcomings and comfort ourselves with kindness.



Connection

We remember everyone struggles, and we are willing to be vulnerable and ask for help.



Perspective

We recognize 'this too shall pass' and don't exaggerate or over-personalize our challenges.



IFS suggests that what feels like one loud critical voice is actually made up of different parts—each carrying its own specific fear. A part terrified of rejection. A part convinced you need to work harder. A part still guarding an old wound. They're distinct voices, each trying to protect you.

And here's the shift: IFS shows us there are no bad parts. Each of these parts learned its protective strategy when you were younger and had fewer resources. They're still running that old program because they don't realize you're an adult now who can be trusted.

From Self-energy, you can turn toward these parts instead of fighting them. Get curious about their fears. Appreciate their efforts. Listen to where they came from. Offer your support—without an agenda to fix them or make them disappear.

When a part feels your Self-energy showing up—curious, calm, compassionate—it doesn't feel so alone and afraid anymore. It doesn't need to shout so loud or work so hard. This is how healing happens—not all at once, but through Self showing up for your parts again and again. The more your parts experience this, the more Self can lead. And that's what helps you hang out in the green zone more often, even when life gets hard.

Here's how to practice: Notice when a part has taken over—when your nervous system has tipped into the blue zone or red zone. Instead of pushing the part away, meet it with Self-energy. Ask: What are you worried about? Why do you feel this is the best way to protect me right now? What would help you trust that I can handle things now?

STEP OUT OF THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Your parts can learn to trust you. But can they trust other people?

Often the answer feels like no. You're stuck in stories about the difficult boss, the unreliable colleague, the friend who let you down. But it's rarely about trusting them. It's about trusting yourself to handle their challenging behavior.

When you don't feel safe enough with others, your protection circuit takes over and your parts generate stories to make sense of what's happening. Psychologist Stephen Karpman noticed these stories tend to follow a pattern—he called it the Drama Triangle.

You cast someone as the Villain—the source of your problems. You look for a Hero to rescue you. And you get stuck as the Victim—as your blue zone and red zone responses kick in. Either way, you've abandoned yourself and placed the threat—and the solution—outside of you.

The other person might genuinely be difficult. But you can't change them. You can only change your response.

To do that, you need Self-energy. Start with a somatic nudge—slow breath, look around, hold your wrist. Let your nervous system settle. Then move toward your parts. Reassure them you're here. They're not alone. You're going to help them navigate this fear.

From that place, you can bring curiosity to the story your parts are telling: Am I in the Drama Triangle? Which role am I playing? Is this story keeping me safe—or keeping me stuck? You can bring compassion to everyone involved, including yourself. You can stay connected—asking for coaching and support rather than waiting for rescue. And you can get creative about what you're learning.

This is how the Drama Triangle becomes the Compassion Circle. The Villain becomes a Challenger—someone pushing you toward growth you didn't choose but might need. The Hero becomes a Coach—someone who supports your capability. And the Victim becomes a Creator—someone who trusts themselves to choose their response, even when others are difficult.

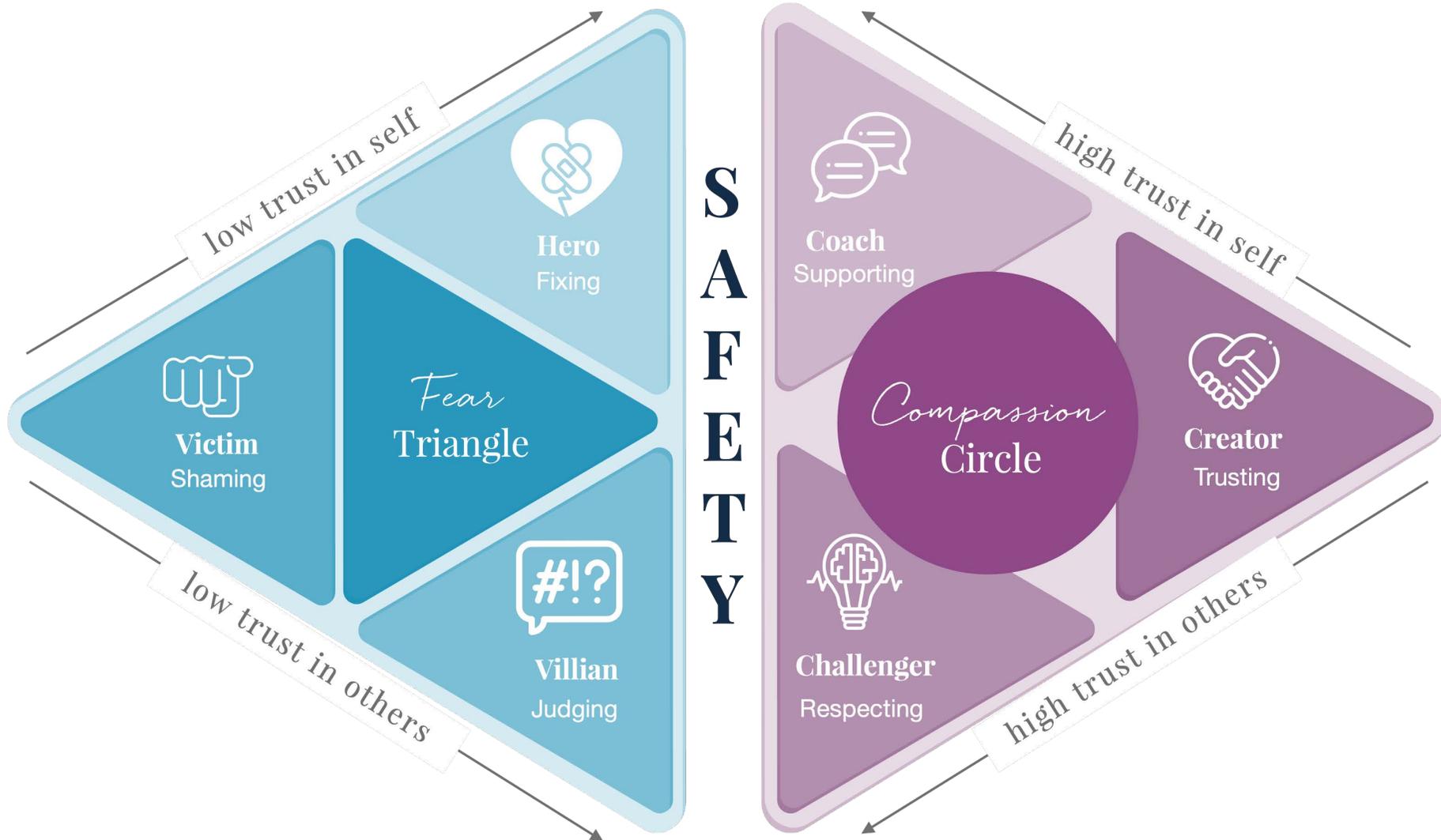
Here's how to practice: Notice when you're stuck in a villain story. Use a somatic nudge to settle your nervous system. Then, from Self-energy, ask: Who am I casting as the villain? Who am I hoping will rescue me? Where have I made myself helpless? What if I trusted myself to handle this? What would a Creator do next?

A safari guide in Tanzania once told me that when facing a hungry lion, he was trained never to say "don't run"—because all the brain hears is "run." Instead, he learned to say three words: "Stay with me." When the brain hears that, it hears we've got this, we're going to figure it out, you can trust me.

Settling your brain is learning to say "stay with me" to yourself. When your inner critic attacks, you stay—meeting yourself with compassion instead of piling on. When your parts are afraid, you stay—turning toward them with Self-energy instead of fighting them. When the Drama Triangle pulls at you, you stay—trusting yourself to choose your response instead of abandoning yourself.

Your protection circuit will still fire. Your parts will still get scared. The stories will still come. But each time you stay with yourself instead of running, you signal to your brain that you're safe enough. That's how you hang out in the green zone more often—not because life gets easier, but because you trust yourself to navigate it.

Can You Step Out Of The Drama Triangle?



(Karpman, 1968; McQuaid, 2024)

(Emerald, 2015; McQuaid, 2024)



The Nervous System Advantage

Body Tools

THECHANGELAB

FROM THE MICHELLEMCQUAID GROUP

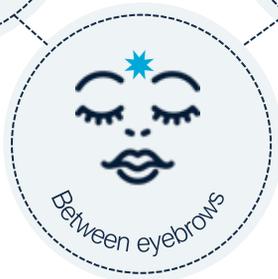
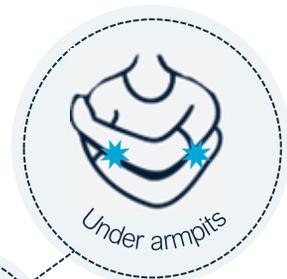
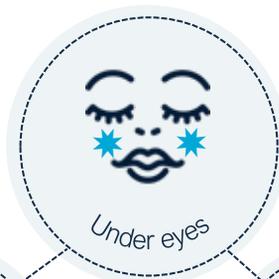


TAP IT OUT

A Somatic Nudge

By tapping key meridian points (the same used in acupressure) to a gentle rhythm allows you to focus attention on the body and breath. It sends calming sensory signals through the skin to the brain.

- 1 Create your tapping tools:** Bring both hands out in front of you, make a peace-sign with both hands, and then bring the middle and index fingers together. These are your tapping tools.
- 2 Start tapping:** Start by tapping the points that feel right for your body. Let the breath move softly in and out through the nose as you tap. You may find it helpful to follow a steady rhythm or repeat a simple mantra. Continue for three rounds at each point.



- 3 End with a hug:** When you feel ready to stop, it might feel nice to wrap your arms around your chest in a self-hug. What do you want to remind yourself of in this moment?



Inspired by: Nick Ortner



SOOTHE WITH SOUND

A Somatic Nudge

Anxiety often shows up as tension in our throat, causing our voice to rise in pitch. By using specific vocal techniques, we can create soothing vibrations that calm our nervous system. These three simple steps help us find relief through sound.

1 Choose your sound: Select one vocal approach that meets your current needs.

Hmmm like you're curiously pondering what's been said.

THE HMMM PAUSE



THE LATE NIGHT DJ



Speak deliberately low and slow like a late-night radio host.

Softly sing or hum a simple, soothing melody.

THE SOFT SONG



THE QUIET CHANT



Repeat a short reassuring phrase, mantra or sound.

2 Let it resonate: Take one full breath as you notice how your nervous system responds to the sound vibration. Feel the shift from tension toward ease.

3 Notice the effect: Pay attention to how your throat relaxes, your breathing deepens, and your thoughts slow. Allow this vocal soothing to create space between your feelings and your responses.

Scan Me 



Inspired by: Martha Beck



GRAB AN OXYTOCIN SHOT

A Somatic Nudge

Quickly ease your feelings of anxiety and stress (cortisol hormones) and increase your sense of peace (oxytocin hormones) by gently placing your hands on your body in a way that feels comforting and reassuring. Try to tune into how your body responds to find the approach that suits you best.

1

Place one hand over the opposite wrist: You can do this seated with your hands resting on your lap or placed on top of a table. You can also do this standing with your arms crossed in front of you or clasped behind your back.



2

Take three slow, deep breaths: As you hold your wrist gently and reassuringly, try to slow and deepen your breath. You want to stay in this position as you breathe in and out for at least six seconds to help release your oxytocin hormones and calm your nervous system.

3

Notice how your body is feeling: Is your jaw softening? Are your shoulders relaxing? Does your body feel calmer? Continue holding your wrist and slowing breathing as needed until you feel your body has released the feelings of anxiety and stress.

Scan
Me



Inspired by: Jane McGonigal



OFFER A BUTTERFLY HUG

A Somatic Nudge

This bilateral practice gives your body something steady and reassuring to tune into. The gentle, alternating rhythm and touch offer a sense of support and predictability.

- 1 Create your butterfly wings:** Bring both hands in front of you, palms facing toward the face. Cross both wrists and interlace the thumbs. Here are your butterfly wings. Gently place your wings on your chest.
- 2 Flutter your wings:** Begin alternately tapping your palms against your chest - left, right, left, right - as if your butterfly is gently fluttering its wings. Keep the pace slow and soothing.
- 3 Take a few butterfly breaths:** As you continue tapping, imagine your butterfly wings moving in harmony with your breath. Let each exhale help your body soften and settle.
- 4 Let your butterfly land:** After about 20 seconds of gentle tapping (or whenever it feels right), let your butterfly come to rest. Notice if your body feels calmer and more grounded.

Repeat these steps as often as needed, letting each butterfly hug remind your parts that they're safe and cared for.



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Me



Inspired by: Francine Shapiro



FIND YOUR CENTER

A Somatic Nudge

When protection circuits are turned on, it can feel like we leave ourselves — pulled up and out, away from the body. Gently focusing our attention on a centerpoint within the body, imagined as a soft light, gives the nervous system something simple and steady to orient toward.

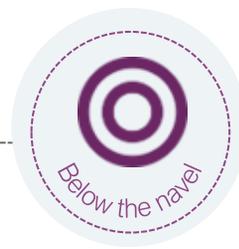
- 1 Find a comfy spot:** Find a seated or laying position, somewhere that you can let the body fully rest. When you land, take a soft gaze or close the eyes.
- 2 Imagine your center:** Start by taking some steady, gentle breaths, in and out of the nose. What can you notice about your breath at this moment? Then, find a centerpoint within the body. This might be between your eyebrows, at the heart space or just below the navel. It might feel helpful to bring your hands to this space for some tactile feedback.



Between eyebrows



At the heart space



Below the navel

- 3 Create your light:** Bring to mind a small, gentle light glowing at your centerpoint. Something like candlelight, or a small ember. With each gentle breath, imagine that light glows just that little bit brighter.
- 4 Send your light out:** With each breath, allow the light at your center to gradually spread through the body. There's nothing to push or visualize perfectly. Just let the sense of brightness or warmth move outward in its own way, filling the body and gently extending beyond it.



Inspired by: Evie Wright



BREATHE IN LOVE

A Somatic Nudge

When you're feeling overwhelmed or disconnected, rest your hands on your body and speak kindly to yourself. Often, the body is simply asking for presence — for company. With that, tenderness and connection can slowly return.

- 1 Soften your body:** Sit somewhere comfortable and quiet. Place one hand on top of the other and cover your heart. Close your eyes or soften your gaze down towards the floor. As you take a slow breath in, relax your jaw. As you take a slow breath out, let your shoulders drop down. Repeat this step for three breaths, letting your heart and body soften a little further each time.
- 2 Soothe your mind:** As you take your next slow breath in say to yourself: "I am safe enough." As you take your next slow breath out say to yourself: "I am loved enough." Repeat this step for five breaths, letting each reminder soothe and reassure your heart and mind.
- 3 Notice what you need:** Remain seated with your hands resting over your heart or another place that feels supportive. Let the breath move naturally. Rather than analysing or fixing, simply notice what your body is communicating through sensation, feeling, or impulse. You might ask quietly:
 - *What wants my attention right now?*
 - *What would help my body feel a little more at ease?*
 - *What can wait until later?*

When you're ready to come out of the practice, take your time bringing your attention back to the room around you.



Inspired by: Martha Beck



SHAKE IT OFF

A Somatic Nudge

Fighting the urge to move when you're anxious is like pressing the gas and brake pedals at the same time. Movement, especially shaking, rocking, or stretching your body, is one of the most effective ways to process stress or trauma. It's your nervous system's way of finding balance, peace, and flexibility to help the oxygen and blood move around your body.

- 1 **Notice your anxiety:** Pay attention to signs of tension in your body. You might notice a weight on your shoulders, a tensing of the jaw, perhaps a tightness in the body. This awareness signals that a gentle (or vigorous) shake might help.

FINGER
DANCE



*Start shaking
both hands
& arms.*

SHAKE
HIPS



*Start shaking
your hips side
to side.*

SHOULDER
ROLL



*Roll the
shoulders up
and down.*

WIGGLE
TOES



*Spread and
wiggle all ten
toe.*

NECK
TWIST



*Gently rock
your head side
to side.*

- 2 **Get curious:** As you move, imagine all that anxiety and stress being shaken out of the body. Can you take a moment to notice, what feels tight? What's loosening? This presence helps to shift your brain from anxiety to exploration.
- 3 **Slow it down:** Once you've felt like you've shaken it off, slowly start to reduce the intensity of your shaking. What can you notice has changed within your body? It might feel nice to pull a long, gentle breath into the body.

Scan
Me 



Inspired by: Nahid de Belgeonne



SHIATSU SWINGS

A Somatic Nudge

Quickly ease feelings of anxiety and stress by gently swinging your body to activate your parasympathetic nervous system—your body's natural "rest and digest" state. This simple movement practice also stimulates your vagus nerve, which plays a key role in regulating your stress response.

- 1 Find your stance:** Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder width. Soften your knees and let your arms hang loosely by your sides. If comfortable to do so, close your eyes.
- 2 Swing in the breeze:** Begin gently twisting your torso from side to side, allowing your arms to swing like branches in the wind. As they swing, let them softly thump against your torso.
- 3 Flow with the movement:** There's no need to force the movement - imagine your arms are simply responding to the rotation of your trunk. This rotation can be as fast or as slow as you'd like.
- 4 Breathe and notice:** As you continue these gentle swings, focus on your breath and notice any changes in your body.
- 5 Add gentle percussion:** Make a fist with your hands and start gently thumping your body, moving up and down your torso and back.



Inspired by: Master Gu Shining



ROAR IT OUT

A Somatic Nudge

When anger is present, it often shows up as heat, tension, and pressure in the body. It might look like a tight jaw, clenched hands, shallow breath, or a charged belly or chest. This practice gives that built-up energy somewhere to go, using sound and strong breath to release tension and settle the nervous system.



Stand Tall

Find a strong stance: Stand up with your feet in a comfortable position. If it feels right, you might close your eyes. Take a gentle inhale and exhale through your nose. Can you find more stability with your feet?



Notice Feelings

Notice your feelings: As you continue breathing, can you notice any uncomfortable feelings you are struggling with right now? Don't try to dismiss the feelings, fight them, or fix them. Just let yourself feel them fully. Is there something you'd like to let go of? Or something that needs to be said?



Roar It Out

Roar it out: When you're ready, take a deep inhale, then imagine you can see the uncomfortable feelings being pushed out from your body as you exhale strongly. Do this by opening your mouth wide, and as you stick out your tongue and stretch it down towards your chin, push the air from your belly, as you make a loud "ha" sound. If it helps, pretend you are a lion roaring.

Repeat your roaring breath as needed until your nervous system feels calmer. Take a few normal breaths. Laugh at how ridiculous and/or relieved you feel after.

Scan Me



Inspired by: Tina Bruce



TAKE A GENTLE JIGGLE

A Somatic Nudge

When the nervous system shifts into protection mode, attention moves out of the body and into urgency. Muscles tighten, energy mobilizes, and the system prioritizes action over sensing. Slow, rhythmic movement draws attention back into the body and gives the brain something simple to orient toward.

- 1 Choose your movement:** Select one movement that meets your current needs. Pair the movement with a slow inhale and exhale breath.

Spread all ten toes, then gently stretch and curl them in..

TOE
CURLS



FINGER
WIGGLES



Extend the fingers, give them a wiggle, then softly close.

Rock onto the ball of your feet and back onto the heel..

HEEL
ROCKS



SHOULDER
JIGGLE



Reach your arms forward, jiggle the shoulders.

- 2 Slow it down:** Let the movement be soft, small, and controlled. What can you notice about your body when you move this slowly?
- 3 Speed it up:** You can stay slow and subtle, or let it become a gentle jiggle if your body wants more movement. When you're ready, let your body rest. Take one or two natural breaths and notice any shift.

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Inspired by: Nahid de Belgeonne



The Nervous
System
Advantage

Brain Tools

THECHANGELAB

FROM THE MICHELLEMCQUAID GROUP



REACH FOR SELF-COMPASSION

A Brain Nudge

When things go wrong, we often turn on ourselves. Your inner critic gets loud, certain that being hard on you will help. But self-criticism doesn't build safety — it wears you down. What helps is showing up as a wise and kind friend to yourself.



See The Struggle

See the struggle: Notice when your inner critic has taken over — telling you you're not enough, replaying your mistakes, etc. Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly or hold your opposite wrist gently. Breathe slowly. Thank your inner critic for looking out for you and letting you know that something important needs your attention.



Sit Beside Critic

Sit beside the critic: Let your inner critic know that it's okay to share what it's afraid of, but it's not okay to call you names or be mean. Gently remind your inner critic that none of us get it right all the time. Nature made each of us perfectly imperfect so that we can learn and grow as the world around us and within us keeps changing. Try to listen with curiosity and compassion to its fears.



Speak Wisely & Kindly

Speak wisely and kindly: How might the wisest and kindest person you know respond to your inner critic's concerns? What would help you both feel clearer and calmer? Curious and creative? Compassionate and connected? Confident and courageous? Write down what emerges. Return to these words when you need them.

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Inspired by: Dr Kristin Neff



STRENGTHEN SELF

A Brain Nudge

Your Self-energy - that wise, grounded presence within you - is like the sun: always there, even when it has become hidden by clouds. This practice helps you expand the presence of your Self-energy from the inside out.

- 1 Sit In Self-Energy:** Find a quiet place to sit or lie where you feel comfortable and safe. Then, place both hands on the middle of your chest – leave them here throughout the practice. Start to breathe gently in a way that feels good for you. When you're ready – at your own pace – move through each of these steps:

Step 1: Feel the calm, clear warmth under your hands gently expanding across your chest as you continue breathing.

CALM
& CLEAR



COMPASSIONATE
& CONNECTED



Step 2: Notice how the feeling of warmth soothes your heart and remind yourself: "You are safe. You are loved."

Step 3: Can you feel your jaw, shoulders, belly, and legs soften as you trust the warmth to allow you to be present?

CURIOUS
& CREATIVE



CONFIDENT
& COURAGEOUS



Step 4: Notice how the earth supports you as you draw up a confident, courageous breath that straightens your spine.

- 2 Soak In Self-Energy:** Self-energy can't be forced. Let the feelings of calmness, clarity, compassion, connection, curiosity, creativity, confidence, and courage settle into every cell of your body. Let your brain soak in the feeling of being safe enough. Silently affirm: "My Self-energy is always with me."

Scan
Me 



Inspired by: Richard Schwartz



KNOW YOUR PARTS

A Brain Nudge

Rather than judging or fighting against your protective parts, try moving towards them with curiosity and compassion. Remember, your parts developed to protect you. They're not enemies to eliminate, but aspects of yourself waiting to be understood. Try this three-step process to help you connect with your parts from a place of Self-energy.

NOTICE

Be a gentle observer of your parts.

- Where in your body do you feel this part's presence?
- What thoughts, emotions, or sensations are arising?
- Is there an image that comes to mind? Does this part have a name?
- How are you feeling towards this part? (If you don't feel curious or compassionate, another protective part may need space.)

KNOW

Listen to your part's story with openness.

- How old are you?
- What would you like me to know about why you're showing up now?
- When was the first time you felt you needed to protect me?
- What are you worried might happen if you didn't protect me in this way?

NEED

Offer your part genuine care and support.

- How old do you think I am? Tell it your age so it knows you are an adult.
- What do you need from me to feel less activated?
- How can my Self-energy help you feel safer?
- What would help you trust that I can handle things now?

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Inspired by: Jenna Riemersma & Dr Richard Schwartz



BUILD SELF TRUST

A Brain Nudge

Take a few minutes each day to connect with your different internal parts, like checking in with dear friends. Like building any relationship, consistency matters more than duration. Even 5 minutes of genuine attention each day helps your parts feel more seen, soothed, safe, and secure. Begin by:

- 1 Connecting To Self:** Place one hand on your heart, the other on your belly. Take a few slow breaths until you feel grounded and calm. Let your Self's natural curiosity and compassion emerge.
- 2 Checking In With Parts:** When you've connected with your Self-energy, ask your parts these key questions:

Who's here right now and would like to be heard?

Notice any emotions, body sensations, or thoughts that arise.

What are you most concerned about today?

Listen without trying to fix or change anything.

What support do you need from me?

Your parts may want acknowledgment, protection, or comfort.

Let your part know what you will do to help.

How are you feeling now? Is there anything else you'd like me to know?

Leave space for whatever else needs to be expressed.

- 3 Celebrating Your Commitment:** When you've completed your check-in, take a moment to celebrate and savor the Self trust you are building.



Inspired by: Dr Richard Schwartz



STEP INTO COMPASSION

A Brain Nudge

Trusting other people can be challenging. The difficult boss, the unreliable colleague, the friend who let you down. Unfortunately, we can't change other people's behavior. But we can learn to trust ourselves to navigate all the different ways people show up.

- 1 Spot The Drama:** When you find yourself confused, frustrated, disappointed and/or angry about people's behavior, ask yourself: "What story am I telling myself?" Are you stuck as the Victim? Have you cast someone as the Villain—the source of your problems? Are you looking for a Hero to rescue you? Are you stuck in a Drama Triangle that is making this situation harder to resolve?

What story am I telling myself about this situation?

- 2 Get Curious:** Place one hand on your heart, breathe gently, and ask yourself: "What might my story be missing?" What is the shared hope for this interaction? What information may have been overlooked or misunderstood? What assumptions might be making this challenging? Have you asked for what you need?

What might my story be missing about this situation?

- 3 Step Into Compassion:** Add the other hand over your heart, and continue to breathe gently as you ask yourself: "What can I learn from this moment?" Can you be a Creator—someone who trusts themselves to navigate challenging experiences? Can you see your Villain as a Challenger—someone pushing you towards growth (even if it wasn't what you would have chosen)? Can you ask your Hero to become a Coach—someone who helps you build capability? Can you step into the Compassion Circle?

What can I learn from this moment to write a better ending?



Inspired by: Stephen Karpman & David Emerald

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