

## **Regulation** (ideas summarized from Lisa Dion [www.lisa-dion.com](http://www.lisa-dion.com))

Many of us often turn to external regulators to attempt to feel safe. We connect to the news to gather information or reach out to others. While it is good to stay informed to make decisions about yourself and your loved ones, it is not what will help you feel safe. In order to feel a sense of safety we need to connect to our inner self, and we do that physiologically by activating our Vagus nerve.

We regulate our bodies through our Vagus system. The Vagus nerve allows us to take a breath, and to put the brakes on our system when it is overwhelmed and feeling unsafe. If we lose the connection to this system, our body remains on high alert and our bodies continue to release adrenaline and cortisol, which over time affects our immune system.

### **FIRST: Regulate YOU**

So the key right now is to strengthen this regulatory capacity. Start with regulating yourself. Here are some ways that are scientifically proven to connect to your calming, Vagus system.

- Take a deep breath (for real). Deepen the breath from the diaphragm. Do this several times per day. This is activating your Vagus nerve and tells your body to relax for a minute. Count 4 in, 2 hold, 4 out, 2 hold.
- Ground yourself by feeling your feet touch the ground, your body, your bottom in the seat.
- Cold water splash on face upward. The cold helps relax the system so you can get back in connection with self. Cold shower or cold minute at end of shower.
- Movement – very regulating. Essential for activation and stimulation of this part of your system; stretching is good too. Take 3 walks per day to support the physiology of your system. Dancing is very fun, calming, regulating.
- Singing chanting, humming will help activate the Vagus system.
- Touch and push on your head, your arms, your legs. Reminding your body “I’m here in my body.” Wrap self in blanket, push yourself into the wall, or into a chair.
- Rub the sides of your neck, activate the Vagus nerve. Combine with deep breath.
- Connect and have conversation with others via phone or video chat. Familiarity is soothing.
- When going into tough situations, create a plan before you go in – deep breaths, a list of what you need to focus on to stay in the thinking part of the brain.

The goal is not to “be calm.” The goal is to be connected to our inner self. The probability of you feeling calm right now is not realistic because of all the activation going on in the world. Don’t “should” yourself (I should be calm) which can contract you around the intensity. We are not avoiding the fear, we are just breathing in the midst of the fear = “I can take a deep breath; I am safe right here.” Connecting to yourself; it’s internal.

## **Second: Help Others Regulate**

It's a fact that we "borrow" each other's nervous system symptoms. You can get activated by others if they are panicky. For yourself, your family, your kids, **YOU CAN BE THE EXTERNAL REGULATOR.**

If we regulate ourselves first, they can absorb that regulation from us. Our system can regulate their system. When we are next to our kids, they will orient to us.

- Teach them the above regulation strategies. Make it fun and age related.
- Connect to their experience and give them an opportunity to express it. Questions to ask your kids daily (as our situations are changing rapidly):
  - How are you doing today?
  - What does your body need today?
  - Tell me how you're feeling. Share with me.
- Tell them what they are feeling is so normal. It's normal to be scared. It's normal to also want to disconnect and not think about it, so don't be surprised if kids say they are not thinking about it at all. This is another way of our internal systems trying to feel safe.

Bottom line, regulate you and then help your kids to regulate. If you are activated, you might also activate them, whether you are aware or not. Our kids will pick up on our feelings and our activation.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional support to you and your families! Reach out to [susan@heartwise-counseling.com](mailto:susan@heartwise-counseling.com).