

TRAUMA:  
A Simple Guide To  
Understanding  
Your Nervous  
System

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[Nervous System Reset](#)

## INTRODUCTION: Finding Balance in your Body's Thermostat

Welcome! I'm so glad you're here. In this book, I want to help you understand your body's reactions in a way that feels comforting, not overwhelming.

You may have heard of the fight-or-flight response or felt moments of shutdown when stress becomes too much, but what if we could look at these experiences through a different lens - one that helps you to feel more in control?

Let's imagine that your nervous system is like a thermostat, managing the "temperature" of your body's reactions. Just like a thermostat keeps your home at a comfortable setting, your nervous system is always working to keep you feeling safe and balanced.

But when you've experienced trauma or prolonged stress, this internal thermostat can get stuck, leaving you feeling too hot, too cold, or rarely "just right."

Understanding this is the first step in reclaiming your balance, and I'm here to guide you through it.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Three Nervous System States— Understanding Your Body’s Thermostat

The Polyvagal Theory, developed by Dr. Stephen Porges, teaches us that our nervous system has three primary states, each like a setting on a thermostat:

1. **Sympathetic Activation:** Too Hot
2. **Dorsal Vagal Shutdown:** Too Cold
3. **Ventral Vagal Regulation:** Just Right

These states aren’t “good” or “bad.” They’re simply your body’s way of responding to different levels of safety and threat. Let’s take a closer look at each one.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Sympathetic Activation— Too Hot to Handle

When your body senses any kind of threat or danger, your sympathetic nervous system kicks in like a boiler that's turning up too high.

Think of it as your thermostat being set to HOT. This is your body's fight-or-flight response, preparing you to face a threat or run away from it.

**How It Feels:** You might notice your heart racing, your mind feeling scattered, or a sense of urgency. It's as if there's an internal adrenaline surge - your body is getting ready to act, even if there's no immediate danger.

#### **Common Signs:**

- Anxiety or panic
- Racing thoughts
- Restlessness or agitation
- Feeling “wired” or jumpy

When you're stuck in this “too hot” state, everyday challenges can feel like it's all just too much. Small things might make you overreact or feel overwhelmed.

Your body's internal thermostat is set on high alert, keeping you from feeling truly calm. But don't worry - there are ways to reset your temperature.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Dorsal Vagal Shutdown—Too Cold to Connect

If the sympathetic system is like a thermostat that's too high, the dorsal vagal system is like a setting that's turned down too low.

This is your body's freeze response, which can feel like a deer stuck in the headlights. Imagine your thermostat stuck on COLD - you feel numb, as if your energy is frozen, disconnected and exhausted.

**How It Feels:** It feels like your battery is flat, and even getting through the day can feel like too much. This freeze state often happens when you can't take action, and your nervous system is overwhelmed and shuts down to protect you.

#### **Common Signs:**

- Exhaustion or chronic fatigue
- Feeling emotionally numb or distant
- Disconnection from others
- Difficulty getting out of bed or doing daily tasks

When your body gets stuck in this state, it's hard to find motivation or feel engaged. But again, this isn't a flaw - this is your body's way of saving energy and keeping you safe when it feels there's no way out. Understanding this is the first step toward gently warming up and finding balance again.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Ventral Vagal Regulation—Just Right and Comfortable

Finally, let's talk about the Goldilocks Zone - the state where your nervous system is just right. This is the ventral vagal state, where you feel safe, connected, and able to engage with the world around you comfortably.

Imagine your thermostat set at a perfect temperature: not too hot, not too cold, but cosy and just right.

**How It Feels:** You feel calm and at ease. Even when faced with challenges, you're able to stay present and respond with clarity. This state allows you to connect deeply with yourself and others, enjoy activities, and feel a sense of flow in your day-to-day life.

#### **Common Signs:**

- Feeling calm and present
- Emotionally comfortable
- Being able to handle stress without feeling overwhelmed or overreacting
- Feeling safe and connected to others

This is the state where healing happens. When your nervous system is balanced, your body feels safe enough to release the tension and stress it's been holding onto. You can see new possibilities, build relationships, and feel more like your true self.

## CHAPTER FIVE

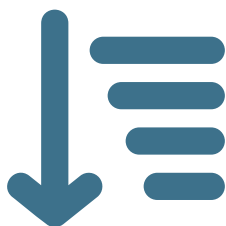
### Resetting Your Thermostat—Using Polyvagal Therapy to Find Balance

If you've been feeling too hot, too cold, or bouncing between both, it's time to gently reset your nervous system's thermostat.

Polyvagal Therapy can help you to move out of these stuck states and into that place of “just right” balance.

**Here are some simple ways to begin this process:**

#### 1. Cooling Down from Sympathetic Activation (Too Hot)



- **1:1 Breathing:** Count your in breath and then make your out breath the same length. Just breathe comfortably, without forcing yourself to take deep breaths, until your in and out breathe is more even.
- **Squeeze and Release:** Tense and then release your fists several times to let go of pent-up tension.
- **Bursts of Movement:** Try a full body shake out to release some of the heat in your body, by jiggling your arms and legs vigorously for 30-60 seconds.



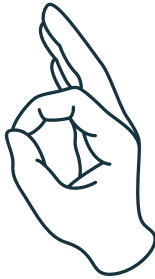
## 2. Warming Up from Dorsal Vagal Shutdown (Too Cold)



- **Small, Gentle Movements:** Begin with anything that brings a little movement back - wiggling your toes, pressing your hands together, or sitting to standing.
- **Using Warmth:** Hold a warm cup of tea, wrap yourself in a cosy blanket, or soak in a warm bath.
- **Safe Social Connection:** Call a friend, watch a favourite movie, or spend time with a pet. Connection helps to slowly bring you back to life.



### 3. Maintaining Ventral Vagal Balance (Just Right)



- **Glimmers:** Surround yourself with comforting items, familiar scents, and textures that soothe you.
- **Go outside:** Being out in nature is very grounding.

Each of these steps is about giving your nervous system a little nudge toward balance.

There's no need to rush - healing happens gently, in small steps.



## CONCLUSION: Reclaiming Your Balance

Your body isn't broken. If you've been stuck in states of too much or too little energy, it's your nervous system trying to keep you safe.

With Polyvagal Therapy, we can gently guide your internal thermostat back to a state of just right.

It really is possible to feel calm, connected, and at ease again.

Remember, you have the power to shift your nervous system and find balance.

Healing is not just about managing symptoms - it's about creating a life where you feel comfortable in your own skin.

You deserve to live in a body and mind that feels safe, warm, and welcoming.

If you're ready to reset your thermostat and bring your nervous system back into balance, I'm here to support you every step of the way.

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# A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME ...



Hi I'm Caroline King. I'm a Psychotherapist who helps traumatised women to reset their nervous systems.

I offer 35 years of experience in helping you to create a better mind-body connection.

This is essential to good physical, mental and emotional health. It's how we heal trauma.

If you would like to feel safe, calm and connected please feel free to reach out.

[www.caroline-king.co.uk](http://www.caroline-king.co.uk)  
[carolinekingtherapy@yahoo.com](mailto:carolinekingtherapy@yahoo.com)

My qualifications are Registered and Accredited by  
The National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society.

