



# Self-Regulation in Therapeutic Work

Tending to the Internal World of Helping Professionals  
as a Regulation Resource for Clients

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# W H E R E   A R E   W E   G O I N G ?



## **Objective 1**

Understand what happens in the brain and body when we become dysregulated, *and* how this can impact our therapeutic work.

## **Objective 2**

Learn skills for regulation that can be used in and outside of sessions to help regulate the nervous systems of clinicians and clients.

## **Objective 3**

Create a self-care plan for your nervous system that includes steps to assess the effectiveness of this plan over time.









WHY FOCUS ON  
UNDERSTANDING OUR OWN  
NERVOUS SYSTEMS FIRST?

# There's a lot happening inside

nervous systems

tension to hold  
it together

body/physiologically



implicit/explicit  
memories

reactions/parts

thoughts

emotions

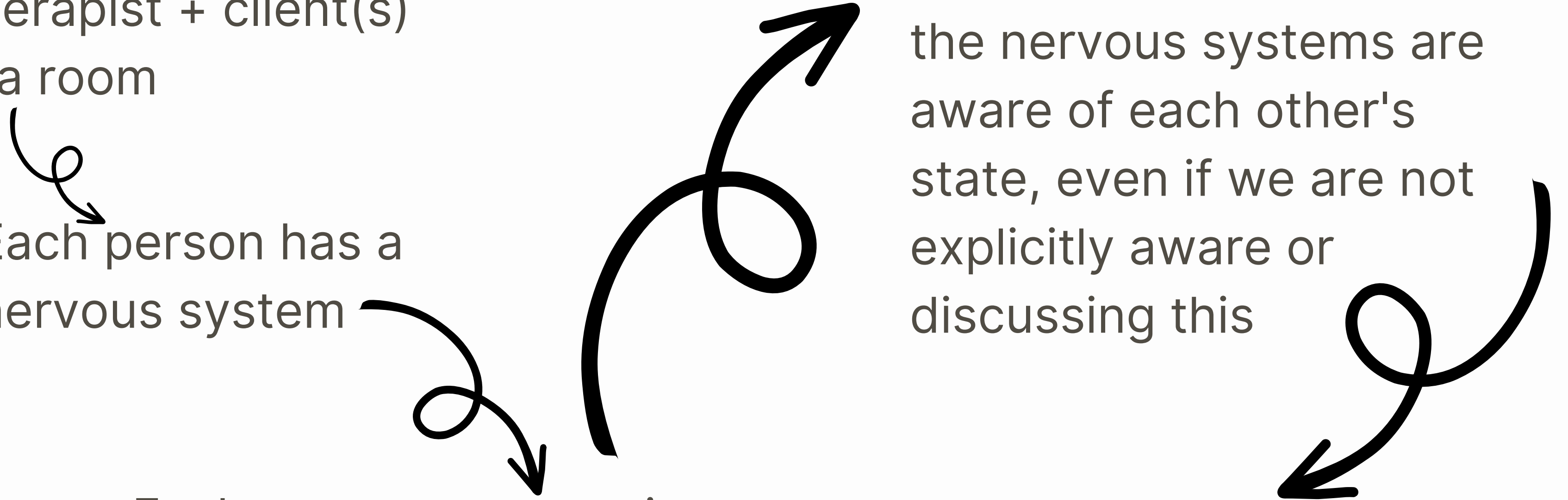
Therapist + client(s)  
in a room

Each person has a  
nervous system

Each nervous system is  
scanning, regulating and/or  
reacting based on what's  
happening in the room and  
is impacted by things  
outside the room as well

Beneath our awareness,  
the nervous systems are  
aware of each other's  
state, even if we are not  
explicitly aware or  
discussing this


If we are unaware of or detached  
from what is going on inside of  
us, we are adding a variable, a  
liability, into the therapeutic  
space that impacts the regulation  
of our client's internal world









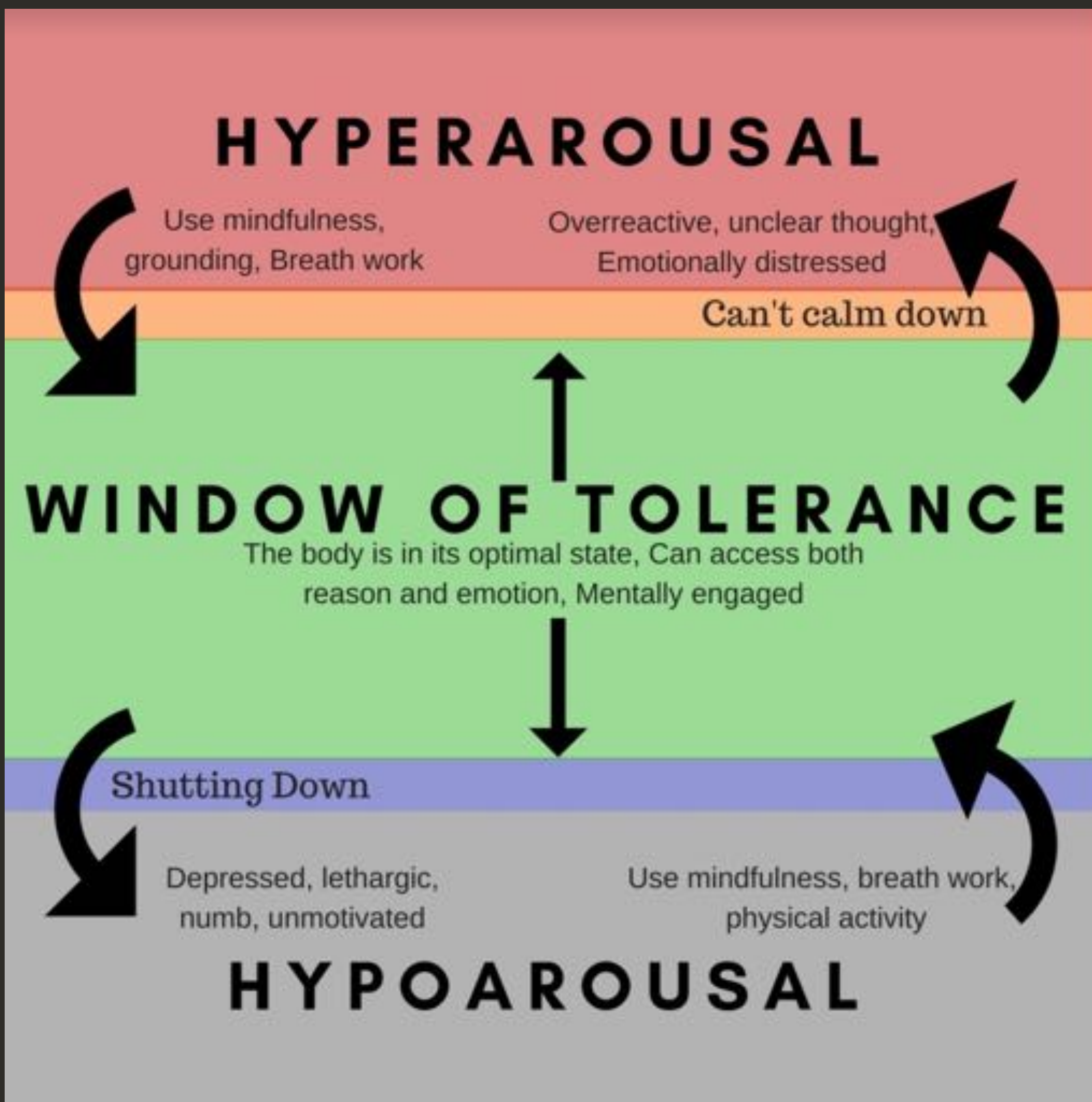
- 
- Being professional
  - Not making it about us

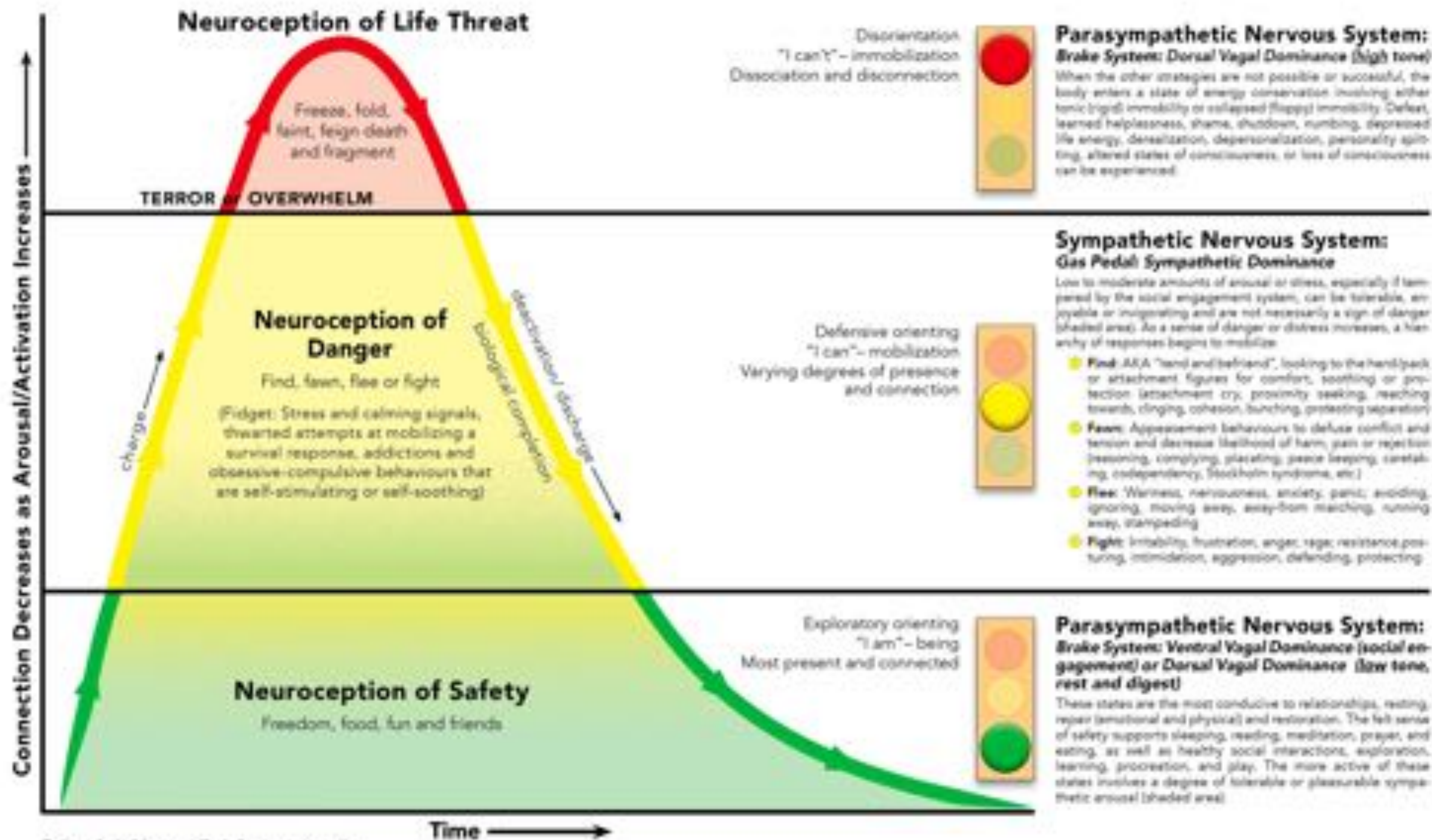
- Being human
- Not fragmenting our being



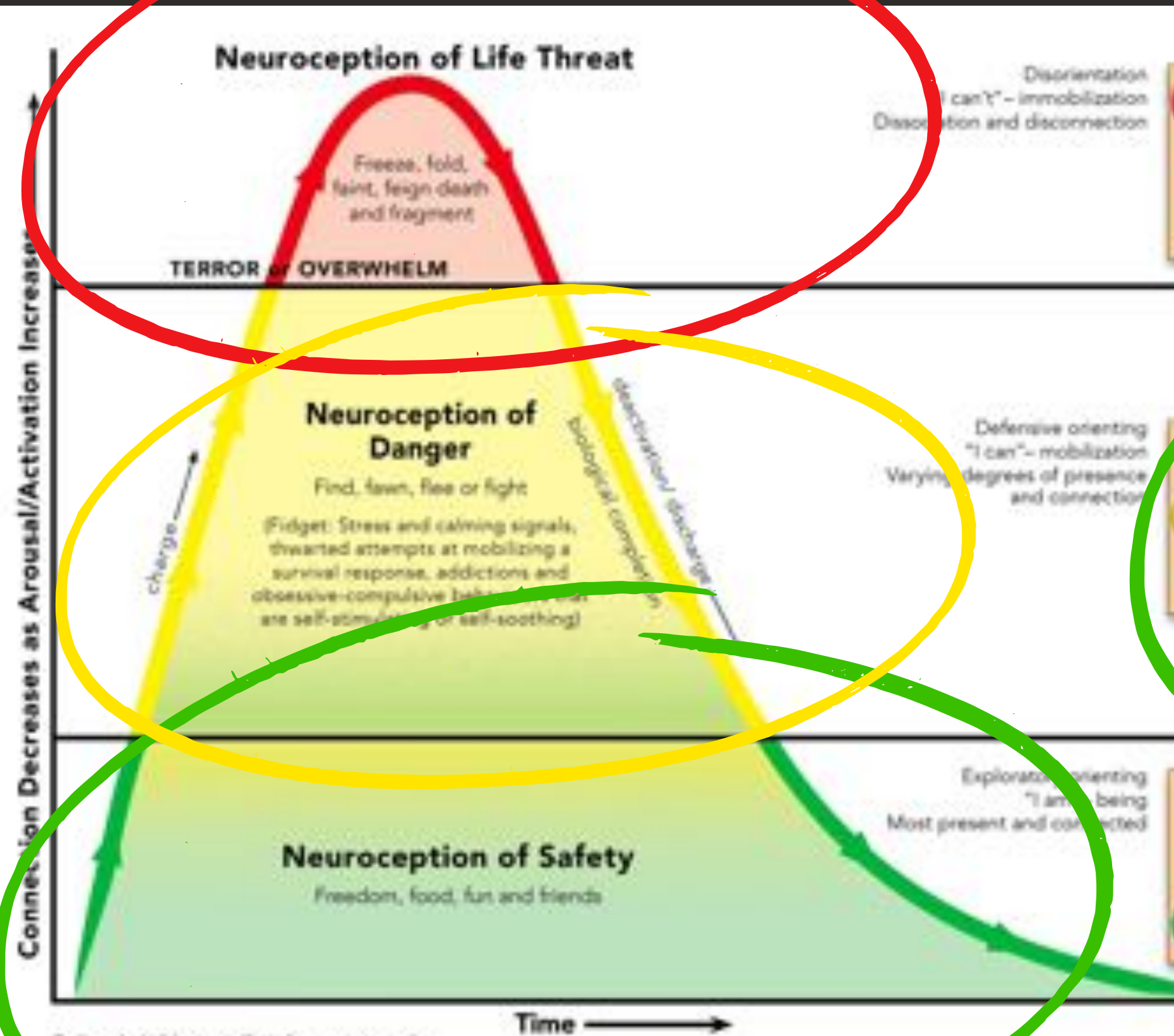
--> Being authentic & present, so that we can offer genuine empathy & attunement





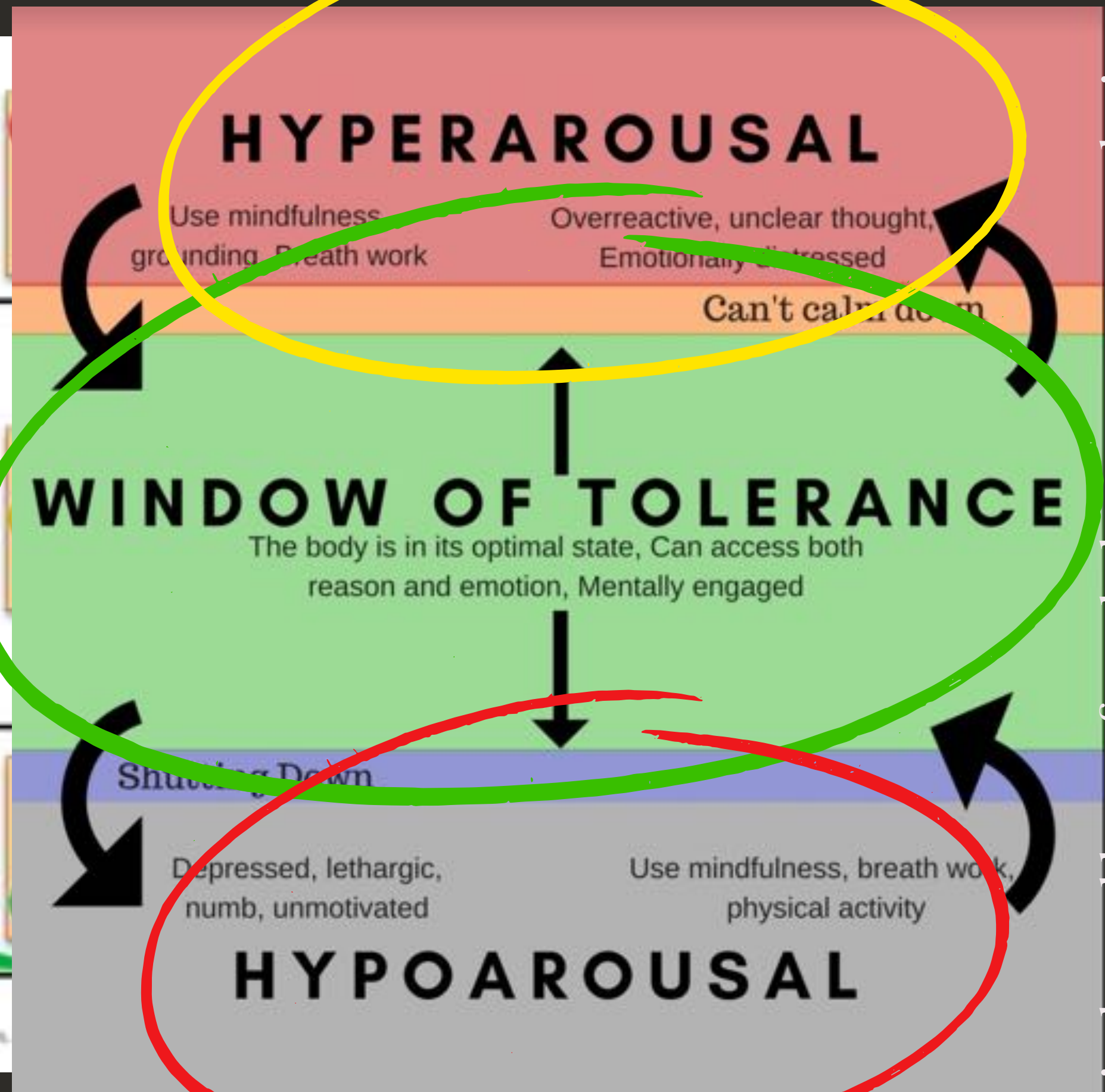






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Adapted from Porges (2011, 2015), Levine (1997, 2009), Walker (2018), Harkness Consulting (in AG), Osofsky (2018), Rees (2018), Schaefer & Ellis (2010), Kozlovskaya et al. (2018).



**SHUT DOWN**

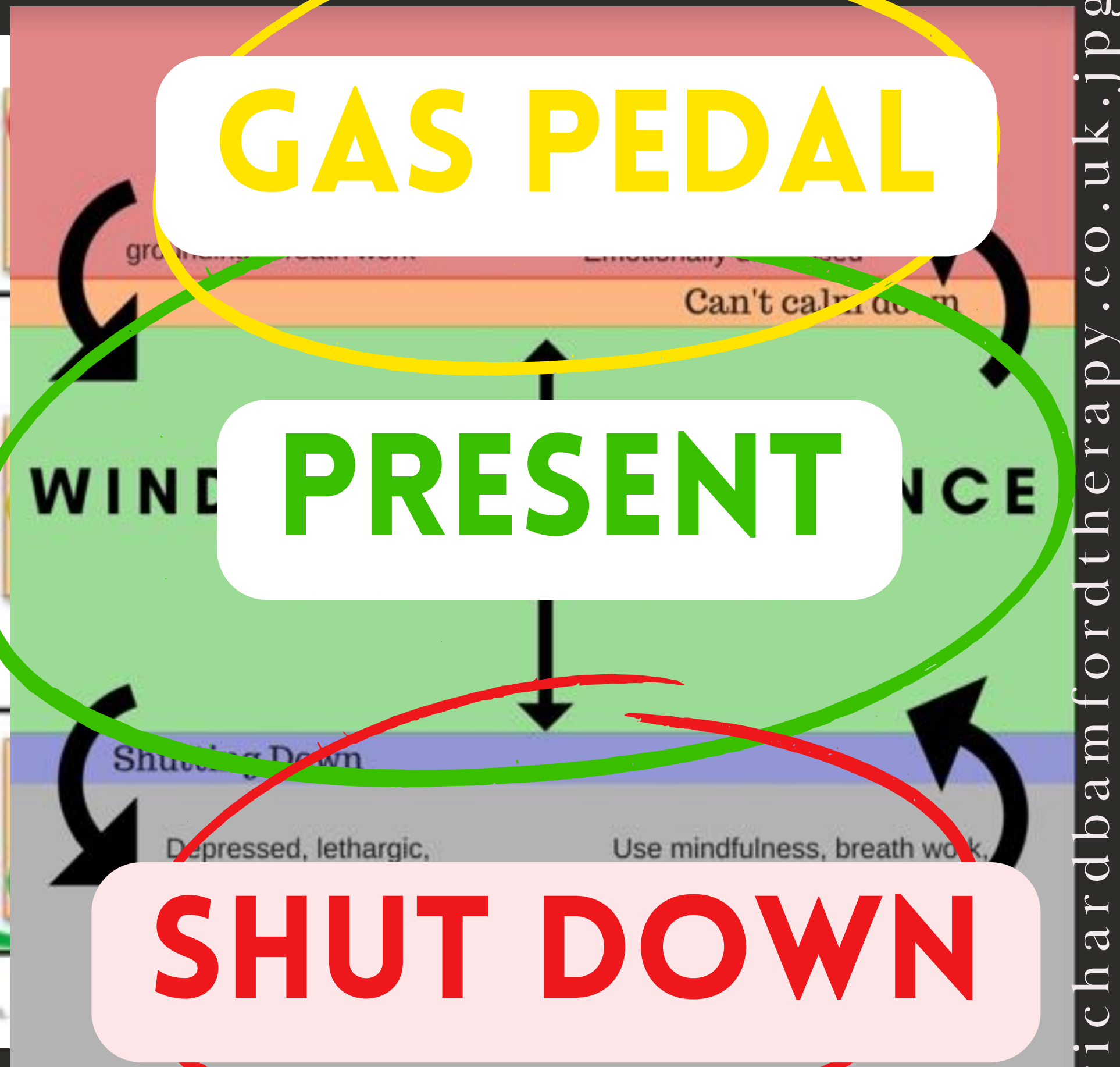
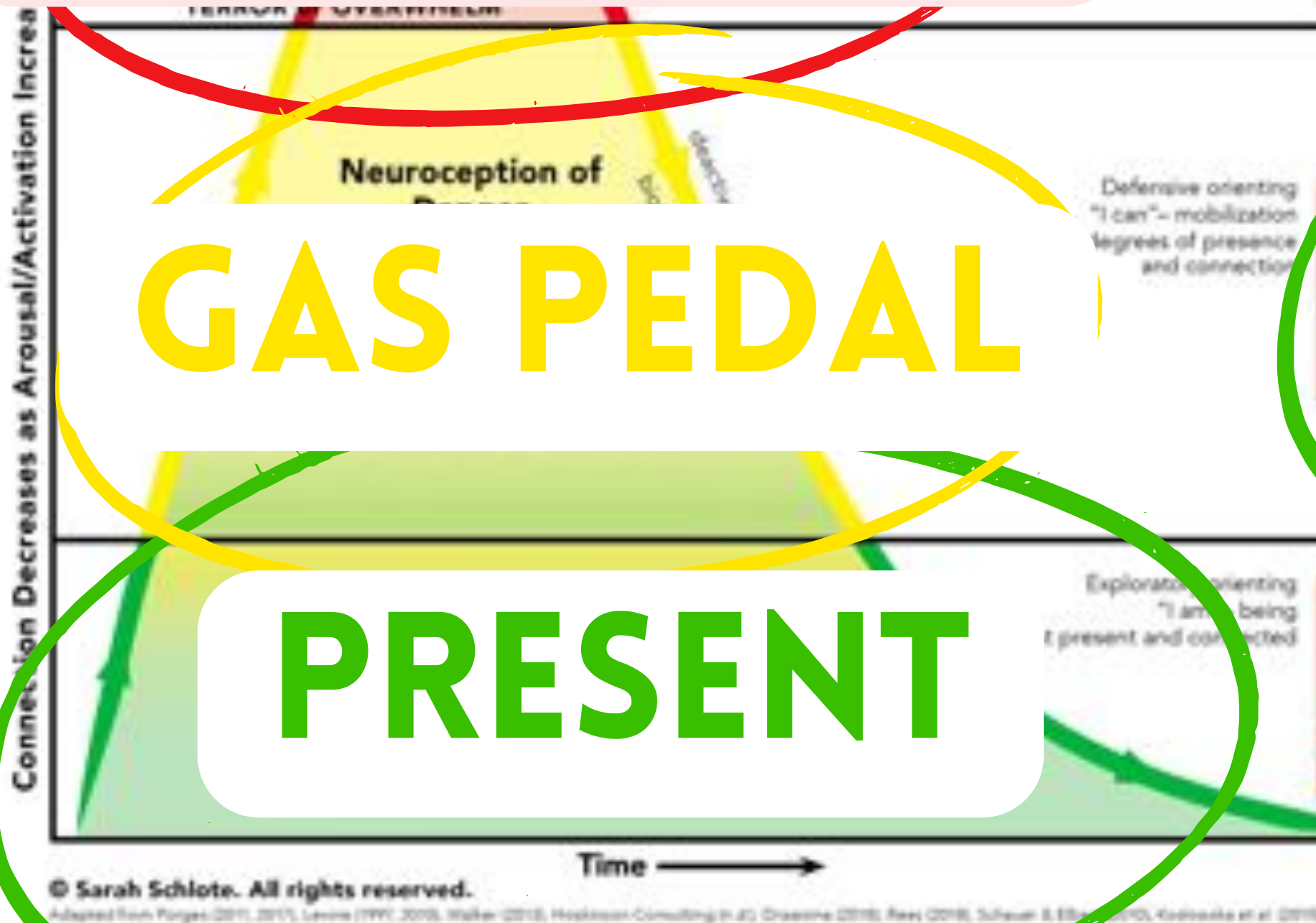
**GAS PEDAL**

**PRESENT**

**GAS PEDAL**

**PRESENT**

**SHUT DOWN**





**PRESENT**

**GAS PEDAL**

**SHUT DOWN**

Awareness in our self-regulation as  
helping professionals includes  
understanding these different internal  
states so that we can:

- (1) regulate our internal world
- (2) in order to be a dependable  
regulation resource for our clients.



## Further Reflection

(1) How do you experience the "gas pedal" (sympathetic NS) in your body?

(2) When you experience distress, do you tend to react by:

- fighting (protective/reactive)
- fleeing (get me out of here, anxious, avoidant)
- fawning/submitting (don't rock the boat)
- finding/attaching (sadness, vulnerability, seeking protection and connection)
- freezing/shutting down/overwhelm

(3) Reflect on a time when something happened in a session (or had happened just before a session) that impacted your nervous system state while you were with a client. Looking back, how do these categories of nervous system states that are charged by those instinctual reactions help you make sense of what happened inside of you in that session?

(4) If you cannot recall a time like this, consider how connected you feel to your nervous system while you are working. Are there ways you'd like to increase connection to your internal world and awareness of what's going on inside?

# GENERAL SELF-REGULATION RESOURCES

Deep Breathing

Body Grounding

Containment

Mantra/Prayer

Body Scan/Check in

Mind-Body Connection

Cardio Burst

Body Work











# Parts Perspective

- IFS
- INNER CHILD
- SHADOW WORK
- PARTS / MODES / DIMENSIONS / FACETS
- PROTECTIVE & VULNERABLE



➔ PART OF ME \_ \_ \_ \_ & PART OF ME \_ \_ \_ \_

# NERVOUS SYSTEM & PARTS



*adapted from the work of Janina Fisher, 2017*

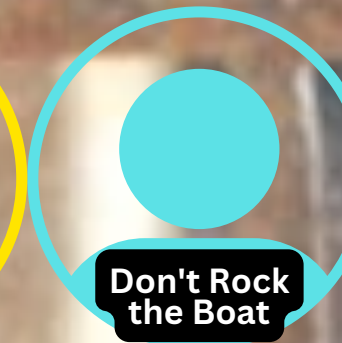
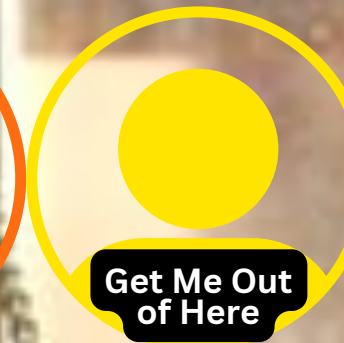


If we aren't aware of how our drive  
to keep functioning pushes distress  
reactions down or away, we'll be  
left with an internal conflict of  
unresolved energy that will not  
magically go away on its own

*based on the work of Janina Fisher, 2017*



- Being professional
- Not making it about us



- Being human
- Not fragmenting our being

--> Being authentic  
& present

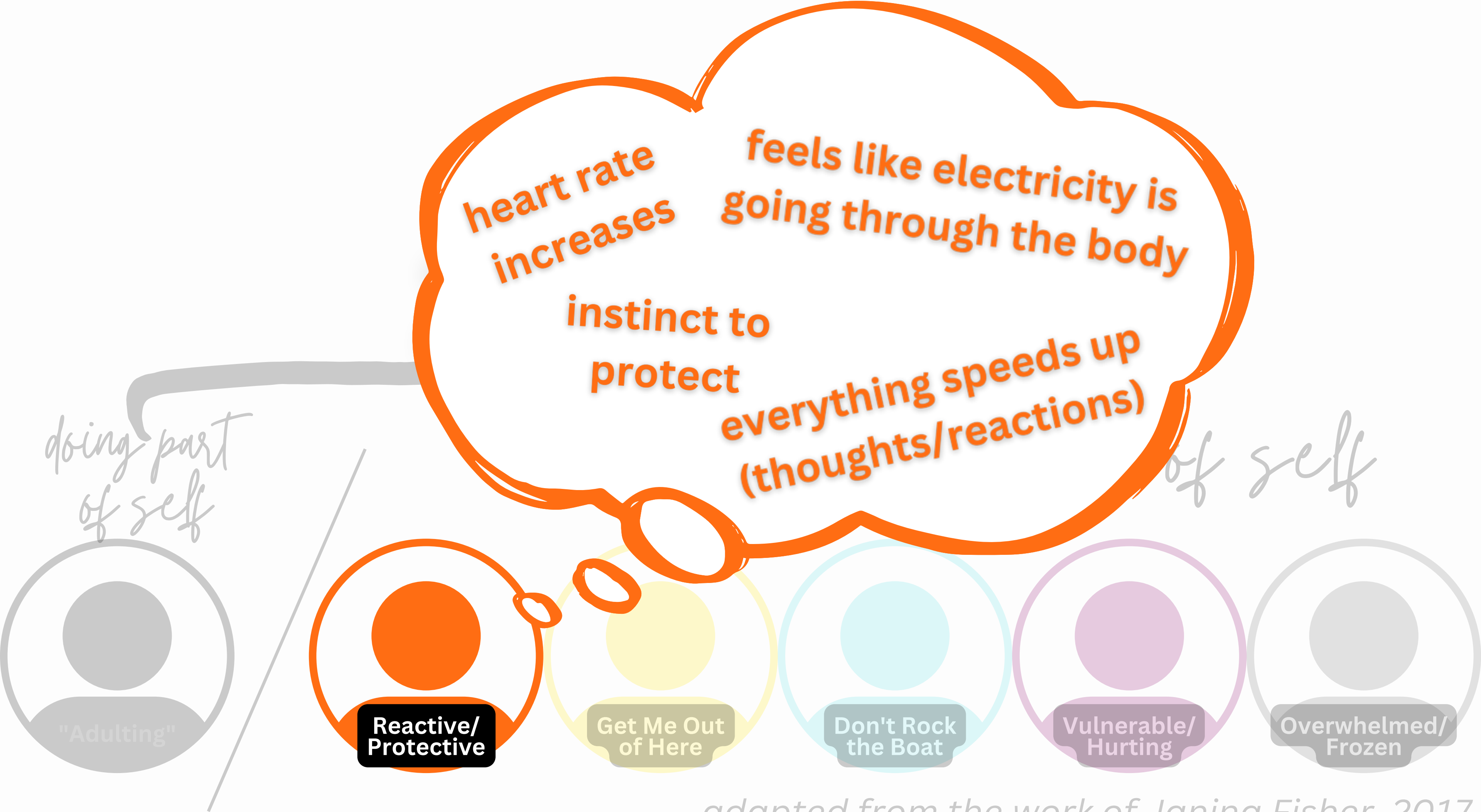


so that we can offer genuine  
empathy & attunement





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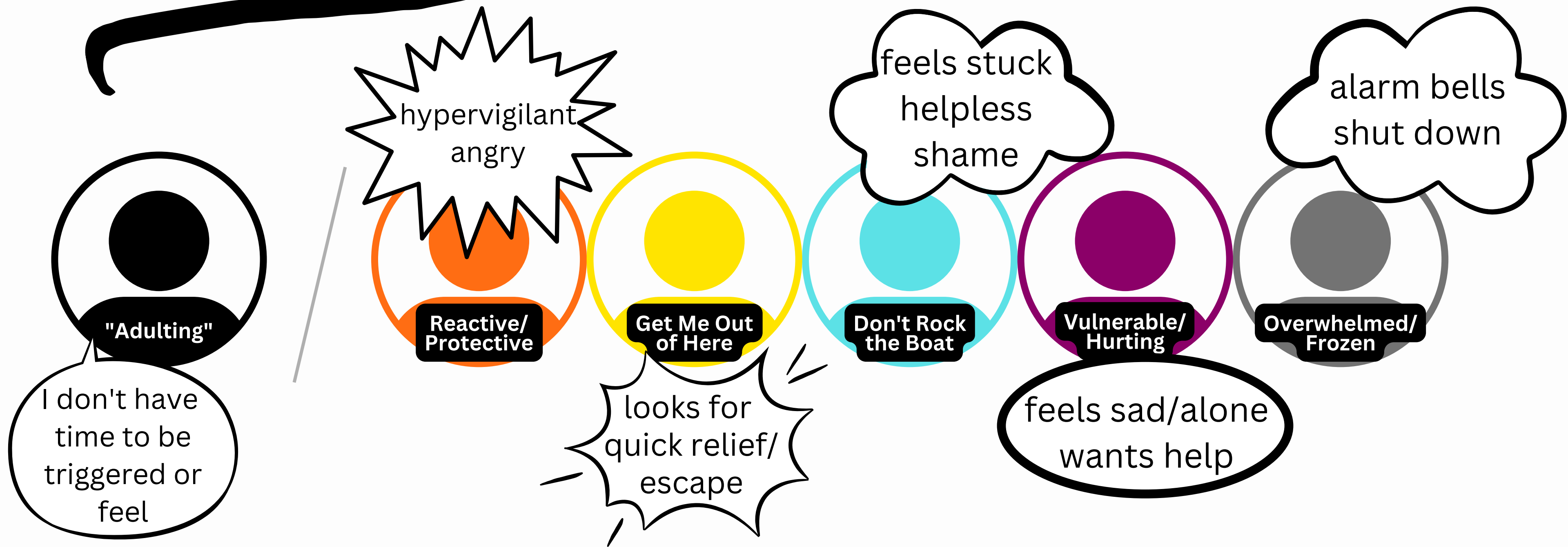
*adapted from the work of Janina Fisher, 2017*



doing part  
of self

self

feeling & reactive  
parts of self



*adapted from the work of Janina Fisher, 2017*

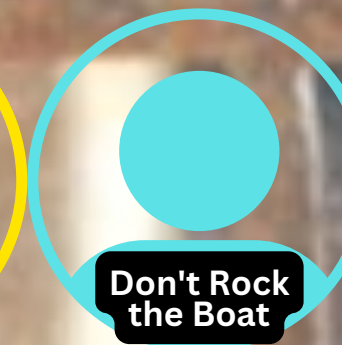
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## FURTHER REFLECTION

- (1) Has there been a time when you saw that general self-care was not helping your nervous system/tending to what you most needed? How did you know that it was not effective in the ways you were wanting/needing it to be?
- (2) How would you describe the part of you or drive in you to "keep it together" or "be a professional" that can be in tension with the messiness of being human? (word mode/therapy mode)
- (3) Whether it's at work or in life, which of these reactions can you most easily envision as a "part" of yourself that comes to the surface under stress? Are there ways you see tension between your reactions to stress and your drive to keep it together/be a professional?







**I Can't Adult Today.**



**Please Don't Make Me Adult.**



# CREATE A CARE PLAN FOR YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM



(1) Connect & Assess State of Your Internal World

(2) Ask, What Do I Need? *\*often multifaceted for balance*

(3) Consider How Proactivity Could Create Change

(4) Stay Connected & Check In (quarterly? 6 months?)

***It is slow work to connect to our internal world and to stay connected -- this isn't just a touch point once!***



## WHAT DO I NEED?

*To release energy/tightness/grip --  
deep breathing, mindfulness*

*To re-regulate/find balance -- slow  
down/thaw out (requires time!)*





## WHAT DO I NEED?

*To release energy -- movement, cardio burst, running/short sprints*



*To re-regulate/find balance --  
lengthening the spine, progressive  
muscle relaxation, gentle movement  
with breathing (yoga, walking), tactile  
grounding*



## WHAT DO I NEED?

*To release energy* -- opening of movement and breath, e.g., intentional deep sighs, laying flat on back



*To re-regulate/find balance* -- mindful movement (walking, yoga), assurance that distressing situation is over, potential conflict/escalation that was feared is no longer a threat





## WHAT DO I NEED?

*To release energy -- crying, sighing, journaling/giving voice to sadness that welled up underneath the surface*

*To re-regulate/find balance -- soothing stimuli (cozy blanket, pets), contact comfort (30sec hugs), reassurance that you have adult self to care for younger self, they are not alone/unseen*

# VISUALIZATION + BREATHING

Visualize hurting self being cared for by adult self or attachment figure in a safe place

Visualize get-me-out-of-here part able to go on a long run and move/breathe out the instinct to escape

Visualize the stress and burdens that the "adulting" part carries, and tend to their exhaustion





## FURTHER REFLECTION

What do you sense your system needs when you are overworked/exhausted from "adulting"? ***How would you care for another person in the same state?***

What do you sense your system needs when you have pent up energy to fight or flee? (reactivity/hypervigilance, anxiety/avoidance)

What do you sense your system needs when you have turtled in, gone quiet, shut down, frozen, or numb?

What do you sense your system needs when vulnerable parts of you are heavy with sadness, grief, or despair?

## CHECK-POINTS

Schedule time in 6-weeks to:

- Reflect on recent nervous system states/parts of self that have been present in and outside of sessions, has the plan or life circumstances changed anything?
- Consider if current practices are attuning to what's happening in your body --> For example, do you need more movement, less movement, different kinds of movement?









# Embrace Counseling

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[www.embracecounseling.info](http://www.embracecounseling.info)



for resources and upcoming events  
for counselors & therapists

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# R E L A T E D   R E S O U R C E S   &   R E S E A R C H

## **Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute**

[Preliminary Research & Literature](#)

[PEACE Protocol PDF](#)

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[Information & Research of Assessments Used](#)

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[Robust Resource Page, including Research & Free Resources for Clinicians](#)