

Getting Out of Freeze Mode: A Gentle Guide with Long-term & In-the-moment Tools

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For when you feel stuck, numb, disconnected or distant from yourself

What Is Freeze Mode, Really?

Freeze mode is one of the **core trauma responses** of the nervous system - alongside fight, flight & fawn. It's what happens when our body senses danger but feels **unable to act**. Rather than *mobilising* (as in fight or flight), the body **immobilises**. It's like a *full-body pause*: protective, automatic and often misunderstood. Think of a deer in headlights: "If I go completely still, I might survive this..."

Biologically, freeze involves:

- A **blending of sympathetic activation** (the part of the nervous system that says "do something! Fight/flight!") and **parasympathetic shutdown** (which says, "shut it all down - it's not safe").
- This internal conflict - being both activated and shut down - creates the unique **stuckness** and **numbness** of freeze.
- You may feel anxious on the inside but appear calm or disconnected on the outside. You might feel too tired to move, but too restless to rest.

Instead of seeing it as dysfunction, see it as your body saying:

"I don't feel safe. I'm overwhelmed. So I'm going to conserve energy & shut things down to protect you."

In childhood, this can be a response to **emotional neglect, unpredictability, over-control or overstimulation**. It becomes a habit when your system learns that action doesn't lead to safety - but stillness might.

Why So Many of Us Are in Freeze Today

We live in a system that constantly pushes us beyond our **window of tolerance**.

- Capitalism glorifies productivity, speed & output - rewarding those who suppress their needs and shaming those who slow down.
- This creates chronic overstimulation: constant information, comparison, urgency, hustle.
- Many of us are carrying intergenerational trauma, chronic stress, and economic precarity... with no real time or support to process any of it.
- The result? A nervous system that's maxed out... and a society that pathologises its very real symptoms.

Freeze mode is not laziness.

It's a nervous system response to a world that never lets us rest.

What's often labeled as "burnout" or "depression" is sometimes unprocessed **freeze** - a sign that your system is protecting itself from unsustainable pressure, rather than malfunctioning.

And so, before we rush to shame or pathologise our freeze states, it's worth pausing to ask:

What has my system been *enduring*?

Why does my body believe this is its *safest* option?

Where am I not allowed/unsafe to rest or be held?

What meaning is assigned to rest in my family/culture/society?

What would change if this society valued nervous system health as much as profit?

Long-Term Support for Unfreezing

Here are some gentle, sustainable practices that help you build safety and vitality over time. These are not quick fixes - they are invitations to create new rhythms in your life and nervous system.

1. Build Safety into Your Life

Your system needs to feel safe before it can move forward. Safety isn't just external - it's relational, emotional & internal.

Ways to cultivate safety:

- Practice saying **no**
- Try to observe & meet your most obvious & immediate needs to show your body that you're listening
- Incorporate vagus nerve stimulating practices into your daily life
- Create **rituals** around rest and nourishment
- Remove or **limit** exposure to people or environments that leave you feeling on edge
- Prioritise time in spaces (even digital ones) where you feel **seen** and **soft**
- Seek therapy, bodywork or somatic support if available

“The body struggles to heal in the same environment/context it froze in.”

2. Reconnect with Your Body (Slowly)

Freeze often includes **dissociation** - a disconnection from your physical form. You don't need to “jump back in” - you just need to begin noticing.

Body-based invitations:

- Gentle **walks**, especially in nature or around water
- **Stretching** or swaying, even in bed
- Breath with touch: one hand on chest, one on belly
- Using textures, scents, or warmth to stimulate awareness (eg. essential oils)

- Practices like yin yoga, qigong or dance (when ready)
- Anything that sparks aliveness, even in small doses

Consistency is more powerful than intensity. Five minutes a day adds up.

3. Restore Connection with Safe Beings

We're not meant to heal alone. Co-regulation - being around nervous systems that feel grounded and safe - has a profound impact. We are communal creatures, after all.

Ways to connect:

- Reach out to a friend or Loved one - even a voice note helps
- Join a low-pressure group or space, online or in person
- Volunteer gently, or spend time with animals
- Loving and nurturing a pet
- Reconnect to a spiritual practice or ancestral lineage, if that feels supportive
- Allow yourself to *be witnessed* in your stuckness without fixing

"Your nervous system is wired to heal through belonging."

4. Invite Gentle Flow

Freeze is a state of energetic **stagnation**. We want to slowly facilitate an energy of gentle motion, instead. You don't need to run a marathon - just invite some soft, non-threatening flow.

Options:

- Your favourite creative practice/artform - paint, dance, pottery etc.
- Flow journaling/doodling/mandala drawing without editing
- Washing dishes slowly while focusing on the water
- Drawing, painting, cooking, gardening
- Listening to instrumental or ambient music
- Walking while naming what you see around you

Creativity is flow. So is movement. So is curiosity.

5. Acknowledge the System, Shift the Story

Understand that you're responding *appropriately* to something - past or present - that overwhelmed you. This is not an abnormal response to much of what goes on in this world.

Practices to shift:

- Practice saying: *"There is nothing wrong with me."*
- Shame release
- Write letters from your frozen self to your future self/vice versa
- Read about trauma responses - education can be deeply regulating
- Track your freeze triggers and notice your patterns without judgment
- Ask: *What parts of me are still waiting for permission to slow down?*

In-the-Moment Tools for When You're Frozen

When you're in the thick of it - numb, foggy, tired, unreachable - these tools can help you **disrupt the freeze gently**. They are not about 'fixing you', but about reorienting your system.

Basic Orientation

Look around and name:

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

This simple sensory practice helps bring your awareness into the present.

Name What's True, Compassionate & Safe

Say out loud:

- "I am here."
- "It's safe to be still."
- "I'm safe in this moment."
- "I don't have to do anything yet."
- "I am having a natural reaction."
- "Rest is allowed."
- "I am powerful in stillness and motion."

Even if it doesn't feel fully true, speaking to your body like this helps.

Humming or Vibration

Humming stimulates the vagus nerve, which regulates your system.

Try:

- Humming softly for 30 seconds
- Putting your lips together and letting your chest vibrate
- Listening to low-frequency music or drumming rhythms
- Humming/singing along to song you Love
- Extra points for massaging your neck while doing so

Drink Water Slowly, or meet an immediate need

A glass of water, sipped with awareness, helps bring you back. So does listening to your body's cues, like going to the loo when your bladder is full.

You can also:

- Splash cool (not freezing) water on your face
- Hold your hands under a cool tap or hold a warm mug
- Chew mint gum or something with texture

Micro-Movement

Even the smallest motion signals safety to the body. Try:

- Rolling your neck
- Shrugging shoulders slowly
- Tapping your fingers to a rhythm, or EFT tapping
- Standing and swaying side to side
- Shaking out your hands
- Seated spinal twists

Set a timer for one minute and move however you can. Let your body decide.

Let Yourself Pause Without Panic

Sometimes you're not ready to act or move - and that's okay.

You can still:

- Light a candle and watch the flame
- Sit wrapped in a blanket and simply breathe
- Journal without making sense
- Listen to calming voices or sounds
- Watch stand-up comedy
- Place your hands over your heart and say: "Even now, I am with me."

If you're reading this while in freeze - or coming out of it - I want you to know:

✨ You are not broken

✨ You are not lazy

✨ You are not behind

You are a nervous system doing its best to survive in a world that asks too much, too fast, too often.

Freeze mode is not a failure.

It's a form of wisdom.

And every time you soften toward yourself, every time you try one small thing, you are rewriting the story in your body. You are moving, even when it feels like you're not.

There is no rush.

There is no 'right' timeline.

There is only your rhythm and it is sacred.

May this guide be a soft place to land whenever you need it.

And may you remember: you are allowed to rest. You are allowed to heal.

You are allowed to come back to life... at your own pace.

♥ With warmth and gentleness,

Sasha Blossom