

THE BRAIN HIJACK

—  UNDERSTANDING MY BRAIN,  —
SIGNALS, AND RESPONSES

INPUT FROM
EVERYWHERE



PEOPLE



SOUNDS



TECHNOLOGY



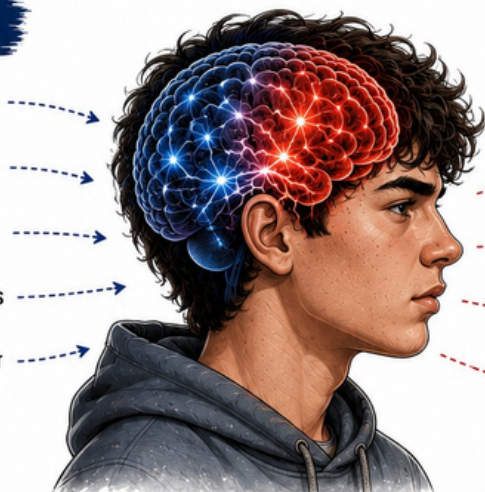
EXPECTATIONS



ENVIRONMENT



EMOTIONS



MY BRAIN
HELPS ME



FOCUS



UNDERSTAND



DECIDE



COMMUNICATE



RESPOND

AWARENESS IS POWER.

TOOLS GIVE ME CONTROL.

PRACTICE CREATES CHANGE.



UNDERSTAND
MY BRAIN



RECOGNIZE
MY SIGNALS



USE TOOLS
TO REGULATE



BUILD BETTER
RESPONSES

I can interrupt old pathways and build new ones.

BRAIN HIJACK

When Signals Aren't Balanced

My goal is to notice signs, use tools, and get my thinking brain in the driver's seat.



Your brain and body are always working to find balance.

But when there are **too many** or **not enough** signals, your brain can get hijacked.

Thinking Brain (Prefrontal Cortex) in the DRIVER'S SEAT



MY JOB:

- ✓ Notice early signs
- ✓ Use tools that help
- ✓ Make smart choices
- ✓ Keep learning & growing

TOO MANY SIGNALS

I'm Overwhelmed



My brain thinks it needs to **PROTECT** me. I go into fight, flight, or freeze.

SIGNS I MIGHT NOTICE:

- Big feelings, anger, fear, panic
- Racing heart, fast breathing
- Tense muscles, headaches, stomachaches
- Can't think clearly
- Reacting without thinking
- Shutting down or exploding

I NEED TO:



Calm my body



Use tools that help



Get my thinking brain back online

JUST RIGHT

I'm In Control



My brain and body are working **TOGETHER**. I feel calm, focused, and ready.

SIGNS I MIGHT NOTICE:

- Calm, relaxed, in control
- Can think clearly
- Focused and productive
- Good listener
- Flexible and problem-solve
- In the zone!

I CAN:



Stay aware & check in



Use tools to stay balanced



Make good choices

TOO LITTLE SIGNALS

I'm Understimulated



My brain isn't getting enough input. I miss cues, can't focus, feel blah.

SIGNS I MIGHT NOTICE:

- Bored, tired, or zoning out
- Hard to focus or get started
- Daydreaming or spacing out
- Low energy or blah mood
- Not noticing what's going on
- Sluggish or moving slow

I NEED TO:



Wake up my body



Add input I need



Get engaged & focused

WE HAVE TWO SYSTEMS THAT WORK TOGETHER

PARASYMPATHETIC SYSTEM REST & DIGEST

- Helps me relax
- Slows heart rate
- Calms breathing
- Helps me recover
- Builds & restores
- Brings me back to center



When these two systems are in **BALANCE**, my brain works best.



SYMPATHETIC SYSTEM PROTECTION MODE

- Helps me react
- Increases heart rate
- Speeds up breathing
- Gives me energy
- Keeps me safe
- Kicks in during stress



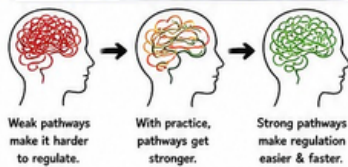
When I get out of balance, my brain can get **HIJACKED**.

My amygdala takes over and my thinking brain gets pushed out of the driver's seat.

HOW I REGAIN BALANCE

- 1 NOTICE EARLY SIGNS**
Check in with my body and brain.
- 2 USE TOOLS THAT HELP**
Calm down, wake up, or focus.
- 3 GET BACK TO GREEN**
My thinking brain gets back in charge.
- 4 PRACTICE EVERY DAY**
Stronger pathways = better regulation.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN. BUILD STRONGER PATHWAYS.



Weak pathways make it harder to regulate.

With practice, pathways get stronger.

Strong pathways make regulation easier & faster.

I CAN GROW MY BRAIN!

- Practice self-awareness
- Use tools on purpose
- Make small, smart choices
- Learn from my experiences
- Keep showing up for myself

AWARENESS GIVES ME POWER.



I can't always control what happens.



But I can control how I respond.



I choose my tools.



I get my thinking brain back in the driver's seat.



I'm in charge of me.

TOOLS GIVE ME CONTROL.

PRACTICE GIVES ME CHANGE.



TOO MUCH
(OVERWHELMED)



JUST RIGHT
(IN CONTROL)



TOO LITTLE
(UNDERSTIMULATED)

SELF-MONITORING

Check In. Tune In. Choose What Helps.

Self-monitoring is the ability to check-in and see what I need. It helps me **understand** my signals, **regulate** my emotions, and decide which tools will help me feel and function my best.

When I self-monitor, I check in with my body and brain so I can choose the right tools and make better choices!



BODY SCAN: HOW AM I FEELING RIGHT NOW?



Start at the top of your head and check in with each part of your body. Notice what you feel. There are no right or wrong answers.



HEAD

How does the top of my head feel?

- Headache?
- Tension or pressure?
- Scattered thoughts?
- Hard to focus?



EYES

How do my eyes feel?

- Tired?
- Dry or burning?
- Hard to focus?
- Need a break from screens?



EARS

How do my ears feel?

- Too loud?
- Sensitive to sound?
- Not listening?
- Tune out or distracted?



MOUTH / THROAT

How does my mouth or throat feel?

- Dry?
- Need a drink?
- Am I talking too much?
- Holding back words?



CHEST

How does my chest feel?

- Is my heart racing?
- Tight or heavy?
- Shallow breathing?
- Feeling anxious or angry?

STOMACH

How does my stomach feel?

- Hungry?
- Nauseous or upset?
- Butterflies?
- Need to use the bathroom?

LEGS TO FEET

How do my legs and feet feel?

- Restless?
- Tense or tight?
- Need to move?
- Want to run, stretch, or jump?

CHECK IN & CHOOSE TOOLS

After my body scan, I decide what I need and choose tools that help.



If I feel RED
(too much)

- I need to calm down.
- I can breathe.
- I can move.
- I can take a break.
- I can use tools to feel safe.



If I feel GREEN
(just right)

- I stay focused.
- I keep going.
- I make good choices.
- I help others.



If I feel BLUE
(too little)

- I need more input.
- I can move my body.
- I can get a drink or snack.
- I can try a new strategy.

WHAT'S MY ZONE RIGHT NOW?

Circle the zone that matches how you feel most right now.

RED
TOO MUCH



Overwhelmed, angry, frustrated, out of control.

GREEN
JUST RIGHT



Calm, focused, in control.

BLUE
TOO LITTLE



Tired, bored, low energy, not focused.

I CAN CHOOSE TO...

- ✓ Notice how I feel.
- ✓ Understand why.
- ✓ Choose tools that help.
- ✓ Try again if I need to.

I'VE GOT THIS!



REMEMBER:



- ✓ My body gives me information.
- ✓ All feelings are okay.
- ✓ I can pause and check in any time.
- ✓ The more I practice, the better I get!

TOOLS I MIGHT CHOOSE



MOVE MY BODY



DRINK WATER



TAKE A BREAK



JOURNAL MY FEELINGS



BREATHE SLOWLY



TALK TO SOMEONE

MY PLAN



Tools that help me most:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- ☞ I will use these when I need to.



I AM IN CHARGE OF ME.



I CHECK IN.



I CHOOSE WHAT HELPS.



I CAN DO HARD THINGS.

WHEN SIGNALS COME IN TOO STRONG

When my brain gets **too much** input **too fast**,
my **emotional system** can take over before
my **thinking brain** has time to respond.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

Too many or too intense signals overwhelm my brain. My survival brain (amygdala) hits the alarm and takes control.



Amygdala
(Survival Brain)
Fast, automatic, and protective.

THE HIJACK:

The survival brain hijacks the thinking brain (prefrontal cortex).

I react before I can think.



Prefrontal Cortex
(Thinking Brain)
Slower, logical, plans, problem solves, considers consequences.

THIS CAN LEAD TO STRONG AND INTENSE BEHAVIORS:



AGGRESSION
Hitting, fighting, threatening



YELLING
Raising my voice, saying hurtful things



IMPULSIVE DECISIONS
Acting without thinking



EMOTIONAL EXPLOSIONS
Meltdowns, rage, panic



SHUTTING OTHERS OUT
Isolating, refusing help or connection



UNSAFE CHOICES
Risky behaviors, regret later

SIGNS MY BRAIN IS OVERLOADED:



- ✓ Heart racing
- ✓ Muscles tense
- ✓ Breathing fast
- ✓ Feeling hot
- ✓ Racing thoughts
- ✓ Trouble thinking clearly
- ✓ Feeling out of control

REMEMBER:

It's not that I'm a bad person.
My brain is trying to protect me.



My goal is to recognize the signs, use tools, and bring my thinking brain back online.



MY GOAL:

Catch the signals early, use tools that help, and get my **thinking brain** back in charge.

I can pause.
I can reset.
I can choose a better response.

OPTIONS, TOOLS & STRATEGIES

When Signals Hit Too Strong



When my brain is hijacked and in "RED,"
I can choose strategies that help me **reset**,
regain control, and **think** again.



I have
**COMPLETE
CONTROL.**

WHEN MY BRAIN IS IN RED...



My body
reacts before
I can think.



Emotions feel
too big.



Thinking gets
foggy.



I might act
without
meaning to.



I feel panicked,
angry, or out
of control.

STRATEGIES THAT HELP ME RESET & TAKE BACK CONTROL:

1 MOVE MY BODY



- ✓ Go for a walk.
- ✓ Stretch.
- ✓ Shake it out.
- ✓ Get my energy moving.

2 USE MY BREATH



- ✓ Breathe in slow.
- ✓ Hold for a moment.
- ✓ Breathe out slow.
- ✓ Repeat 4-6 times.

3 VISUALIZE TO CALM



- ✓ Picture a safe place.
- ✓ Imagine it with all 5 senses.
- ✓ Stay there in my mind for a minute.

4 USE MY STRENGTH



- ✓ Push, pull, lift, or carry.
- ✓ Squeeze a stress ball or pillow.
- ✓ Use my muscles to release energy.

5 CHANGE MY ENVIRONMENT



- ✓ Step away.
- ✓ Go to another room or outside.
- ✓ Take a break to reset my brain.

THE CONNECTION THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING



HIJACKED
(RED)



CALM & IN CONTROL
(GREEN)



My strategies send a message to my brain:
"I've got this."



Each time I practice, I build **stronger** pathways.



Practice makes **my** self-control stronger.



Better choices. Better responses. Every time.

I HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL.



- ✓ I can choose how I respond.
- ✓ I am in charge of my actions.
- ✓ I decide what I do next.

PRACTICE MAKES STRONGER.



- ★ The more I practice what works, the stronger my brain becomes.
- ★ Better today, better tomorrow!

I AM NOT ALONE.



Everyone struggles sometimes.
Not everyone knows how to manage it—and that's okay.

I CAN RESET. I CAN REGROUP. I CAN TAKE BACK CONTROL.



Awareness gives me **POWER**.



Tools give me **CONTROL**.



Practice gives me **CHANGE**.

WHEN MY BRAIN MISSES SIGNALS

Sometimes my brain is **not getting enough input**, or the signals are **too weak** for me to notice. I may miss important information.

NOT ENOUGH INPUT CAN LOOK LIKE:



BOREDOM

Not enough stimulation for my brain.



LOW ENERGY

Feeling tired, exhausted, or drained.



DISTRACTIONS

Screens, noise, and clutter compete for my attention.



SHUTTING DOWN

My brain protects me by tuning out or disconnecting.



NOT ENOUGH CHALLENGE

My brain needs just the right amount of input to stay engaged.

THIS CAN LEAD TO:



MISSING ASSIGNMENTS

I may not turn in work or remember deadlines.



MISSED SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

I may not notice personal space or how others feel.



APPEARING DISCONNECTED

Others may think I don't care, but my brain missed the cue.



LOW MOTIVATION

My brain doesn't get the signal to start or keep going.



NOT RECOGNIZING CONSEQUENCES

I may not connect my actions to what happens next.



CHECK IN WITH ME



- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ Am I getting enough sleep? | ☐ Am I eating and drinking enough? | ☐ Am I feeling bored or underchallenged? |
| ☐ Is my environment too busy or distracting? | ☐ Do I need more movement or a break? | ☐ Is my brain trying to protect me by tuning out? |

REMEMBER:

My brain needs the **right amount** of input—not too much and not too little.



MY GOAL:

Help my brain get the right input so I can notice, understand, and respond.



AWARENESS IS POWER. When I notice the signs, I can make a change.



OPTIONS, TOOLS & STRATEGIES

When There Aren't Enough Signals

When my brain is understimulated and in "BLUE," I need more input.
I can use strategies to wake up my brain, focus, and feel better.

People around me can help by noticing when I'm "BLUE" and showing me this page of ideas that help me!

WHEN MY BRAIN IS IN BLUE...



I'm low energy or feel tired.



I can't focus or think clearly.



I miss things—cues from teachers, peers, parents, or the world around me.



I feel blah, bored, or "off."



I need more input for my brain to work and my body to feel better.

STRATEGIES THAT ADD INPUT & WAKE UP MY BRAIN

1 MOVE MY BODY



- ✓ Stretch or do yoga.
- ✓ Go for a quick walk.
- ✓ March in place.
- ✓ Do 10 jumping jacks.
- ✓ Shake it out!

2 USE QUICK CHAIR MOVES



- ✓ Chair push-ups.
- ✓ Push up and hold.
- ✓ Sit tall, then stand.
- ✓ Squeeze & release muscles.
- ✓ Move without leaving my space.

3 FUEL MY BRAIN & BODY



- ✓ Drink water (with ice).
- ✓ Have a snack—chewy or crunchy works best!
- ✓ Keep my brain and body fueled.

4 USE A TIMER & BREAK IT UP



- ✓ Set a timer.
- ✓ Work in chunks.
- ✓ Take a short break after each chunk.
- ✓ It helps me get things done!

5 TURN IT INTO A GAME



- ✓ Make it a challenge.
- ✓ Beat my best score.
- ✓ Race the clock.
- ✓ Make it fun and earn points!

6 GET HEAVY INPUT



- ✓ Push, pull, lift or carry.
- ✓ Use resistance bands.
- ✓ Wall push.
- ✓ Squeeze a stress ball.

7 JUMP, BOUNCE & VESTIBULAR FUN



- ✓ Jump on a trampoline.
- ✓ Hop or skip.
- ✓ Spin in a chair.
- ✓ Swing or rock.
- ✓ Get my body moving in new ways.

8 RESET SOCIAL WITH MOVEMENT



- ✓ Use my muscles to release energy.
- ✓ Play a quick game.
- ✓ High-five, push a wall, carry something.
- ✓ Movement helps me connect!

9 CHANGE MY POSITION



- ✓ Stand while I work.
- ✓ Work on the floor.
- ✓ Sit on a wobble seat or yoga ball.
- ✓ A new position can wake me up!

10 BREATHE & BOOST OXYGEN



- ✓ Take 5 deep breaths.
- ✓ Blow out slowly.
- ✓ Open a window.
- ✓ Fresh air = fresh focus.

THE CONNECTION THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING



UNDERSTIMULATED (BLUE)

I add input and use strategies that wake up my brain.



AWAKE, FOCUSED & IN CONTROL (GREEN)

- ✓ I notice more.
- ✓ I focus better.
- ✓ I feel better inside.
- ✓ I can get things done.
- ✓ I'm ready to learn, connect, and succeed!



I'M NOT ALONE.

Everyone has times when their brain feels "blue." The difference is knowing what helps and using it!



Awareness gives me POWER.



Tools give me CONTROL.



Practice gives me CHANGE.

★ I CAN RESET. I CAN REGROUP. I CAN WAKE UP MY BRAIN. ★

When my brain is



GREEN...

READING THE ROOM

Signals Working = Awareness in Action

Reading the room helps me understand my surroundings, adjust my behavior, and make things work better for everyone.

When my signals are working, I can see what's happening around me and make smart choices.



GOOD READERS OF THE ROOM...



Listen to what others are saying and how they're saying it.



Notice how people feel and give space when needed.



Follow the rules and expectations of the space.



Adjust my behavior so I can learn, connect, and get along.



Help create a space where everyone can be successful.

Use **STOP** as a quick way to read the room and check in with your surroundings.



SPACE: Look around.

- What is happening in the SPACE I'm in?
- Is it busy and loud, quiet and calm, or somewhere in between?
- Do I need to adjust my behavior (volume, energy, or movement)?
- Is this a flexible space that allows me to get the kind of input I need?
- Are there expectations or rules in this space?

BUSY & LOUD



Lower my volume.
Stay focused.
Give others space.

QUIET & CALM



Use a quiet voice.
Stay on task.
Respect the calm.

IN BETWEEN



Adjust as needed.
Read the cues.
Be flexible.



TIME: Think about how much time I have.

- Is there a deadline that will affect my behavior and effort?
- What is the pace right now?
- What is next?
- Is there too much time and I know I get bored?
- What strategies can I use to stay focused during this TIME?



Check the clock or timer.



Know what's expected and what comes next.



Use time wisely.
Start now.
Stay on track.



Use strategies to stay engaged and beat boredom!



OBSERVE: Look at the objects around me.

- What do I see that is needed for task completion?
- What tools or resources are available to help me?
- Am I ORGANIZED for right now?
- Can I use a peer or the environment to support my success?



Do I have what I need?



Am I organized and ready?



Can a peer help me stay focused?



Use timers or the clock to create a helpful goal.



PEOPLE & PRACTICE: Who can help? What can I practice?

- Who can help me succeed?
- Who might distract me?
- What tools help me adjust and stay on track?
- Practice using strategies that help me respond, not react.



Find people who support and encourage me.



Limit distractions. Make smart choices.



Use tools that help me reset, refocus, and adjust.



Practice now, so I'm ready for anything!



When I read the room and adjust...



- I make better choices.
- I build stronger relationships.
- I can learn more and stress less.
- I help create a positive space for everyone.



AWARENESS IS POWER.
ADJUSTING IS STRENGTH.
PRACTICE MAKES PROGRESS.



I can STOP.



I take TIME.



I OBSERVE.



I include PEOPLE & PRACTICE.

I read the room. I adjust. I succeed.



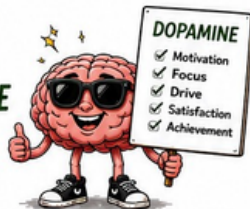
I know I should do it... I just need my brain on board.



DOPAMINE:

THE "HAVE FUN & GET IT DONE" HORMONE

Dopamine is a chemical in your brain that helps you feel motivated, focused, and rewarded. It's your brain's way of saying, "THIS IS WORTH DOING!"



WHY DOPAMINE MATTERS

- ✓ Helps you get started
- ✓ Keeps you on task
- ✓ Pushes you through hard things
- ✓ Makes you feel good when you finish
- ✓ Builds habits and follow-through



THE PROBLEM: DOPAMINE OVERLOAD

Too much quick dopamine = harder to get things done.



Video games, social media & endless scrolling hit the reward center FAST.



Your dopamine receptors get flooded and become less sensitive.



When it's time to do homework or chores, there's no dopamine left to get you going.



Boring or hard tasks feel impossible, so you procrastinate.

Instant fun now = struggle later.

NOT EVERYONE HAS THE SAME AMOUNT

Some teens naturally have less dopamine or a slower system. That's not a flaw—it just means you may need more strategy and support.

Some teens have more.



Some teens have less.

You can train your brain to create more dopamine the smart way!

URGENCY + NOVELTY + INTEREST = DOPAMINE

Your brain pays attention to three things: urgency, novelty and interest. When you add these to a task, your brain gives you more dopamine to do it!



URGENCY
(feel it matters now)



NOVELTY
(something new)



INTEREST
(make it engaging)



MORE DOPAMINE = MORE MOTIVATION = GET IT DONE!

SMART STRATEGIES TO BOOST DOPAMINE (THE RIGHT WAY!)

Trick your nervous system. Train your brain. Get more done.

1 GAMEIFY IT

Turn tasks into a game.

- Earn points
- Level up
- Beat your high score
- Track your streaks
- Create challenges



Make it fun, challenging and rewarding.
Play the long game.
Future you is the real winner.

2 SET TIMERS & DEADLINES

Deadlines create urgency. Urgency creates dopamine.



- Use timers (Pomodoro or countdowns)
- Set mini-deadlines for each chunk
- Beat the clock
- Make it a race against you!

A deadline tells your brain, "This matters now." It wakes up your focus.

3 FOCUS ON THE REWARD AFTER

Think about what you'll enjoy after this chunk is done.



- Pick a reward you love
- Set a timer for your reward (so you don't get stuck)
- Use it as motivation to finish the work

Work first. Reward second. Set a timer and get back to it!

4 MAKE IT NEW & INTERESTING

New = more dopamine.



- Do it in a new place
- Work on your stomach
- Have your cat nearby
- Dictate instead of write
- Use colorful notes or mind maps
- Change up your tools or playlist

Small changes = big dopamine boost.

5 CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Your brain likes connection and commitment.



- Check in with a friend or parent
- Tell someone your plan
- Use study groups
- Join an accountability app or group
- Don't break the chain!

People believe what other people help them stay accountable to.

EXAMPLE: HOMEWORK CHUNK



Pick your task (e.g., 30 min of science notes)



Set a timer (25 minutes)



Game plan: Earn 100 points by finishing it!



Work in a new way (on stomach with cat nearby)



Take a 10-minute reward break (timer on!)



Get back to it! You got this.



Feel good. Celebrate. Repeat.



I don't need motivation. I can create it.

SIGNS OF LOW DOPAMINE

- Hard to get started
- No motivation
- Bored easily
- Procrastination
- Brain fog
- Tired even when not doing much



SIGNS OF HEALTHY DOPAMINE

- Ready to start
- Focused
- Enjoy the process
- Push through challenges
- Feel proud after finishing
- Balanced use of tech



QUICK DOPAMINE BOOSTERS (HEALTHY HABITS)

- Exercise
- Sunlight
- Sleep
- Protein + water
- Accomplish small wins



REMEMBER...

- ★ You can train your brain.
- ★ You can create your own dopamine.
- ★ Smart choices now = freedom later.

YOU'VE GOT THIS. ♥

DON'T WAIT TO FEEL MOTIVATED. CREATE IT. FUEL YOUR BRAIN. GET IT DONE. 🧠

It's not stress that kills you. It's **toxic stress**.



CORTISOL: THE STRESS HORMONE

Cortisol is your body's natural alarm system. It helps you wake up, focus, and get things done. But **too much—or for too long**—can hurt you.

Balance is Everything.



TOO MUCH CORTISOL = TOXIC STRESS

Harmful over time.

- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or angry
- Trouble sleeping
- Headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension
- Weaker immune system
- Hard to think clearly or focus
- Burnout, exhaustion, or shutdown



JUST RIGHT = HEALTHY STRESS

Helpful and motivating.

- Gives you energy to do hard things
- Helps you focus and stay alert
- Creates a sense of urgency
- Helps you solve problems
- Builds confidence and momentum



TOO LITTLE CORTISOL

Can leave you feeling...

- Tired, unmotivated, or "blah"
- Hard to get started
- No energy or drive
- Bored, foggy, or checked out
- Not enough "push" to act



MANAGING CORTISOL = MANAGING YOUR TIME AND STRESS

TOOLS THAT HELP YOU USE CORTISOL WISELY:

CREATE DEADLINES



Set mini-deadlines before the real one. Urgency helps you act—without waiting until the last minute.

USE CHECKLISTS



Break tasks into small steps you can check off. Every check fuels progress and motivation.

PLAN YOUR WEEK



Spread your work out. Don't dump it all on one day. Your future self will thank you!

CHUNK YOUR WORK



Big tasks feel less overwhelming when you break them into smaller pieces.

COACH YOURSELF



Talk it out. A quick "coaching session" helps you reset, problem-solve, and make a new plan.

COACHING SESSION (Example Chat)

You: I don't want to do this homework.
Coach: What's making it hard right now?
You: It's a lot, and I don't know where to start.
Coach: Let's break it down. What's the first small step?
You: I can do the outline.
Coach: Great. Let's set a timer for 20 minutes. Then take a break.
You: Okay, I can do that.
Coach: I believe in you. You've got this.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T STICK TO THE PLAN...

THE PLAN (Smart Plan)

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
History Reading (1 hr)	Math Problems (1 hr)	Science Notes (1 hr)	English Essay (1 hr)	Study / Review (1 hr)	You Time (Play, Relax)	Rest

Work is spread out. Stress is low. You have time for you.

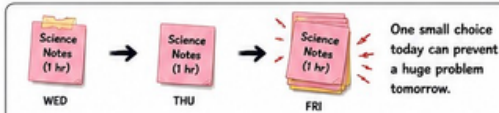
THE REALITY (Work Piled Up)

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
History Reading (1 hr)	Math Problems (1 hr)	Science Notes (1 hr)	English Essay (1 hr)	History Reading (Math) English Essay Study / Review	You Time (Play, Relax)	

All the work lands on Friday—the day you wanted to play. Now you feel overwhelmed, stressed, and behind.

MOVING WORK = SEEING THE CONSEQUENCES

When you don't finish your work on time, you have to move it. That pile-up is a visual reminder of the stress you create for yourself—and your body. More stress = more cortisol. Manage your plan = manage your cortisol.



One small choice today can prevent a huge problem tomorrow.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Chronic stress keeps cortisol high.
- High cortisol can harm your body and brain.
- Smart planning keeps cortisol in the healthy zone.
- Healthy cortisol = energy, focus, and better choices.



SIGNS OF TOO MUCH CORTISOL

- Feeling on edge or irritable
- Racing thoughts
- Trouble sleeping
- Stomach issues or headaches
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Procrastination or total shutdown



WHAT CAN YOU DO RIGHT NOW?

- ✓ Check your plan.
- ✓ Break one task into a smaller step.
- ✓ Set a timer and get started.
- ✓ Take breaks on purpose.
- ✓ Move your body.
- ✓ Talk to someone.
- ✓ Celebrate progress!



YOUR GOAL:

FEEL THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF URGENCY—NOT TOXIC STRESS.
Plan smart. Work steady. Finish strong. Feel good.



- ★ AWARENESS GIVES ME POWER.
- ★ TOOLS GIVE ME CONTROL.
- ★ PRACTICE GIVES ME CHANGE.

I feel overwhelmed, on edge, worried all the time.



MANAGING STRESS & ANXIETY

Find Balance. Feel Better. Learn Better.

Stress is the gatekeeper to learning. When our stress is too high, our brain goes into survival mode. We live in the reptilian brain, where we are simply surviving and reacting, not learning and growing.



When I'm in survival mode:

- ✗ I can't focus
- ✗ I feel scared or angry
- ✗ I react, not think
- ✗ Learning is almost impossible

LET'S TAKE CARE OF OUR BRAINS AND OUR HEARTS.

TRY THESE ACTIVITIES TO FIND BALANCE

1 ANXIETY APPOINTMENTS

Schedule times for worries. When we focus too much on worries, they grow—just like a plant that is constantly tended to.



- ✓ Write down the worry and get it out of your brain.
- ✓ Put it in your "worry jar" or notebook.
- ✓ Save it for your anxiety appointment time.
- ✓ During your appointment, talk about it with a friend, your dog, or a trusted adult.



Worries shrink when we stop feeding them. This gives your brain room to focus and learn!

2 FLEX / RELAX

Release the tension. Help your body send a signal to your brain that it's safe to relax.

Try these:



...then RELAX.



...then RELAX.



...then let it all go. Take a deep breath. Repeat a few times.

Tension is built up. Relaxation is a choice. Practice makes it easier!

3 BUCKET FILLING AT THE END OF THE DAY

Talk about kindness. Shift your focus from worries to people. Build empathy and awareness for others.



- ✓ How did you fill someone's bucket today?
- ✓ Did someone fill yours?

Small acts of kindness fill buckets—and hearts. It helps you feel good and connected.

4 TALK ABOUT THE REAL STUFF

End the day with conversations that build confidence, connection, and self-awareness.

- 1 What did you do that was brave today?
- 2 How were you successful today?
- 3 How did you need help from someone today?
- 4 How were you kind, or how did you fill someone's bucket today?

These conversations help you see the good, build resilience, and strengthen relationships.

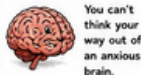
PARENTS & ADULTS: PARTICIPATE AND CONNECT

- ♥ Do these activities with your teen.
- ♥ Listen without fixing.
- ♥ Share your answers too!
- ♥ You are your teen's most powerful support.

Connection is the foundation of calm, confidence, and learning.

We're all in this together. Let's help each other thrive.

REMEMBER...



You can't think your way out of an anxious brain.



Notice it. Name it. Tame it.



Use tools that help you find balance.



Small steps today = a stronger brain tomorrow.



You are capable. You are important. You belong.



I've got tools. I can handle this.

CALM BODY. STEADY MIND. STRONG HEART. READY TO LEARN.

YOUR VAGUS NERVE

Your Body's Superhighway To Calm

Small actions.
Big impact.
You've got this!



The vagus nerve is the **longest** nerve in your body. It connects your brain to many important organs and helps control how you feel.

When we stimulate the vagus nerve, we can calm down, feel better, and function our best.

THE VAGUS NERVE AFFECTS:



Mood & Emotions



Breathing



Heart Rate



Digestion



Immune System



Voice & Communication

...and so much more!

WHAT DOES IT DO?

- ✓ Helps your body relax after stress
- ✓ Slows your heart rate and breathing
- ✓ Improves digestion and reduces stomach upset
- ✓ Supports better sleep and recovery
- ✓ Helps regulate mood and emotions
- ✓ Helps you think more clearly and focus

Think of it as your body's "brake pedal" that helps you shift out of stress mode.



HOW TO STIMULATE YOUR VAGUS NERVE

1. COLD THERAPY

Use a cold pack or cold washcloth on your neck or face.



Cold stimulates the vagus nerve and helps your body calm down fast.

2. EXERCISE / HEAVY WORK



Activities like running, lifting, pushing, pulling, or even yard work wake up your body and help regulate your nervous system.

3. HUM / CHANT



Hum, chant, sing, or gargle! The vibrations stimulate your vagus nerve through your throat and vocal cords.

4. DEEP, SLOW BREATHING

Try 6 breaths per minute (in for 5 seconds, out for 5 seconds).



Let your belly move in and out. This sends a strong calm signal to your brain.

WHY 6 BREATHS PER MINUTE?

Most people take about 12-20 breaths per minute when stressed.

Slowing down to 6 breaths per minute activates your body's natural calm system.



5. LAUGH!



Laughter reduces stress hormones, boosts mood, and activates the vagus nerve.

6. MEDITATION / MINDFULNESS



Even a few minutes of quiet, focused attention can calm your mind and stimulate your vagus nerve.

7. CONNECT



Positive social connection, kind words, and feeling safe with others all help stimulate the vagus nerve.

8. OTHER HELPFUL IDEAS



- Listen to calming music
- Spend time in nature
- Drink cold water
- Yoga or stretching
- Massage or self-massage
- Get quality sleep
- Eat real, whole foods
- Practice gratitude
- Take breaks and rest

SIGNS YOUR VAGUS NERVE NEEDS ATTENTION

- Feeling anxious or on edge
- Racing heart
- Shallow or fast breathing
- Stomachaches or nausea
- Trouble focusing
- Mood swings or feeling overwhelmed
- Poor sleep



WHEN YOU STIMULATE YOUR VAGUS NERVE, YOU MAY FEEL:

- ✓ Calmer
- ✓ Clearer thinking
- ✓ Better mood
- ✓ Slower heart rate
- ✓ Easier breathing
- ✓ Less stress
- ✓ More in control

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CALM YOUR BODY AND MIND.

Small actions. Big change. Anytime. Anywhere.

Breathe. Reset. Rise.



★ STIMULATE YOUR VAGUS NERVE. CALM YOUR BODY. TAKE CHARGE OF YOU. ★



YOU'VE GOT THIS.

YOU HAVE ALL THE TOOLS AND AWARENESS
TO FEEL GOOD AND DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO. ♥

Your brain and body are always working to keep you safe, help you learn, and help you grow. When you understand how it all works, you can make choices that help you stay in control and create the life you want.

Awareness gives me power.
Tools give me control. Practice gives me change.

THE PROCESS: SIMPLE STEPS, BIG IMPACT

1 NOTICE CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF.



Pause and pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, body, and environment. Self-monitor using your body scan and the Red, Green, Blue check-in.



2 UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE.



Is your brain in Survival (Red), Calm & In Control (Green), or Low/Underwhelmed (Blue)? Know your triggers and your patterns.



3 CHOOSE PICK YOUR TOOL ON PURPOSE.



Use the right tool for what you need right now. Your toolbox is full—breathing, moving, sensory tools, positive self-talk, focus strategies, and more!



4 TAKE ACTION USE YOUR TOOL AND REFOCUS.



Use your tool, get regulated, and bring your brain back into thinking mode. Small steps create big shifts.



5 REFLECT & ADJUST LEARN. GROW. KEEP GOING.



Reflect on what worked and what didn't. Adjust your plan. Every time you practice, you build stronger pathways in your brain.



YOUR TOOLBOX: YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED

CALM YOUR BODY



Deep breathing
Stretch or move
Sensory tools
Vagus nerve stimulation

FOCUS YOUR MIND



Timers & deadlines
Break tasks down
Gamify it
Reduce distractions
Stay in the moment

FUEL YOUR BRAIN



Sleep
Healthy food
Movement
Hydration
Positive self-talk

CONNECT & CARE



Talk to someone
Ask for help
Give kindness
Build relationships
Fill buckets

STAY MOTIVATED



Dopamine boosters
Rewards
Celebrate wins
Track progress
Keep going!

WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH—USE THIS PLAN

TOO MUCH STRESS (RED)

Survival Brain Takes Over

- Big feelings
- Racing thoughts
- Overwhelmed
- Can't think clearly



WHAT TO DO:

Pause. Breathe. Use your body tools. Reach out. Get support. Get regulated.

THE GOAL is to get back to GREEN—Calm, Focused, In Control.



TOO LITTLE INPUT (BLUE)

Underwhelmed or Checked Out

- No motivation
- Hard to focus
- Feel "blah"
- Avoiding tasks



WHAT TO DO:

Move your body. Try something new. Use interest & novelty. Boost dopamine.

DAILY HABITS = A STRONG, FLEXIBLE BRAIN



Start your day with intention



Learn something new



Move your body



Be kind (to others and yourself)



Use your tools on purpose



End your day with reflection

REMEMBER...

- ✓ It's not about being perfect. It's about progress.
- ✓ You will have hard days. That's normal.
- ✓ Every time you try, you are rewiring your brain for success.



You are stronger than you think.



YOU HAVE THE TOOLS. YOU HAVE THE POWER.
YOU'VE GOT THIS—TODAY AND EVERY DAY. ♥

One choice.
One step.
One better day.



★ AWARENESS GIVES ME POWER. ⚡ TOOLS GIVE ME CONTROL. ♥ PRACTICE GIVES ME CHANGE.