

Therapist Self-Care Resources: Tracking Your Own Activation

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As therapists, we often focus on our clients' states, but our own systems matter too. Tracking your nervous system means noticing shifts. Whether you're present and engaged, keyed up and restless, or shut down and disconnected. This awareness helps you respond early and supports long-term resilience.

Let's have fun exploring different feelings, noticing our thoughts, and finding new ways to handle tricky situations.

The Green Zone Regulated or Your Sweet Spot

You're clear, calm, and present. Your breath is steady, your body at ease, and you're genuinely engaged with your client. This is where your best work happens.

Notice what regulation feels like in your body: what tells you you're grounded and available? Appreciate this state and trace what helped you get there: rest, boundaries, movement, or connection. Name those supports so you can return to them. Maintain this zone with small daily practices. Your regulation supports not just you, but those around you.

The Yellow Zone Shut Down Mode or Hypoactivation

You feel disconnected from your body, thinking is foggy, and you're going through the motions. You might feel numb, exhausted, or like you're "not really here."

Your system needs gentle activation and reconnection. Move your body: stretch, shake, or take a brief walk. Remind yourself of your purpose by reflecting on a client success or supportive feedback. Reconnect with someone safe, sip cold water, or engage your senses with texture or scent. Use grounding tools to stay present, and when possible, create space between sessions. Avoid quick fixes like excess caffeine as they can lead to deeper crashes later.

The Red Zone Too Much Energy or Hyperactivation

You notice shallow breathing, tension in jaw/shoulders/neck, scattered thoughts, or feeling rushed, activated or agitated. You might interrupt clients more or feel irritable or reactive.

Your system needs calming and grounding. Slow your exhale, cool your body, and orient to something neutral around you. Use physical grounding, press your feet into the floor or place a hand on your chest. Limit caffeine and sugar; choose something soothing instead. When possible, schedule intense sessions during times of greater capacity.



If severely dysregulated: You may need to seek your own support, reschedule sessions if you can, and contact your supervisor, colleague, or your own therapist. It's not only okay for helpers to need help, it's essential. Recognizing when you need support is a sign of professional wisdom, not weakness.

Making Tracking an Automatic Habit

Get in the habit of checking in with yourself and tracking your own nervous system before sessions, during transitions, and after particularly intense work. Notice how your body feels, your breathing pattern, the clarity or fog in your thoughts, what emotions are present, and your overall energy level. Developing this practice of tracking your states allows you to respond to them with care and intention.

Remember: The goal isn't to always be in the green zone; that's unrealistic. Your nervous system will naturally fluctuate. The key is to catch shifts early through regular check-ins, so you can respond skillfully. This isn't about perfection; it's about building a sustainable relationship with your own nervous system that supports both your well-being and your clinical effectiveness.

Helpful Questions to Ask Yourself

- 1 Know Your Patterns:**
What tends to activate or dysregulate me: certain clients, times of day, or environmental factors? What early signs tell me I'm shifting out of regulation?
- 2 Understand What Supports You:**
What reliably helps me regulate? Which self-care practices truly restore me? How am I nourishing myself during harder states?
- 3 Use Insight to Plan:**
How can I align my schedule with when I feel most regulated? How does my state at the end of the day spill into my personal life?
- 4 Reach for Support When Needed:**
When do I need to ask for help, and who can I turn to? How has my capacity for regulation changed over time, and what does that teach me?