

Hacking Your Vagus Nerve **Some Simple Ways to Shift into States of** **Social Engagement, Safety and Self-Regulation**

Breathing

Exhale slowly to calm down, create resistance with lips and tongue to enhance the effect
Breathe in and out deeply and slowly to engage Heart Rate Variability (calm alertness)
Imagine directing your breath to different parts of body as you breathe in
Blow bubbles – practice slow exhalations to get them bigger

Posture and Gesture

Wonder Woman Pose, Victory Pose, Welcoming Pose – counteracts helplessness, despair, shame
Curl forward in chair when exhaling; expand and open up core when inhaling
Try doing the opposite (breathe in when collapsing, breathe out when inhaling)
Balancing exercises and activities involving fluid movement
Dance (combines gesture, posture, gait, serve and return, co-regulation with others).

Somatic and Visceral Sensations

Spinning, rocking, prayer wheel, rosary, fidget spinner, tapping
Deep pressure
Hugging, holding hands
Imagine you have roots anchoring your feet to the ground, strings holding your arms to the sky
Body scan for tension, try tensing and relaxing different parts
Try to detect your pulse in different parts of body
Mindful eating – attend to taste, smell, texture, swallowing

Sound

Humming and chanting – there's a direct nerve from larynx to the heart's pacemaker
Positive self-talk (preferably out loud)
Vary the cadence, tone, rate, pitch, volume, phrasing of your voice – note how it makes you feel
Try speaking in long slow sentences with a pause at the end (sometimes used for stage fright)
Listen to music, attend to different instruments, timbres, harmonies, dissonance, and variations
Focus attention on far away sounds then attend to sounds progressively closer, ending with those in your body
Play music, preferably in sync with other people

Face and Head

Smile, tilt your head, exercise facial muscles
Run an ice cube down your face, splash cold water, or chill briefly in a bowl of ice
Widen your eye sockets – it helps you hear better
Move your eyes as if they were hands on the face of a clock, clockwise and counterclockwise

Co-Regulation and Play

Toss a ball, do activities that involve serve-and-return, call-and response, variations on a theme.
Play games (rules create safe parameters for co-regulation, competition can incorporate fight/flight)
Practice meaningful shared rituals, create your own rituals, celebrations, marking events or transitions
Expressive Arts: music, drumming, dance, drama, improvisation, poetry, murals
Play: Experiment and improvise – Generate patterns, synchronize, then switch it up
Tell, be moved by, and create new stories with others.

What do these “neural exercises” have in common?

They induce good stress and “tolerance” through controllable, predictable, and patterned activities
They strengthen and extend the capacity to shift into states of safety, regulation, and connectedness