



focus<sup>2</sup>

# Polyvagal Exercises

**Polyvagal Theory**, developed by Stephen Porges, helps to language the dialogue between our parasympathetic system (associated with calm – resting heart rate, regular breathing, relaxed digestion) and our sympathetic-adrenal system (associated with high alert – elevated heart rate, muscle response, shallow breathing – commonly known as fight or flight).

Polyvagal exercises help to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, increasing vagal tone while reducing sympathetic activity.

The 4 exercises I love most are described below, but they are better observed by following along in the video. Please note, this my own descriptive language and should not be considered medical advice.

---

**#1** Finger massage up and down on either side of the ear. By clipping the ear between fingers and pressing the fingers along the skull while moving up and down at a count of about 30-40.

**#2** Small circles inside the cartilage of both ears with finger tip.

The objective here is not to plug the ears so that you cannot hear but rather massage the cartilage in a continual motion.

*\*You may notice a greater sense of relaxation or opening in the ear canal.*

**#3** Diaphragmatic massage. Place your thumb approximately 3 fingers down from your sternum and press in towards the spine while making small circles in one direction (Count to 30) and small circles in the opposite direction (Count to 30).

*\*You may notice some pain or nausea when doing this one.*

*Adjust to an intensity that is within your personal window of tolerance.*

**#4** Kidney warming. Clap your hands and rub them until warm and place your warmed hands on your back just at the bottom of the ribs. Do this several times, or alternatively you can lie down with a heating pad of some kind.

*\*When we are in an adrenalized state, the kidneys tuck up under the ribs.*

*By warming the area, we can guide and coax the kidneys back down to a more parasympathetic resting place.*