

Tips for Integration

River of Integration is an Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB) term that means you are integrated both horizontally (right and left brains are connected and working together) and vertically (information from the body is coming up into and being received and recognized by the brain). This feels “hummy.” Other labels for River of Integration are Seat of Awareness, Mindful Awareness, Full Presence, Big Belly, Soft Belly, Self-energy. The term Self Energy is derived from Internal Family Systems (IFS). IPNB is a term coined by Dan Siegel (so is River of Integration) and IFS is a therapy modality developed by Dick Schwartz.

Brain science tells us that when we are activated our prefrontal cortex goes “off line” and we *react* to our situation/environment rather than *respond* to it. That’s because our mid brain—the limbic system—has taken over and we literally cannot think clearly. The neocortex is resource heavy in processing time, oxygen, and blood, and if the human system is activated in this way, we *react* as if we are in a fight for our lives. In some situations, this may really help save our lives, like when a saber tooth tiger is threatening to eat us; wait, that happened to our ancestors. The point is, our limbic system is hyper alert to danger and gets activated in situations that require thinking rather than flock, fight, flight, or flee. When we are activated the suggested interventions listed below can help. Anything you do to interrupt the increase in activation is worth trying. Doing almost anything unexpected or unusual might help; you are trying to interrupt your trajectory of activation. Add your own interventions to the list and post it somewhere that you will see it regularly. Pick a few from the following list to try and see what works best for you. Keep in mind that top down techniques for integration (using the brain to soothe the brain, such as using a mantra or talking yourself down) are overvalued in white supremacy culture. Bottom up (also called somatosensory) techniques are likely to be more effective (breathing, using one’s body in patterned, rhythmic ways: see reference to Bruce Perry’s work on the bottom of this handout). Disassociation, also sometimes referred to as attention out, or attention off the distress, is a regulatory function that we all use (for more information, see the same Bruce Perry video referenced below and/or refer to the handout called Attention Out).

Breathing is so fundamental it deserves an entire paragraph: you will always feel better if you breathe deeper, and focus on making your out breath longer than your in breath. Try the mantra “the air is still free.” Begin by breathing about 4 seconds in, and about 12 seconds out; don’t fuss too much about the timing, you will find your own natural rhythm. A longer outbreath stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (feed and breed, or rest and digest) which is the opposite of the sympathetic nervous system (flock, fight, flight, or freeze).

Try any of the following:

Meditate for 1 to 5 minutes (or more)

Do something physically vigorous (jumping jacks, running, dancing, wrestling)

Put your body into a different position (upside down, a fetal position, a yoga pose)

Plunge your face into a basin of ice water splash your face with cold water

Laugh (it’s ok if it’s forced, it actually will help anyway)

Read a poem out loud

Draw an infinity symbol (a figure 8 on its side) in the air in front of you, follow it with your eyes)

Name 3 things you are looking forward to

Hold your forehead and the back of your neck with your palms (you can do this for someone else if it is welcome)

Do a body scan

Move your eyes all the way to the left, then all the way to the right

March in place

Put your hands in water (cold, cool, or warm, all can be effective)

Splash your face with cold water

Note 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste

Drink water (many of us are dehydrated much of the time)

Name things in alpha order (apple, box, cat etc)

Hold a piece of ice

Do math in your head (simple or hard) or count in increments up or down (e.g.: count by 3s or 5s etc)

Name 3 things you are grateful for (this is a helpful daily practice if you are so inclined)

Hold an object, focus on it, perhaps draw it

Mentally draw an outline around each foot (and each toe). Or, simply focus on your feet: can you move each toe independently?

Cross your arms and do bilateral tapping

Wipe your face with a cool washcloth

Imagine you are a tree. Spend some time feeling your roots, your trunk, your branches, your leaves or needles

Name things in categories (all the shapes you can name, or animals, plants, birds etc); you can name them in alpha order if you like a challenge.

Slowly roll your head and stretch your neck

Bite on a peppercorn

Lie on your back, touch your left knee to your right elbow, then right knee to left elbow, continue to alternative

Take a bath, listen to music, take a nap, watch the clouds, watch the stars, write a letter, rest with your legs up on a wall, light a candle, learn something new, let out a sigh, read poetry, sit outside, move twice as slowly, listen to a guided relaxation, read a book, call a friend, notice your body, write in a journal, walk outside, eat a meal in silence, turn off all electronics, burst into song, pet a furry creature, create your own coffee break, view some art, read or watch something funny, engage in small acts of kindness, put on some music and dance, let go of something, write a quick poem, paint on a surface other than paper, do some gentle stretches, lay on the ground, rub your ears make some music.....write your own list!

Perry, Bruce. Neurosequential Network. <https://www.neurosequential.com/covid-19-resources> The video on regulation is video number 5: "Understanding Regulation"

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