



Completing The Personal Profile Map

Autonomic mapping helps clients safely connect with, and get to know, their experiences in each of the three autonomic states. The mapping process naturally energizes the system. Help your clients 'dip a toe' into sympathetic and dorsal in order to befriend these states and not be hijacked by them and savor their exploration of ventral. Remember, although clients create their own individual maps, the mapping process is a dyadic experience. Accompany your client on their mapmaking journey and bring your co-regulating energy to support their safe engagement in the process.

Mapping Directions

While mapping can be done in pen or pencil, there is an added benefit to working with color. If you decide to use color, gather a variety of tools (markers, colored pencils, crayons, oil pastels, etc.) and ask your clients to choose colors to represent each of their autonomic states.

Polyvagal-informed exercises support clients in exploring their states and follow the rule, “Always end in ventral”. In this mapping exercise, travel the predictable pathway down the hierarchy and first map the sympathetic state, then move to dorsal vagal, and end by mapping the ventral vagal state of regulation.

Ask your client to remember a time when they felt a sense of sympathetic activation and let a bit of that into their mind and body - just enough to get a flavor of it. In the sympathetic section of the ladder map have them write what it feels like, looks like, sounds like. What happens in their body? What do they do? What do they feel? What do they think and say? Ask how sleep, their relationship with food, and use of substances or compulsive behaviors is impacted. As they finish the section, ask them to fill in the sentences “I am...”, “People are...”, and “The world is...” These sentences identify the core beliefs at work in the state.

Repeat this process with the dorsal vagal state. Mapping dorsal vagal can easily activate the energy of collapse and disconnection. Use your ventral vagal co-regulating capacities to support your client and help them connect with just enough of their dorsal state to begin to map it.

Finish by mapping the ventral vagal state. For this section help your client bring the state fully alive. Some clients have a difficult time believing they have access to this state or think they are damaged and their ventral vagal system is broken. If a client struggles to connect to their ventral state, look for moments in the therapeutic relationship, connection with a pet, or time spent in nature. A micro-moment of ventral regulation is enough to bring the state alive and map it.

When all three states are completed, ask your clients to give each state a name and have them write the name in the boxes along the side of the map.

Explore the map with your client. Listen to their sympathetic and dorsal experiences and finish the exercise by anchoring in the experiences of the ventral vagal system.