

# Improve Your Stress Response: *Vagus Nerve* *Micropractices for Regulation*

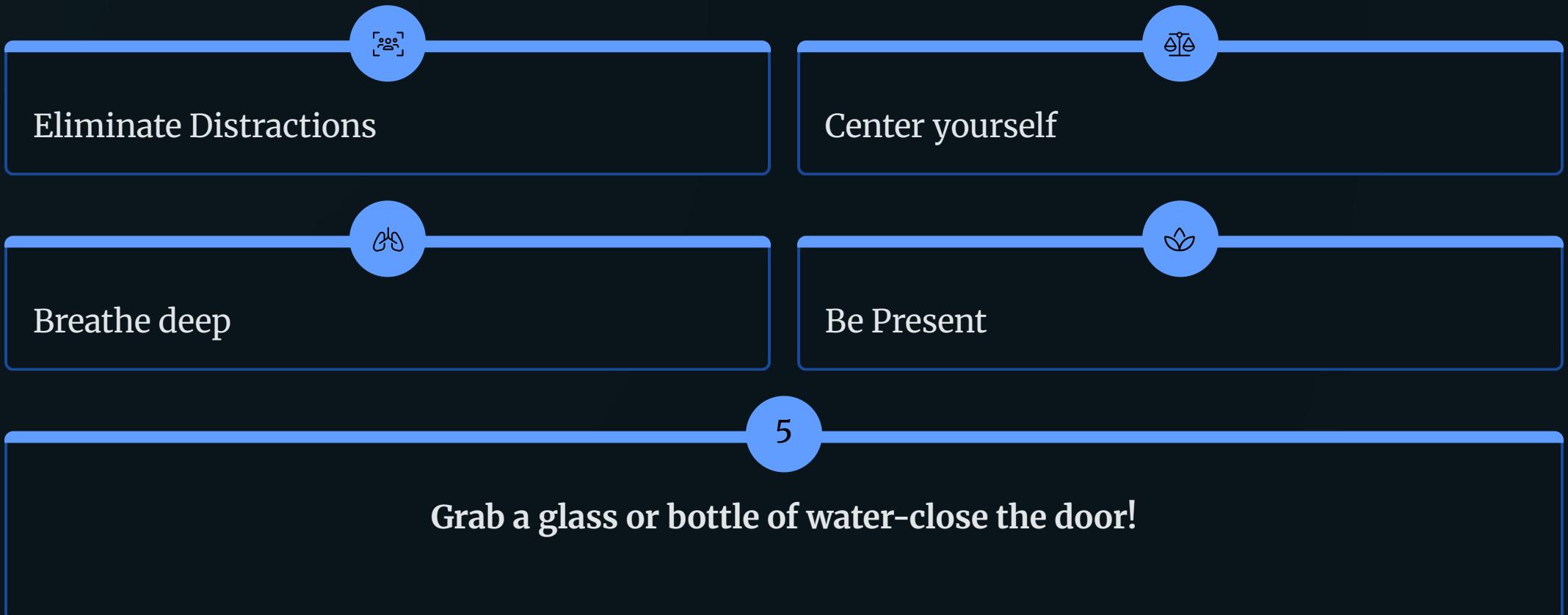
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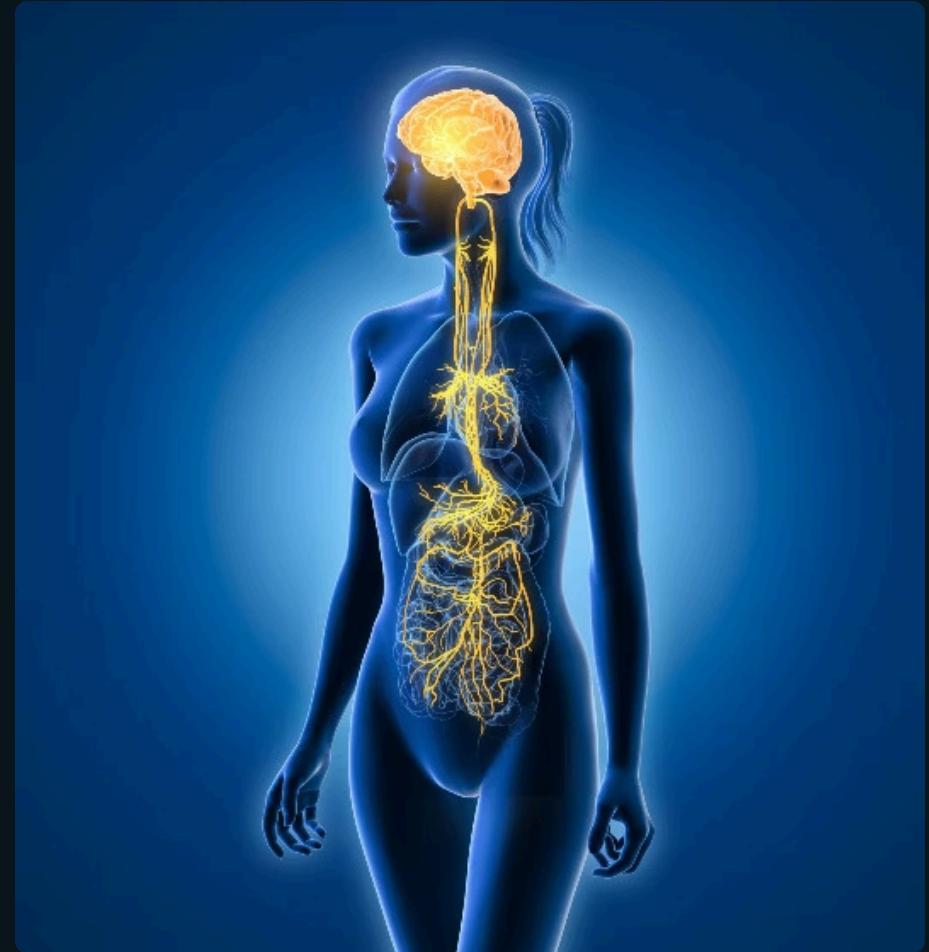
*Orange County Department of Education*



# Take a Minute to Arrive



# What Is the Vagus Nerve?



# Why Vagal Tone Matters in Educational Environments



## Supports Focus & Learning

A regulated nervous system enhances cognitive function and sustained attention for all stakeholders, from students to faculty and administrative teams, improving overall productivity and decision-making.



## Builds Emotional Resilience

Cultivating stronger vagal tone enables leaders, educators, and students to navigate challenges with greater composure, recover more quickly from stress, and maintain a stable, supportive organizational culture.



## Fosters Connection & Collaboration

The vagus nerve influences social engagement, promoting more empathetic communication, stronger team cohesion, and healthier relationships across the entire educational community, from schools to district offices.

These strategic benefits transcend individual classrooms, impacting organizational health, leadership effectiveness, and the holistic well-being of your entire educational ecosystem. Implementing small, consistent practices can yield significant, system-wide improvements.

# Deep Belly Breathing

Inhale slowly through your nose for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale through your mouth for 6-8 counts. The longer exhale activates the vagus nerve and signals safety to your body.



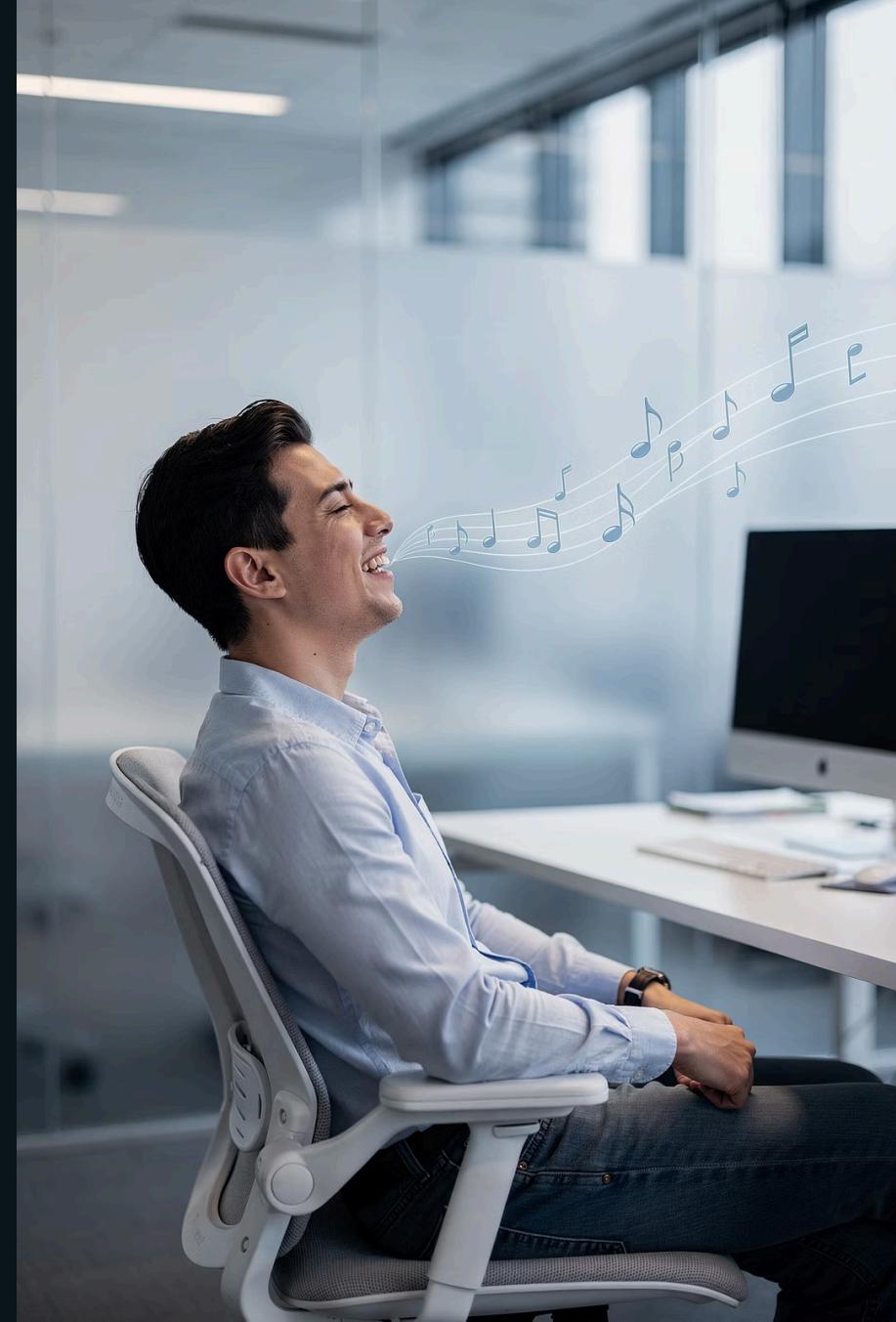


## Cold Water Splash

Splash cold water on your face or hold a cold pack on your cheeks. This triggers the "dive reflex," instantly calming your heart rate and engaging the vagus nerve.

# Humming or Singing

The vibrations from humming, singing, or even gargling stimulate the vagus nerve directly through your vocal cords. Try humming a favorite tune during transitions.





# Gentle Neck Rolls

Slowly roll your head side to side and in gentle circles. This releases tension in the neck where the vagus nerve runs and promotes relaxation.



## Compassionate Self-Touch

Place your hand on your heart or give yourself a gentle hug. This activates oxytocin and sends calming signals through the vagus nerve, especially helpful before difficult conversations.

# Social Connection

Warm, face-to-face interactions—even brief ones—activate the social engagement system and increase vagal tone naturally.



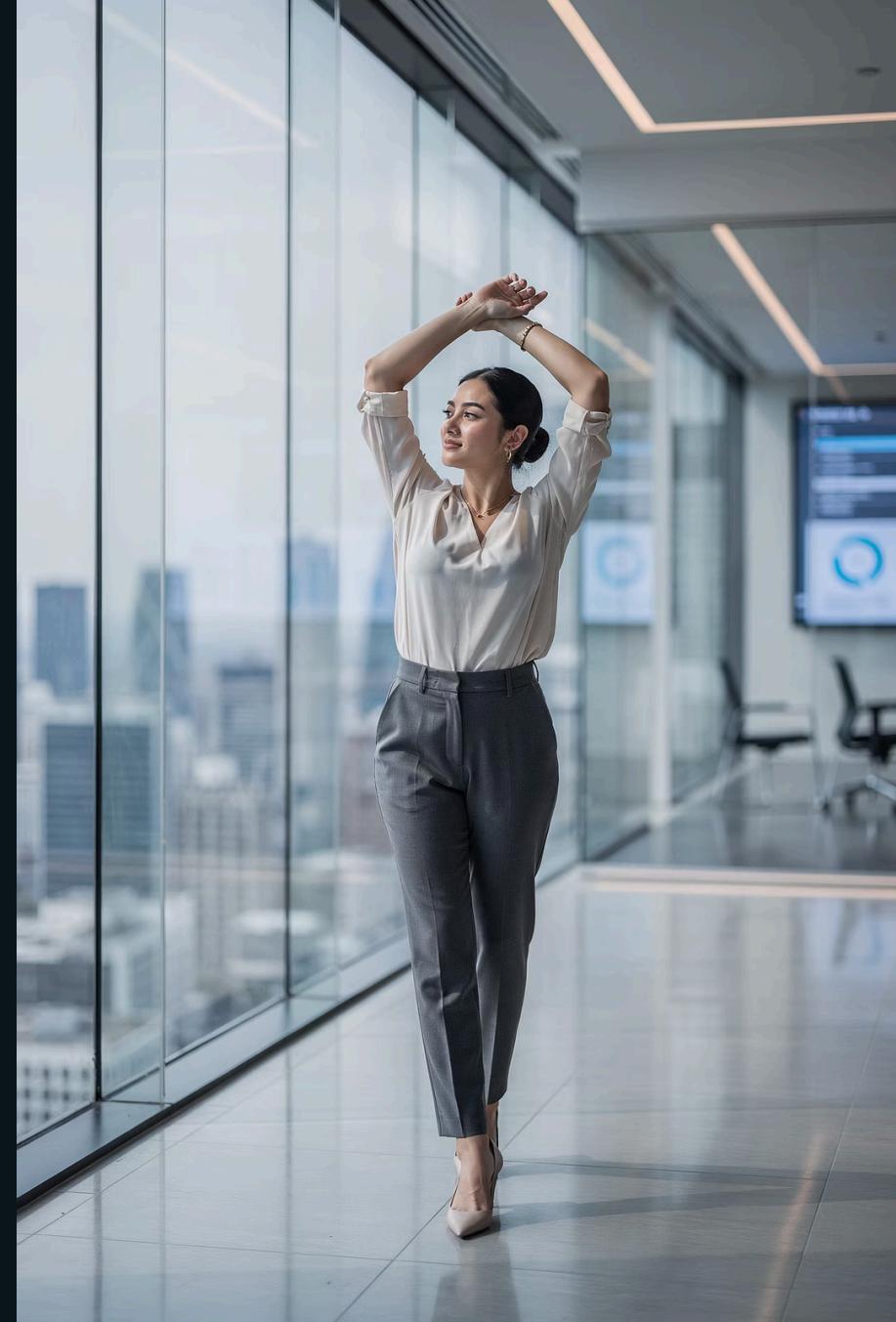


## Occipital Massage

Gently massage the base of your skull where your neck meets your head. This area contains pressure points that help activate the vagus nerve and release tension.

# Gentle Movement

Slow, mindful movement like stretching or a short walk supports vagal tone by shifting your body out of fight-or-flight mode.





# Gargling

Gargling water for 30 seconds activates throat muscles connected to the vagus nerve, providing quick nervous system regulation you can do anywhere with water.



# Gentle Eye and Ear Massage

Close your eyes, touch your eyes gently, and move in a circle.

Grab the trager and gently squeeze pull release

# Eye Movement

Looking left to right—hold each for 5 seconds.





# Gentle Carotid Massage

Using 2-3 fingers gently in a circular pattern.

# Laughter

The best medicine.



YouTube

Should we trust these kids? 00 #fyp #funnykids #kidslying #parentinghum...

▶ 01:07



# Fasting

Days in a row or just daily. Can help diabetes, blood pressure.

# Infrared Heat

Red light, hot sauna, best if followed by cold plunge.



# Integrating Regulation Breaks Into Your Work Day

## Morning Moments

- Before staff, students or client arrivals: 2-minute breathing practice at your desk
- After initial team check-in: Cold water splash on wrists in the staff restroom
- Between morning meetings: Neck rolls while walking to your next office

## Midday Reset

- Before administrative task block: Humming or singing while organizing files
- During lunch break: Deep breathing in your car or a quiet office space
- After lunch: Cold water on wrists before afternoon counseling sessions or meetings

## Afternoon & Transitions

- Between sessions/meetings or challenging calls: 30-second breathing reset at your desk
- Before challenging conversations or meetings: Hand on heart + three deep breaths
- During independent administrative work: Gentle neck stretches while at your computer

## End of Day

- After final staff/client interaction: 2-minute breathing before packing up
- Before leaving the office: Cold water face, arms or back of neck splash to transition home
- In your car: Humming or singing on your commute

## Remember This

You don't need a lot of time. Even 30 seconds of intentional vagal activation can shift your state. Consistency matters more than duration.

Your nervous system is listening—give it the signals it needs to feel safe, regulated, and resilient.

# 9 Quick Vagal Tone Practices You Can Use Today

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