

Therapist Reflection & Regulation: Staying Present with Dissociation

A Self-Awareness Resource for Working with Dorsal Vagal States

1. Attunement & Awareness

Reflection Prompt:

How do I attune to subtle shifts in a client's presence, posture, or tone that may indicate dissociation?

Regulation Practice – Body Tracking Pause:

Before or between sessions, slowly scan your body:

- 'Where do I feel present?'
- 'Where do I feel absent?'

Place one hand where you feel most connected. Breathe gently into that space.

2. Relational Dynamics

Reflection Prompt:

How do I respond internally when a client dissociates? Do I feel pulled to fix, push, or retreat?

Regulation Practice – Name the Pull:

Notice and name your impulse internally:

- "I want to rescue"
- "I feel helpless"

Then ask: What does this part of me need to feel safe?

Let this guide your next step.

3. Therapist's Nervous System

Reflection Prompt:

What happens in my body when the room goes quiet, blank, or emotionally flat?

Regulation Practice – Orienting + Exhale Lengthening:

Gently look around and name 5 objects in your space.

Then extend your exhale (e.g., inhale for 4, exhale for 6).

This activates ventral vagal tone and steadies you in dorsal moments.

4. Clinical Practice & Pacing

Reflection Prompt:

Am I attending to the client's window of tolerance, or do I sometimes override it?

Regulation Practice – Pace Check-In:

Pause and ask yourself:

“Is my pace led by the client's cues, or by my own anxiety to achieve?”

If needed, slow your voice, breath, and rhythm.

5. Growth Edges

Reflection Prompt:

What feels most challenging for me about working with dissociation?

Regulation Practice – Compassionate Journaling:

Write to the part of you that struggles.

“Dear part that feels overwhelmed when my client dissociates...”

Let it speak, and respond with care—not critique.

6. Supervision & Support

Reflection Prompt:

Am I allowing time for my own integration when working with clients who dissociate?

Regulation Practice – Closure Ritual:

After sessions, take 3 minutes to reset:

- Stretch
- Sip a warm drink
- Light a candle

Create a consistent rhythm that signals emotional closure and nervous system reset.

Anytime Anchor

“Can I stay connected to myself while being present with the client's disconnection?”

Place a hand on your chest or belly and let this question settle in the body.

Let your answer come from sensation, not analysis.