



**The Family Recovery Foundation**  
**Fix Your Family**  
**MODULE 2**

Your Central Nervous System and How to Regulate it  
Understanding the Nervous System and Addiction

The nervous system, particularly the autonomic nervous system (ANS), plays a significant role in how we respond to stress and potential threats. The ANS has two main components.

**Sympathetic** Nervous System (SNS): Often referred to as the "fight or flight" system, the SNS prepares the body to respond to perceived danger by increasing heart rate, releasing adrenaline, and mobilizing energy.

**Parasympathetic** Nervous System (PNS): Known as the "rest and digest" system, the PNS promotes relaxation, digestion, and recovery.

In the family system, the nervous system of all persons can become dysregulated. Individuals may experience heightened anxiety, stress, and an overactive fight or flight response, especially during times of concern of relapse or change in the loved ones emotions and behaviors.

**Learning to Regulate the Nervous System**

Effective regulation of the nervous system can help individuals manage stress, reduce conflict and prevent undue stress. Here are some strategies:

1. Breathing Techniques

- Deep Breathing: Practice slow, deep breaths to activate the PNS. Inhale deeply through the nose, hold for a few seconds, and exhale slowly through the mouth.

- Box Breathing: Inhale for four counts, hold for four counts, exhale for four counts, and hold again for four counts.

## 2. Mindfulness and Meditation

- Mindfulness: Stay present and aware of your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment. This can reduce stress and increase emotional regulation.

- Meditation: Regular meditation can calm the mind, reduce anxiety, and improve overall emotional health.

## 3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Tense and then slowly release each muscle group in your body, starting from your toes and moving up to your head. This technique helps reduce physical tension and promotes relaxation

## 4. Physical Exercise

- Engage in regular physical activity, such as walking, yoga, or tai chi. Exercise releases endorphins, reduces stress, and improves mood.

## 5. Grounding Techniques

- 5-4-3-2-1 Technique: Identify five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This helps anchor you in the present moment and reduce anxiety.

## **Managing Fight or Flight Responses when Triggered**

Relapse can trigger intense stress and the fight or flight response in family members.

Here are strategies to manage these reactions:

### 1. Stay Connected

- Observe your body's activation. Where are you feeling stressed? How does it show up for you? Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or Alanon sponsor. Social support is crucial in managing stress and calming your nervous system.

### 2. Use Relaxation Techniques

- Implement the relaxation techniques mentioned above to calm your nervous system. Breath work, meditation, **walking for minimally 12 minutes at a slow pace.**

KEY:

If you find yourself in panic, attend to the body not the content of the situation.

What is the content? The content is the situation. It is imperative that you attend to your nervous system before making decisions unless it's an emergency.

Many times we think we need to fix a situation in order to feel better. Once the body is activated with adrenaline there is a lack of ability to manage the situation (content) around you. ***Stop, support your body with care and nurture until the nervous system adjusts.***

It takes time.

Your body will settle and the adrenaline that has been activated will run its course.

These skill sets will in time help your body heal from its dis-regulated state.

3. Seek Professional Help

You don't need to make any decisions when you are activated unless someone is a threat to self or a threat to others. Outside of that: WAIT.

- If you're struggling to manage your stress response and prevent panic and undue stress, consider seeking help from a therapist or counselor who specializes in addiction and family systems dealing with addiction.