

The Skill of Savoring

Savoring can begin with noticing an experience in the moment or by intentionally bringing an experience to mind. In your work with clients, be on the lookout for a moment to savor. They happen regularly even with our most complicated cases. Savoring is not disavowing of our clients' suffering. The practice of savoring is an acknowledgement that there are "glimmers" in the darkness. Bringing active awareness to micro-moments of ventral vagal regulation is important to interrupt the negativity bias and honor the "small and often" practices that bring change.

We can savor the experience or savor the state. When savoring the state, limit attention to the sensations of embodied ventral vagal activity. Use the physiological frame to surround the act of enjoyment. When savoring the experience, bring in the images, feelings, and thoughts that make up the ventral vagal moment. Appreciate the ways physiological and psychological systems are connected.

Savoring the State

- Bring attention to a moment of ventral vagal regulation.
- Stay present to the physical sense of this state; breath, heartbeat, warmth, energy moving, sense of internal space
- Imagine your vagal brake working effortlessly, smoothly, keeping the flow ventral vagal energy moving.
- Bring your attention to fully savoring this state. Stay in the savoring practice for 20-30 seconds.

Savoring the Experience

- Bring attention to a moment of ventral vagal regulation.
- Sense the moment in your body and then invite in the images, feelings, and thoughts that accompany the moment.
- Actively receive the fullness of the experience...sight, sound, emotion, belief, and body. Invite physiology and story to move together.
- Bring your attention fully to the experience for 20-30 seconds.

For some clients, savoring the state or the experience even for 20-30 seconds may be too great a challenge for the capacity of their vagal brake and the savoring may turn from an amplifying experience to a dampening one.

- If sympathetic or dorsal vagal responses begin to intrude when savoring the state, use vocal prompts to bring your client's attention to engaging the vagal brake to preserve the savoring experience. Before entering into a savoring practice, first work with your client to create an image of the vagal brake relaxing and reengaging. Then, when needed, help your client activate the image to sustain the savoring experience.
- If sympathetic or dorsal vagal responses begin to intrude when savoring the experience, ask your client to share the individual elements of their experience. Listen to your client describe the sights, sounds, emotions, beliefs, and body sensations and actively hold them with your client.

Sharing the story of the savoring is a way of strengthening the experience. The experience is changed when language is added and it is held within an attuned dyad. We relive in the retelling. When clients tell the story of their savoring experience, they commonly report a sense of the experience expanding and extending. Outside of sessions, clients can share their experience with someone they trust to respond with interest. Invite your clients to create a practice of noticing a ventral vagal moment and stopping to savor. While adding reciprocity to the savoring process can increase and prolong the experience, studies show savoring without the component of sharing is beneficial as an individual practice.