

Listening to the Body's Wisdom

Recognizing your natural protective states and welcoming your nervous system home.



A gentle exploration of Fight, Flight, and Freeze as intelligent biological protection rather than personal failure, accompanied by gentle micro practices for daily life.

Written by Laura

FOUNDER, BEYOND THE BEND

Private Somatic & Restorative Support

FOUNDATIONS

The Body Does Not Make Mistakes

Why our symptoms are biological protection rather than personal failure.

I have been noticing in my private somatic work and in my own daily life how quickly we jump to judging ourselves when our bodies feel overwhelmed. We wake up with our teeth clenched, our chest feeling tight, or our thoughts racing, and our first instinct is to wonder what is wrong with us. We tell ourselves that we should be more resilient, that we should be able to calm down, or that we are failing at managing our stress.

I want to begin this inquiry by offering a very different perspective. Your body does not make mistakes. When your shoulders creep up toward your ears, when your stomach ties itself into knots, or when your mind suddenly goes quiet and blank in the middle of a difficult conversation, you are not experiencing a personal failure. You are witnessing your autonomic nervous system doing the exact job it was created to do, which is keeping you safe and alive.

Long before our rational brains can analyze a situation, our bodies are constantly reading the world through sensations, breath, and tone. When life brings more intensity, unpredictability, or demand than we can comfortably digest, our system shifts into protective states. We call these survival responses. They are biological reflexes of survival, and until we learn to understand their language without shame, we will keep fighting against the very body that is trying to hold us together.

AN OPENING REFLECTION

Meeting Sensation Without Needing to Fix It

Before reading about the survival styles on the pages ahead, take one unhurried breath. Bring a warm hand to rest lightly on your chest or belly. Notice whatever sensation is present right now, whether tightness, fatigue, or racing energy. Rather than trying to change it, see if you can offer it one quiet thought: *I see how hard you have been working to protect me.*

NERVOUS SYSTEM STATES

The Three Protective States

Our autonomic nervous system operates with three primary protective pathways. You can think of them as inner guardians that step forward when pressure builds. Most of us default to one or two of these states so frequently that they begin to feel like our personality, rather than temporary states of protection.



The Mobilizing Impulse

**FIGHT
RESPONSE**

This state brings heat, energy, and tension upward. It is the body preparing to protect its boundaries, defend what is precious, or hold ground against a threat.

- A sudden flash of irritation, sharpness, or anger that feels bigger than the moment calls for.
- A tight, clenched jaw, a hardened brow, or tension gripping the throat and neck.
- An overwhelming need to be right, to argue your case, or to defend yourself even when you are exhausted.
- Feeling like the world is demanding too much and you must brace yourself to push back.

The Urge to Escape

**FLIGHT
RESPONSE**

This state accelerates your system to put physical or mental distance between you and the perceived demand. It shows up as restlessness, perpetual motion, and avoiding stillness.

- Feeling like you cannot sit still, constantly physical fidgeting, or needing to stay busy with cleaning, chores, or work.
- A persistent desire for a fresh start, daydreaming about moving away, changing careers, or walking out.
- Rushing through daily errands and conversations as if there is an invisible clock ticking.
- Changing the subject or leaving the room whenever emotional tension begins to surface.

The Protective Stillness

**FREEZE
RESPONSE**

When the nervous system perceives that fighting is impossible and fleeing is out of reach, it pulls the emergency brake. It creates a temporary numbness so you do not have to feel the full weight of the overwhelm.

- Going completely blank in a conversation and finding it impossible to access your words.
- Feeling heavy, numb, foggy, or disconnected from your physical hands and feet.
- Canceling plans, retreating into bed, and having zero desire to interact with the world outside.
- Losing hours of time scrolling or watching screens without feeling truly rested or present.

EMBODIED REFLECTION

Where Does Your Body Feel Most at Home?

Few of us live in just one response all the time. Our bodies perform a moving dance between all three, depending on who we are with, the time of day, and what memories are touched. Notice without any criticism which of these states feels like your most familiar companion.

Personal Inquiry Journal

When you feel overwhelmed, hurried, or misunderstood, what does your body do first? Do you notice the heat of fighting, the speed of fleeing, or the heaviness of freezing?

SOMATIC YOGA MICRO PRACTICE

The Jaw & Collarbone Softening (For Mobilized Tension)

If your body tends toward fighting, clenching, or bracing against the day, take ninety seconds right now to invite your jaw and shoulders to set down their guard.

- 1 Find a comfortable seat. Allow lips to remain lightly closed with teeth parted.
- 2 Let your tongue soften down from the roof of your mouth to the floor of your mouth.
- 3 Bring both warm hands to rest flat over your collarbones and upper chest with gentle pressure.
- 4 Inhale gently through your nose. As you exhale, let out a soft audible sound. Repeat for four breaths.
- 5 Pause in the quiet stillness that opens up. Notice how much energy it took to stay braced against the world today, and offer your body a moment of sincere kindness. Remind your heart inwardly: I am safe enough in this moment to soften my guard, set down the burden, and breathe.

NERVOUS SYSTEM WISDOM

Honoring the Protection

Before we can invite a protective response to soften, we have to honor what it did for us. These survival states are not flaws. They are ancient, life saving systems that stepped in during moments when you were small, overwhelmed, or in real danger.

Consider how these responses show up in everyday life to protect our physical and emotional bodies:

The Swift Step Back (Flight in Action)

Imagine walking across an icy parking lot in the dead of winter, and suddenly your heel slips out from underneath you. Before your thinking brain can register what is happening, your muscles contract, your arms reach out, and your core catches your weight. That split second reaction is your flight and mobilization system keeping your skull and hips safe. You did not have to think about it, your body saved you.

The Protective Fierceness (Fight in Action)

Think of a time when someone you love, your child, your sister, or your beloved dog, was threatened or treated unfairly. You might normally be quiet and gentle, but in that moment your shoulders squared, your voice became firm, and an unshakeable boundary arose from your belly. That is healthy fight energy. It is the sacred fierceness that protects life and asserts dignity.

The Shock Absorber (Freeze in Action)

Think of receiving unexpected, shocking news, or sitting in the passenger seat during a sudden car collision. Your body goes quiet, cold, and numb. You feel strangely calm or detached. That is the freeze response functioning like an internal shock absorber, softening the blow so your heart and nervous system are not flooded with more sensation than you can physically survive in that moment.

When we begin to view our symptoms as past protectors that simply do not know the emergency is over, our relationship with our body shifts from frustration into deep gratitude.

EMBODIED REFLECTION

Remembering When Your Body Saved You

When we look back over our lives, we can often trace our present physical patterns back to specific seasons where being vigilant, staying busy, or going quiet was the only way to get through safely.

Personal Reflection

Can you recall a time in your life when staying busy, keeping your guard up, or going quiet genuinely protected your emotional or physical wellbeing? How did that response serve you then?

SOMATIC YOGA MICRO PRACTICE

The Pelvic Rock & Floor Connection (For Restless Flight)

If your body defaults to rushing, mental racing, or feeling like you cannot settle into stillness, this floor movement reassures your nervous system through physical weight.

- 1 Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor, about hip width apart.
- 2 Place hands flat on lower belly below your navel. Take a quiet breath into palms.
- 3 On exhale, gently flatten lower back into floor, feeling ground supporting your sacrum.
- 4 On inhale, gently arch lower back. Rock like a slow rhythmic cradle for two minutes.
- 5 Rest in stillness. Feel the floor holding your weight: Nothing is chasing me, and I do not have to earn my rest. I am allowed to land right here.



Giving Your Body Space to Speak

You do not need to turn to another notebook or filter your words here. Use this quiet space to write honestly about what arose for you while reading these protective states. Write about where you feel tired, where you feel protective, or what your body has been carrying on your behalf.

- What is one heavy expectation, worry, or role that your body has been carrying recently?
- If your body could ask for one small kindness from you this week, what would it ask for?

NERVOUS SYSTEM OVERDRIVE

When the Switch Stays in the On Position

Our protective survival states were designed for acute, temporary moments. An animal in the wild runs from a predator for two minutes, escapes into safety, shakes its entire body vigorously, and immediately returns to grazing in peaceful regulation.

Human beings, however, live in a culture that rarely offers a clear end to the threat. We live with chronic deadlines, financial responsibilities, relational tension, family caregiving, and social expectations that ask us to be constantly productive and endlessly available. When we layer childhood emotional history or past trauma on top of daily stress, the nervous system never receives the internal memo that it is safe to rest.

"You cannot talk your diaphragm into relaxing when your body believes it is fighting for survival. True calm only arrives when we meet the nervous system where it lives, through the felt sense of the physical body."

When the body lives in perpetual fight, flight, or freeze, our physiology begins to pay a heavy toll. Adrenaline and cortisol remain elevated, depleting our adrenals and disrupting our natural sleep rhythms. Blood is shunted away from our digestive organs and reproductive systems out toward our skeletal muscles, creating stomach knots, chronic bloating, and hormonal imbalances. Our muscles stay locked in perpetual bracing, wearing out our joints and creating chronic pain in the hips, neck, and lower back.

This is why positive thinking, affirmations, and sheer willpower fail to bring lasting calm. True regulation requires somatic safety, built through small, repeated experiences of grounded ease.

THE LIVED REALITIES

How Chronic Survival Shows Up in Daily Life

When the nervous system has been running on alert for years, the signs are rarely loud or dramatic. They show up quietly in the way we hold our breath, the way we relate to people, and the way we move through our week. Check off any of the following that you recognize in your own body:

In Your Body

- ☐ Jaw clenching or grinding teeth
- ☐ Shoulders permanently hiked up
- ☐ Shallow breathing high in chest
- ☐ Waking between 2:00 and 4:00 AM
- ☐ Chronic neck stiffness returning
- ☐ Digestive sensitivity or bloating
- ☐ Exhausted yet unable to unwind

In Relationships

- ☐ Guilt when saying no
- ☐ Anticipating others needs first
- ☐ Feeling guarded with closeness
- ☐ Dissociating during conflict
- ☐ Irritation at small disruptions
- ☐ Lonely even with people
- ☐ Constant urge to fix others

In Daily Rhythm

- ☐ Rest must be earned after chores
- ☐ Chronic rushing with plenty of time
- ☐ Procrastination born of overwhelm
- ☐ Fear of making visible mistakes
- ☐ Brain fog and divided focus
- ☐ Playing small to avoid critique
- ☐ Numbing out with screens

SOMATIC YOGA MICRO PRACTICE

Soft Orienting (For Brain Fog & Freeze)

If you find yourself numb, foggy, or checking off many items above, this simple practice gently guides your nervous system back into presence through safe connection.

- 1 Pause whatever you are doing. Feel the solid contact of the floor beneath your feet or your sitting bones resting heavily into your chair.
- 2 Without moving your head quickly, allow your eyes to wander slowly around the room, simply taking in colors, shapes, and textures without needing to fix or organize anything.
- 3 Find two or three objects that feel neutral or comforting to look at, such as a plant, a warm patch of sunlight, or a familiar picture. Let your gaze rest softly upon them.
- 4 Place one warm hand over your heart or lower belly. Feel the rise and fall of your breath, letting your ancient brain stem register the reassuring reality: I am right here, and I am safe in this room.
- 5 Allow a sense of gentle compassion to settle over you. Remember that feeling tired or numb is not a personal failure, but your body working hard to protect your tender heart. Rest in the shared human reality that you are allowed to move slowly, take up space, and return to yourself one quiet breath at a time.

INTEGRATION & NEXT STEPS

A Container for Your Unwinding

If you recognized yourself in these pages, please take a moment to place a warm hand over your heart. Nothing you read here means that you are broken. It means your body has been carrying an immense load for a very long time, and it has done so with extraordinary loyalty.

A RESTORATIVE PRACTICE TO TRY TONIGHT

Supported Heart Rest on the Floor

Find a firm bed pillow or a folded wool blanket. Place it lengthwise along your spine, with one end supporting your head and the other supporting your mid back. Let your knees bend with your feet flat, or extend your legs long. Let your arms open out to the sides with your palms turned upward. Stay here for five to ten quiet minutes. Notice what happens when you do not ask your body to perform, achieve, or fix anything at all.



PRIVATE ONE ON ONE CONTAINER

Private Somatic & Restorative Support

An eight week held container designed to guide your nervous system out of chronic survival and back into deep, embodied safety, trust, and ease.

\$1,040 Total (or \$130 per week for eight weeks)

This work is never a one size fits all formula. Every session is individually shaped around your unique body, lived history, and nervous system pacing, using gentle somatic yoga, restorative floor postures, nervous system inquiry, and embodied boundary practices.

Ready to explore working together? Book a free, quiet twenty minute Connection Call with Laura to talk through where your body is at.

Visit Webpage: beyondthebendyoga.ca/private-sessions

Email Laura Directly

Visit the page to explore the container and request a quiet consultation, or email directly at laura@beyondthebendyoga.com.

With warmth & gratitude,
Laura