

Finding Calm

Participant Glossary

Per Norrgren · Deeper Mindfulness · www.deepermindfulness.org

How to use this glossary

This is a companion to the ten Finding Calm practice sessions. You don't need a science background to follow it. Each entry explains an idea by what it does, not just what it is called. Read it in order the first time. After that, dip in and out.

Part One · The Forest and What It Does

The forest as signal

Before you consciously register where you are, the brain has already begun evaluating the environment. Open canopy, diffuse light, the sound of wind in trees, the texture of ground underfoot — these activate the orienting network without requiring any effort. The threat prior quiets slightly, automatically, before a single practice begins. The forest is not a metaphor here. It is a delivery mechanism.

Why the forest receives you

A forest does not assess you before allowing you in. This is not poetic licence. The nervous system's social evaluation circuits are specifically tuned to assess whether an environment is responding to your presence. A forest responds — light shifts, sound changes, the ground yields slightly underfoot — without requiring anything of you first. For a nervous system that has been on high alert, this non-conditional reception is a genuine prediction error: something responded warmly, and nothing was required in return.

Why you matter to the forest

A forest with a person genuinely present in it is biologically different from a forest without one. The breath you exhale becomes carbon the trees use. The ground records your weight. This is not a therapeutic reframe. It is a fact. The mattering signal in the forest is different from the mattering signal in human relationships — it carries no risk of rejection. It is simply true. Over the course of the programme, this truth is offered to the nervous system repeatedly, until the body begins to receive it.

Part Two · What the Practices Are Doing

Each session uses a range of signals. These are the main ones.

Heel press / sit-bone weight / palms on thighs · nerves that sense stability and pressure

Pressing a firm surface sends a signal to the brain's stability system faster than the threat prediction can evaluate it. The signal arrives before the prior's first-line defences can reframe it. This is why every session begins here.

Precise small movements · the agency signal

When you make a tiny deliberate movement — pressing the thumb to each fingertip, drawing the shoulder blades together — the brain predicts what that movement will feel like. When it happens and matches the prediction, a specific signal fires: I chose this, and the body produced it exactly. That is the agency signal. It works directly against the prediction of inadequacy.

Skin nerves for gentle touch · the belonging pathway

There are nerve fibres in the skin tuned to slow, warm, light moving contact. At the right speed, these fibres send a signal to the part of the brain that releases belonging chemistry. Your own hand works just as well as another person's.

The double-breath reset · the fastest calming signal

A breath in through the nose, one small additional sniff on top, then a long slow complete exhale. The double inhale reinflates small air sacs in the lungs that shallow breathing leaves collapsed. The long exhale activates the body's own calming system. Two signals, one practice.

Slow deliberate movement · the Moro brake

Very slow, very deliberate movement — the kind that feels almost exaggerated in its slowness — activates a specific braking pathway in the nervous system. This pathway governs how fully the body settles after a startle or stress response. It develops through repetition across a long timescale. Each slow movement in each session contributes to its gradual strengthening.

Rhythm · tapping, swaying, humming

When the next beat arrives exactly when predicted, the part of the brain that generates urgency signals receives a low prediction error. The urgency settles. Rhythm works across all activation states. The hum adds three signals at once: the extended exhale, vibration in the throat, and the sound of the voice.

Noticing change · the consolidation step

The brain consolidates what is attended to. When attention notices that something has shifted — specifically, not generally — it creates a memory record that sleep can consolidate into lasting change. Even one fraction of a degree of difference counts. Name it.

Part Three · The Four Layers

Every session works with all four. They are not a sequence. They are a chord.

Chronic background stress · the always-on setting

For some nervous systems, the threat prior has been running so long it feels like a personality. The body is always slightly braced. Sleep restores partially, not fully. This is the layer most directly addressed by the grounding and breath signals. It begins to shift with accumulated evidence that, right now, in this moment, nothing requires bracing for.

Inflammatory chemistry · the hidden amplifier

Sustained stress generates specific chemicals the brainstem reads as confirming threat. The loop runs independently of what any session delivers. The counter is frequency — consistent, repeated small practices that activate the body's own counter-chemistry. This is why the daily topup is not optional. Small and often is the mechanism.

Moro brake development · the startle circuit

Everyone has a startle reflex. In normal development, a braking pathway develops that intercepts this reflex before it triggers a full-body cascade. When the brake is underdeveloped, ordinary events trigger near-full-strength responses. This is not a prior. It cannot be revised by prediction error. It requires very slow deliberate movement, over a long timescale, and the co-regulation of being in the presence of calm others. Both are in every session.

Mattering · the reliance signal

Not belonging, and not worth. The specific felt sense of being needed — of being someone the world depends upon and would genuinely miss. When this is absent, a particular hollowness runs underneath everything, distinct from loneliness, harder to name. The programme approaches this layer through the forest: a forest with you genuinely present in it is different from one without you. Over ten sessions, this truth is offered to the body until it begins to be received.

Part Four · How Change Happens

A prior · a prediction the body runs automatically

A prior is not a conscious belief. It is a background assumption the brain makes below the level of thought. It cannot be changed by deciding to feel differently. It changes through accumulated small experiences that don't match what it predicted.

Prediction error · the active ingredient

What happens when the body experiences something the brain did not expect. Not drama, not revelation. A specific, genuine, bodily experience that doesn't match the prediction. If it happens enough times, the prediction shifts.

Accumulation · why frequency matters more than intensity

The brain updates through accumulated evidence, not through single moments of intensity. Five brief returns to practice each day send more separate pieces of evidence than one long session. Small and often beats deep and rare.

Sleep and the overnight process · when real change happens

During deep sleep, the brain consolidates the day's prediction errors into lasting change. The practice creates the evidence. Sleep does the filing. This is why naming something specific at the end of each session matters.

The three predictions · threat, isolation, inadequacy

There are many things the brain can predict wrongly. The sessions work primarily with three: that the world is dangerous and requires vigilance; that real connection is unavailable and it is safer to manage alone; and that warmth toward the self is undeserved. These three generate the most widespread and persistent suffering. When addressed together, they create the conditions for everything else to shift.