Nonlinear Exploratory Protocol for DOES-C Framework

A Sensory-First, Flexible Approach to Neurochemical Regulation

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About This Protocol

This protocol is designed for learners who want to explore emotional regulation through **direct sensory experience** before cognitive understanding. It honors neurodivergent sensory processing differences and provides flexible, experiential pathways to neurochemical balance.

Who This Is For

- Neurodivergent adults with sensory processing differences
- Self-directed learners who prefer experiential learning
- Individuals seeking body-based regulation strategies
- Anyone who finds traditional “talk therapy” approaches insufficient
- People who want to understand their neurochemistry through lived experience

Core Principles

Sensory-First: Experience before explanation
Body Wisdom: Trust what your body tells you
Experimentation: Discover what works through trial
Flexibility: No required order or timeline
Accommodation: Honor sensory differences without judgment

The DOES-C Framework

DOES-C maps five key neurochemicals across five sensory modalities, creating a 5×5 matrix of regulation strategies:

The Five Neurochemicals

- **D - Dopamine**: Motivation, reward, pleasure, focus
- **O - Oxytocin**: Bonding, trust, social connection, calm
- **E - Endorphins**: Happiness, pain relief, resilience, euphoria
- **S - Serotonin**: Mood balance, contentment, well-being, stability
- **C - Cortisol Regulation**: Stress management, alertness balance, recovery

The Five Senses

- **Visual**: What you see
- **Auditory**: What you hear
- **Taste**: What you eat and drink
- **Tactile**: What you touch and feel physically
- **Olfactory**: What you smell

The Matrix

Each neurochemical can be influenced through each sense, creating 25 possible intervention points. You’ll discover which combinations work best for your unique nervous system.

How to Use This Protocol

1. Start with Sensory Experience

You don’ t need to understand the neuroscience first. Begin by trying activities and noticing what feels good, energizing, calming, or connecting. The science can come later (or never—it’ s optional).

2. Explore Based on Need

Rather than working through neurochemicals systematically, explore based on what you need in the moment:

- Need motivation or energy? → Explore Dopamine activities
- Need connection or calm? → Explore Oxytocin activities
- Need joy or resilience? → Explore Endorphin activities
- Need mood balance? → Explore Serotonin activities
- Need stress relief? → Explore Cortisol Regulation activities

3. Experiment with All Five Senses

For each neurochemical, try activities across different senses. Notice which sensory modalities are most effective for you. Some people respond strongly to visual input, others to tactile or olfactory.

4. Honor Sensory Differences

If certain sensory inputs are uncomfortable or overwhelming, skip them. Sensory sensitivities are real. This protocol accommodates seeking and avoiding patterns.

5. Build Your Personal Toolkit

Collect activities that actually work for you (not what “should” work). Organize them by situation, energy level, and accessibility. Create multiple backup options.

Phase 1: Sensory-First Discovery (Self-Paced)

Objective

Explore through direct sensory experience before cognitive understanding

Sensory Preference Mapping

Before diving into neurochemicals, understand your sensory profile:

Identify Comfortable and Uncomfortable Senses

- Which senses do you naturally seek out?
- Which senses do you avoid or find overwhelming?
- Which senses are neutral or variable?
- How does sensory tolerance change with stress or energy?

Explore Seeking vs. Avoiding Patterns

- Sensory seeking: Craving intense sensory input
- Sensory avoiding: Preferring minimal sensory input
- Mixed patterns: Seeking in some areas, avoiding in others
- Context-dependent: Different patterns in different situations

Recognize Existing Regulation Strategies

- What do you already do to feel better?
- Which senses do you naturally use for regulation?
- What stimming behaviors serve sensory needs?
- Which environments support your regulation?

Honor Sensory Differences and Needs

- Sensory sensitivities are real and valid
- Accommodations are necessary, not optional
- Your sensory profile is unique

- No hierarchy of senses—all are equally valid

No Hierarchy Approach

- Visual input isn’ t “better” than tactile
- Olfactory regulation is as valid as auditory
- Your most effective sense is the right one
- Multi-sensory combinations are powerful

Experiential Introduction

Experience Activities First, Learn Neurochemistry Later

Try the sensory activity buffet below without knowing which neurochemical each activity targets. Just notice how each one makes you feel.

Sensory Activity Buffet (Try Many Things Quickly)

1. Look at bright, colorful images
2. Listen to upbeat music
3. Eat a piece of dark chocolate
4. Do 10 jumping jacks
5. Smell peppermint essential oil
6. Look at photos of loved ones
7. Listen to someone’ s soothing voice
8. Drink herbal tea
9. Give yourself a hand massage
10. Smell lavender
11. Watch a comedy clip
12. Listen to nature sounds
13. Eat something spicy
14. Stretch your body
15. Smell citrus
16. Spend time in sunlight

17. Listen to rhythmic music
18. Eat complex carbohydrates
19. Practice gentle yoga
20. Smell forest or earth scents
21. Organize a cluttered space
22. Listen to white noise
23. Drink water with lemon
24. Do progressive muscle relaxation
25. Smell chamomile

Notice What Feels Good, Energizing, Calming, etc.

After trying activities, reflect:

- Which made you feel more energized?
- Which made you feel calmer?
- Which made you feel happier?
- Which made you feel more connected?
- Which made you feel more balanced?
- Which were uncomfortable or ineffective?

Track Responses in Preferred Format

- Visual chart or graph
- Written journal
- Voice recordings
- Emoji ratings
- Body sensation drawings
- Whatever works for your brain

Follow Curiosity and Body Wisdom

Your body knows what it needs. If you’ re drawn to certain activities, explore why. If something feels wrong, trust that. Body wisdom is real.

Neurochemical Education (When Ready)

Learn About D-O-E-S-C in Any Order

When you’ re curious about the science behind what you’ re experiencing, explore the neurochemicals. You can learn about them in any order, focus on just one or two, or skip the science entirely.

Connect Neurochemicals to Lived Experience

- Dopamine: Remember times you felt motivated or focused
- Oxytocin: Recall moments of connection or trust
- Endorphins: Think about experiences of joy or resilience
- Serotonin: Notice when you’ ve felt balanced and content
- Cortisol: Recognize your stress patterns and recovery

Visual/Graphic Representations of Brain Science

- Infographics showing neurochemical functions
- Visual maps of the DOES-C matrix
- Color-coded charts
- Diagrams of brain regions
- Sensory-neurochemical connection wheels

Special Interest Deep-Dive Option Available

If neuroscience becomes a special interest, dive deep! Learn about receptors, pathways, interactions, and mechanisms. Hyperfocus on the science if that serves you.

No Tests or Required Knowledge Retention

You don’ t need to memorize anything. Understanding can be intuitive and experiential. The goal is regulation, not academic knowledge.

Phase 2: Matrix Exploration (Non-Sequential)

Objective

Discover effective activities through experimentation, not prescription

Choose Your Own Adventure

- Start with any neurochemical-sense combination
- Follow what works, abandon what doesn’ t
- No required order or completion
- Revisit combinations multiple times
- Build personal favorites library

When You Need Motivation/Energy (Dopamine)

What Dopamine Does

Dopamine drives motivation, reward, pleasure, focus, and goal-directed behavior. When dopamine is balanced, you feel energized, motivated, and able to pursue goals.

Experiment with All 5 Senses

Visual Dopamine Activities

- Create or view goal boards with images
- Use progress charts and trackers
- Watch motivating videos
- Look at bright, high-contrast images
- Play video games with clear rewards
- Organize visual spaces (satisfying completion)

Auditory Dopamine Activities

- Listen to upbeat, energizing music
- Motivational podcasts or speeches
- Reward sounds (dings, chimes for task completion)
- Binaural beats for focus
- Pump-up playlists
- Audiobooks on topics that excite you

Taste Dopamine Activities

- Protein-rich foods (tyrosine for dopamine production)
- Dark chocolate (contains dopamine precursors)
- Foods you find rewarding
- Novel flavors (novelty boosts dopamine)
- Favorite treats as rewards
- Caffeinated beverages (moderate amounts)

Tactile Dopamine Activities

- Exercise and movement (releases dopamine)
- Cold exposure (cold showers, ice)
- Fidget toys and stimming
- Completing physical tasks (checking boxes)
- Video game controllers (tactile feedback)
- High-fives or fist bumps

Olfactory Dopamine Activities

- Peppermint (alertness and energy)
- Citrus scents (uplifting)
- Coffee aroma (even without drinking)
- Energizing essential oil blends
- Scents associated with rewards
- Novel scents (novelty seeking)

Notice Which Sensory Inputs Boost Motivation for You

Everyone’ s dopamine system responds differently. You might find that visual progress tracking works better than auditory motivation, or that tactile activities (exercise) are more effective than taste-based approaches.

Create Personalized Dopamine Menu

Build a list of dopamine-boosting activities that work for your brain:

- Quick dopamine hits (5 minutes or less)
- Moderate activities (15-30 minutes)
- Deep dopamine work (1+ hours)
- High-energy and low-energy options
- Activities for different settings (home, work, public)

Include Special Interests and Hyperfocus Triggers

Your special interests are dopamine goldmines. Engaging with interests naturally boosts motivation and focus. Use this strategically:

- Start the day with brief special interest time
- Use special interests as rewards
- Connect tasks to special interests when possible
- Allow hyperfocus on interests for dopamine regulation

Honor Rest as Valid

Not everything needs dopamine. Rest, low-motivation periods, and recovery time are necessary. You don’ t need to be “on” all the time. Dopamine crashes are real—build in recovery.

When You Need Connection (Oxytocin)

What Oxytocin Does

Oxytocin facilitates bonding, trust, social connection, and calm. It’ s the “connection neurochemical” that helps us feel safe with others and ourselves.

Explore Connection Activities That Fit Your Style

Visual Oxytocin Activities

- Eye contact with trusted people (if comfortable)
- Looking at photos of loved ones
- Watching heartwarming videos
- Seeing familiar, comforting faces
- Video calls with friends/family
- Observing acts of kindness

Auditory Oxytocin Activities

- Listening to soothing voices
- Collaborative music-making
- Singing together (or alone)
- Hearing “I love you” or words of affirmation
- Listening to stories of connection
- Shared laughter

Taste Oxytocin Activities

- Shared meals with safe people
- Comfort foods from childhood
- Warm beverages (tea, cocoa, soup)
- Foods associated with care and nurturing
- Cooking for others

- Eating together (even virtually)

Tactile Oxytocin Activities

- Hugs from safe people (if touch-comfortable)
- Hand-holding
- Massage or gentle touch
- Petting animals
- Warm baths
- Weighted blankets
- Self-massage

Olfactory Oxytocin Activities

- Lavender (calming and connecting)
- Vanilla (comforting)
- Familiar scents (home, loved ones)
- Baking smells (nurturing associations)
- Scents from positive memories
- Essential oils for calm

Include Non-Traditional Bonding

Parallel Play: Spending time with others while doing separate activities is legitimate connection. You don’ t need constant interaction to bond.

Shared Interests: Deep connection happens through shared passion for topics, not just face-to-face conversation.

Online Connection: Text-based relationships, online communities, and virtual friendships produce real oxytocin. Digital connection counts.

Animal Connection: Bonding with pets is powerful oxytocin regulation. Animals provide connection without social complexity.

Accommodate Social Energy Limits

- Set time limits on social activities
- Plan recovery time after socializing
- Choose one-on-one over groups when possible
- Use asynchronous communication (text, email)
- Honor your social battery

Virtual Connection Counts

Video calls, text conversations, online gaming together, shared document collaboration, and social media interaction all produce oxytocin. You don’t need in-person contact for connection.

Solitude as Valid Need

Not always seeking oxytocin is healthy. Alone time, solitude, and independence are necessary. Balance connection with autonomy. You don’t need to be social all the time.

When You Need Joy/Relief (Endorphins)

What Endorphins Do

Endorphins create happiness, relieve pain (physical and emotional), build resilience, and produce natural euphoria. They’re your body’s built-in feel-good chemicals.

Find What Genuinely Brings You Joy

Visual Endorphin Activities

- Watching comedy (laughter releases endorphins)
- Viewing beautiful art or nature
- Bright colors and uplifting imagery

- Funny videos or memes
- Satisfying visual content (oddly satisfying videos)
- Watching joyful movement (dance, play)

Auditory Endorphin Activities

- Laughter (your own or others')
- Uplifting music that makes you want to move
- Singing loudly
- Sounds of joy (children playing, celebration)
- Music that gives you chills
- Comedy podcasts or shows

Taste Endorphin Activities

- Spicy foods (capsaicin releases endorphins)
- Favorite treats and comfort foods
- Dark chocolate (endorphin boost)
- Foods that bring joy
- Novel flavors that excite you
- Eating mindfully for pleasure

Tactile Endorphin Activities

- Exercise and movement (major endorphin source)
- Stretching and yoga
- Dancing freely
- Stimming (releases endorphins)
- Self-massage
- Physical play
- Cold or hot exposure (intensity releases endorphins)

Olfactory Endorphin Activities

- Energizing scents (citrus, peppermint)

- Scents associated with happy memories
- Aromatherapy blends for joy
- Favorite perfumes or colognes
- Baking smells
- Fresh air and nature scents

Include Stimming, Special Interests, Comfort Activities

Stimming: Repetitive movements (rocking, flapping, spinning, bouncing) release endorphins. Stimming is joyful regulation, not something to suppress.

Special Interests: Deep engagement with interests produces joy and endorphins. Hyperfocus on what you love is therapeutic.

Comfort Activities: Whatever brings you genuine comfort and joy is valid—rewatching favorite shows, rereading books, engaging in "childish" play.

Movement That Feels Good

Not prescribed exercise, but movement that your body enjoys:

- Dancing in your room
- Walking in nature
- Swimming or water play
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Stretching luxuriously
- Any movement that feels good, not "should" exercise

Laughter, Play, and Fun in Your Style

- Solo play is valid (video games, puzzles, crafts)
- Humor that matches your style (dark, absurd, puns)
- Play without productivity (just for joy)
- Silliness and goofiness
- Creative expression for fun

Sensory Joy Activities

Activities that bring sensory pleasure:

- Soft textures (blankets, plush toys)
- Satisfying sounds (ASMR, crunching, popping)
- Beautiful sights (sunsets, art, patterns)
- Delicious tastes (favorite foods)
- Pleasant smells (flowers, baking, rain)

When You Need Calm/Balance (Serotonin)

What Serotonin Does

Serotonin regulates mood, creates contentment, supports well-being, and provides emotional stability. Balanced serotonin helps you feel “okay” and steady.

Discover Your Personal Calming Activities

Visual Serotonin Activities

- Sunlight exposure (crucial for serotonin production)
- Calming colors (blues, greens, earth tones)
- Nature scenes and landscapes
- Organized, uncluttered spaces
- Gentle, soft lighting
- Repetitive visual patterns (mandalas, waves)

Auditory Serotonin Activities

- Nature sounds (rain, ocean, forest)
- Rhythmic music (steady beats)
- White noise or brown noise
- Meditation music

- Familiar, comforting sounds
- Silence (absence of sound can be calming)

Taste Serotonin Activities

- Complex carbohydrates (help serotonin production)
- Foods with tryptophan (turkey, eggs, cheese, nuts)
- Warm, comforting foods
- Regular, balanced meals (blood sugar affects serotonin)
- Herbal teas (chamomile, passionflower)
- Omega-3 rich foods (fish, walnuts, flax)

Tactile Serotonin Activities

- Gentle movement (walking, tai chi, qigong)
- Yoga (especially restorative)
- Massage or gentle touch
- Warm baths
- Soft textures
- Grounding techniques (feeling earth, grass)

Olfactory Serotonin Activities

- Grounding scents (sandalwood, cedarwood)
- Forest bathing (tree and earth scents)
- Lavender (calming)
- Chamomile
- Vetiver
- Natural outdoor smells

Include Routine, Predictability, Sameness

Serotonin thrives on stability:

- Regular sleep schedule

- Consistent meal times
- Predictable routines
- Familiar environments
- Reduced uncertainty where possible
- Sameness as comfort (not rigidity)

Sensory Regulation Strategies

- Dim lighting for calm
- Quiet spaces
- Comfortable clothing
- Temperature regulation
- Minimal sensory input when overwhelmed
- Sensory-friendly environments

Special Interests as Grounding

Engaging with familiar special interests provides serotonin-boosting stability. The predictability and mastery within interests creates calm and balance.

Accommodation as Balance

Using accommodations (noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, comfortable clothes, predictable schedules) supports serotonin balance. Accommodation isn’t avoidance—it’s regulation.

When You Need Stress Relief (Cortisol Regulation)

What Cortisol Does

Cortisol is the stress hormone. In appropriate amounts, it helps you respond to challenges. Too much cortisol creates chronic stress, anxiety, and overwhelm. Regulation means managing cortisol levels.

Identify Your Stress Signals

Neurodivergent stress signals may differ from neurotypical ones:

- Increased stimming or decreased stimming
- Sensory sensitivity intensifies
- Executive function crashes
- Meltdown or shutdown approaching
- Masking becomes exhausting
- Physical symptoms (headache, stomach issues, tension)

Explore Regulation Strategies That Actually Work for You

Visual Cortisol Regulation Activities

- Calming imagery (nature, peaceful scenes)
- Organized, clutter-free spaces (visual calm)
- Dim or soft lighting
- Closing eyes (removing visual input)
- Watching slow, gentle movement (fish, clouds)
- Visualization exercises

Auditory Cortisol Regulation Activities

- White noise or brown noise
- Meditation music
- Nature sounds
- Silence (removing auditory input)
- Noise-canceling headphones
- Bilateral stimulation sounds (EMDR-style)

Taste Cortisol Regulation Activities

- Herbal tea (chamomile, passionflower, lemon balm)
- Anti-inflammatory foods

- Warm liquids (soothing)
- Avoiding caffeine and sugar during high stress
- Magnesium-rich foods (dark leafy greens, nuts)
- Hydration (dehydration increases cortisol)

Tactile Cortisol Regulation Activities

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Grounding techniques (5-4-3-2-1)
- Gentle stretching
- Weighted blankets
- Warm or cool compresses
- Self-soothing touch (hand on heart)

Olfactory Cortisol Regulation Activities

- Chamomile (calming)
- Bergamot (stress relief)
- Lavender (relaxation)
- Frankincense (grounding)
- Rose (soothing)
- Any scent you associate with safety

Include Stimming, Movement, Sensory Tools

Stimming: Repetitive movements regulate cortisol. Rocking, flapping, bouncing, pacing—all are stress regulation. Don’ t suppress stimming during stress.

Movement: Walking, stretching, shaking out your body, dancing—movement metabolizes stress hormones.

Sensory Tools: Fidgets, chewelry, weighted items, textured objects—use whatever helps you regulate.

Recognize Masking as Stressor

Masking (hiding neurodivergent traits) significantly increases cortisol. Stress relief often requires unmasking:

- Stim freely in safe spaces
- Use accommodations without shame
- Communicate directly without social performance
- Take off the mask to reduce cortisol

Build in Recovery Time

After stressful events, you need recovery time:

- Alone time to decompress
- Low-demand activities
- Sensory-friendly environments
- Permission to not be productive
- Sleep and rest
- Return to baseline before next stressor

Phase 3: Personalized Sensory Toolkit (Ongoing)

Objective

Create flexible, accessible regulation strategies

Toolkit Development

Collect Activities That Actually Work

Not what "should" work, but what does work for your unique nervous system. Be honest about effectiveness. If meditation doesn't work, don't keep it in your toolkit.

Organize by Situation, Energy Level, Access

By Situation:

- At home alone
- At work/school
- In public spaces
- With others
- During specific triggers

By Energy Level:

- High energy available (can do complex activities)
- Medium energy (moderate effort okay)
- Low energy (need simple, easy options)
- Crisis mode (need immediate, accessible tools)

By Access:

- Always available (breathing, grounding)
- Usually available (music, movement)
- Sometimes available (nature, specific foods)
- Rarely available (specific people, locations)

Include Accommodations and Supports

Your toolkit should include:

- Physical accommodations (headphones, sunglasses, fidgets)
- Environmental modifications (lighting, temperature, noise)
- Communication supports (scripts, AAC, text-based)
- Schedule accommodations (breaks, flexibility, reduced demands)
- Social supports (safe people, professional help)

Build in Multiple Backup Options

If your primary regulation strategy isn’ t available, have backups:

- If you can’ t go outside → nature sounds and images

- If you can’ t move freely → small stretches or hand movements
- If you can’ t access safe people → comforting objects or media
- If you can’ t use preferred sense → try another sense

Allow for Changing Needs and Preferences

What works today might not work tomorrow. Energy, stress, hormones, seasons, and life circumstances change your needs. Revisit and revise your toolkit regularly.

Situational Protocols

Design Flexible Responses for Common Situations

Create “if-then” protocols:

- If overwhelmed in public → find quiet space, use headphones, ground with 5-4-3-2-1
- If low motivation → dopamine boost through music + movement + reward
- If lonely → reach out via text, engage with online community, pet animal
- If anxious → cortisol regulation through breathing + calming scent + gentle movement

Account for Executive Function Variability

When executive function is low:

- Use external reminders (alarms, notes, visual cues)
- Reduce decision-making (pre-made protocols)
- Lower the bar (easier versions of activities)
- Ask for help (support from others)

Include Low-Energy and High-Energy Options

Low-Energy Regulation:

- Passive activities (listening, watching, smelling)
- Minimal movement required
- Can be done lying down

- Short duration (5 minutes or less)

High-Energy Regulation:

- Active engagement (exercise, creating, socializing)
- Requires focus and effort
- Longer duration
- More complex activities

Build in Escape Routes and Breaks

Always have an exit strategy:

- Know where quiet spaces are
- Have a reason to leave ready
- Build in breaks during activities
- Permission to stop when needed
- No guilt about self-preservation

Prevention and Recovery

Prevention: Use toolkit proactively before crisis

- Regular sensory check-ins
- Preventive regulation activities
- Avoid known triggers when possible
- Build in recovery time

Recovery: After meltdown, shutdown, or high stress

- Extra gentle with yourself
- Low-demand activities only
- Extended rest and recovery
- No expectations for productivity

Integration with Daily Life

Embed DOES-C into Existing Routines

Don’ t create a separate “regulation practice”—integrate into life:

- Morning: Sunlight (serotonin) + movement (endorphins) + coffee smell (dopamine)
- Work breaks: Stretch (endorphins) + nature sounds (serotonin) + peppermint (dopamine)
- Evening: Warm bath (oxytocin) + dim lights (cortisol) + lavender (serotonin)

Use Special Interests as Regulation Tools

Your special interests naturally regulate neurochemicals:

- Dopamine: Motivation and focus through interests
- Oxytocin: Connection through shared interest communities
- Endorphins: Joy from engaging with interests
- Serotonin: Stability and comfort in familiar interests
- Cortisol: Stress relief through interest immersion

Accommodate Sensory Environment

Shape your environment for regulation:

- Lighting: Adjustable, dimmable, natural when possible
- Sound: Control noise levels, use headphones, create quiet spaces
- Temperature: Regulate for comfort
- Visual: Reduce clutter, add calming elements
- Scent: Use essential oils, remove irritating smells

Build Sustainable Practices

Regulation practices should not be exhausting:

- Start small (5 minutes daily)
- Build gradually

- Make it easy (reduce barriers)
- Make it enjoyable (not a chore)
- Be flexible (skip when needed)

Celebrate What Already Works

You’re already regulating your neurochemistry, even if you didn’t know it. Recognize and celebrate:

- Stimming (endorphins, cortisol regulation)
- Special interests (dopamine, serotonin)
- Sensory seeking/avoiding (all neurochemicals)
- Social patterns (oxytocin management)
- Routines (serotonin stability)

Tips for Success

Honor Your Sensory Profile

- **Sensory sensitivities are real**: Accommodate them without shame
- **Seeking and avoiding are both valid**: Honor your patterns
- **Sensory needs change**: What works today might not work tomorrow
- **Sensory overwhelm is serious**: Prevent and respond to it
- **Your sensory experience is unique**: Don’t compare to others

Trust Your Body

- **Body wisdom is real**: Your body knows what it needs
- **Interoception varies**: Some people feel body signals clearly, others don’t
- **Physical sensations are data**: Notice without judgment
- **Body-based regulation works**: You don’t need to think your way to balance
- **Movement is medicine**: Your body wants to move in ways that feel good

Experiment Without Judgment

- **Try everything once**: You won’t know what works until you try
- **What doesn’t work is valuable data**: Eliminate ineffective strategies
- **Preferences are personal**: Your effective activities might surprise you
- **Combinations are powerful**: Multi-sensory approaches often work best
- **Evolution is normal**: Your toolkit will change over time

Accommodate Neurodivergence

- **Stimming is regulation**: Include it, don’t suppress it
- **Special interests are tools**: Use them strategically
- **Masking is costly**: Reduce it for better regulation
- **Executive function varies**: Plan for low-EF days
- **Sensory differences are real**: Build around them

Build Sustainable Practices

- **Start small**: 5 minutes daily beats 1 hour weekly
- **Make it easy**: Reduce barriers to access
- **Make it enjoyable**: Regulation shouldn’t be a chore
- **Be flexible**: Skip when needed without guilt
- **Celebrate small wins**: Every regulation attempt matters

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to understand the neuroscience to use this protocol?
No. You can regulate neurochemicals through sensory experience without ever learning the science. The protocol is designed to be effective experientially.

What if I have sensory sensitivities that make some activities impossible?
Skip any activities that are uncomfortable or overwhelming. The protocol offers

multiple options for each neurochemical specifically to accommodate sensory differences.

How do I know which neurochemical I need to regulate?
Notice what you’ re experiencing: Low motivation? (Dopamine) Lonely? (Oxytocin) Sad? (Endorphins) Anxious? (Cortisol) Unstable mood? (Serotonin) Start there.

Can I work on multiple neurochemicals at once?
Absolutely. Many activities regulate multiple neurochemicals simultaneously. For example, exercise boosts dopamine, endorphins, and serotonin while reducing cortisol.

What if nothing seems to work?
Some possibilities: 1) You might need professional support (therapy, medication), 2) You might need more time to find what works, 3) Underlying medical issues might need addressing, 4) You might need to try more extreme versions of activities (more intense, longer duration).

Is it okay to use the same regulation strategy repeatedly?
Yes. If something works, use it. You don’ t need variety for the sake of variety. However, having backup options is useful for when your primary strategy isn’ t available.

How long does it take to see results?
Some activities work immediately (deep breathing, cold water, certain scents). Others take consistent practice over weeks. Neurochemical balance is ongoing, not a one-time fix.

Can I use this protocol alongside medication?
Yes. This protocol complements medication. However, consult your prescriber about any major lifestyle changes, especially regarding supplements or foods that might interact with medications.

What if I’ m multiply neurodivergent?
This protocol works for all forms of neurodivergence. Adapt it to your specific needs, whether you’ re ADHD, autistic, dyslexic, or have multiple neurodivergences.

Resources for Continued Learning

Books

- *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk
- *Sensory Processing 101* by Dayna Abraham
- *The Neuroscience of You* by Chantel Prat
- *Divergent Mind* by Jenara Nerenberg

Online Resources

- Sensory processing disorder resources
- Neurodivergent-affirming occupational therapy
- Somatic experiencing and body-based therapy
- Neurochemistry education (for those interested)

Professional Support

- Occupational therapists (sensory integration)
- Somatic therapists
- Neurodivergent-affirming counselors
- Functional medicine practitioners

About SEL Academy

SEL Academy provides evidence-based, neuroscience-informed social-emotional learning frameworks designed for diverse learners. We honor neurodivergent sensory processing and provide body-based regulation strategies grounded in neurochemistry.

For more information, resources, and support, visit our website or contact us.

Remember: Your sensory experience is valid. Your body knows what it needs. There is no "correct" way to regulate neurochemicals—only the way that works for your

unique nervous system.

Trust your body. Honor your senses. Regulate in ways that feel good to you.

This protocol was designed with input from neurodivergent individuals, occupational therapists, and somatic practitioners. It reflects lived sensory experience and neurodiversity-affirming values.