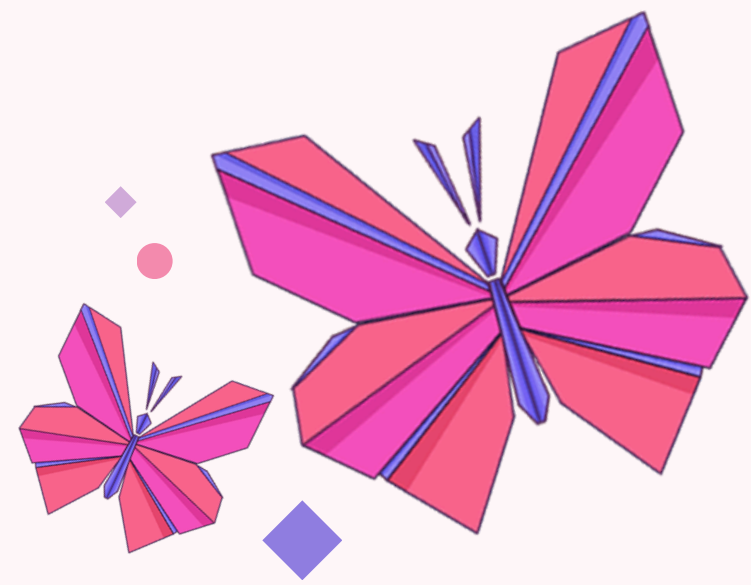




What are Glimmers?

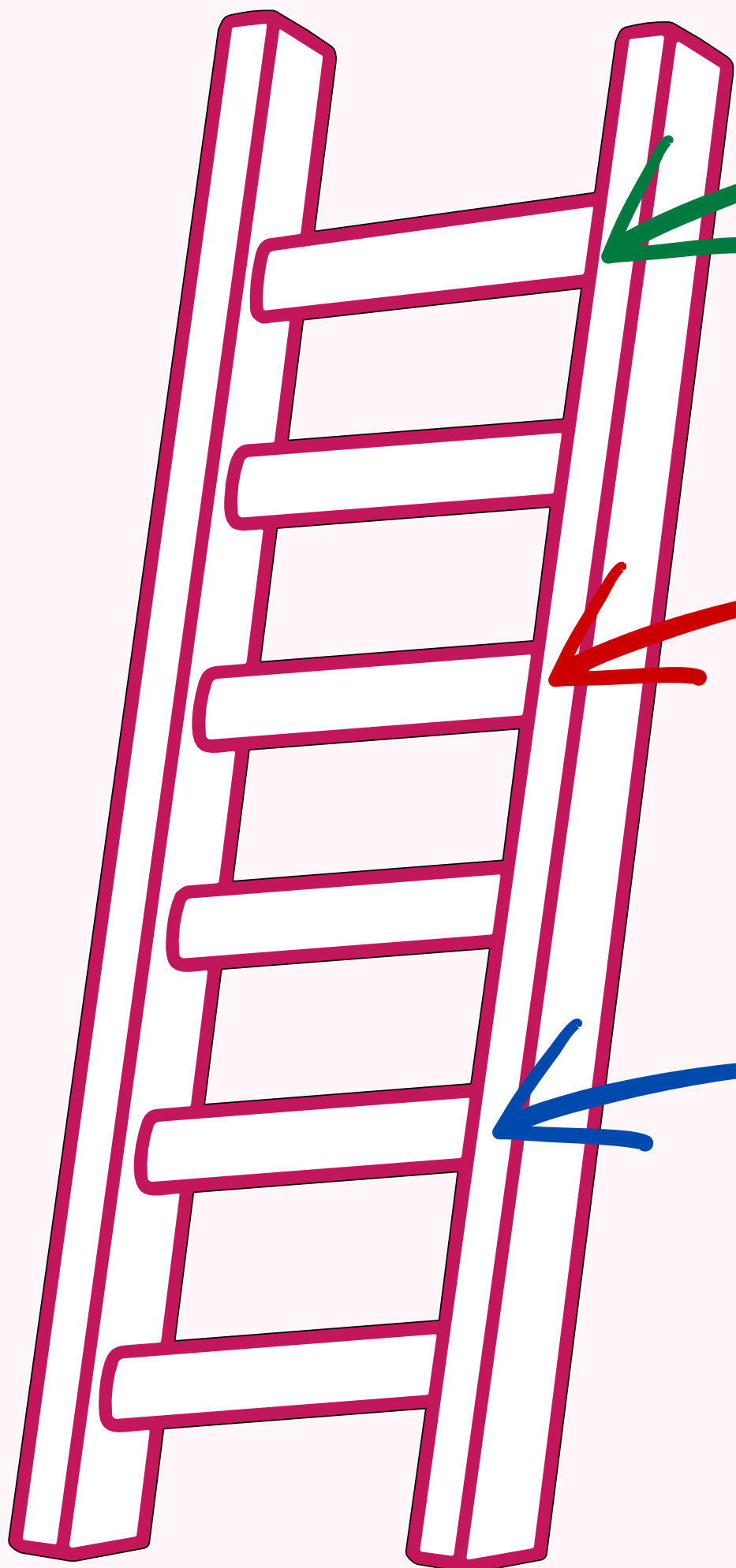
A glimmer is a small everyday moment that helps you feel calm, safe or joyful. These moments signal safety to your nervous system and help you feel more regulated. Glimmers are personal and can be anything from enjoying your favourite drink or snack, excitement over seeing an animal or noticing the beautiful colours of a sunset.

An Overview of the Theory

Polyvagal Theory, developed by neuroscientist Dr. Stephen Porges, helps us understand how our body decides if we're safe or stressed, based on signals it picks up from the world around us. The theory identifies three distinct states of the nervous system which are stacked in order, like rungs on a ladder, that your body moves up and down on depending on what it perceives.

You don't choose which state you land in - your body does it automatically, based on your past experiences and what's happening around you in the moment. Learning about these responses can help you make more sense of how you react to things and better understand yourself.

The Nervous System Ladder



Your Safe & Social State (Ventral Vagal)

"I'm good. I can laugh with friends and handle a disagreement without losing it."

What is happening in the body: Can feel like:

Breathing is calm
Muscles feel relaxed
Heart rate is steady

Moments of ease, even brief ones
Being connected to others
Able to think clearly and make decisions

Your Fight / Flight State (Sympathetic)

"Something feels wrong. My body is gearing up to fight back or get out of here fast."

What is happening in the body: Can feel like:

Adrenaline is released (preparing for action)
Heart starts racing
Muscles get tense
Digestion slows down

Anxious, restless, angry, irritable or overwhelmed
You may notice your chest is tight, it is hard to sit still and difficult to concentrate.

Your Shutdown / Freeze State (Dorsal Vagal)

"I've hit a wall. I can't speak, think, or move properly. I just want to hide."

What is happening in the body:

Heart rate slows down (can drop quickly)
Body feels heavy or numb
Breathing is shallow

Can feel like:

Being frozen, disconnected or dissociated
Physical and mental exhaustion
Wanting to self-isolate or disappear

Note: you may not relate to these examples, that is okay!
Everybody is different.

There's no wrong way to use this resource. You can read it all at once, come back to bits, or skip what doesn't feel right for you.

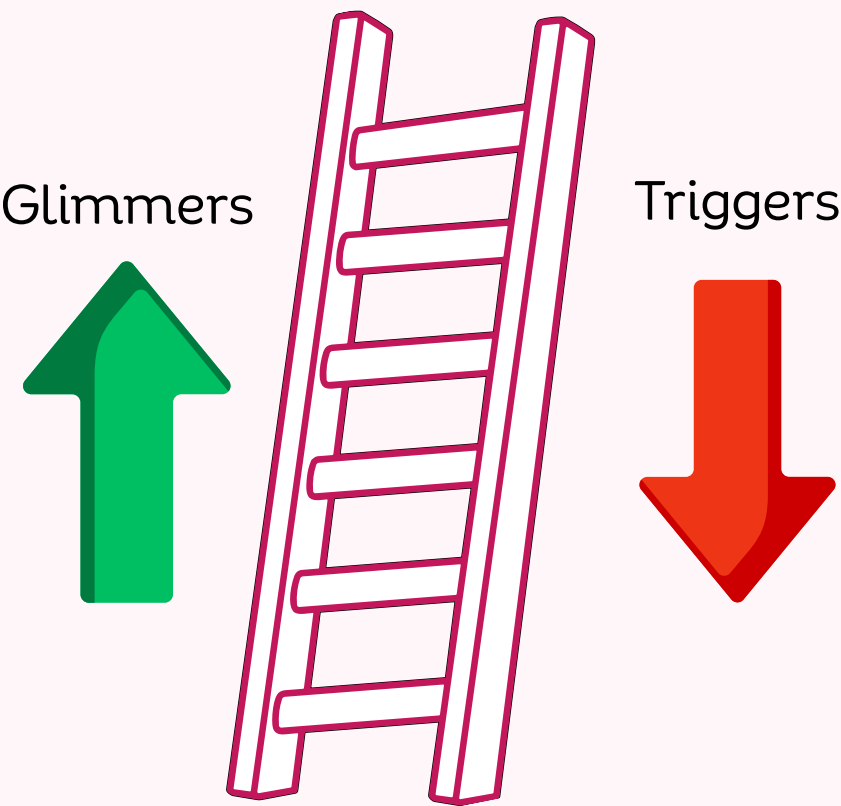
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Where do Glimmers fit in?

Now we understand how our nervous system responses can move us into different states. But what are the things that make us move up and down the ladder? You are probably familiar with the term “triggers”. Triggers are people, places, situations or sensory stimuli (like smells and sounds) that activate our nervous system and move you **down** the ladder and into a Fight/Flight or Freeze/Shutdown response.

Glimmers are micro-moments that signal safety to your nervous system and help you feel more regulated. They can help move you **up** the ladder and back into your Safe & Social state and reduce the level of stress in your body and mind.

Sounds simple, right? In reality it can be more complex.



The Impact of Chronic Stress and Trauma

When you live with chronic stress whether due to mental health challenges, trauma, disability, chronic illness or other reasons, the way you think, feel and engage with the world is changed. Chronic stress and trauma cause nervous system dysregulation which can leave your Fight / Flight response stuck on high alert. You may be spending most of your day in a dysregulated state. When this occurs anxiety can be so dominant it can be very difficult to feel **any** moments of calm, safety or joy.

If glimmers feel hard to find at first, that's okay, it's a really normal response to chronic stress and trauma. If you feel like you are currently stuck in Fight/Flight or Freeze/Shutdown refer to page 4 of this resource for some practical ideas on how to soothe your nervous system.

What Are Your Glimmers?



Glimmers are personal and unique. If you're unsure about where to start think about times when you've felt calm and safe, or when you've felt joyful and energised, and this will point you in the right direction. Using the [Glimmer Treasure Hunt](#) may help you find some ideas of glimmers that are present in your life.

Want to hear it explained?

Deb Dana originated the term 'glimmers' in her work with survivors of complex trauma. You can listen to her explain what glimmers are and how they can help regulate your nervous system in her own words [here](#)

Common Questions

Are Glimmers a form of 'Toxic Positivity'?

No, this approach is not about ignoring pain and suffering and trying to dismiss, downplay or put a positive spin on those experiences. Instead it is about acknowledging our suffering whilst also acknowledging that there are small moments throughout the day or week where we feel safe, good or happy.

Are Glimmers the same as Gratitude Journalling?

If you're familiar with gratitude journalling and other positive psychology practices the idea of glimmers might feel familiar to you. Gratitude practice can feel inaccessible when you're experiencing chronic dysregulation as there isn't likely much you feel "grateful" for, additionally in gratitude practice you may not be tuning into your nervous system to notice if you're feeling safe, calm or joyful. Both practices can be valuable and if you already keep a gratitude journal adding in noticing and appreciating glimmers may make it easier for you to build the habit.

Do I have to call them 'Glimmers'?

If the term glimmers doesn't resonate with you but you're interested in trying this approach you absolutely don't have to call them glimmers! You can choose another word or phrase that makes sense to you like sparkles, sunshine moments, mini-joys or anything else you'd like!

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Building A Glimmer Spotting Habit

When you start noticing glimmers on purpose, it helps your nervous system feel safer. Over time you will notice that finding glimmers becomes easier and you may even begin to notice your nervous system responses don't feel as intense or urgent, and it's easier to shift out of Fight / Flight and Shutdown / Freeze states.

How to Build Your Glimmer Spotting Habit

Here's a simple 3-step approach to start building this habit:

1. Notice

Pay attention to the things that make you smile, feel relaxed or safe, or bring you joy. Use the Glimmer Treasure Hunt below if you need help getting started.

2. Appreciate

Take a moment to slow down and appreciate the glimmer. Notice how you feel in your body – has your breathing or heart rate slowed or evened out? Are your muscles feeling more relaxed? Try to label any feelings coming up for you, like contentment, relaxation, gratitude, joy or excitement.

3. Record

Keeping a physical record of your glimmers can help when building this habit. You can record your glimmers through journalling, drawing or taking photos, sharing with your partner or a friend at the end of the day, or using a self-care app to track progress.



Even noticing one glimmer a day is a great start!

Glimmer Treasure Hunt

Tick off the glimmers you notice in your daily life. There are no right or wrong answers! You can use this as a weekly treasure hunt where you try and notice a glimmer from each category or choose your own glimmer sparking moments to include instead

Nature & Surroundings

- ☐ Enjoyed the breeze on my skin
- ☐ Watched a sunrise or sunset
- ☐ Saw a rainbow
- ☐ Walked barefoot on grass or sand
- ☐ Looked up at the stars
- ☐ Other: _____

Pets & People

- ☐ Pat or cuddled an animal
- ☐ Saw a wild animal, bird or critter
- ☐ Hugged someone I care about
- ☐ Laughed with a friend
- ☐ Enjoyed looking at a photo
- ☐ Other: _____

Creativity & Learning

- ☐ Enjoyed a new book, podcast or game
- ☐ Learnt something interesting
- ☐ Enjoyed listening to music
- ☐ Started an art or craft project
- ☐ Got supplies for a creative project
- ☐ Other: _____

Sensory & Self-Care

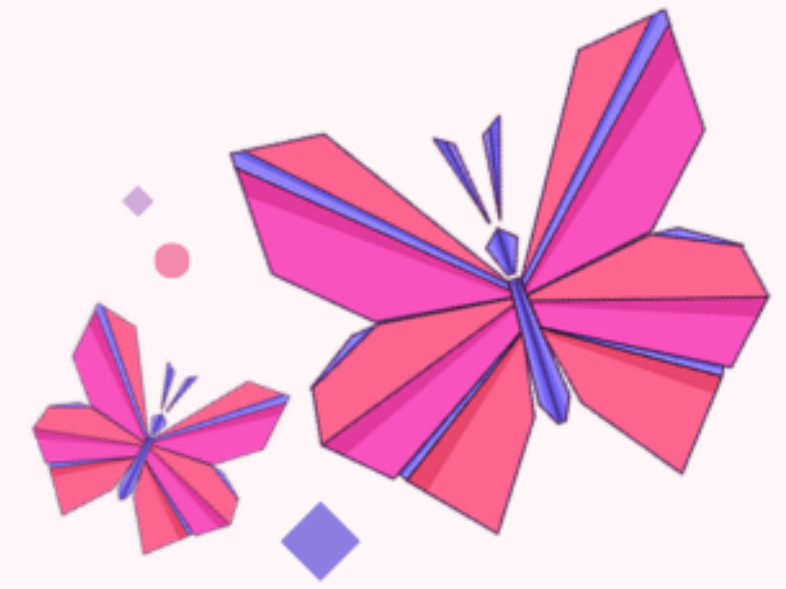
- ☐ Ate a yummy meal or snack
- ☐ Had a warm shower or bath
- ☐ Made a comforting drink
- ☐ Enjoyed a candle or nice scent
- ☐ Wore my comfiest clothes
- ☐ Snuggled up in a cosy spot
- ☐ Other: _____

Unexpected Glimmers

Use this space to record any glimmers that surprised you or didn't fit a category above:

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Feeling Stuck? Some Things That Might Help

This section is completely optional. If glimmers feel out of reach right now because you're stuck in Fight / Flight or Shutdown / Freeze, these simple strategies might help you shift back toward your Safe & Social state. You don't need to do all of them – just try what feels okay.

If you're stuck in Fight / Flight

"My body feels wired, restless, or on edge"

Move your body

Your body is full of energy it wants to use. Try shaking your hands, stomping your feet, doing star jumps, going for a fast walk, or pushing against a wall. The goal is to let your body expel the energy it has built up.

Slow your breathing

Try breathing out for longer than you breathe in (e.g., in for 4, out for 6). This sends a direct signal to your nervous system that you're safe. Even 3-4 breaths can make a difference.

Use cold water or ice

Splash cold water on your face, hold ice cubes, or press a cold cloth to your neck. Cold activates your dive reflex which slows your heart rate quickly.

Name what you notice

Try saying (out loud or in your head): "I notice my heart is racing. I notice my jaw is tight." Naming what's happening in your body can create a small gap between you and the feeling.

Orient to your surroundings

Slowly look around the room. Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. It can be helpful to have a drink or snack when using this strategy. Focusing on the here and now can help remind your brain you are safe.

If you're stuck in Shutdown / Freeze

"I feel numb, heavy, disconnected, or like I can't move"

Start very small

Wiggle your toes. Press your feet into the floor. Squeeze your hands open and closed. You're aiming to gently remind your body it can move.

Use warmth

Wrap yourself in a blanket, hold a warm drink, or place your hands under warm water. Warmth can gently signal safety and help you come back into your body.

Gentle rocking or swaying

Rock gently side to side, or forward and back. You can do this while sitting or standing, whatever is more comfortable. This rhythmic movement is soothing to your nervous system and can help you feel more present.

Hum, sing, or use your voice

Humming or singing (even quietly) activates your vagus nerve and can help shift you out of shutdown. Try humming a familiar tune or just making a low "mmm" sound. Playing some music while you do this can be helpful if you feel self-conscious about singing or humming aloud.

Need More Support?

If you're navigating challenges and feel like you could use some extra support, Finding Glimmers is here for you. We offer trauma-informed mental health counselling in a safe, judgement-free space where you can explore what you're going through at your own pace. Whether you're dealing with stress, anxiety, past experiences, or just feel like things are a lot right now, reaching out is a big step and you don't have to figure it out alone. Get in touch whenever you're ready.

Book a telehealth counselling session with Finding Glimmers
0470 443 286 | info@findingglimmers.com.au | findingglimmers.com.au

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