

POLYVAGAL THEORY

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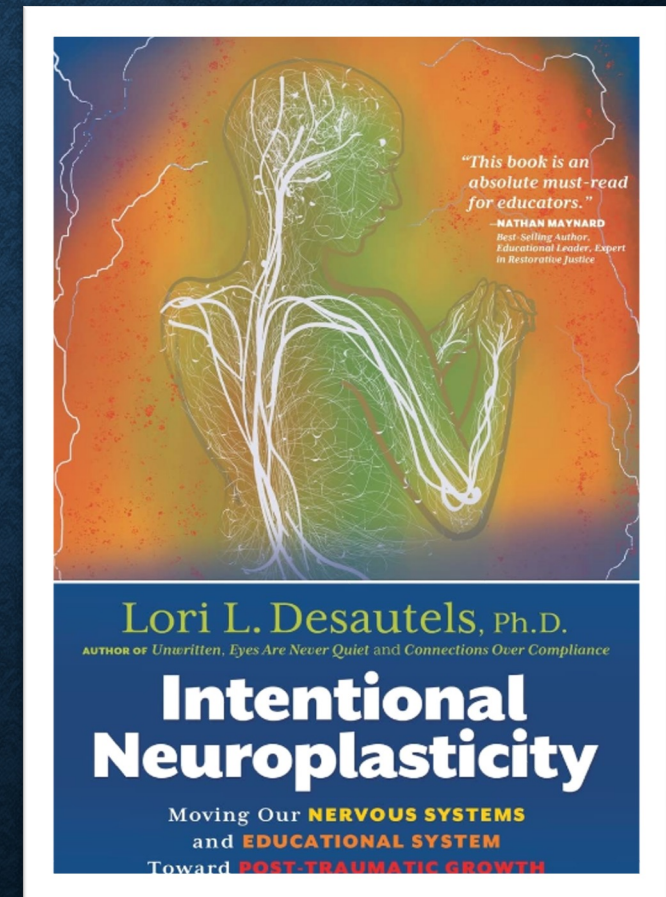
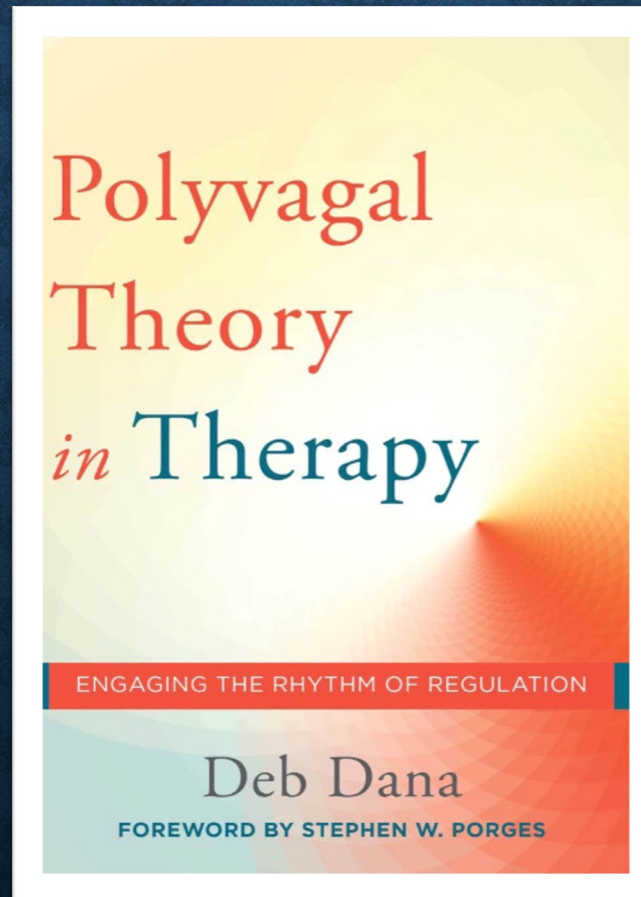
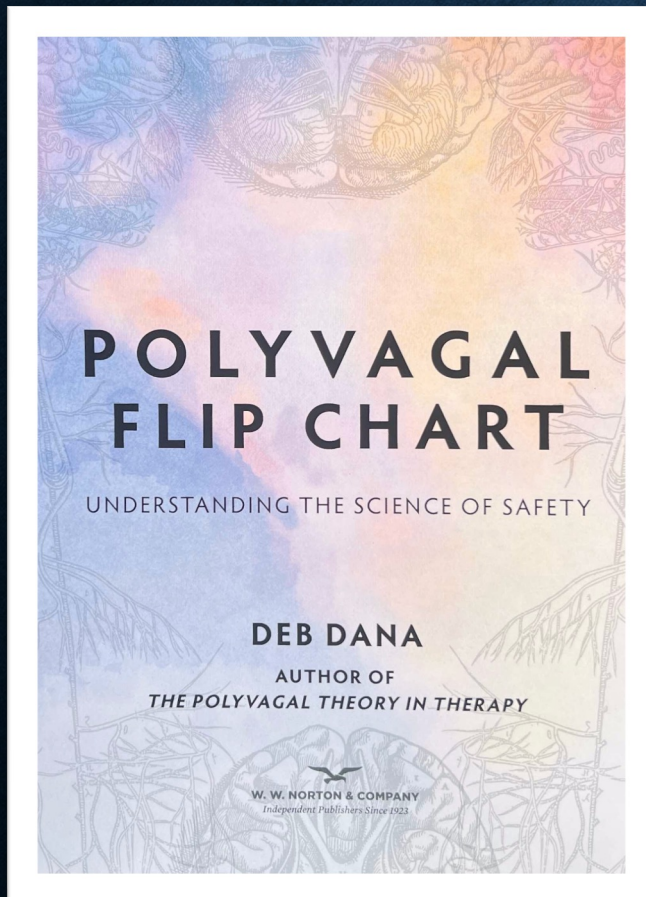
BY THE END OF THE SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

1. Explain the three organizing principals of Polyvagal Theory (Co-regulation, Neuroception, and Hierarchy)

2. Utilize tools created for Polyvagal Theory for the purpose of working with clients who are struggling with regulating their nervous system.

3. Have personal insights when viewing their own nervous system through the Polyvagal Theory three predictable pathways of response (Ventral Vagal, Sympathetic, and Dorsal Vagal).

RESOURCES UTILIZED IN CREATING THIS PRESENTATION





POLYVAGAL FLIP CHART

UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE OF SAFETY

DEB DANA

AUTHOR OF

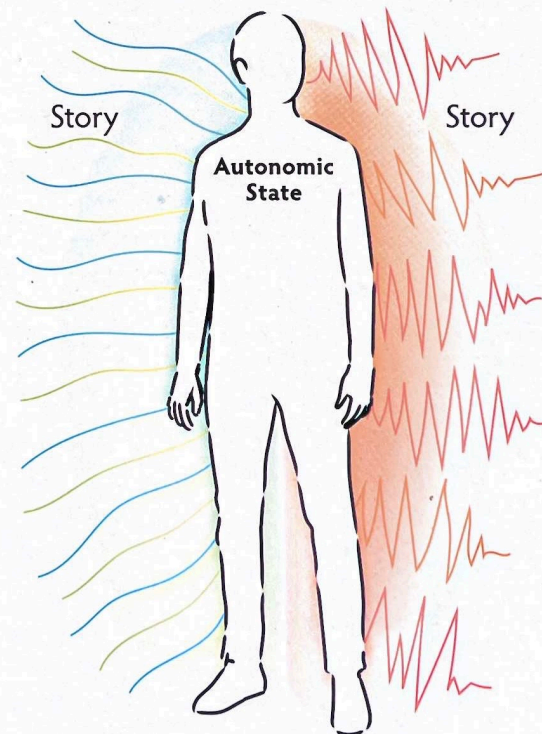
THE POLYVAGAL THEORY IN THERAPY


W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
Independent Publishers Since 1923

What is Polyvagal Theory?

Polyvagal Theory is a theory of the ways the autonomic nervous system works. Polyvagal Theory:

- defines the ways the autonomic nervous system reacts to experiences and regulates responses
- describes the ways the autonomic nervous system takes in information and initiates a response to help us safely navigate the ordinary demands of a day along with the extraordinary challenges we sometimes face
- outlines a hierarchy of three biological pathways of response providing a map of the ways we predictably move in and out of engagement, mobilization, and collapse in response to daily experiences



**Stories about self, the world, and relationships are based in autonomic state.
State creates story.**

Three Essential Elements

Context

Choice

Connection

Three Organizing Principles of Polyvagal Theory

Co-regulation

a biological imperative

Neuroception

detection without awareness

Hierarchy

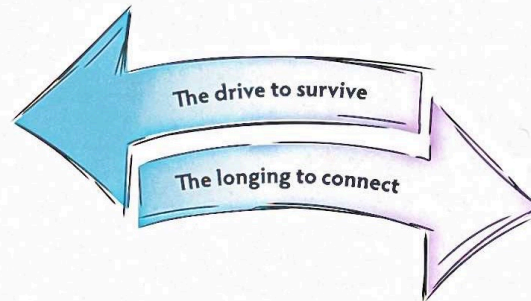
three predictable pathways of response

- Ventral Vagal
- Sympathetic
- Dorsal Vagal

Co-Regulation

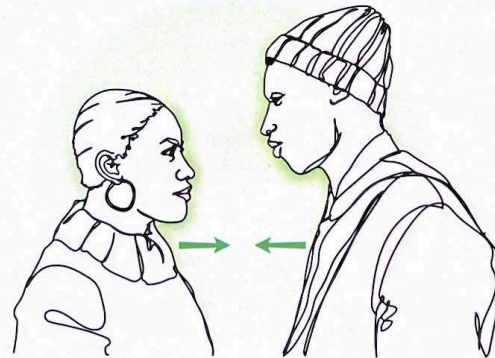
IS IT SAFE TO CONNECT?

The autonomic nervous system SENDS and SEARCHES FOR cues of safety or danger.



Two primary experiences coexist in the autonomic nervous system. Sometimes these actively work together and other times they work in opposition to each other.

The autonomic nervous system is both shaped and regulated through interactions with others.



The cues sent from one system to another either ...

co-regulate and invite new possibilities

OR

increase reactivity and reinforce habitual survival patterns

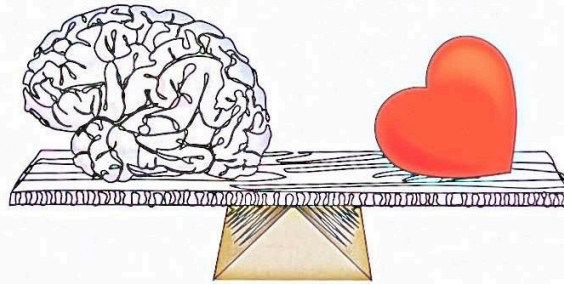
Neuroception

DETECTION WITHOUT AWARENESS

Neuroception describes the way the autonomic nervous system takes in information without involving the thinking parts of the brain.

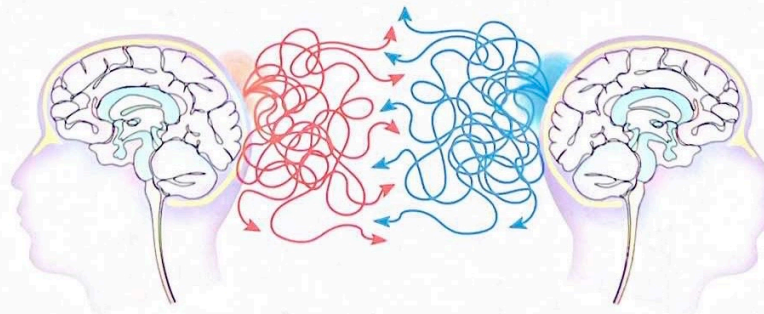
Neuroception responds to cues of safety and danger inside the body, outside in the environment, and between people.

When there is a neuroceptive match:



Neuroception accurately answers the question, "In this moment, am I safe or in danger?" The autonomic nervous system moves into the state that brings the energy needed to manage the situation effectively.

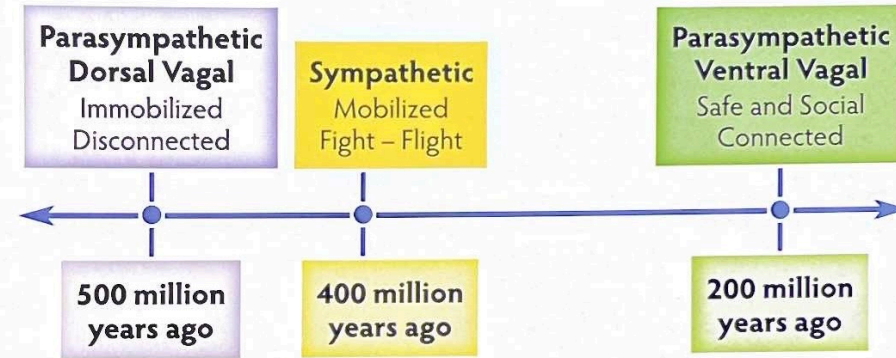
When there is a neuroceptive mismatch:



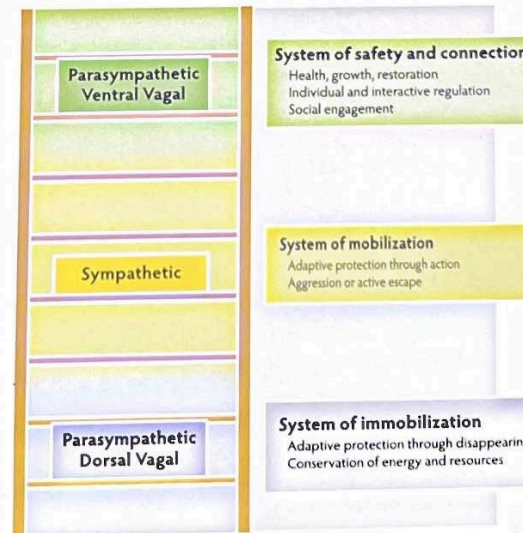
Inability to calm defense systems in safe environments leads to a habitual hypervigilant, alarmed state.

Inability to activate defense systems in a risk environment leads to an inadequate response—either dulled and unaware or high risk taking.

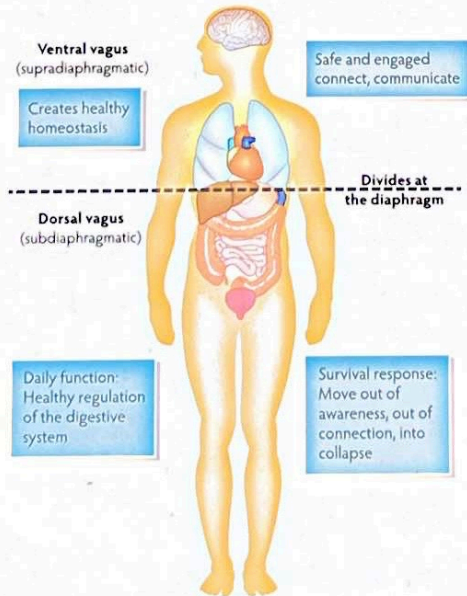
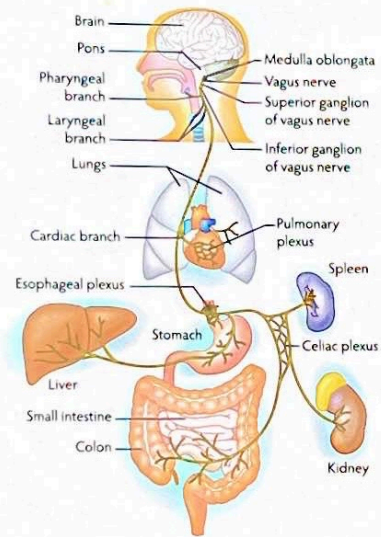
The Autonomic Timeline



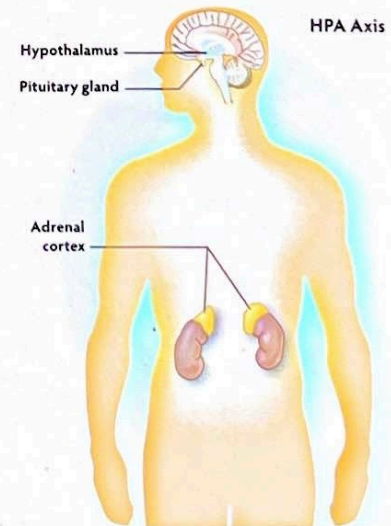
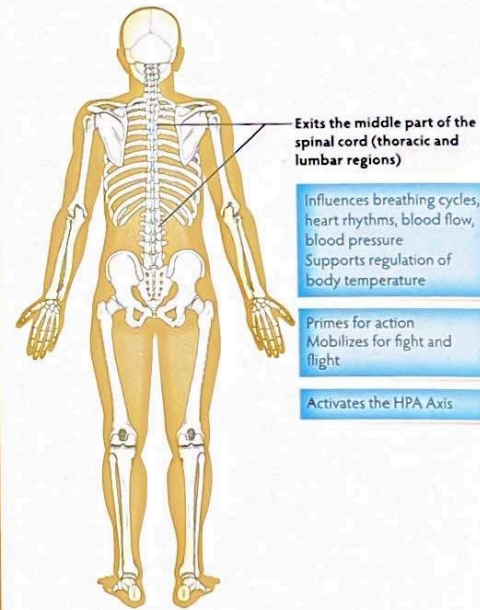
The Autonomic Hierarchy



Vagal Components of the Parasympathetic Nervous System



The Sympathetic Nervous System

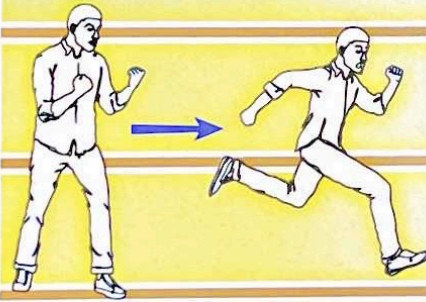


The Autonomic Ladder



Neuroception of safety

social
engaged
connected



Neuroception of danger

mobilized
action taking
fight and flight



Neuroception of life-threat

immobilized
shut down
collapsed

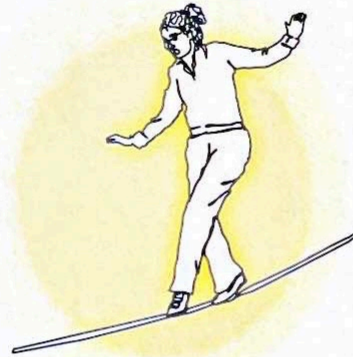
Newest Evolutionary Circuit–Ventral Vagal

Safely embodied
Co-regulate
Self-regulate
Connect to self, others, the world, spirit
Acknowledge distress
Explore options
Reach out for/offer support
Resourced and resourceful



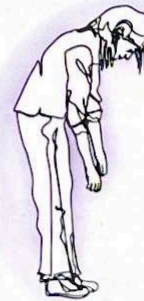
The Sympathetic Response

Mobilize to survive
Move into fight or flight
Feel out of sync with others
Driven to get needs met
Alarmed
Anxious
Hypervigilant
Misread cues
Listen for sounds of danger
Sacrifice social engagement for survival



Earliest Evolutionary Circuit–Dorsal Vagal

Withdraw
Shut down
Collapse
Become foggy, numb
Go through the motions without awareness
Disconnect from self, others, the world, spirit
Feel lost, abandoned, invisible
Disappear into a state of not knowing, not
feeling, not being

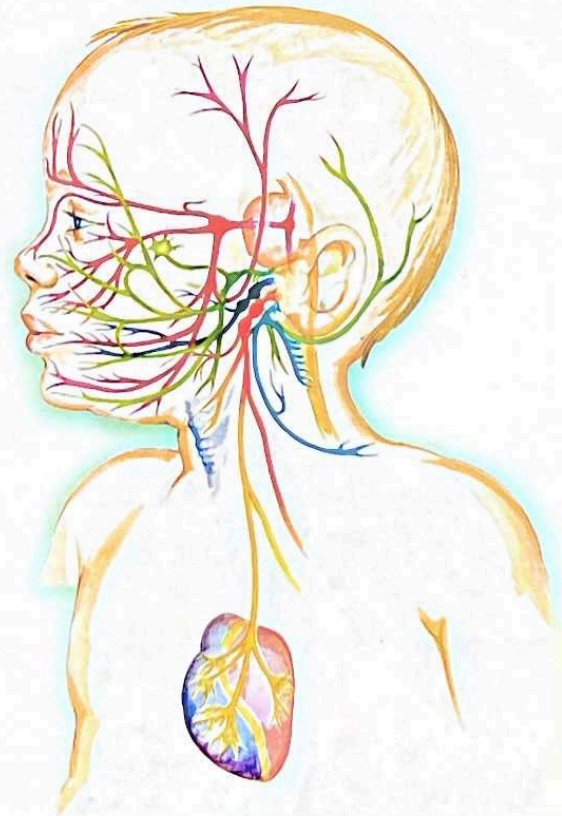


The Social Engagement System

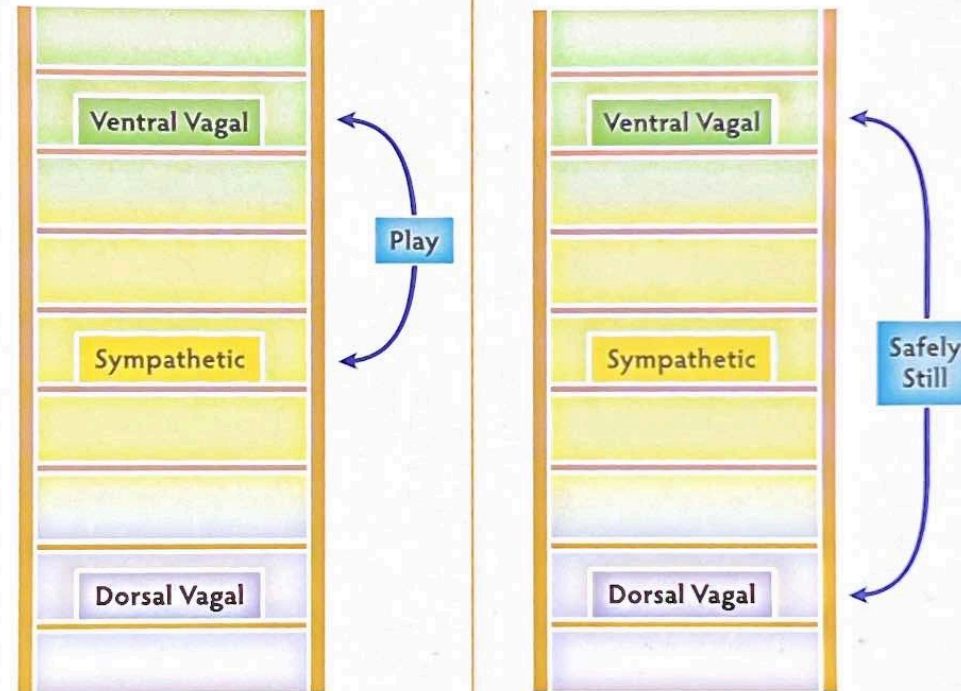
The social engagement system is our face-heart connection. The vagus (heart) and nerves in the face and head connect to control:

- Facial expression (emotional expression)
- Eyelids (social gaze)
- Middle ear (hear human voice)
- Mastication (ingestion, sucking)
- Larynx, pharynx (vocalizing, swallowing, breathing)
- Head turn and tilt (social gesture, orienting)

Through these pathways you send and search for signs of welcome and signals of warning.



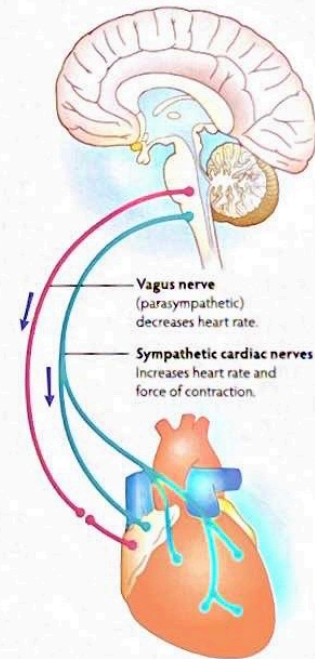
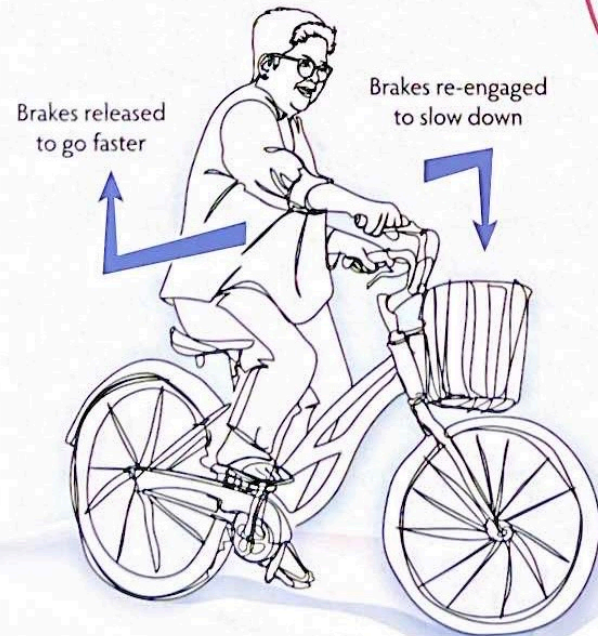
Blended States



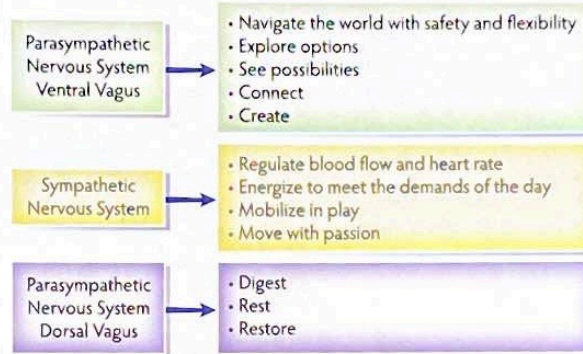
The Vagal Brake

- efficiently increases and decreases heart rate
- brings mobilization without a move into a sympathetic fight and flight survival response
- supports the ability to move between action and calm

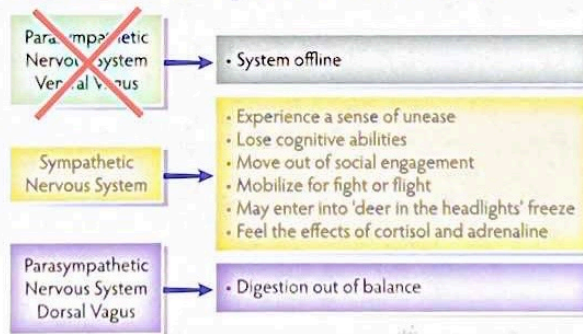
Imagine the vagal brake working like the brakes on a bicycle.



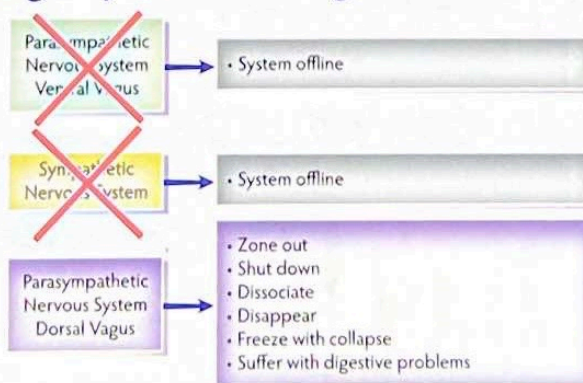
Ventral Vagal Oversees The System *All Systems Online*



Sympathetic Nervous System Takes Over



Dorsal Vagal System in Charge



The Autonomic Impact of Trauma

Co-regulation is often unavailable, unpredictable, and unsafe.

Self-regulation may be inadequate and unsuccessful.

Opportunities to build autonomic circuits of connection are interrupted.

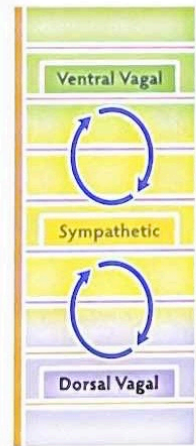
Adaptive survival responses override social engagement.

Patterns of protection replace patterns of connection.



“Trauma is a chronic disruption of connection.” —Stephen Porges

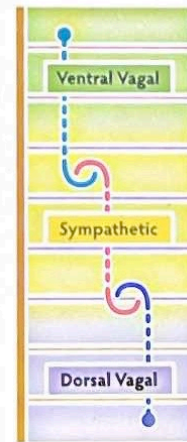
Stuck in an Autonomic Cycle



The ventral vagal state of safety and connection feels unfamiliar, unsafe, and is unsustainable, leading to an ongoing cycle of sympathetic mobilization, brief ventral regulation, return to sympathetic mobilization.

There are not enough resources (internal abilities, environmental safety, social support) to safely engage with sympathetic mobilizing energy, creating a cycle of disconnect—activated distress—disconnect.

Navigating the Autonomic Hierarchy with Flexibility

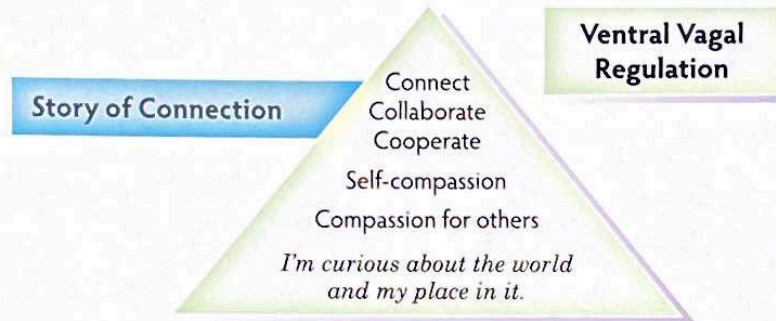


Anchored in ventral with an active vagal brake
Move between ventral and sympathetic with ease

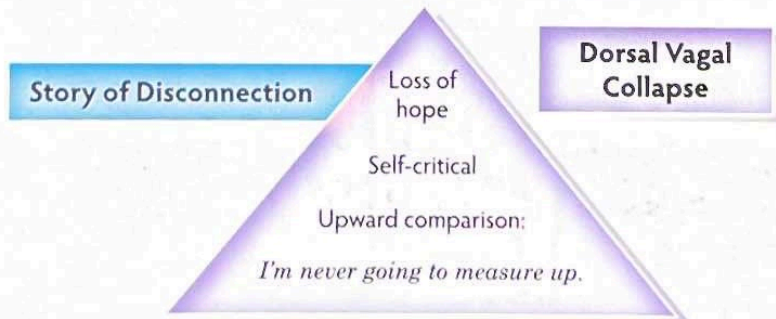
Triggered into sympathetic mobilization
Utilize resources to safely discharge energy and return to a ventral state of regulation

Pulled into shut down
Create a small moment of mobilization
Use the energy of sympathetic in an organized way and continue to move through sympathetic into the ventral state of safety

The Experience of Comparing



Vagal Brake Releasing



Personal Profile Map

Ventral Vagal
Safe
Connected

I am ...
The world is ...

Sympathetic
Mobilized
Fight – Flight

I am ...
The world is ...

Dorsal Vagal
Immobilized
Collapsed

I am ...
The world is ...

Personal Profile Map

<p>Ventral Vagal Safe Connected</p>	<p>Physical Responses:</p> <p>Behaviors:</p> <p>Thoughts:</p>
<p>Sympathetic Mobilized Fight – Flight</p>	<p>Physical Responses:</p> <p>Behaviors:</p> <p>Thoughts:</p>
<p>Dorsal Vagal Immobilized Collapsed</p>	<p>Physical Responses:</p> <p>Behaviors:</p> <p>Thoughts:</p>

Personal Profile Map



Physical Response:

- Lowered heart rate
- Comfortable breath rate
- Mental clarity
- Relaxed facial expression or smiling

Behaviors:

- Being talkative/ interested in connecting
- Friendliness
- Taking time for hobbies

Thoughts:

- I am happy right now.
- I have a good life.
- I am interested in what my future holds.
- I feel calm.



Physical Response:

- Excess/anxious energy
- Concerned/anxious facial expressions
- Increased heart rate
- Racing thoughts

Behaviors:

- Snapping/ sharp tone
- Flustered, rushing to complete many tasks at one once
- Flight: going for a drive, walking away, etc.
- Being argumentative/disagreeable

Thoughts:

- I want to run away.
- I feel like I could throw up.
- I am angry.
- I am overwhelmed.
- Everyone is bothering me.



Physical Response:

- Sleepiness/fatigue
- Malaise
- Lack of eye contact

Behaviors:

- Slacking on responsibilities.
- Withdrawal from personal interests.
- Disinterest in connection/conversation.
- Lack of warmth.

Thoughts:

- I feel hopeless.
- I will never...overcome this, be normal, etc.
- I don't deserve... a person, to be treated in a specific way, etc.
- I'm not good at anything.

Personal Profile Map

Ventral Vagal
Safe
Connected

I am....

Others are...

The world is...

The word or phrase I feel or use when I am feeling a sense of safety and connection:

Sympathetic
Mobilized
Fight – Flight

I am....

Others are....

The world is...

The word or phrase I feel or use when I am feeling a sense of threat or danger and need protection:

What type of thoughts, feelings, sensations, or experiences keep me stuck in fight-flight?

Dorsal Vagal
Immobilized
Collapsed

I am....

Others are....

The world is...

The word or phrase I feel or use when I am feeling a sense of threat or danger or feeling immobilized:

What type of thoughts, feelings, sensations, or experiences keep me stuck in immobilized/collapsed?

Ventral Vagal - Safe/Connected (Cortex Activated):

- I am... [safe](#).
- Others are... [non-threatening](#).
- The world is... [interesting](#).
- The word or phrase that I feel, live, or use when I am feeling a sense of safety and connection: [content, peaceful, or happy](#).

Sympathetic - Fight-Flight (Limbic System Activated):

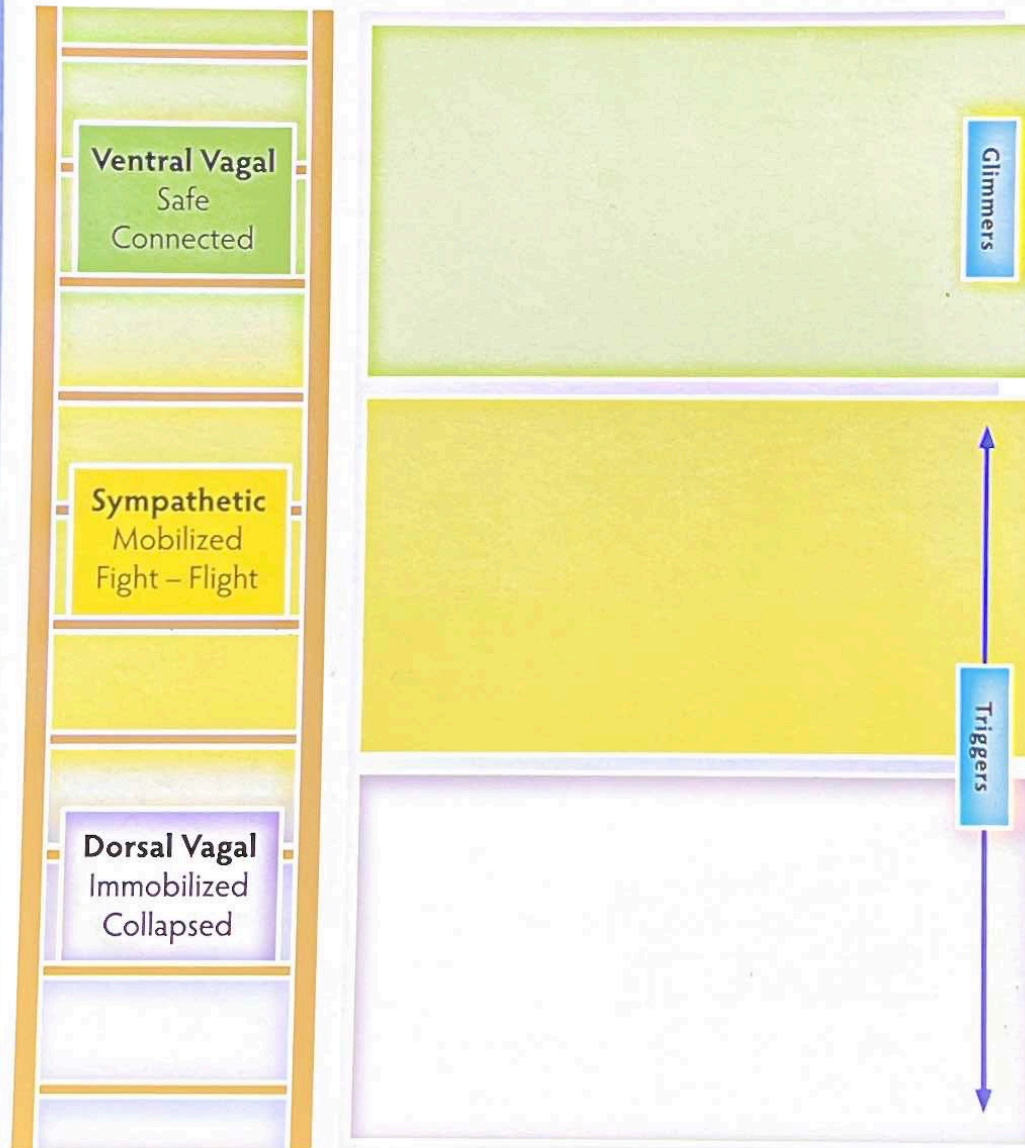
- I am... [anxious](#).
- Others are... [dangerous](#).
- The world is... [daunting](#).
- The word or phrase that I feel, live, or use when I am feeling a sense of threat or danger and need protection: [anxious, panicking, or scared](#).
- What type of thoughts, feelings, sensations, or experiences keep me stuck in fight-flight? [I get the feeling that I need to immediately leave wherever I am, whether it be going for a walk or going for a drive. If I do this without connecting with somebody else, I can spiral in my mind, which keeps me stuck in fight-flight.](#)

Dorsal Vagal - Immobilized/Collapsed (Brain Stem Activated):

- I am... [frozen](#).
- Others are... [un-trustworthy](#).
- The world is... [unrelatable](#).

-
- The word or phrase that I feel, live, or use when I am feeling a sense of threat, danger, or feeling immobilized: [depressed or anxious](#).
 - What type of thoughts, feelings, sensations, or experiences keep me stuck in immobilized/collapsed? [Self-deprecating thoughts/negative self-talk can not only put me in an immobilized state but can keep me stuck there. Indecisiveness can also keep me stuck in an immobilized state.](#)

Triggers and Glimmers Map



***THE BASIC GLIMMER PRACTICE HELPS YOU LEARN TO NOTICE AND NAME
GLIMMER MOMENTS – TO STOP AND FEEL THE SPARK OF JOY A GLIMMER
BRINGS.***

DEB DANA

See: What are the cues that you have found a glimmer? What happens in your body that lets you know you are in a glimmer moment? What do you do when you feel that spark of energy? What thoughts arise? What emotions do you feel?

***THE BASIC GLIMMER PRACTICE HELPS YOU LEARN TO NOTICE AND NAME
GLIMMER MOMENTS – TO STOP AND FEEL THE SPARK OF JOY A GLIMMER BRINGS.
DEB DANA***

Stop: Now that you know the cues, use them to notice glimmers as you move through your day. Glimmers happen regularly, but because they are micro-moments you need to be on the lookout for them. Look for predictable glimmer moments in specific places, with particular people, at certain times. Find the ways glimmers routinely appear. Be open to the unpredictable glimmers that may also appear. When you recognize one of the cues you identified, stop and find the glimmer.

***THE BASIC GLIMMER PRACTICE HELPS YOU LEARN TO NOTICE AND NAME
GLIMMER MOMENTS – TO STOP AND FEEL THE SPARK OF JOY A GLIMMER BRINGS.
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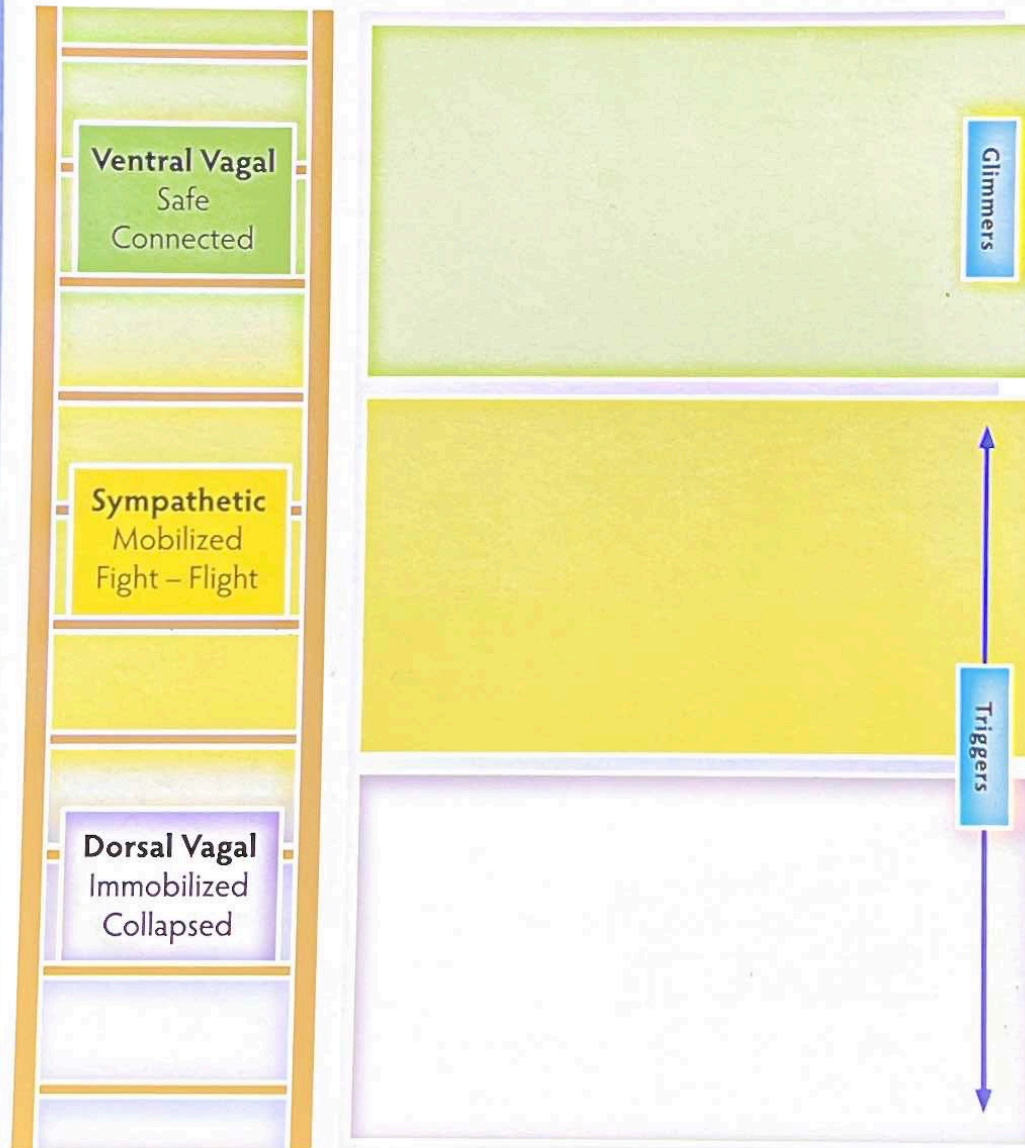
Appreciate: Create an easy way to acknowledge a glimmer as it happens. You might repeat a simple phrase or make a small movement (perhaps your hand on your heart or a finger pointing toward the glimmer) each time you find a glimmer. Notice all the different feelings your glimmers bring. Spend several seconds in appreciation letting the glimmer land in your system.

***THE BASIC GLIMMER PRACTICE HELPS YOU LEARN TO NOTICE AND NAME
GLIMMER MOMENTS – TO STOP AND FEEL THE SPARK OF JOY A GLIMMER BRINGS.
DEB DANA***

Remember: Find ways to keep track of your glimmers. Experiment with ways to build your collection and create a personal glimmer library.

Share: When you share your glimmers with someone else, they come alive again in the remembering and retelling. You might text your glimmers to a friend or make talking about daily glimmers a family ritual. You could find a glimmer buddy or create a glimmer group.

Triggers and Glimmers Map



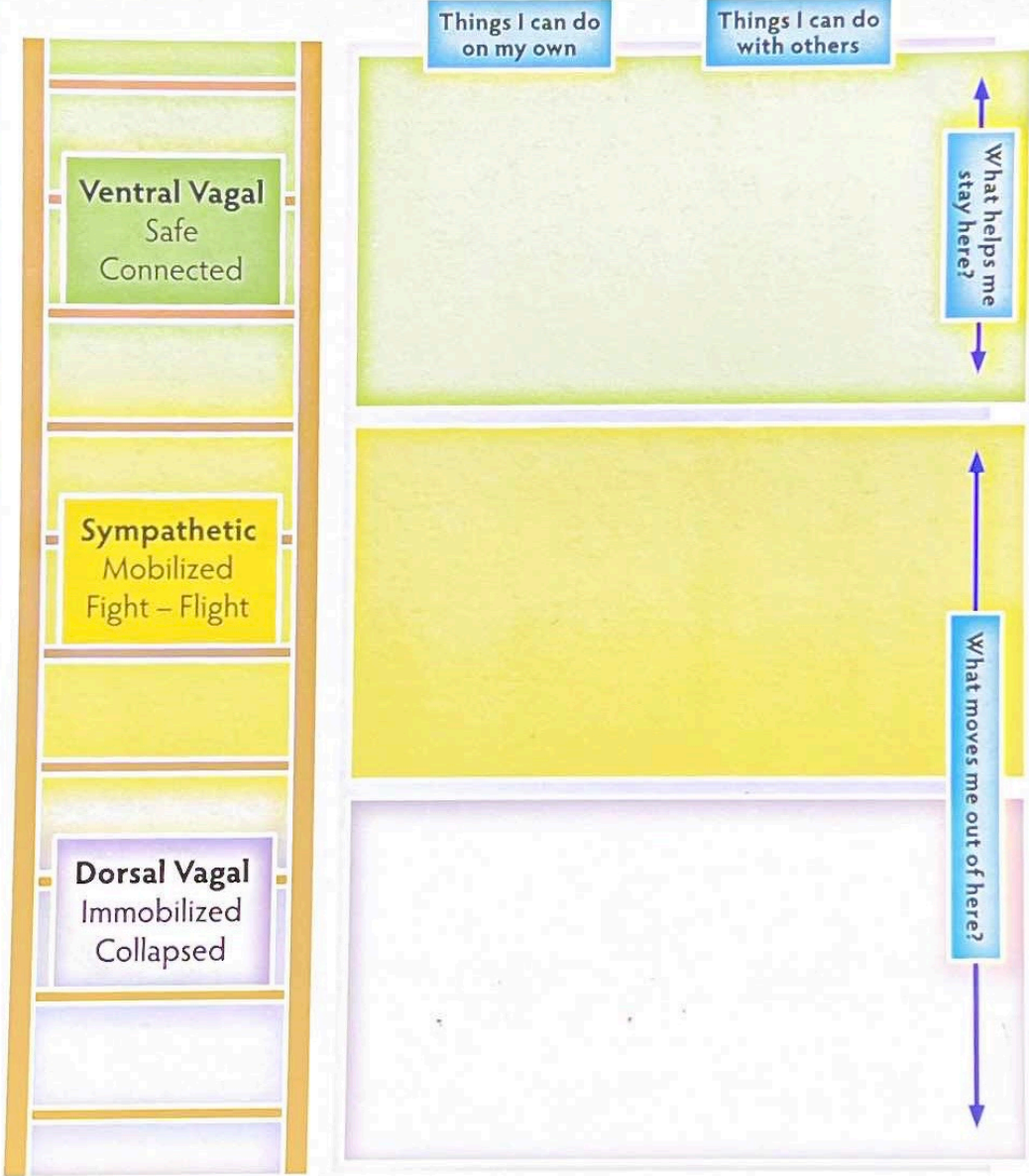
TRIGGERS – WHAT MAY BE A GLIMMER FOR ME MIGHT BE A TRIGGER FOR YOU

WHAT TRIGGERED ME?

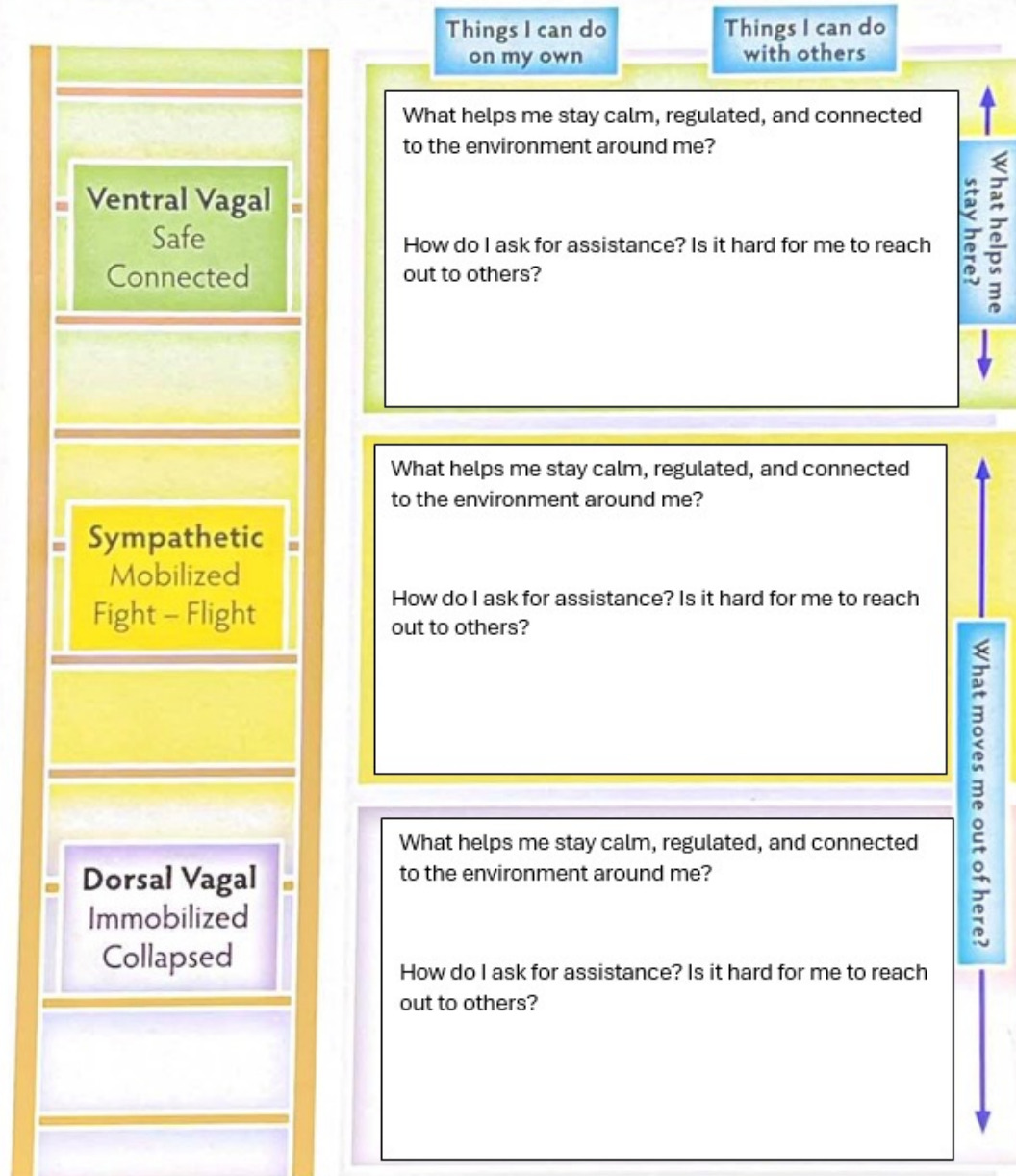
1. I felt disrespected
2. I felt powerless
3. I felt forgotten
4. I felt unloved
5. I felt judged
6. I felt excluded
7. I felt unheard
8. I felt scolded
9. I felt frustrated
10. I felt like I couldn't be honest
11. I felt unsafe
12. I felt that was unfair
13. I felt trapped
14. I felt disconnected
15. I felt manipulated
16. I felt controlled
17. I felt blamed
18. I felt uncared for
19. I felt like the bad guy
20. I felt lonely

from The Gottman Institute

Regulating Resources Map



Regulating Resources Map



Sympathetic Examples

- What helps me stay calm, regulated, and connected to the environment around me?
Connecting with other people helps me stay grounded. Exercise can help calm down my urge for flight.
- How do I ask for assistance? Is it hard for me to reach out to others? It is difficult for me to ask for help. The one person that I do feel comfortable asking for help from is my husband, and I can be hesitant even with him. When I do ask for assistance, I usually blurt out something like "I'm anxious," and he will carry the conversation from there. Oftentimes, he recognizes signs of anxiety and will initiate a conversation before I ask for assistance.

Dorsal Vagal Examples

- What helps me stay calm, regulated, and connected to the environment around me?
Doing things that make me happy, like talking to friends, cuddling with my dog, and hobbies, helps bring my brain back into reality. Sometimes, changing my environment can also help get me "out of my head" and back into reality.
- How do I ask for assistance? Is it hard for me to reach out to others? It is even more difficult for me to ask for help when I am in an immobilized state than when I am in fight-flight. When I am in dorsal vagal, I feel frozen and debate with myself over every action I take (i.e., "I should say something about how I feel...no, it'll pass...no, say something before it gets worse...no, I'm being dramatic."). I'm not sure how I ask for assistance when I am in this state.

**WHAT ARE YOUR TAKE
AWAYS?**



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