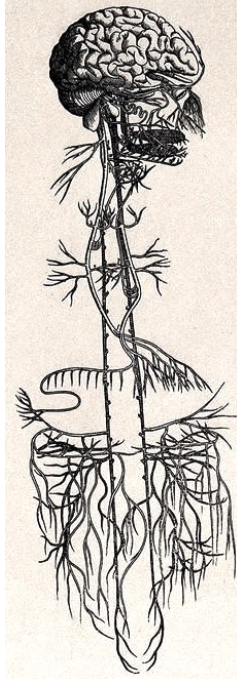


Anchoring in Safety

Deb Dana, LCSW
polyvagal institute.org
rhythmofregulation.com



A healing environment is a safe environment.

&

A safe environment is a healing environment.



Create a story of safety by listening to the nervous system...

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The Organizing Principles of Polyvagal Theory

1. Neuroception - detection without awareness
2. Hierarchy - three predictable pathways of response
 - Ventral Vagal
 - Sympathetic Nervous System
 - Dorsal Vagal
3. Co-regulation - a biological imperative

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Neuroception...Detection without Awareness

Responding to cues of safety and danger from:

- **inside** our bodies
- **outside** in environment around us
- in the relationships **between** us and others

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Our responsibility is to tune into what happens in our own nervous system...

...and be curious about what is happening in another nervous system.

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A guiding question...

In this moment does your neuroception sense me as a restorative resource or a threat?

What are the cues of safety? Cues of danger?

At this moment in your body?

At this moment in your environment?

At this moment in your connection with others?

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Active and Passive Pathways

Passive Pathways:

Neuroception is monitoring *inside, outside* and *between* (embodied, environmental, relational)

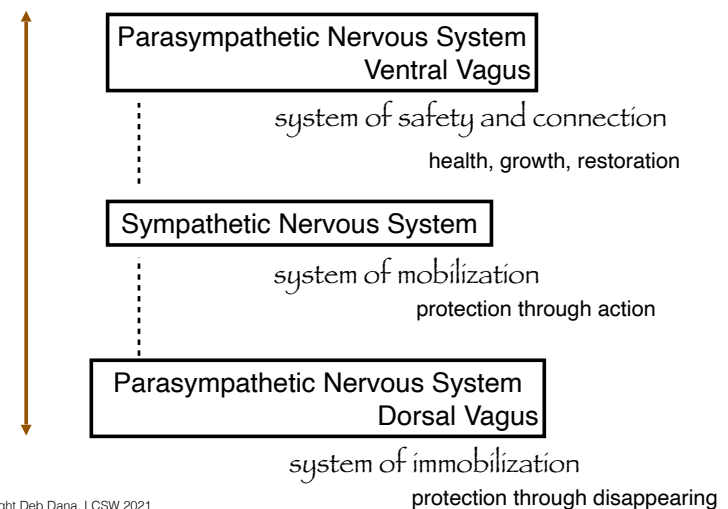
Active Pathways:

actions to consciously influence autonomic state, therapy models, processes, procedures

Regulation of passive pathways is necessary to support work with active pathways.

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Hierarchy of Response



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Emergent Properties of a Dorsal State...

body enters conservation mode
numb, foggy
collapsed
disconnected, untethered, floating
alone, lost, abandoned, unreachable
hopeless
disappear
safety and hope feel unreachable



...a story of despair

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Emergent Properties of a Sympathetic State

sense of unease and impending danger
mobilization of fight and flight
active aggression or escape
alarmed, hypervigilant



...a story of an unsafe world and unsafe people

looking and listening for danger
miss and misread signs of safety
sense of separation - cut off from others
disconnected from self, others, world, spirit

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Emergent Properties of a Ventral Vagal State

...a story of possibility



ventral vagal

co-regulate and self-regulate
connect to self, others, the world, spirit
tune into the moment and tune out distractions
resourced and resourceful
reach out for, and offer, support
explore options
hope
compassion, self-compassion
flexible, resilient
health, growth, and restoration

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States & Stories



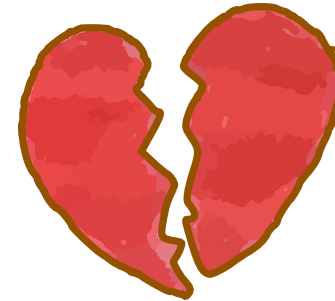
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We are inextricably linked...one nervous system to another...



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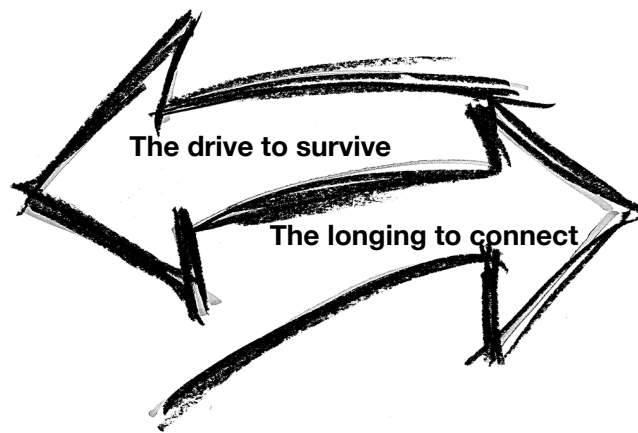
*"Trauma is a chronic disruption of connectedness."
Stephen Porges*



Trauma stories are carried in states of
autonomic dysregulation.

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Co-Regulation Is it safe to connect?



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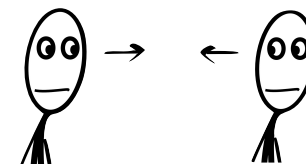
*The autonomic nervous system is shaped and regulated
through interactions with others.*

The autonomic nervous system sends and searches for cues of
safety or danger

The cues sent from one system to another either:

co-regulate and create new possibilities

increase reactivity and reinforce survival responses



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Responsible for being regulated and regulating

"...without the experience of an organizing other...the nervous system is stunned." (Sebern Fisher)

When we are regulated we can be a regulating presence for others. When we are dysregulated, there will be a rupture in attunement and the other person's autonomic response will be an automatic move out of connection into protection.

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The Guiding Questions

What does my nervous system need in this moment to anchor in ventral?

What does my client's nervous system need?

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"Earth will be safe when we feel in us enough safety." Thich Nhat Hanh

The Safety/Danger Equation

Cues of safety outweigh cues of danger
ready for connection
new stories emerge
change is possible
psychological and physical wellbeing



Cues of danger outweigh cues of safety
survival responses activate
stuck in a story
closed to change
disease and dis-ease

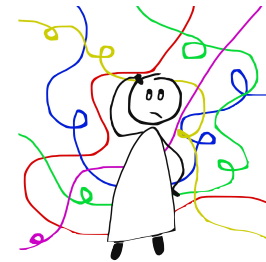
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The Both/And of Autonomic Safety

It is not just the reduction or resolution of cues of danger but also the active experiencing of cues of safety that our autonomic nervous system needs.

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Ventral Vagal Energy is the Active Ingredient



Without a critical mass of ventral in our system, we are pulled into “conservation” and “activation” as we try to find regulation.

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Without a Ventral Vagal Anchor

An autonomic system that is missing the regulating influence of the ventral vagus...

brings health challenges
creates distress in relationships
shapes a daily experience of suffering

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Finding Ventral Vagal Anchors

Identify the predictable *who, what, where, and when* of your ventral vagal system.

Create a practice of turning to your anchors to return to regulation and to deepen connection to your ventral system.

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The Responsibility of Being Polyvagal Informed

autonomic communication always happening between
our “selves”, others, the environment, and spirit

our state impacts the world

attending to the autonomic information we are
sending out into the world

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Benevolence

The active, ongoing, intentional use of ventral vagal
energy in service of healing...

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