



## Polyvagal Theory in Action: Sensing Safety

It is essential to help clients tap into feeling a sense of safety for deep trauma healing. Your nervous system senses and communicates to you whether your internal or external environment is safe enough.

### **Social Engagement System**

#### **A Sense of Safety**

When you feel safe enough, there is no actual or perceived threat, and you are regulated, the nervous system falls into balance. With the parasympathetic and sympathetic being in homeostasis, the ventral vagal nerve allows you to connect socially, and you are both relaxed and alert.

This state is where you can access your Self-energy.

Co-regulation and connection occur in relationships, including between therapist and client. You feel a secure enough attachment with others and your environment. Emotional states are regulated.

Dual awareness is when you can hold enough of this sense of safety while turning toward your trauma. Simultaneously, you can lovingly and adaptively reprocess what happened to you and find a resolution in the present moment.

Qualities you may experience when in social engagement may include: Calm, Curious, Compassionate, Connected, Open, Clear, Insightful, Creative, and Intuitive.

Activities: Love, Compassion, Language, Connection, Empathy, and Intimacy



### **Sympathetic Nervous System**

#### **Action & Energize**

Designed to help you mobilize into action by energizing the lungs, quickening the breath, and preparing the limbs and body to take action and move. It mobilizes you for energized work, play, exercise, and activities.

The sympathetic response aids sexual climax, recreational and vocational excitement, daytime metabolism, alertness, and muscular activity.

In a real or a perceived threat, the sympathetic nervous system sends signals to the brain and body to survey the environment for danger, so you can run, getaway, or fight.

Physiological changes that occur: energizes your heart, breath, lungs, and limbs for protection and defense.

A Threat to Life: Alarm, Orientate, Vigilance, Flight, Fight. Surges of stress hormones are released to get away from danger.

In PTSD, C-PTSD, & Dissociative Disorders: when you perceive a potential threat, real or imagined, you go into a sympathetic response of vigilance, anxiety, panic, agitation, or aggression called HYPER-AROUSAL. This can be a chronic, debilitating, frustrating, and intrusive experience.



## **Parasympathetic Nervous System & Dorsal Vagal Response**

### **Rest & Digest**

Designed to help you rest, unwind, relax, reorganize, and rejuvenate after stress, activity, or threat. Digestion, heart rate, and intestines slow down, and the muscles and immune system relax to conserve energy.

When you perceive a threat, the vagal nerve is like a highway that signals the nervous system attempts to protect you from immobilizing, dissociating, and shutting down.

A Threat to Life: Immobility, Dissociation, Collapse, Faint, Shock, Feign body & mind, slow down to preserve life and protect you.

In PTSD, C-PTSD, & Dissociative Disorders - when you perceive a threat, real or imagined, you go into the dorsal vagal response of immobilization, dissociation, and shut down called HYPO-AROUSAL. This can be a chronic, debilitating, frustrating, and intrusive experience.

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