

Mental Health - Signs and Symptoms



@haveyoutriedtalking

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The nervous system & Polyvagal Theory

Dr Stephen W. Porges

“I’m a nervous wreck.”

“I’m nervous.”

“They get on my nerves.”

“I’m on the edge of my nerves.”

“My nerves are shot.”

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The autonomic nervous system (ANS)



So, how does the ANS make its decisions
regarding safety?

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“Neuroception” - detection without awareness

The autonomic nervous system takes in information...
without involving the thinking part of the brain.



The ANS responds to cues of **safety** or **danger**:

Inside the body

Outside in the environment

Between people

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Cues of safety



Choice



Connection



Context



Cues of danger



**Lack of
choice**



**Dysfunctional
connection**



**Insufficient
context**





Er, I think you'll find I already made that decision for you based on all the available data.

By the time you are telling yourself a story about how you feel, your ANS already made the decision.

(Past experiences play a **huge** part in the decision making process)

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Can we challenge the decision of the ANS?

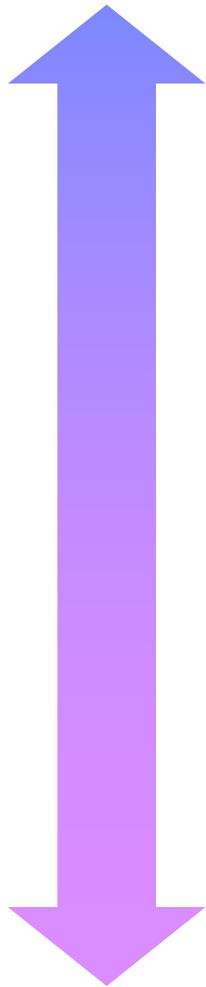


Be **present** and use your **awareness**.

In this moment, in this place, with
these people...

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How the ANS responds to cues of danger



Social Engagement & Connection
(ventral Vagal)

System of Safety
Health, Growth & Restoration

Flight / Fight
(Sympathetic)

System of Mobilisation
Protection through action

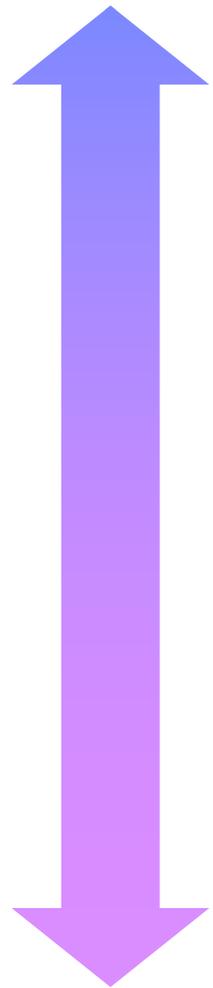
I CAN

Collapse / Freeze
(Dorsal Vagal)

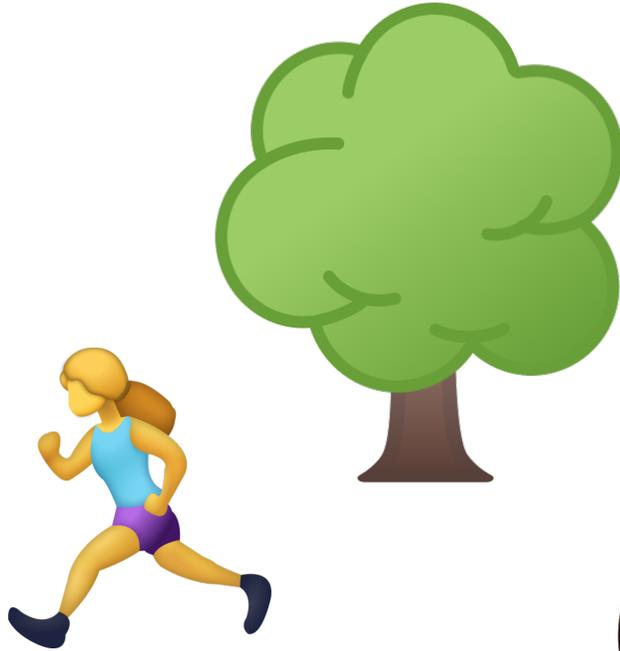
System of Immobilisation
Protection through disappearing

I CAN'T

How do we know what part of our ANS we're in?



What can we do to help regulate our ANS?



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In summary.

- Before anything else, you are a human being
- You have evolved to have predictable responses to perceived threats
- You can get to know your ANS and reshape its responses to cues
- There are things you can do to feel more present and in control
- We may not be able to control others, but we can control our reaction to them

“This too, shall pass”



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The Polyvagal Ladder - Personal Profile Map

Use the sections to map out the profile of your own autonomic nervous system. Start by noting down the things you experience in each state, then complete the sentences. This will start to raise your awareness about the different parts of your system, so you may become more familiar with them. There is no right answer - everyone is different in how they experience each state.

Ventral Vagal	<hr/> <i>Rested, relaxed, open, grounded, warm, capable, organised.</i>
Safe	
Social	<i>I am... OK</i> <i>The world is... A good place, filled with opportunity.</i>
Sympathetic	<hr/> <i>Out of control, too much, overwhelming, confrontational, ready to run.</i>
Mobilised	
Fight/Flight	<i>I am... Crazy, toxic.</i> <i>The world is... Unfriendly, scary, exploding.</i>
Dorsal Vagal	<hr/> <i>Dark, foggy, fuzzy, silent, numb, hopeless, helpless.</i>
Immobilised	
Collapsed	<i>I am... Unloveable, lost, alone.</i> <i>The world is... Cold, empty, inhabitable.</i>

Additional notes:

The Polyvagal Ladder - Regulating Resources

Once we understand our autonomic nervous system, we can bring more of it into our conscious awareness. With this awareness, we can begin to build a 'toolkit' of resources that can help us self-regulate - that is to say, help us move into - or out of - the different states. Use the space below to note down what some of these resources may be for you.

	Things I can do on my own	Things I can do with others
Ventral Vagal	What helps me stay here? Meditation, walking outside, stroking the dog, feeling the sun on my face, gardening.	What helps me stay here? Checking in with friends, watching comedy with my family, cooking together.
Safe		
Social		
Sympathetic	What moves me out of here? Screaming aloud to myself, singing to loud music, dancing around the house, organising cupboards.	What moves me out of here? Sense checking my mindset with a trusted friend, gym class, yoga, ranting to a friend.
Mobilised		
Fight/Flight		
Dorsal Vagal	What moves me out of here? Stretches, making a to-do list with small actions.	What moves me out of here? Accepting a hug, being around others, walking with someone quietly.
Immobilised		
Collapsed		

Additional notes:

Adapted from: Dana, D. (2018). *The polyvagal theory in therapy: Engaging the rhythm of regulation*. New York: W. W. Norton

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The Polyvagal Ladder - Triggers & Glimmers Map

Use the sections to note down the things that move you between the different parts of your autonomic nervous system. Glimmers are the things that bring us into regulation and help us feel grounded and connected to ourselves and others. Triggers are things that move us into either the sympathetic or dorsal vagal part of our system.

Ventral Vagal	Glimmers
Safe	Sun on my face, the beach, warm drinks, hot baths, friendly voices, the family dogs.
Social	
Sympathetic	Triggers
Mobilised	Raised voices, too much on the to-do list, Social Media, unpaid bills, my ex, not being listened to, banging doors.
Fight/Flight	
Dorsal Vagal	Triggers
Immobilised	Constant demands I can't meet, being ignored, feeling powerless to make a difference, watching the news, being left out of conversations.
Collapsed	

Additional notes:

Q & A



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