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Polyvagal Theory and Regulation in the classroom

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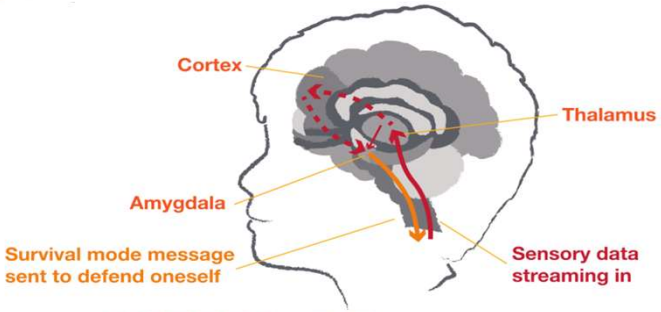
We are about to explore:

- The deep connection between the brain and the body through the Autonomic Nervous System responses to threat.
- The foundational knowledge is based upon Polyvagal theory introduced by Stephen Porges in 1994.
- How this knowledge can support our assessment on what may be disrupting children's connection to learning in the classroom
- How to respond to children in a survival response
- How to regulate and increase safety in the classroom to reconnect children to their learning.

Sensory information response sequence



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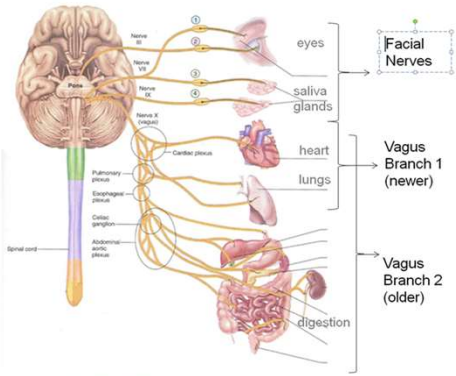
The Vagus Nerve



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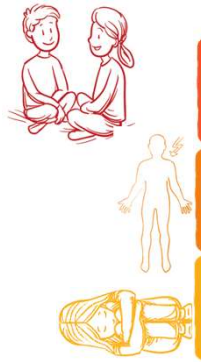
Polyvagal theory and protective responses



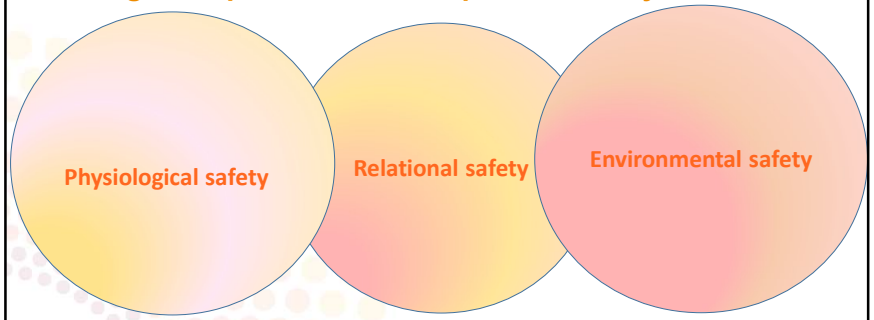
Behavioural Functions	Body Functions
Social Engagement Soothing and calming Indicates safety	• Lowers or raises vocalisation pitch • Regulates middle ear muscles to perceive human voice • Changes facial expressivity • Head turning • Tears and eyelids • Slows or speeds heart rate
Mobilisation Fight or Flight Active Freeze Moderate or extreme danger	**Hyper arousal** • Increases heart rate • Sweat increases • Inhibits gastrointestinal function • Narrowing blood vessels - to slowblood flow to extremities • Release of adrenaline
Immobilisation Collapse or submission Death feigning Increased pain threshold Conserves metabolic resources Life threatening situations	**Hypo - arousal** • Slows heart rate • Constricts bronchi • Stimulates gastrointestinal function

by Stephen Porges

Embodied trauma

- It is important that we understand the deep connection between the body, the brain and trauma.
- Trauma shuts down the cortex and hippocampus impeding on one's ability to 'make sense of' or have a coherent narrative about what their body has endured.
- Our implicit memory (sensory, procedural) can make us feel the sensations of trauma long after the trauma has occurred.
- Students may struggle to remain in the present ‘here and now’

Strategies to promote neuroception of safety



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Physiological Safety

- Provide opportunities for children to reconnect with their bodies such as Interoception activities
- Understand that the body may need time to regulate to a calm state.
- Ensure there is a de-escalation plan for students to help them recover from their distress that includes connection to a supportive adult.

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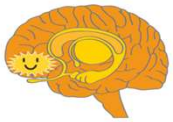
The importance of you

Well-Connected Brain
Utilizing the front part of the brain



Stressed out Brain
Utilizing the more primitive middle region of the brain

Open Flexible and Adaptive

Curious
Empathic
Grounded
Patient

Able to coregulate

Closed and Rigid

Defensive
Hyper alert
Reactive
Impatient

Unable to coregulate

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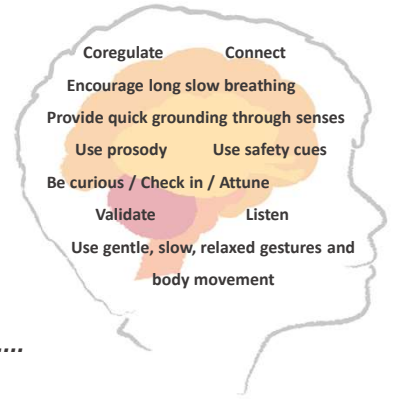
Social Engagement:

Connecting with students using our nervous system

Increase Resources – Regulatory Capabilities



We work to.....

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Working with nervous systems

Increase Resources – Regulatory Capabilities

Social Engagement

Offer...
- Heat snap pack
- Something weighted
- Something rhythmic
- Reduction in stimulus
- Physical task

Offer...
- Punching bag
- Screwed up paper to kick / throw
- Change environment
- Pool noodle

Mobilising

Immobilising

Offer...
- Heat snap pack
- Gentle sensory/ spine engagement
- Chewing on a sweet or sour lolly, drinking cold or sweet

Offer...
- Drip cold water on the skin i.e. palm initially
- Music, hum
- Voice of safe person
- Seek small movement

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Moving through states

- Consider support through transition times
- Consider support through different environments
- Consider support through activities arousal states

Structure everyday experiences to have three distinct phases of activities.

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Safety in the classroom

- Create connection and sense of belonging
- Consider sensory environment i.e. noise level
- Consider where each student is at in their nervous system as they enter – do they need to up regulate or down regulate to focus
- Facilitate early opportunities for success
- Make things predictable and consistent
- Identify an 'emotional anchor' or key person for the student

Phew that was a lot to cover!

Some key points:

- Polyvagal theory tells us that under threat we will slip into unconscious survival based responses of Mobilisation and Immobilisation
- To achieve Social Engagement we need to reconnect the child to a sense of safety through our relationship
- Recovery from trauma takes time, but we can make a difference
- Children will benefit from trauma responsive planning which aims to increase physiological, relational and environmental safety

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