

An infographic resource for professionals to explain the PolyVagal Theory hierarchy



Purpose:

This resource has been developed for professionals to provide a summary of the Polyvagal Theory hierarchy of states and how that might present in children and young people with whom they work. This infographic can be used as a summary for reflection or provided to care team members and those who are also supporting the child or young person. It seeks to summarise the experience of states of social engagement, mobilization and immobilization. This may also link to discussions professionals might have regarding the Window of Tolerance. It outlines how children might present in each state, what might be happening for them and provides a starting point for responding in ways that meet their needs.



Audience:

This resource can be used with all of those working with the child or young person – either to present this information or as a reminder. Equally, it could also be used as a discussion point with the child or young person to help them to understand these different states, and to perhaps add the unique experiences and responses of that child or young person.



What you could do:

- Print and display this infographic in your office as a reminder of Polyvagal Theory and its application in practice
- Provide this infographic to those within a child's care team or broader relational network to support their understanding of the child's presentation and some beginning points for responding
- Expand the 'I need you to....' section for each state with your own ideas of ways of responding that best meet the child's needs
- Discuss the content of this infographic with the child or young person and add in additional ideas based on their own unique story.

I am showing you....

On the inside.....

I need you to....

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Feeling safe, staying in relationship, connection oriented

You might say I am:

- Making eye contact
- Listening
- Engaging in play and exploration

I am feeling:

- Safe, Calm, Happy, Sad, Annoyed, Reflective, Playful, Curious

My body says:

- Approach others
- Sit still
- Breathe deeply

Help me to stay engaged

- Play and have fun with me
- Role model positive relationships
- Set boundaries and natural consequences
- Use reflective and problem solving skills so I can learn them too
- Notice and acknowledge my strengths and my skills

MOBILISATION

Fight, flight, active freeze, action oriented

You might say I am:

- Aggressive
- Loud
- Fighting
- Running away
- Hyperactive

I am feeling:

- Anxious, Frightened, Lonely, Hurt, Confused, Overwhelmed

My body says:

- Run away
- I'm hot
- I can't sit still
- I need to move

Help me to down regulate

- Keep me safe
- Co-regulate – be safe, attuned and responsive to me
- Use movement – big then smaller, jumping, hanging, swinging, climbing, star jumps
- Create a safe space near you where I can retreat to until I calm down
- Model deep breathing
- Repair our relationship – 'we are ok and our relationship is strong'

IMMOBILISATION

Withdrawal, collapse, submission, dissociation, avoidant oriented

You might say I am:

- Withdrawn
- Avoiding contact
- Distant
- Compliant
- Hiding

I am feeling:

- Disconnected, Unfocused, Flat, Withdrawn, I'm disappearing

My body says:

- Avoid others
- I'm not in my body
- I want to hide
- Curl up in a ball

Help me to up regulate

- Co-regulate – be safe, attuned and responsive with me
- Tell me I am safe and demonstrate it with your actions, gestures and tone of voice
- Help me to orient to the room we are in by looking for specific things like something green, something on the roof or something on the floor
- Help me to feel my body by noticing different parts, such as my feet on the floor and my bottom on the chair
- Repair our relationship – 'we are ok and our relationship is strong'