

Polyvagal Theory

The brain stem passes information that is sub consciously picked up onto the brain structures where an automatic response will send signals to different parts of the body , this helps us to consciously recognise that something is not right. The best example of this, is when the Polyvagal nerve recognises danger and slows digestion down, which creates a gut feeling that something is not right.

Low

Level of Arousal
Medium

High

Social Engagement



Fight or Flight



Immobilisation



A healthy level of arousal helps the polyvagal nerve to facilitate Social Engagement. This can occur when in a Safe Environment. At this level of arousal, facial expressions and voice control can help maintain the safe environment by socialising and being mindful of the present moment. Heart rate, digestion and immune response are at healthy levels. Defensive responses are lowered. There is higher Cortical function in safe states.

A constant dangerous environment makes it difficult to detect safety, which causes us to want to either fight the stimuli or run away from it (flight). A constant dangerous environment also makes it harder to read other people's social cues and creates a lower threshold to react. For example, when someone looks scared, the person in the Fight or Flight stage may see this as an angry face and react in a Fight or Flight way. This is due to not being able to use other people to self regulate emotions and seeing others as threatening or damaging.

After fight or flight is no longer an option or when the body is unsure on what to do the 'shut down circuit' can activate. This can happen when the person feels or is physically stuck. The immobilisation stops the person from moving or sometimes even thinking or feeling like normal. This can also be known as disassociation or passive avoidance. This process also releases endorphins that numb and help to raise pain thresholds. This is the highest state of arousal, that affects the polyvagal nerve.

Imagine Inclusion