

Conscious

A row of ten white dice is arranged on a wooden surface, spelling out the word "LEADERSHIP" in black capital letters. In the background, a smartphone is lying flat on the same surface, slightly out of focus.

LEADERSHIP

And Advocacy

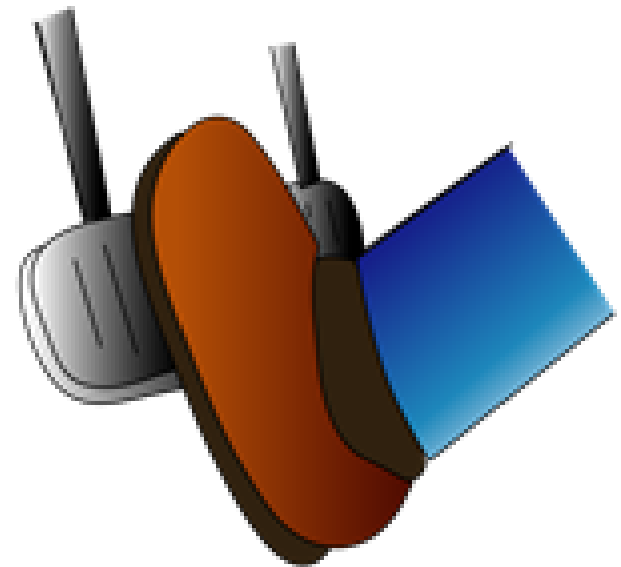
Through a Polyvagal Lens

Breathe 6, 1, 8



Reviewing What We Know

- **Gas pedal** = Sympathetic NS response – Fight or Flight
- **Brakes** = Parasympathetic NS response – Rest and Digest
- Both responses are **Autonomic** (automatic) NS



Psychoneuroimmunology

- Mind/emotions
- Nervous system
- Endocrine system
- Immune system



Gabor Mate'

Author of *When
the Body Says
No*

All connected!

Top Down/Bottom Up (mind and body)

- “If you want to manage your emotions better, your brain gives you two options: You can learn to regulate them from the **top down** or from the **bottom up**. Knowing the difference between top down and bottom up regulation is central for understanding and treating traumatic stress.”



Bessel Van der kolk

Author of The
Body Keeps the
Score

CBT,DBT, MI etc...

- Cognitive Behavioral, Dialectical Behavioral, Motivational Interviewing...etc
- All useful therapeutic models which use thoughts and behaviors as markers for change



If We Could Think Our Way Out...

- Everything that happens to us is tracked and recorded by our nervous systems
- **When we tune in to our nervous system responses we can unlock our ability to change**



Befriending Ourselves and Our Nervous Systems

- What if we could learn to accept our responses without judgement?
- What if our awareness and acceptance could heal us?
- What would that change?



YOU ARE
ENOUGH

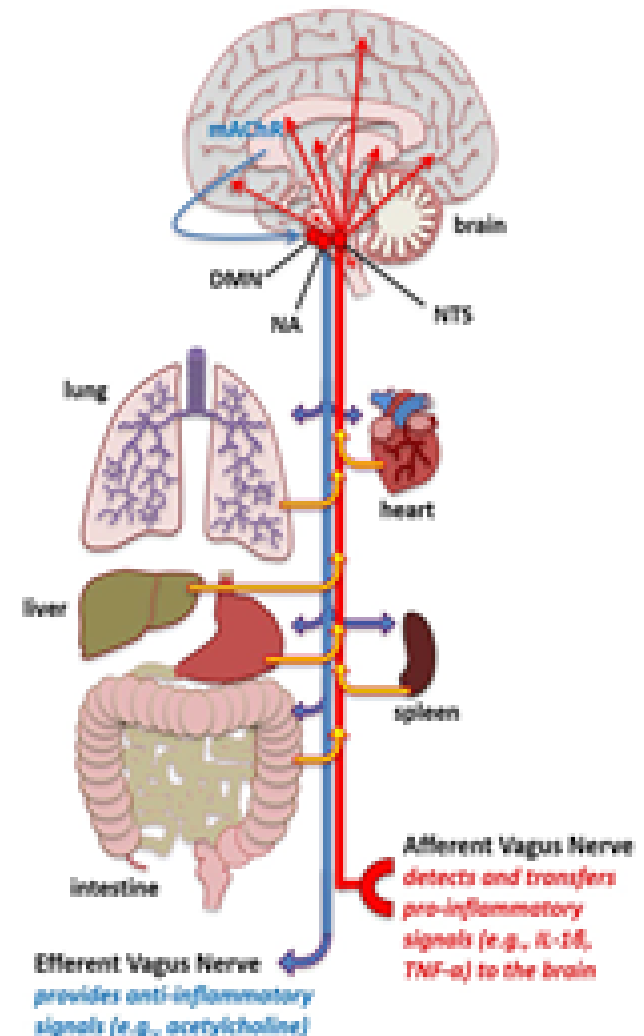
Vagus Baby! (But not that kind...)

The **Vagus Nerve** is the tenth and longest cranial nerve, starting at the base of the skull, running through the face, throat, and all our visceral organs, ending at the end of the digestive tract. It is part of the **autonomic nervous system**.



What Does the Vagus Nerve Do?

- Responsible for the regulation of internal organ functions - digestion, heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, and certain reflex actions - coughing, sneezing, swallowing, and vomiting
- Moderates and downregulates stress response



Autonomic Nervous System

- **Autonomic** nervous system divides into
- **Sympathetic** and **Parasympathetic** branches
- The **Parasympathetic** branch divides into
- **Dorsal Vagal** and **Ventral Vagal**

Poly Vagal Theory

- Developed and introduced by neuroscientist, Dr. Stephen Porges in 1990s to study neonatal patients
- Further developed by Deb Dana for understanding mental health and nervous system healing



Stephen Porges



Deb Dana

Three Main Concepts

1. Hierarchy of the three vagus nerve pathways:

Ventral, sympathetic, dorsal

2. Neuroception:

Continuous subjective monitoring and feedback from nervous system

3. Co-Regulation:

The biological need to feel “safe in the arms of another”

Connection or Protection

- Our nervous systems have adapted to either connect with others or to protect us from danger
- “We are wired for connection!”

If we are not in a connection phase of nervous system, we are in a state of protection



Three Vagal Pathways

- **Ventral-** Connection and safety and is essential for survival
- **Sympathetic** – Fight, run when we feel threatened
- **Dorsal** – Freeze, shut down when running or fighting don't feel possible



Nervous System Evolution

- **Dorsal Shutdown, freeze**
(500 million) (**protection**)
- **Sympathetic Run, Fight**
(300 million) (**protection**)
- **Ventral Connect, Safe**
(200 million) (**connection**)



Three Branches Serve Us Daily

- **Dorsal** – Regulates digestion, nutrients, nourishment
- **Sympathetic** – Regulates heart and breath rhythms, brings energy to move through the day
- **Ventral** - Connection with other beings and the world around us.
Essential for health and well being



Neuroception

- Our **inner subconscious surveillance system** gathers information through three NS pathways
- Subjective NS “data” signals either **danger or safety** – **(protection or connection)**



Neuroception/Perception

- **Neuroception** is the unconscious, subjective detection of threat or safety by the nervous system
- **Perception** is a cognitive process involving conscious thought and sensory data



Dip A Toe In...

- Recall at time when you felt your **sympathetic** nervous system gearing up to **protect** you...
- And you discovered that you were **not in danger** after all...
- **Neuroception** is a subjective, adaptive, involuntary, nervous system response





Co- Regulation

- Connection with others helps us feel safe sending signals of safety
- Feeling safe strengthens our ability to navigate life with more ease



Regulation/Co-Regulation

- True connection happens when we are regulated and we feel safe
- When we are well regulated, connecting with others helps to reinforce a sense of safety and well being



Ventral Vagal

- When our **neuroception** gives us cues of safety, we are drawn to connect with one another
- **Trauma and chronic stress** can impair our ability to read cues of safety and danger appropriately
- **When we experience safety** and connection, we begin to build vagus nerve strength and resilience



Trauma And The Vagus Nerve

During a **sympathetic** nervous system response this branch of the vagus nerve engages to make hearing and vision more acute, shunt blood to muscles and many other functions, preparing the body to run or fight



Or Shutdown Happens

- In the **dorsal** vagal response we shut down, freeze, collapse in order to protect ourselves

Sometimes the chronic sympathetic response is so exhausting that shutting down in dorsal seems the only way to find relief



Try This

- To feel the pathway of the ventral vagal branch:
- Put one hand on the back of your neck, just below your skull
- Put the other hand on your cheek



Reshaping the Nervous System

- With attention and intention to our experiences we begin to notice what brings feelings of safety and connection and the nervous system adapts by **reshaping** our **neuroception** and increasing vagal tone



The Vagal Brake

- Intentional breathing can help slow down sympathetic NS drive, by extending exhalation
- Inhalation speeds up heart rate and breathing
- Exhalation slows down heart rate and breathing
- 6, 1, 8 or 4, 4, 8 It works!



Savoring

- When we focus more attention on a ventral moment (glimmer) we help those experiences to be sustained longer in our awareness
- Even just thirty seconds of conscious focus can help to reshape the nervous system



Curiosity

- Curiosity is a *Ventral Vagal* state
- When our nervous systems are in protection mode, we cannot be curious because our neuroception has already signaled danger



Cynicism

- Is a state of protection- “It will never happen” “They always do that” “Good things don’t happen to me”
- Comes from a sense of “chronically crushed hope”
- Is something that can change with awareness...



Being Regulated

- When we feel **safe, connected** to the world around us, grounded, organized and ready to meet the day, we are in a state of **ventral vagal**
- The more often we experience a ventral vagal state, the easier it is to get back to that place, especially when we savor...



Safety And Connection

- Feeling safe enables us to connect
- **Try this:** Think of someone or something that feels sweet
- Reach out with one hand and the other on your chest over your heart. Breathe (6,1,8) Switch hands. Breathe.



The Responsibility To Be Regulated Advocates

- Our ongoing self-care helps us be more well regulated
- The more regulated we are, the better we can co-regulate with others
- When we can co-regulate with others, we reinforce our own well being and that of others



Glimmers

- Micro moments of ventral experience that routinely appear in every day life and may go unnoticed
- Noticing “glimmers” is one of the ways our nervous systems can be reshaped



Anchored In Ventral Vagal

When our nervous systems become familiar with a state of safety and connection we can more easily return to that state of **ventral vagal energy**



What Kind of Advocate Are You?

- Not about judgement or being perfect but more about feeling “good enough” right now
- Starts with how we feel and our awareness of how we are connecting with the world



“We are wired for connection”