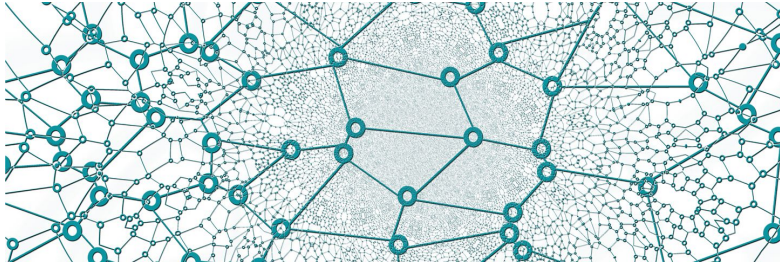


Understanding the Body's Safety Circuit



Deb Dana, LCSW

rhythmofregulation.com
polyvagalinstitute.org

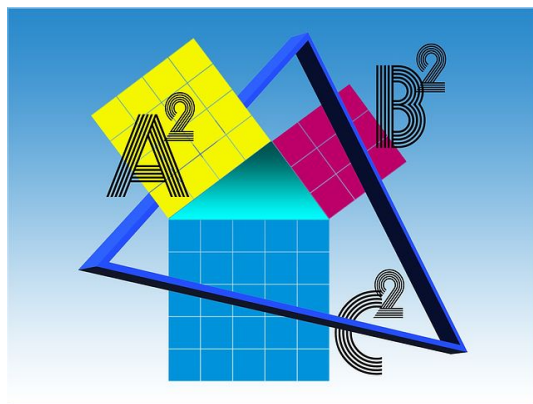
With gratitude to Stephen Porges for his
development of Polyvagal Theory...

The science of connection...

The science of feeling safe enough to fall in love with life
and take the risks of living...

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Webinar 1: The Safety/Danger Equation



The autonomic nervous system is
the heart of our lived experience...

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Neuroception Detection without Awareness

This intent listening happens below the thinking parts of our brain and away from our conscious control.

The autonomic nervous system responds to cues of safety, danger, and life-threat from:

- **inside** our bodies
- **outside** in environment around us
- in the relationships **between** us and others

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Human Social Genomics and Neuroception

Neuroception of danger activates threat related gene expression.

“...increasing evidence that changes in the expression of literally hundreds of genes can occur as a function of the physical and social environments we inhabit. Moreover, it appears as though these effects are often more strongly tied to peoples’ subjective experience of their surrounding social environment than to objective features of those environments.” (Cole)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C62IDmGKZzg>

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Neuroception exerts a powerful influence over our physiology

Cells are in a continual state of regeneration

“...our physiological state on any given day can influence our molecular make-up for weeks and months into the future.” (Slavich and Cole)

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Take an autonomic adventure... ...tune in to neuroception

Are you drawn into connection with the image and a desire to move closer? (ventral)

Do you feel a need to get away from the image or a need to fight back against it? (sympathetic)

Do you feel yourself fading away not able to hold the image in your awareness? (dorsal)

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How did that land in your system?

Our responsibility is to tune into what happens in our own nervous system...

...and be curious about what is happening in another nervous system.

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When there is a neuroceptive match...

...the autonomic state will bring the energy necessary to effectively manage the experience.



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With a neuroceptive mismatch...

Inability to calm defense systems in safe environments
Autonomic nervous system activates a habitual protective response pattern — hypervigilant - alarmed



Inability to activate defense systems in risk environments
Neuroception does not signal danger when there is actual danger; autonomic response is inadequate to manage the situation — dulled, unaware or high risk-taking

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Active and Passive Pathways

Passive Pathways:

Neuroception is monitoring *inside, outside and between* (body, environment, relationships)

Active Pathways:

actions to consciously influence autonomic state, therapy models, processes, procedures

Regulation of passive pathways is necessary to support work with active pathways.

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Regulated and Regulating

"...without the experience of an organizing other...the nervous system is stunned." (Sebern Fisher)

We are responsible for being a regulated and regulating other. If we are dysregulated, there will be a rupture in attunement and the other person's autonomic response will be an automatic move out of connection into protection.

What message is your
autonomic nervous system sending?

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Features of Safety and Danger

Being safer does not necessarily make us feel safer.

Many of our social systems are focused on the features of danger and yet we have a profound sensitivity to features of safety and exposure to these can foster resilience. (Porges)

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Wellbeing

It is not just the reduction/removal/absence of cues of danger but also the active experiencing of cues of safety that our autonomic nervous system needs.

We need to attend to the BOTH/AND of danger and safety. If we only pay attention to one and not the other our clients cannot fully experience wellbeing. A regulated system depends on both!

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Autonomic Pathways

The nervous system doesn't make meaning or assign motivation — it simply acts in service of survival

Neuroception activates autonomic pathways of connection or protection

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Listening from the Outside In

Where am I? (Locate yourself in time and space.)

What's happening in the environment?

Who is around?

What am I doing?

What state has been activated?

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Listening from the Inside Out

What am I sensing in my body?

Where is energy moving?

Where is energy not moving?

Do I feel filled?

Do I feel empty?

What state is active in this moment?

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In this moment does your neuroception sense me
as a resource or a threat?

What are the cues of safety?

What are the cues of danger?

- embodied
- environmental
- relational



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The Safety/Danger Equation

Cues of safety outweigh the cues of danger
ready for connection
new stories emerge
change is possible
wellbeing



Cues of danger outweigh the cues of safety
survival responses activate
stuck in a story
closed to change
dis-ease

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Cues of Safety

The cues of safety have to outweigh the cues of danger

The balance changes moment to moment.



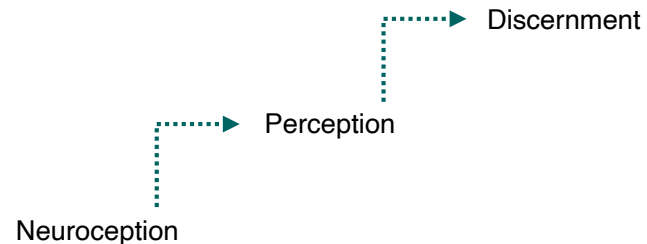
Cues of Danger

Look for cues of safety and danger in the categories of:

embodied
environmental
relational

Make the cues concrete.

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In this moment, in this place, with this person/people,
is this response/level of response needed?

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Learning to Listen

What is the nervous system trying to tell us?

Stay tuned into the conversation.

Seeing in a New Way

Look at your clients through the lens of their nervous systems.

What are the symptoms trying to tell you about their state of dysregulation?

Safety is not a cognitive experience...it is an embodied one...
A safe environment is a healing environment.



Create a healing environment by listening to your ANS.

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*“Earth will be safe
when we feel in us enough safety.”
Thich Nhat Hanh*