

## Transforming Trauma: A Somatic Perspective ECMH Conference 2020

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**“Traumatized children do not have shortcomings you need to overlook – they have extreme survival skills you need to understand.”**

-Paula Goodwin, Defend Survivors



## Disclaimer.....

Talking about Trauma can be, well, TRAUMATIZING!



- ORIENTATION
- GROUNDING
- MOVEMENT
- SELF CONTACT

Above all, take care of yourself! Check in with what is happening in YOUR nervous system during this session.

"Be Curious, Not Judgmental." – Walt Whitman



## What is Trauma?

"Trauma is fundamentally a disorder in the ability to be in the here and now." - Bessel Van Der Kolk

"Nature has instilled in all animals, including humans, a nervous system capable of restoring equilibrium. When this self-regulating function is strained beyond its adaptational capacity to regulate states of arousal, trauma symptoms develop as ways of binding the undischarged arousal or activation." – Peter Levine

"Trauma is anything that overwhelms our ability to cope and leaves us feeling hopeless, helpless, out of control, or unable to respond." – Seane Corn



## What Causes An Event To Be Traumatic?

- Trauma is in the **NERVOUS SYSTEM.....**not in the event!
- What happens during and after the event
- Past experiences – triggers can retraumatize
- Intensity
- Duration (happened too long or not long enough)



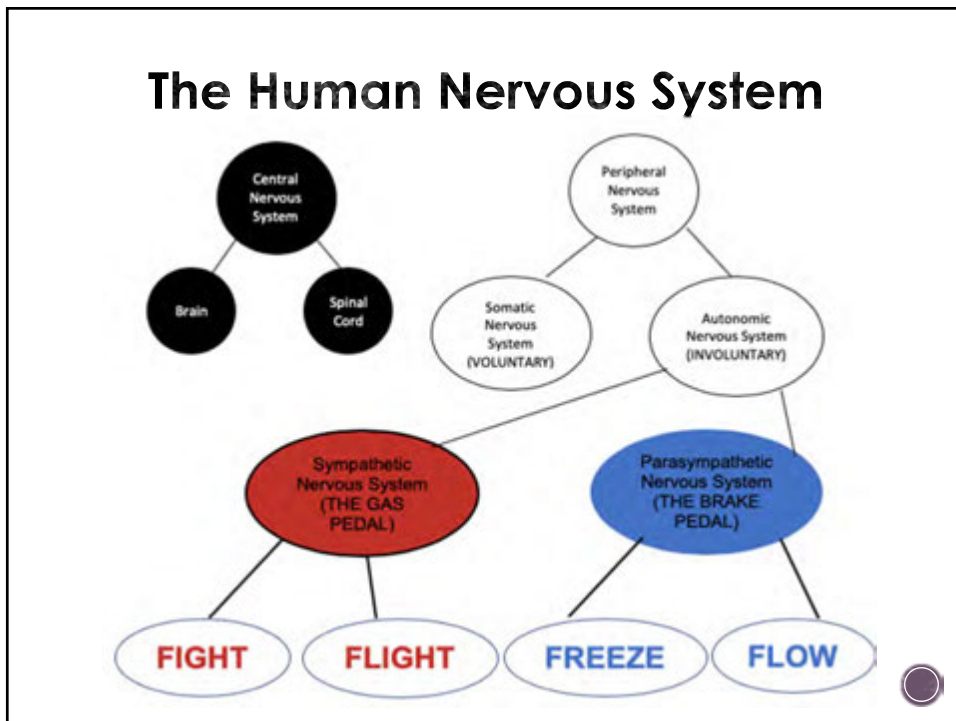
## How the Nervous System Responds to Threat: (Real or Perceived)

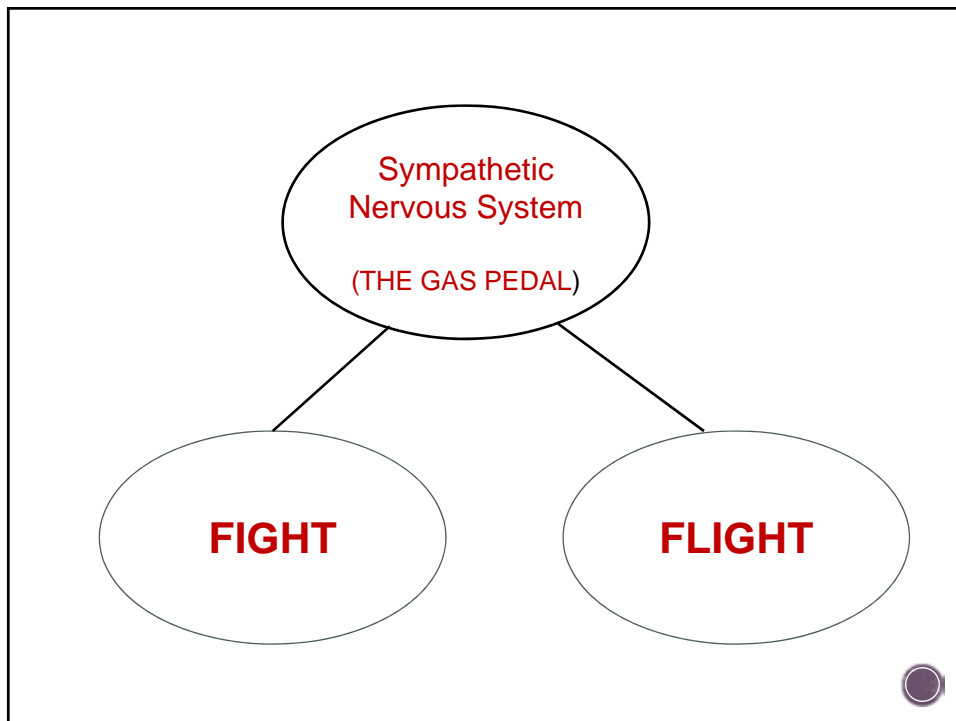
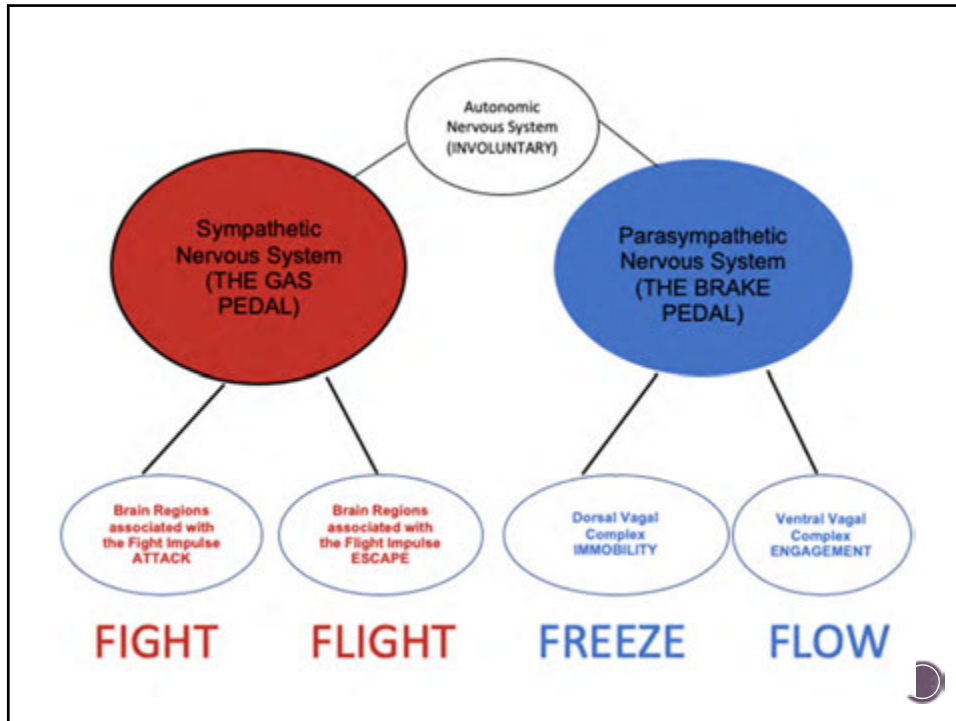
**FIGHT**

**FLIGHT**

**FREEZE**







## **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) FIGHT / FLIGHT**

The sympathetic nervous system acts as the “gas” pedal of the nervous system. It gets our whole body ready for action. It increases activity during times of stress and arousal whether positive or negative. It prepares us for emergency/threat by:

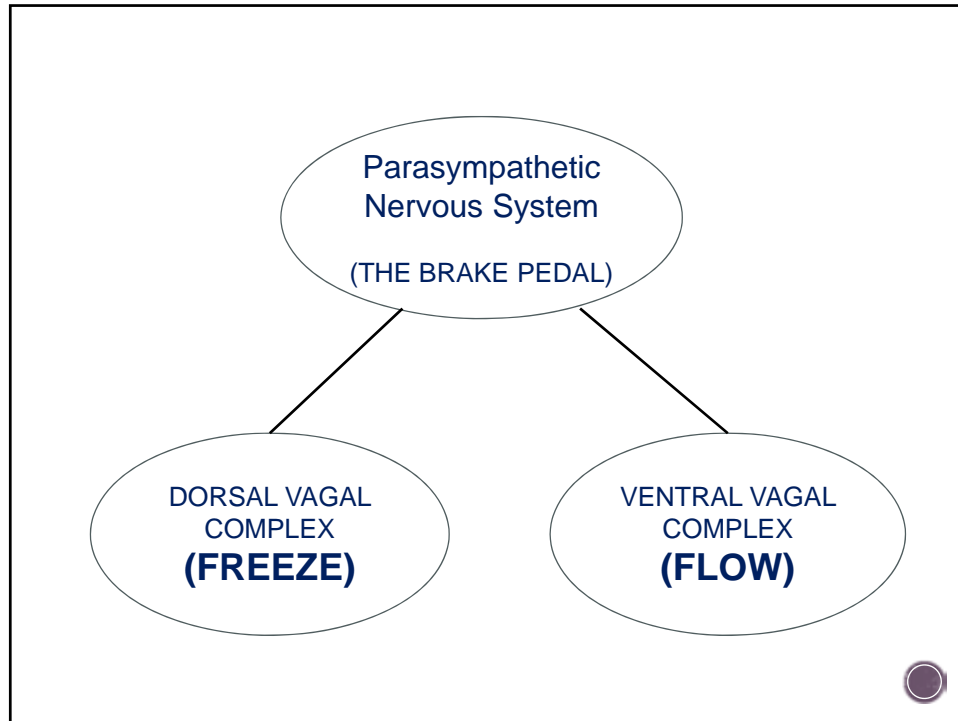
- increasing our heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure
- shifting blood away from our digestive system to allow for quicker movement
- constricting our blood vessels and draining blood from the skin periphery (which turn pale and cold) to prepare for injury
- dilating pupils, retracting our eyelids, focusing our eyes
- increasing muscle tension
- releasing chemicals that will prepare us to fight/flee



## **WHEN HYPERAROUSAL PREDOMINATES, THESE SYMPTOMS MAY APPEAR OVER TIME:**

- Panic attacks, anxiety, phobias
- Flashbacks
- Exaggerated startle response
- Extreme sensitivity to light and sound
- Repetitive play themed about the trauma that does not bring satisfaction or relief
- Attraction to dangerous situations
- Frequent crying and irritability
- Abrupt mood swings/rage reactions
- Regressive bxs
- Increased risk taking bxs
- Avoidance behavior/clinging
- Nightmares/night terrors
- Hyperactivity; restlessness





## Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) **FREEZE / FLOW**

The PNS acts as essentially the “brake” of the nervous system. It helps to:

- unwind, reorient, reorganize, regenerate after threat or stress
  - lower heart rate and blood pressure
  - warm our skin and return color
  - aids in digestion
  - slows/deepens breathing
  - allows immune system to fully function
  - secretes body fluids
  - relaxes muscles
- A small purple circular icon is located in the bottom right corner of the text box's frame.

**WHEN DISSOCIATION PREDOMINATES, THESE SYMPTOMS MAY APPEAR OVER TIME:**

- Distractibility and inattentiveness
- Amnesia and forgetfulness
- Reduced ability to organize and plan
- Feelings of isolation and detachment
- Blunted emotional responses
- Frequently/easily stressed out
- Frequent daydreaming
- Fear of going crazy
- Low energy/easily fatigued
- Excessive shyness/imaginary friends

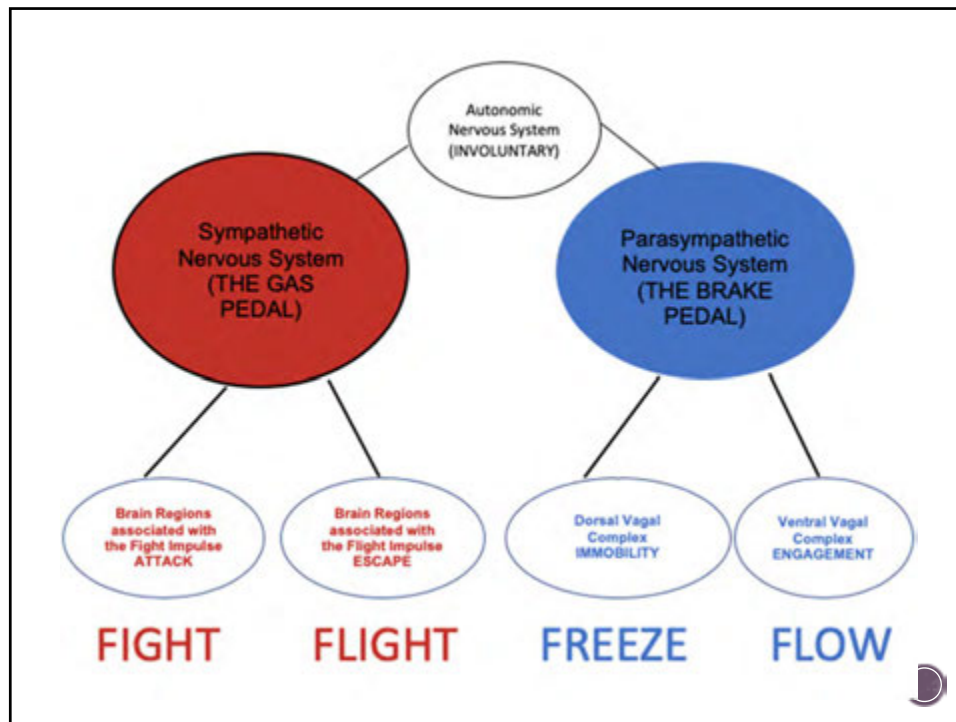


**WHEN CONSTRICTION / FREEZE / IMMOBILITY PREDOMINATE, THESE SYMPTOMS MAY APPEAR OVER TIME:**

- Headaches/stomachaches
- Digestive issues
- Feelings and bxs of helplessness
- Enuresis/Encopresis
- Feelings of shame/guilt
- Avoidance behavior
- Repetitive play
- Diminished curiosity
- Reduced capacity for pleasure/joy
- Posture/coordination problems
- Low energy
- Clinginess/regression

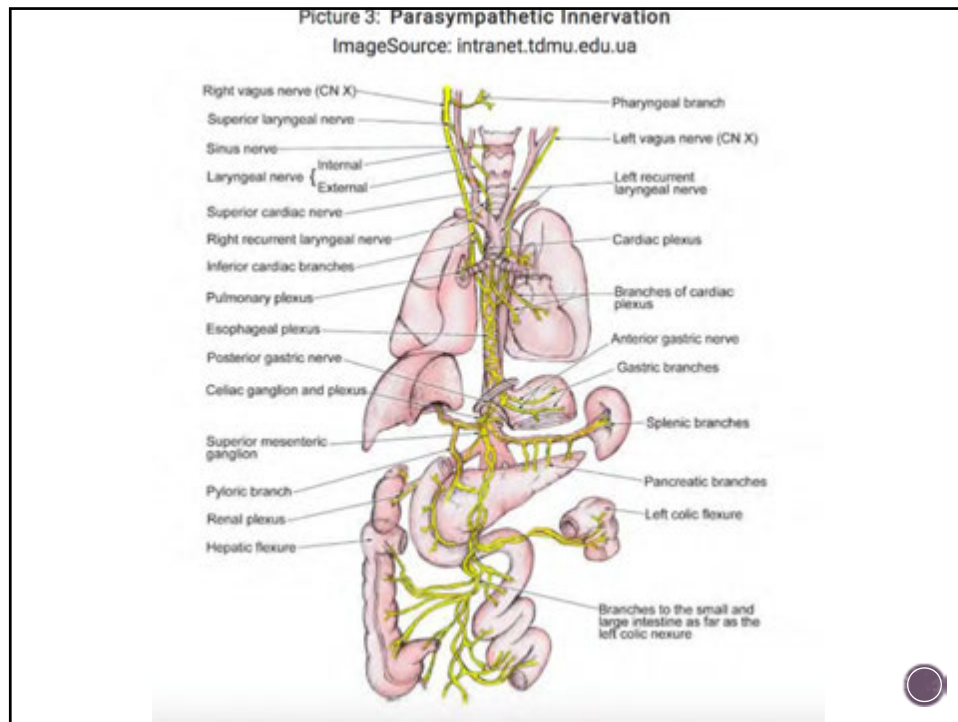






## Let's Take a Look at Freeze...

- We are programmed to go into freeze when fight or flight is impossible or is perceived to be impossible. Many children protect selves not by running away but by running to an adult attachment figure. To help them resolve a trauma, there needs to be a safe adult available.
- Biological dilemma is set up if the people who are supposed to love and protect us are also the ones that have hurt, humiliated, and violated us. I need to flee or fight but need to stay connected with my caregivers.
- Babies cannot physiologically self-regulate until approximately 18 months old



## BREATHING TECHNIQUES

- Belly Breathing
- Breathing through a Straw
- Bumblebee Breath
- Box Breath

Breathing through your nose will help you to avoid “overbreathing” which will cause you to hyperventilate.....definitely a YUK!!

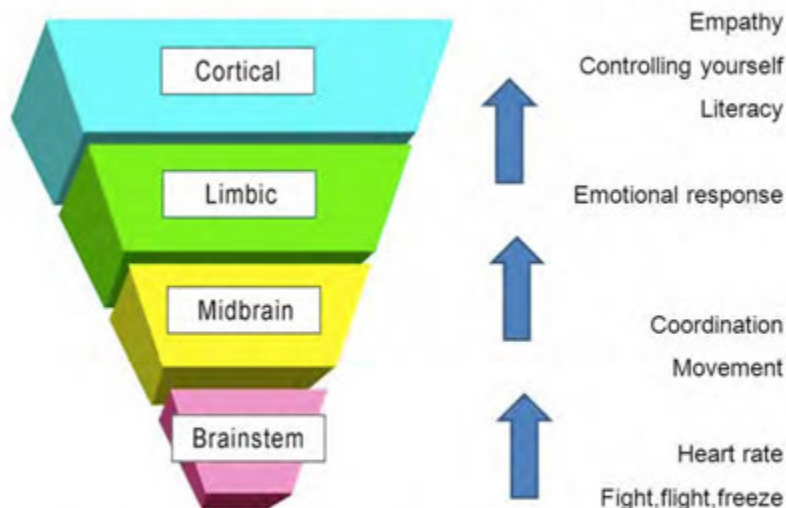
## AUTOMATIC RESPONSES OF BABIES WHEN THREATENED

- Shallow breathing
- Vomiting
- Spitting
- Clenching muscles
- Arching the back
- Pushing away
- Biting
- Tightening the tummy
- Excessive sleeping
- Dazed Expression

Ray Castellino and BEBA (Building and Enhancing Bonding and Attachment) focuses on issues that occur before, during, after birth and can help babies renegotiate a traumatic birth [www.beba.org](http://www.beba.org)




## Perry's Neurosequential Model



Perry, B.D. (2002). *Brain Structure and Function I: Basics of Organisation*. Adapted in part from *Maltreated Children: Experience, Brain Development and the Next Generation* (W.W. Norton & Company).

### Triune Brain Theory

Lizard Brain	Mammal Brain	Human Brain
Brain stem & cerebellum	Limbic System	Neocortex
Fight or flight	Emotions, memories, habits	Language, abstract thought, imagination, consciousness
Autopilot	Decisions	Reasons, rationalizes



The Triune Brain in Evolution, Paul MacLean, 1960



## Why is Sensation so Important?

- The language of the reptilian brain is sensation because this is where survival responses are housed
- Slows nervous system
- Broadens awareness of body experiences...brings it into the here and now
- Not just what you say, how you say it....the words, tone, pacing....we want to engage the instinctual brain without "waking up" the higher brain that will start to rationalize, deny, blame, judge....



## Sensation Words

achy	damp	goose bumpy	prickly	spasming
airy	dark	gurgling	puffy	spinning
alive	dense	hard	pulled	sticky
bloated	disconnected	heavy	pulsing	still
blocked	dizzy	hollow	quaking	streaming
breathless	draining	hot	quiet	stretchy
brittle	dull	icy	quivering	stringy
bruised	elastic	intense	raw	suffocating
bubbly	electric	itchy	relaxed	sweaty
burning	empty	jagged	releasing	tender
buzzy	energized	jittery	rolling	tense
calm	expanding	jumpy	sensitive	thick
chilled	faint	knotted	shaky	throbbing
clammy	fizzy	light	sharp	tickly
clenched	flowing	loose	shimmering	tight
closed	floating	moving	shivery	tingling
cold	fluid	nauseous	shudder	trembly
congested	flushed	nervy	silky	tremoring
constricted	fluttery	numb	smooth	twitchy
contracted	frantic	open	soft	vibration
cool	frozen	paralyzed	sore	warm
cozy	full	pounding	spacey	wobbly
crampy	furry	pressure	spacious	wooden



## Experiential Activity: Tracking Sensation



## Language of Sensation

### Open Ended

- What do you notice in your body?
- Where in your body do you feel that?
- What are you experiencing now?

### Invitational

- What else are you noticing?
- Would you be willing to explore how your foot wants to move?
- Would you be willing to stay with that feeling and see what happens next?

### Move Through Time

- What happens next?
- As you follow that sensation, what happens?

### Explore Sensation With Details

- What are the qualities of that sensation
- Does it have a Size? Shape? Color? Weight?
- Does it spread? Which direction?
- Can you notice the edge? Is there a clear boundary?

### Broaden Awareness of Sensation

- When you feel \_\_\_\_\_ what happens in the rest of your body?
- When you feel that \_\_\_\_\_ in your \_\_\_\_\_ how does it affect your \_\_\_\_\_ now?

### Savoring and Deepening Sensations

- Allow yourself to enjoy that sensation as long as you'd like.



### Categories of Trauma

<b>Medical and Surgical</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Surgery/Medical procedures, stitches, needles, exploratory exams</li><li>• Dental procedures</li><li>• Life threatening illnesses and high fevers</li><li>• Prolonged immobilization</li><li>• Poisoning</li><li>• Fetal distress and birth complications</li></ul>	<b>Violent Acts/Attacks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being hit</li><li>• Animal attack</li><li>• Various violence (media)</li><li>• Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Neglect</li><li>• War, conflict, etc.</li><li>• Terrorist attack</li><li>• Kidnapping</li></ul>
<b>Accidents and Falls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sports Injuries</li><li>• Auto Accidents</li><li>• Near drowning/suffocation</li></ul>	<b>Environmental Stressors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exposure to extremes of temperature</li><li>• Natural disasters/pandemic</li><li>• Sudden loud noises for babies and young children</li></ul>
<b>Loss</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Divorce</li><li>• Death</li><li>• Separation</li><li>• Being Lost</li></ul>	<b>Social/ Historical</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overt Racism</li><li>• Microaggressions</li><li>• Intergenerational</li><li>• Lack of Access to Services</li></ul>

**SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA OVERLAYS ALL OTHER TRAUMA**

### Emotional First Aid for Trauma Prevention

- Check your own body's response first
- Assess the situation
- As shock wears off, guide Child's attention to their sensations
- Slow down and follow Child's pace by careful observation of change....timing....
- Keep validating the Child's responses
- Trust in Child's innate ability to heal- and your ability to allow this to happen
- Encourage Child to rest even if they do not want to
- Attend to Child's emotional responses – storytelling, art etc

## How Do We Release Trauma That Is Stored in the Body?

1. Deep discharge can happen when given the opportunity to sit with a safe adult when they have been triggered or shaken up...lead Child to explore their internal impulses and sensations in a safe non- judgmental environment with no disruptions
2. Strong survival energy can be directed into specific physical activities that promote healthy protective actions, readiness, and defensive responses.
3. Involuntary motor movements may also be observed, encouraged and slowed down. In this way, we create a re-organization in the autonomic nervous system in a way words cannot.

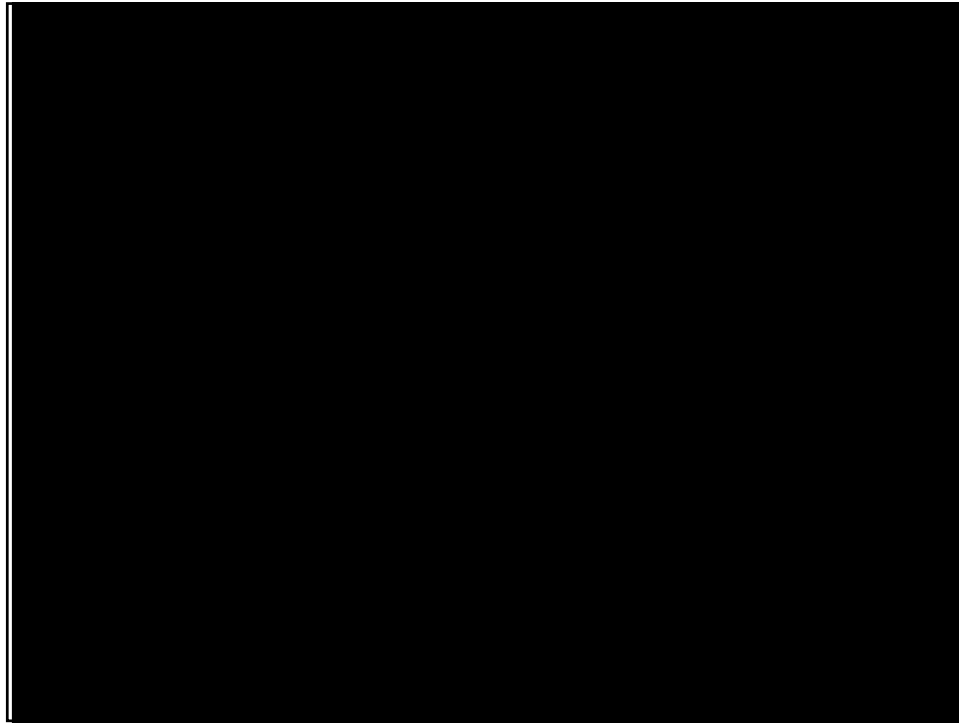


## Elements of Somatic Approaches

- Safety
- Sensation
- Resourcing
- Impulse
- Titration
- Pendulation







## What Are Resources?

### External

- Loving dependable caregivers
- Other nurturing adults. Peers
- Pets
- Access to nature
- Objects that are sensory soothers
- An enriched environment with books, learning opportunities, art, toys
- Caring safe community

### Internal

- Natural gifts and talents
- Personality characteristics
- Connection to something greater than oneself- spirituality
- Ability to notice shifts in physiology
- Embodiment



## **Managing Activation: Tools for Self Regulation**

- Orientation to your environment.
- Grounding “feel your feet and your seat”
- Movement – stretch, jiggle, dance
- Self Contact
- Horse Lips
- Breathing Techniques
- Proprioceptive Input (Deep Touch Pressure)
- Splashing cold water on face
- Hum/Chant/Sing
- Sensory Soothers / Stressors



## **Managing Activation: Tools to Assist With the Regulation of Others**

- YOUR OWN SETTLED NERVOUS SYSTEM!!!!
- Identifying/Accessing sensory soothers
- Language of the reptilian brain – keep it simple
- Being Mindful during transitions
- Attend preferentially to healing elements and resources as they spontaneously appear - help them “take in the good”



## **6 Principles to Help Guide Children's Play Towards Resolution**

1. Let Child control the pace of the game
2. Distinguish between fear, terror, and excitement
3. Take one small step at a time
4. Become a safe container
5. Stop if you feel that the Child is genuinely not benefiting from the play
6. Assist with resourcing using empowering sensations such as strength, grounding, and centering



## **Healthy Nervous System Traits**

- Functional range/full spectrum of resiliency
- Ongoing cycles of charge/discharge (pendulation)
- Body and senses relaxed, yet alert
- Person is embodied (present through all layers of self...physical, spiritual, emotional)
- Responses are fluid and resilient
- Emotionally stable/available for connection
- Will experience that they have choices/options
- Capacity for a healthy relationship





## YOUR MISSION.....

(if you choose to accept it)



- Develop and practice sensation vocabulary. Notice sensations are different than emotions.
- Practice Emotional First Aid with yourself and the Children you love
- Bring more body-based interventions into your work (less content!)
- Use some of the tools EVERY DAY to engage your Parasympathetic Nervous System
- Be Gentle With Yourself!!!!

“...You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.....”

-Mary Oliver, from Wild Geese



## Resources

- Raising a Sensory Smart Child, Lindsey Biel & Nancy Peske, Penguin Books, 2009
- In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness, Peter A. Levine, North Atlantic Books, 2010
- Trauma Through a Child's Eyes, Maggie Kline & Peter Levine, North Atlantic Books, 1997
- The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, Self-Regulation, W.W. Norton & Company, 2011
- The Body Keeps the Score, Bessel Van Der Kolk, 1994
- My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Mending of Our Bodies and Hearts, Resmaa Menakam, Central Recovery Press, 2017
- Between the World and Me, Ta-Nehisi Coates, One World, 2015
- Ray Castellino <http://raycastellino.com> or [www.beba.org](http://www.beba.org)
- Ale' Duarte [www.aleduarte.com](http://www.aleduarte.com)
- Dr. Bruce Perry [www.bdperry.com](http://www.bdperry.com)
- Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute [www.traumahealing.org](http://www.traumahealing.org)

