

Mapping your Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) using the Polyvagal Theory

Think of a situation when you notice being in each state, about 3 /10 on the scale of activation, so you do not feel overwhelmed by it. You can use the information to help track your levels of activation during the day and notice glimmers of hope. **When mapping the ANS, always end with the Ventral Vagal.**

<u>Ventral Vagal Nerve</u> (VVN) feeling safe, social, engaged, choice to speed up or slow down. All is well		
<u>What do you notice in your:</u> Body? Emotions/feelings? Thoughts? <u>What is your relationship to:</u> Food Substances Behaviours <u>Complete these sentences:</u> The world is... I am...		
<u>Sympathetic Nervous System</u> (SNS) mobilized, fight, flight, agitated, seek help		
<u>What do you notice in your:</u> Body? Emotions/feelings? Thoughts? <u>What is your relationship to:</u> Food Substances Behaviours <u>Complete these sentences:</u> The world is... I am...		
<u>Dorsal Vagal Nerve</u> (DVN) numb, collapsed, shut down. Acts as an emergency break		
<u>What do you notice in your:</u> Body? Emotions/feelings? Thoughts? <u>What is your relationship to:</u> Food Substances Behaviours <u>Complete these sentences:</u> The world is... I am...		

- *ANS is made up of the parasympathetic nervous system (VVN and DVN) and the sympathetic nervous system (SNS).
- * to thaw from DVN you need to regain some mobilisation in your breath and body to move through SNS to VVN.
- * when in the SNS, use the long out breath (breathe in for the count of 3 (through your nose if you can) and out for the count of 4) to help activate the parasympathetic systems.
- *recognise your autonomic arousal state; if triggered, respect it as a survival strategy; regulate or co-regulate into VVN; then re-tell the story to yourself from this calm place through the ventral lens.

Worksheet created by Sally Bubbers (2019) from the work of Stephen Porges and Deb Dana (*The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation* by Deb Dana). There are many videos on YouTube about the Polyvagal Theory: names to look for are Stephen Porges and Deb Dana.

Introduction to Internal Family Systems (Richard Schwartz, 1995)

Self: the core of the person, which can act as a compassionate leader for the parts in our system, is curious, compassionate, calm, clear, creative, confident, courageous, committed, present, patient and persistent, with perspective and playfulness.

Exiles: parts of us that hold painful emotions and memories, along with things we are ashamed of or do not want to be seen in the world. They become isolated, hidden deep inside us: out of our conscious awareness. This is for their protection and our safety and survival. They are frozen in the past, often holding things like disowned feelings, needs, hopes, memories, phobias, shame, fear/terror, grief/loss. They are guarded by our protectors. They can become increasingly extreme, in an effort to be noticed, seeking healing and help. Common exile behaviours are sensitivity, dependency, loneliness, spontaneity, flashbacks, and nightmares.


Our protective system is comprised of managers and firefighters.

Managers: these are parts that proactively attempt to run our lives to keep the person in control of every situation and relationship in order to protect the exiled parts from feeling hurt or rejected and to help carrying on with normal life. They often take on roles like judgement, self-critic, striver, controller (of the environment and others), caretaker, planner, passive-pessimist, perfectionist, worrier, risk avoider, pleaser, and denier. They often intellectualise, distract, detach emotionally and can be reclusive and depressive.

Fire Fighters: parts that play a “back up” role to protect the system. Their role is to extinguish feelings, thoughts, body sensations, memories and images that are upsetting or overwhelming. They act reactively and do not consider what damage they may cause to ourselves or relationships if an exile becomes upset. They sooth or distract. They often use strategies like addiction, suicidality, violence, obsessions, compulsions, fantasy or dissociation. They can be triggered into action in milli-seconds.

None of these parts intend to cause any trouble: they are all trying to help us survive, but parts that may have taken jobs on in the past and got stuck with them, are sometimes unaware that time has moved on. They carry burdens which consist of memories, feelings, behaviours, jobs or roles they needed in the past.

It is possible for us to notice our parts, which can communicate with us by thoughts, emotions and body sensations. We can then talk to them and offer support. When they realise that your adult and your ‘Self energy’ are there, and that they can trust them, they often relax and are relieved of their burdens or may choose to change their roles. This helps them to release their gifts, and to build an internal team of self-lead parts.



Firefighters: Generally, hide out of sight, below conscious awareness until they react to threat or distress. Provide the ultimate defence to protect or distract to stop exile pain. They may use anger, addictions, suicide, or shut down

Managers: They are the first line of protection and proactively run our lives to prevent the exiles from being seen or upset. They can appear to be chaotic or rigid in their approach to life and will use strategies like perfectionism, overwork, caring, illness, exercise, and routine to help us. The world often sees them as us.

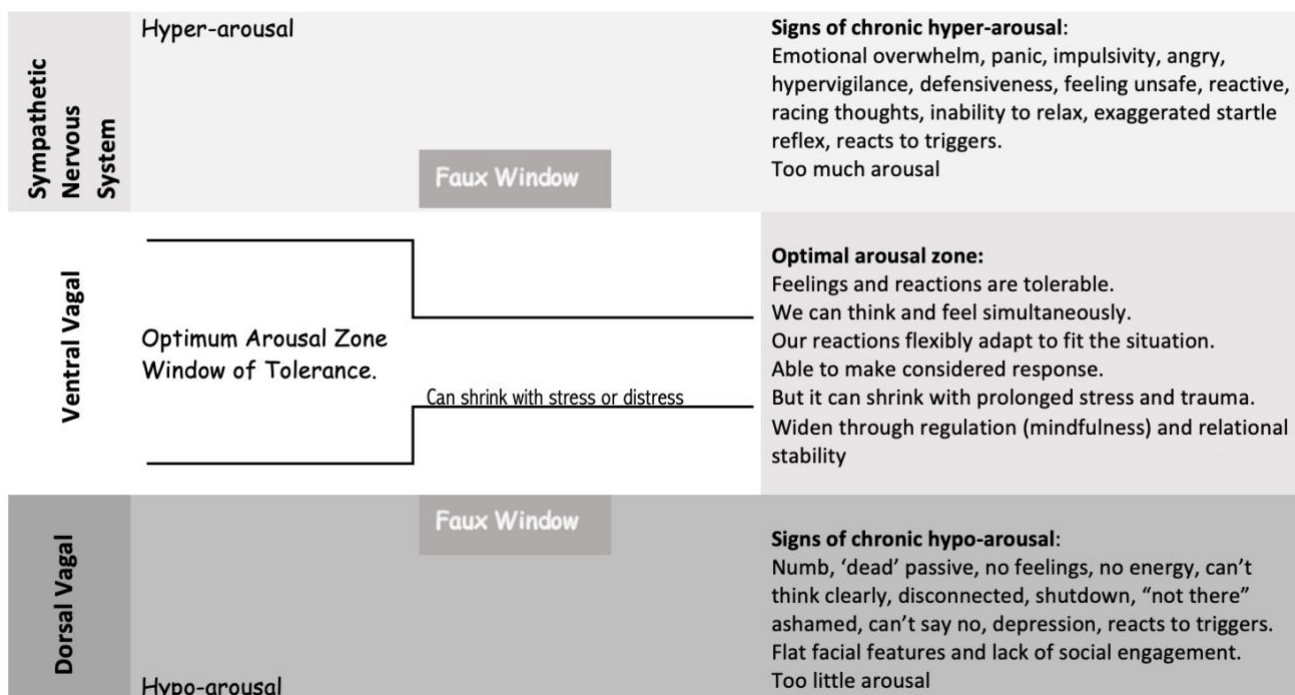
Exiles: They are often buried deep in the subconscious holding burdens of pain, and memories, emotions, or behaviours which were either disapproved of by adults, or things we do not want to be seen in the world

Self: Innate qualities at the core of everyone: compassion, curiosity, clarity, creativity, calm, confidence, courage, and connectedness; patience, perspective, persistence, perseverance, and playfulness.

For information about Internal Family Systems (IFS) see [Ifs-institute.com](http://ifs-institute.com).

IFS has been created by Dr Richard Schwartz (information sheet assembled by Sally Bubbers).


Window of Tolerance and Polyvagal Theory



Dr Dan Siegel 'window of tolerance' 1999. Ogden, Minton & Pain 2006, Dr Janina Fisher 2008, Van der Kolk, Peter Levine, Stephen Porges 2017, Kain & Terrell 2018
 Infographic created by Sally Bubbers 2022

The Focusing Ball

Exercise for calming created by Sally Bubbers (2017) based on neurobiology

Start breathing in and out at your own pace, not forcing anything Breath in 1 2 3, pause Breath out 1 2 3 4, pause Notice where the 'in' breath goes. if it is high in your chest, gently try and send it a little further down into your belly The longer out breath calms the body	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Focusing Ball</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">grounding exercise</p>  <p style="margin: 10px 0 0 0;">Start breathing following the instructions on the left</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hold the ball in your hand and name or count the colours ▪ Rate which colour you are on the ball eg fizzy red, or calm blue? ▪ Look around you, moving your neck and name 5 things you can see <i>Come back to you breath</i> ▪ Name 3 things you can hear <i>Come back to you breath</i> ▪ Notice any tension in your body and move if you need to <i>Come back to you breath</i> ▪ Name and just notice any sensation, emotion or feelings <i>Come back to you breath</i> ▪ Name any thoughts, words or images in your head. Acknowledge them and let them know you will come back to them later <i>Come back to you breath</i> ▪ Check inside and see if anything has changed ▪ Now check and see if you feel any closer to the blue ring <p style="margin: 10px 0 0 0; text-align: right; font-size: small;">Created by Sally Bubbers 2017</p>	This exercise uses a rainbow practice golf ball (purchased on the internet) but you can have a photo on your phone or find another object that helps focus your attention.
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