

Self Regulation of the Nervous System through Trauma Informed Yoga



JULIE JACK
DIRECTOR, THE EXHALE PROJECT



- New Initiatives program
- We offer trauma informed yoga to survivors of sexual assault, domestic abuse, human trafficking and other related traumas.
- Classes are free for survivors. We also invite service professionals and non offending family members to attend.
- Currently, we work in Johnson, Linn, Mahaska, Marshall, Poweshiek and Washington Counties but hope to expand.
- Classes are offered in both English and Spanish.

“Trauma is like a splinter: It is the body’s response to the foreign object that becomes the problem, more than the object itself”

– Bessel van der Kolk

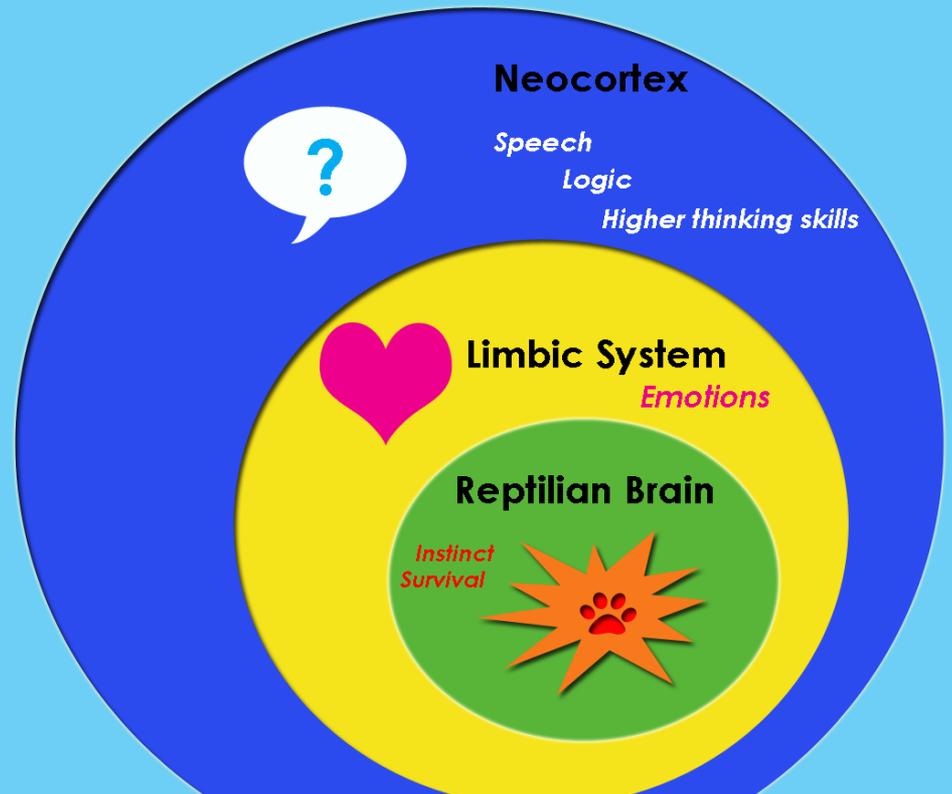


The Reptilian Brain doesn't have the ability to learn. It is **instinctual** and will continue to do something over and over.

The Limbic System or emotional brain has the ability to learn but uses signals of pleasure and pain to control behavior. Emotions that we are **feeling** more than thoughts we are thinking control our behavior.

The Neocortex is the thinking, rational brain. **Consciousness.** The key here is practice and repetition.

Model



The Three Human Brains

Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)



- The nervous system that you don't control, that causes you to do things automatically, like digest your food.
- Part of the Limbic System (emotional brain)
- Two branches:
 - Sympathetic (SNS) – Fight and Flight
 - Parasympathetic (PSNS) – Rest and Digest
- The two branches are meant to work in a rhythmic alternation to support digestion, sleep and immune system functioning, even in light of stressful lives.

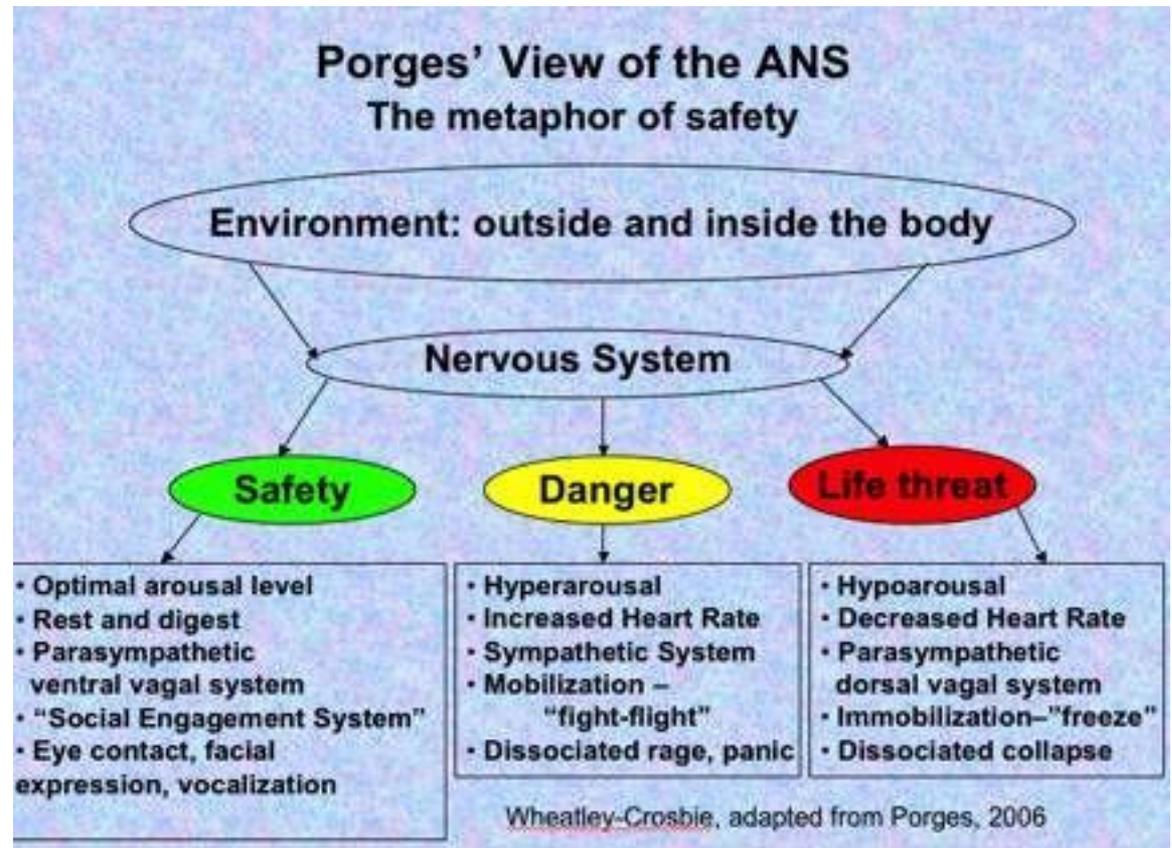
What happens in a traumatic situation?



- The sympathetic nervous system kicks in to help us deal with the threat.
- Fight and flight responses are activated and chemicals are released which changes the body and readies it to run or defend.
- When fight or flight do not restore safety the body goes into a state of immobilization. Freeze!

Polyvagal Theory

This theory developed by Stephen Porges affirms that the Vagus Nerve produces a third type of nervous system response that further explains how trauma affects human beings.



Polyvagal Theory



- The Vagus Nerve has two branches:
 - The Dorsal Vagus is related to the organs below the diaphragm and activates shutdown in the face of danger.
 - ✦ Reptilian response – FREEZE or FEIGN
 - ✦ A physiological response of the body that keeps us “safe” or able to endure.
 - The Ventral Vagus is related to organs above the diaphragm such as the face, heart and lungs and allows us to engage with others.
 - ✦ This is the Social Engagement **System**.

Social Engagement System



- The Social Engagement System helps us navigate relationships allowing us to be more flexible in our coping styles.
- Social Engagement requires a sense of safety.
- Ventral Vagal activity tends to down regulate or calm the SNS moving us into the Social Engagement System.
- When in the Social Engagement System we move into a calmer, more relaxed state of being. This is the state of creativity and play.
- The SES system is linked to the inner ear and governs the facial muscles, eyes, voice and ears.
- Porges suggests the following techniques to return survivors to the SES:
 - Using facial muscles, making eye contact, modulating our voice, listening to others

Trauma informed yoga



- Yoga adapted to the unique needs of individuals working to overcome trauma can help to manage symptoms by creating a safe, tailored practice for students to learn how to respond, rather than react, to symptoms and circumstances.

Trauma Informed Yoga



- Yoga is a bottom up approach.
- Yoga as a mind body practice, engages down regulating practices that emphasize activation of the PSNS as well as upregulating practices that stimulate the SNS.
- Mindful use of these practices, over time, helps us to discern cues from our body, and teaches us how to recalibrate or balance our nervous system so we are better able to self regulate.

Trauma Informed Yoga



- Yoga acts to calm the nervous system allowing interoception to be more accessible.
 - Interoception is a sense that helps you understand and feel what's going on inside your body. For example feelings of calmness, hunger, anxiety or heart rate.
 - Interoception can be threatening to trauma survivors because it can heighten or bring attention to feelings of hyperarousal.
 - Yoga can help to bring awareness to this sense. If we are able to sense what it feels like to be calm, we may be able to dwell in that state longer. Likewise if we identify a sense that is more like trauma we may have more tools to mitigate it.

Trauma Informed Yoga



- Yoga is a “practice” not an exercise.
 - Practice, practice, practice is what changes our reactions to the emotional brain (pleasure or pain), allowing us to make change.
- Trauma informed yoga classes are safe social situations that offer the opportunity to safely practice social engagement.
 - Soothing voice
 - Eye contact
 - Melodic music

TIY tools



- **Pranayama – the practice of breathing**
 - The breath is a bridge between mind and body and is directly linked to nervous system functioning.
 - Specific breathing practices help to reduce hyperarousal
 - Moves the facial muscles, which stimulates the social engagement system
- **Asana – Physical Postures**
 - Offers the opportunity to practice awareness and interoception
 - Creates strength which builds self esteem and trust in oneself

TIY tools



- **Mindfulness**
 - If we can watch our bodily sensations and see that they pass, or see that we are actually safe in the moment, we encourage our social engagement system functioning
 - Soothing voice encourages the SES
- **Yoga Nidra – Yogic Sleep**
 - Induces a state of deep relaxation
 - Reduces emotional reactivity
 - Promotes self regulation
 - Helps survivors to access their innate ability to self soothe and calm their nervous system.



Tips and tools for advocates and counselors



- First and foremost, work to create a sense of safety. Your relationship with the victim is key!
 - Practicing your own self care.
- Normalize what the victim is experiencing.
- Language
- Eye contact
- Melodic music
- Breath work
- Singing/Chanting
- Keep your word (to the best of your ability).

Self Care



"Self-care is often a very unbeautiful thing. True self-care is not salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to build a life you don't need to regularly escape from.

And that often takes doing the thing you least want to do.

If you find yourself having to regularly indulge in consumer self-care, it's because you are disconnected from actual self-care, which has very little to do with "treating yourself" and a whole lot do with parenting yourself and making choices for your long-term wellness. It is becoming the person you know you want and are meant to be. Someone who knows that salt baths and chocolate cake are ways to enjoy life – not escape from it."

-Brianna Wiest, in Thought Catalog

Kaki Pranayama

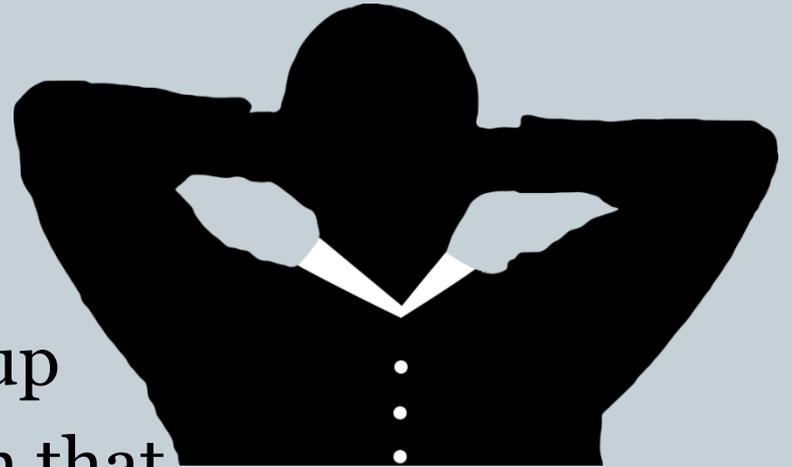


- Inhale deeply through the nose, then purse your lips like you are going to blow out a birthday candle and slowly let the air out (reduces SNS response)
- Make an O shape with the mouth and inhale slowly through pursed lips. Suspend and then exhale through the nose. (Cooling)

Eye Movement



- Stabilize the head with the hands interwoven behind it.
- Begin to move your eyes to the right and hold until you yawn, swallow or sigh (up to 60 seconds). This is a sign that the nervous system is relaxing.
- Repeat on the other side.



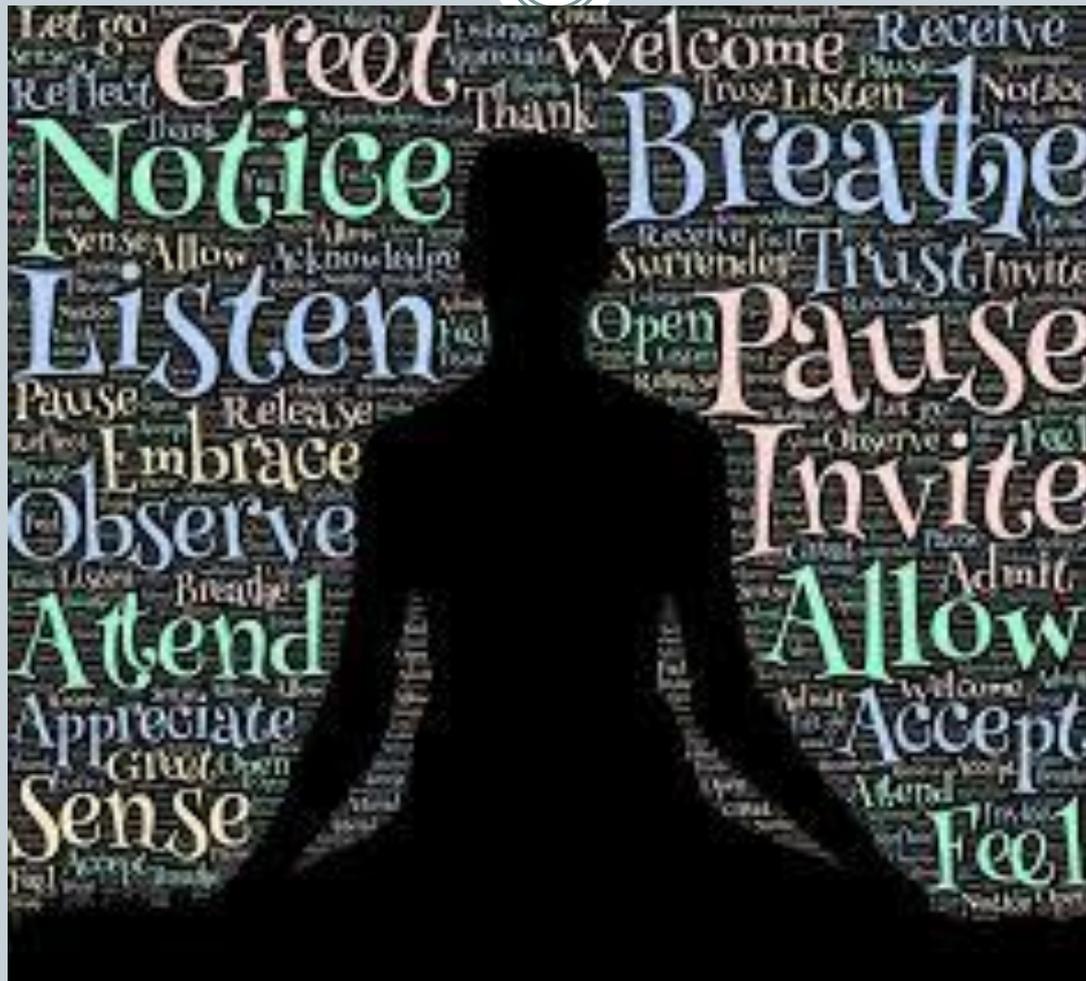
Cat/Cow



Mountain



Mindfulness meditation



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