THE IMPORTANCE OF FEELING SAFE

Sympathetic Nervous System = Fight/Flight

In this state our system is flooded with emotions such as anxiety, anger, panic, rage, or avoidance through spatial or relational distance. With the activation of sympathetic nervous system, our hearing shifts away from listening for human voices to listening for low frequency sounds of predators & high frequency sounds of distress. Our ability to read facial cues are affected – neutral faces may seem angry or experienced as dangerous. We are on high alert – heart rate increases, breath is short & shallow. Cortisol & adrenaline are released, producing energy in our system that needs to be released.

Dorsal Vagus = Freeze

In this state, we do not have enough energy to deal with the threat. Our body attempts to slow down and conserve energy. We feel fatigue, low motivation, lack of appetite, difficulty concentrating, and sadness. We experience reduced oxygen flow to our brain, which we experience as “fogginess” or inability to make decisions, lack of concentration and dissociation. The dorsal vagus nerve is considered the oldest “primitive vagus” branch of our nervous system affects organs below the diagphragm, which are organs related to digestion, has analgesic effects in order to protect us from physical or psycholgoical pain or can rescue us from traumatic events through dissociation.

Ventral Vagal = Connection & Engagement

When we are in ventral state we experience a desire & energy to connect with others. We form & deepen relationships, we are motivated to learn new things, & develop new interests or skills. Safety is felt in ventral state., allowing us to use our energy for engagement. We give and receive, listen and talk. We are able to be calm, happy, engaged, meditative, alert, & relaxed. Our heart rate slows down, our eyes & voice soften to enhance connection. We feel compassion & empathy when we are in ventral state. Our stress reduces & our immune system remains uncompromised.