

The Window of Tolerance One Activity at a Time



**Dr. Joy Kreider, founder and CEO
938 College Avenue
Harrisonburg, VA 22802**

**Kreider05@gmail.com
415-830-7430**






The Window of Tolerance invites us on a journey to look within. It's more likely a winding rather than linear path but definitely one worth traversing

None of us can say **“I will always stay in my WOT all the time”** but we are working to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, our triggers and the things that soothe us. And we seek build better self-care and other-care habits that help us to detect when are we veering left or right and can help us to make adjustments

This starts with paying attention to our bodies and all the messages that it sends us which links us deeply with our polyvagal nerve, our amygdala and prefrontal cortex and with information that is detected as safe, ambiguous or dangerous

The Window of Tolerance And The Effects of Stress

HYPO-AROUSAL or SHUT DOWN	WINDOW OF TOLERANCE	HYPER-AROUSAL or MAXED OUT
<p>Flat Affect Sleepy Foggy Brain Shut-down mode Not able to solve problems Not able to fully communicate needs, wants... Limited Body Awareness Numb Confused Faint Not able to Self Soothe</p>  <p><small>This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC</small></p> <p>Disconnection</p>	<p>Calm Alert Able to Concentrate Focused Able to Problem Solve Able to Make Decisions Able to Communicate Needs, Wants... Aware of Whole Self Grounded Able to Self Soothe</p>  <p><small>This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC</small></p> <p>Regulation and Deep Interactions</p>	<p>Overwhelmed Anxious/Agitated/Panic Shaking Sweating Impulsive behaviors Breathing and Heart Rate Increases Angry Decisions are extreme! Not Able To Solve Problems Not able to fully communicate wants/needs Wanting to get out of my body</p>  <p><small>This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA</small></p> <p>Mobilization</p>

How Would You Define Emotional Regulation?

Think/Pair/Share



<https://www.medbridge.com/blog/2019/04/emotion-regulation-an-essential-aspect-of-social-communication/>

--Having a coherent relationship with the self—my body, my emotions, my senses, my body sensations are integrated and I am paying attention to HOW I FEEL

--Retaining the ability to accurately detect and evaluate cues, and if I have questions being open other people's interpretations

--A coherent relationship with myself across time....what is happening within and around me now, how have I reacted before, and if there has been change....reacting now with different subtleties

The Polyvagal Nerve and Theory

The autonomic nervous system is:

Foundation of our lived experience

Assists us in detecting safe/ambiguous/dangerous information

Helps us move towards protection, mobilization, shut down if necessary and ultimately safety

Its 3 Organizing Concepts that are tethered in our brains and biology

A Daily Waking Hierarchy

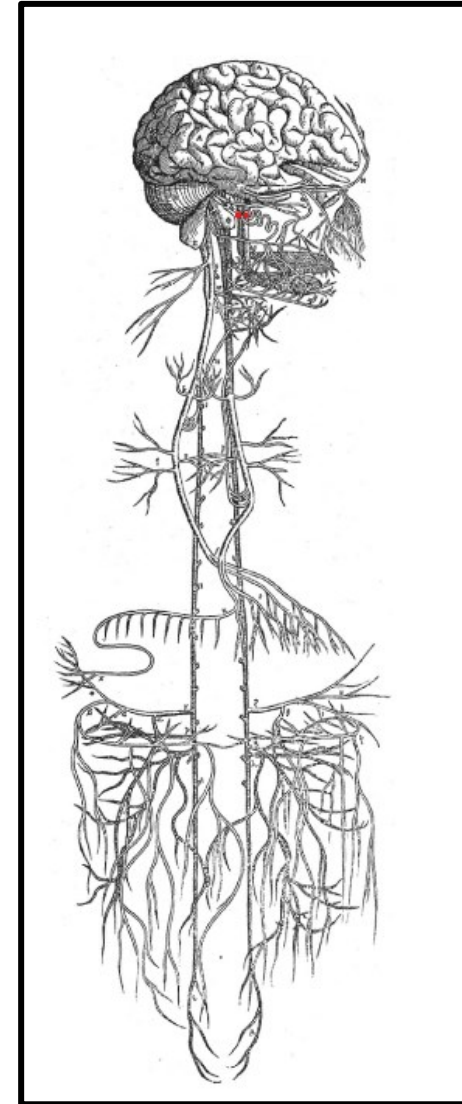
Connection (window of tolerance)

Mobilization (fight or flight)

Disconnection (freeze or shut down)

Neuroception: Detecting Safety and Danger

Co-Regulation: Deep connection with Others



The Polyvagal Nerve and Theory

Our Hierarchy: The three waking states that we travel through many times a day

Connection (window of tolerance)

Mobilization (fight or flight)

Disconnection (freeze or shut down)

There is an orderly progression through these states depending on incoming signals

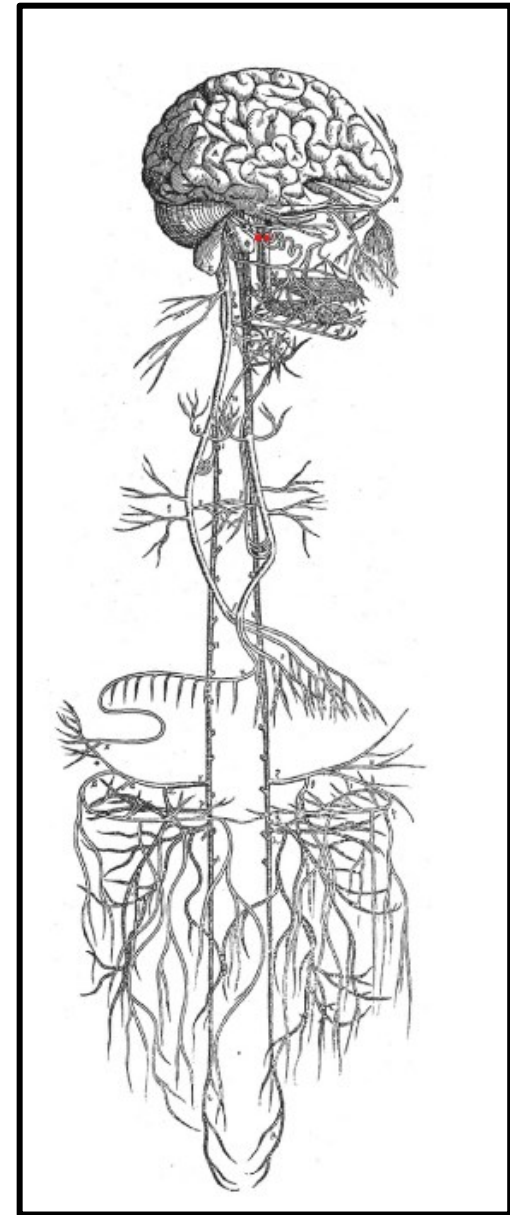
Neuroception is the way the brain receives cues and interprets those cues about safe/ambiguous/dangerous events within and around us and pays attention to cues from Inside the body

Outside the body

Between ourselves and others (safety, danger)

Co-regulation: We are **wired** to be in relationship! How do infants learn to calm themselves? I feel safe when my mother holds me against her body, I am protected,

Our ability to discern safe from unsafe keeps us alive (by 9 months, most infants know who their care givers are and may pull away from a stranger—this is the ANS and Vagal Nerve already at work). It is in co-regulation in our childhood that we can see and know others and feel seen and known—and build an inner space from which we can ultimately offer compassion, mercy and grace to others



The Polyvagal Nerve and Theory

A regulated and flexible autonomic nervous system allows us to meet the challenges of the day including going into fight or flight (dysregulation) to rescue the toddler who is wandering towards traffic and then recovering (rest and digest) and moving back into our relational space (staying anchored and returning to safety)

Good Autonomic Tone Affords Us:

Reduced inflammation and control of immune response

Lower risk of stroke, heart disease and diabetes

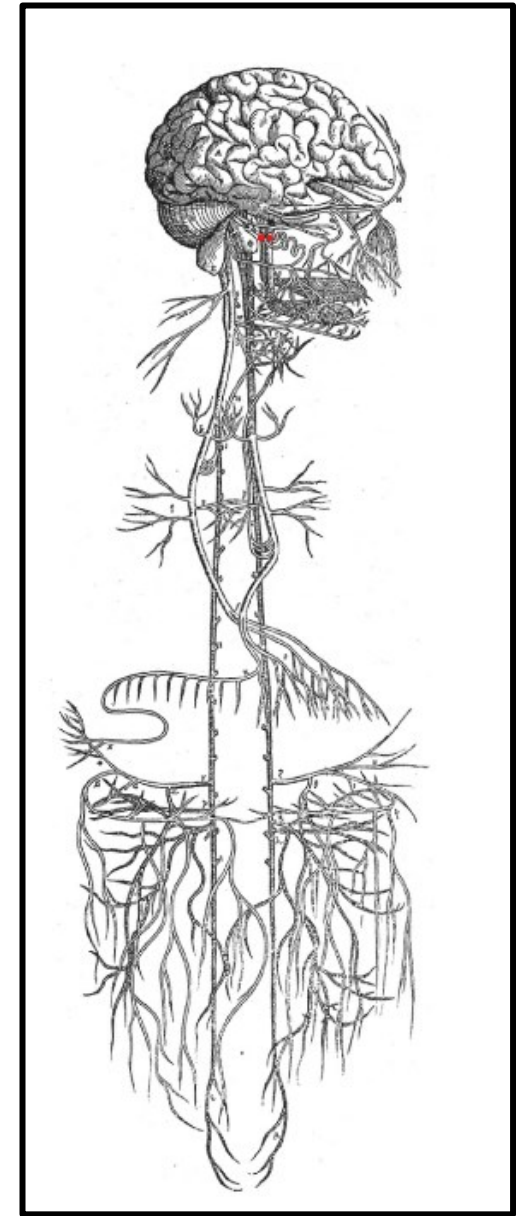
Better able to manage our emotions

Increased capacity for relationships

Ability to respond in resilient ways to the challenges in our lives

We have compassion for others

What are the different aspects of the self that our brain is listening to and directing?



“The Building Blocks of the Present Moment”

Cognitions: Thoughts, interpretations, beliefs about ourselves, others and the world.

Emotions: Anger, joy, grief, fear, being happy, and all the other shades of how we feel about our lives, our moods, and the minute inner shifts as we experience life in all its nuances

Peripheral Five Senses: Touch, smell, vision, taste and hearing

Movement: Our ability to move through space as well as change facial expressions, postural changes, as well as small changes like trembling or the sensation of your own pulse or muscle twitches

Body Sensations: Physical sensations (vibration, tingling, stiffness, ect.) created by the various elements within the body that monitor and respond to what is happening within and the near environment around us.

When we are connected to our “whole selves”, we are most effective at Recognizing the difference between Safety and Danger and being able to co-regulate with others

Long-Term Responses to Untreated Trauma

Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral	Physical	Spiritual
Fear/Terror	Confusion	Social Withdrawal	Dry mouth	Emptiness
Anxiety	Hypervigilance	Self Harm	Twitches/Tremors	Loss of meaning/Faith crisis
Panic/Paranoia	Suspiciousness	Violence toward others	Weakness	Doubt
Anger/Rage	Flash backs	Increased substance use/abuse	Nausea/Vomiting	Looking for magical fixes
Depression	Difficulty Focusing	Loss of/or increase of appetite	Chest pain	I am being punished
Shame	Can't make decisions	Not able to sleep	Elevated BP	Loss of direction
Guilt	Memory changes	Always on Edge	Rapid Heart rate	Cynicism
Sadness	Overly critical	Aggravated Startle	Shallow Breathing	Bargaining With God
Numbness	Blaming others	Without Words	Diarrhea	A loss of trust in God

PFC Goes Off-Line
Amygdala Gets Strong
We lose touch with our bodies

Our ability to care for self and others is disrupted including co-regulation

Our ability to show compassion and empathy towards others is disrupted

Neuroception



Our Autonomic Nervous System Is Watching for cues about safety and danger

This tends to be more automatic and less conscious

- Inside the body
- Outside in the world
- Between people

Why does a baby coo for mom and cry when picked up by a stranger?

Why does a toddler enjoy being held by someone known and resists being held by someone unknown?

We are built for survival—we tend to move away from dangerous situations and towards safety.

Is it really safe? Or, am I always on high alert?

Have I faced extreme risks before?



Let's try an experiment

1= Safe

2=Ambiguous

3=Dangerous

1= Safe
2= Ambiguous
3= Dangerous



1= Safe
2= Ambiguous
3= Dangerous



- 1= Safe
- 2= Ambiguous
- 3= Dangerous



- 1= Safe
- 2= Ambiguous
- 3= Dangerous



1= Safe
2= Ambiguous
3= Dangerous



1= Safe
2= Ambiguous
3= Dangerous



- 1= Safe
- 2= Ambiguous
- 3= Dangerous



This might seem like a silly exercise but it quickly demonstrates that we don't all see the same world the same way at the same time.

The more aware we become of what's beneath our own surface, our inner cues, leanings, sensations of danger or safety, the more we can recognize others in their strengths and woundedness.

	Safe= 1	Ambiguous= 2	Dangerous= 3
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
TOTALS	7	14	21
Lowest Possible=6 Highest Possible=18 Where did you land?			

Our lenses matter, and are shaped by whether we are in fight or flight, a relational space, whether we are sensing each other and co-regulating or in shut down mode.

In turbulent times, the way leaders (community officials, clergy, counselors, presidents) interpret events and frame what is happening either:

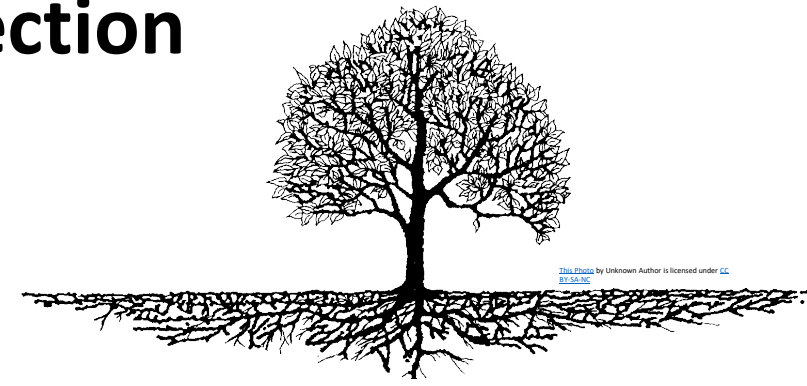
- helps individuals and groups heal **OR**
- further inflames situations, keeping individuals and groups stuck in the cycles of victimhood / violence.

If I am outside my window of tolerance, if I am in fight or flight or I am in shut down and I walk into a conflict at work or home can I be the calm center that people need me to be? Can I be the source of connection and co-regulation for others?

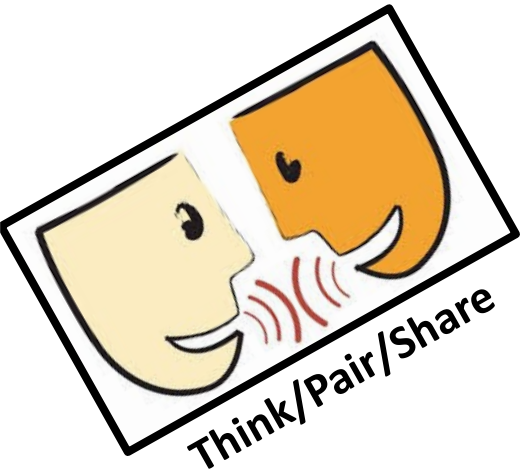


Exploring Strategies to Move Towards Connection

Emotional Grounding



Earthing or physical grounding is about regaining a sense of connectedness to the earth...people often take off their shoes and walk barefoot. Or lay in the grass, whatever sensory experience that helps us reconnect with mother earth. There is also emotional grounding, people, places or things that help you move back into your WOT.



Some Journaling and Sharing

Think about a time when you needed to calm yourself down.

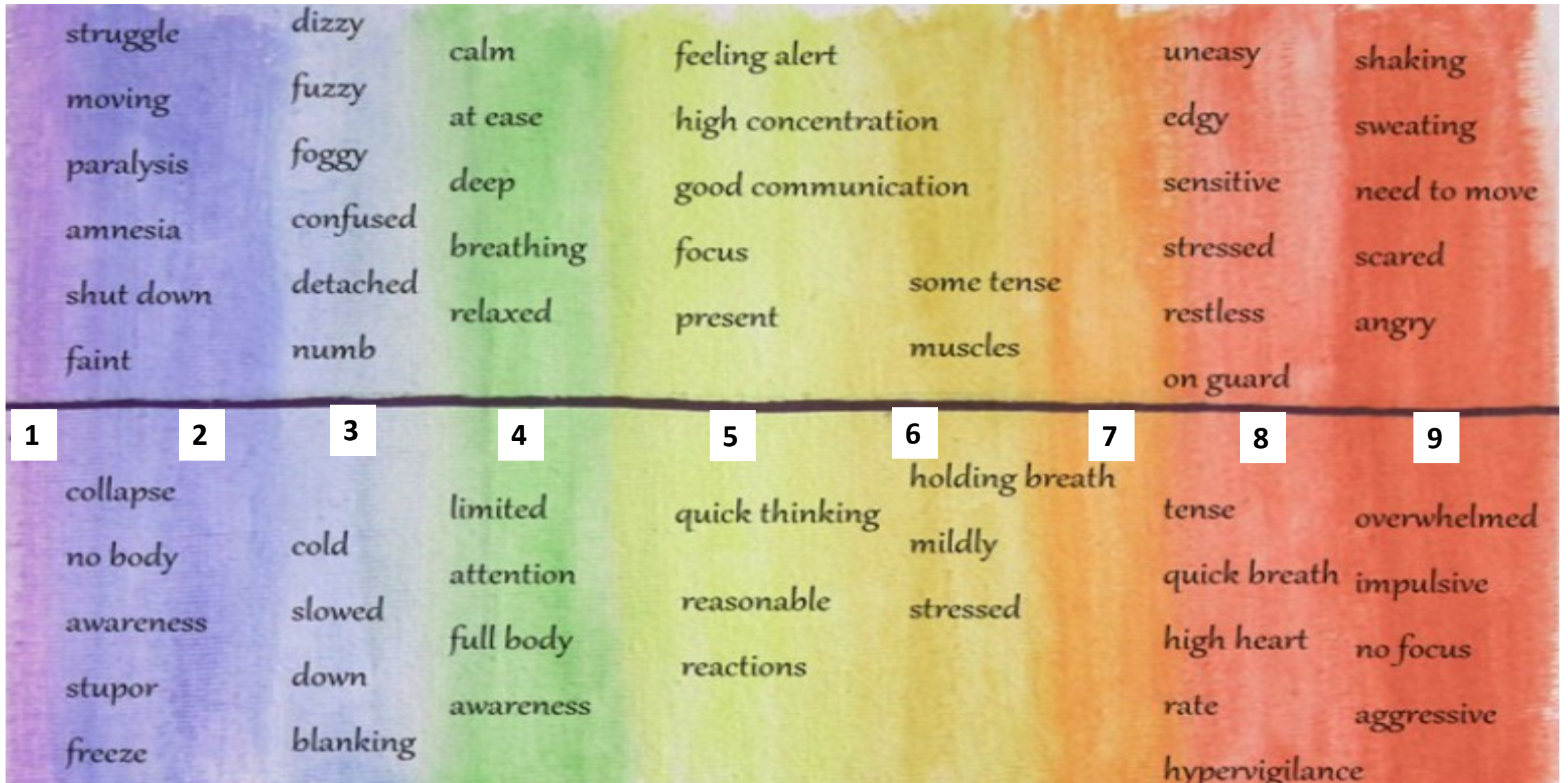
Do you have practices, favorite beverages, a favorite activity that helps you move towards calmness, centeredness, rest? Jot those down.

Do you deploy these activities regularly?

Who are the people who ground you—who see and know you and can help you co-regulate back towards relationality?

How easy is it for you to connect with them when needed?

Where Do You Find Yourself At The Moment?

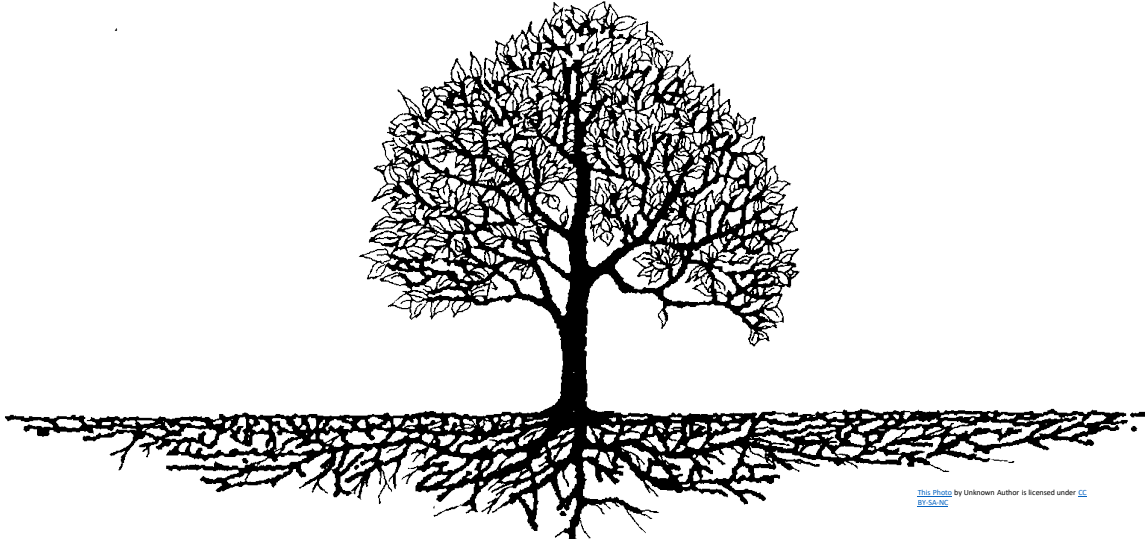


Hypo-Arousal

Window of Tolerance

Hyper-Arousal

Let's Try A Grounding Activity.....



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Where Do You Find Yourself At The Moment?

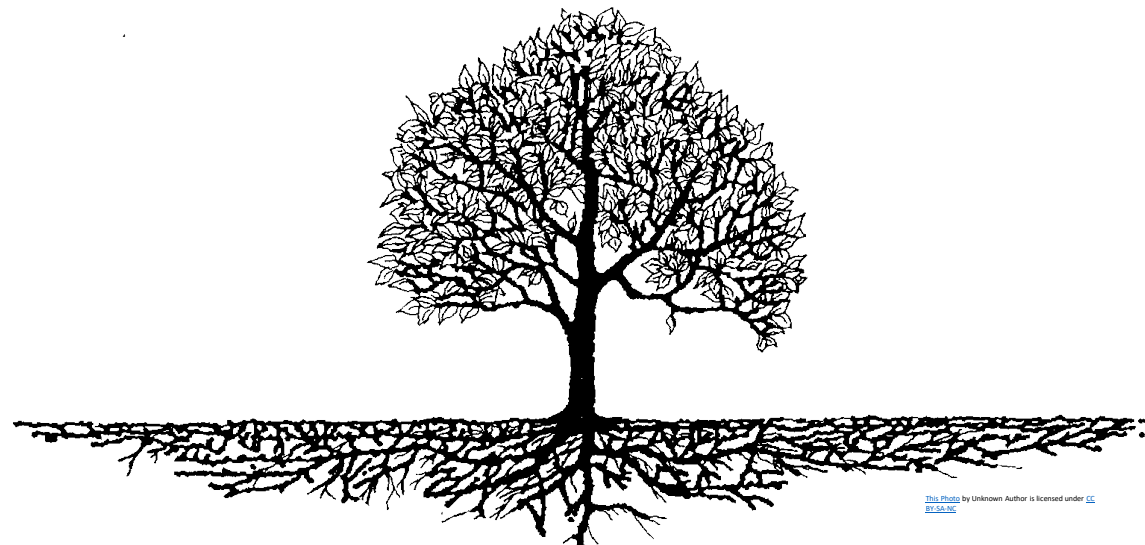


Hypo-Arousal

Window of Tolerance

Hyper-Arousal

Think/Pair/Share
How Was This For You...

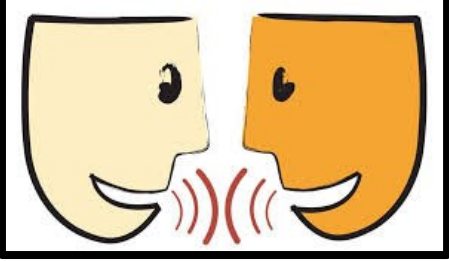


Were there things that were distracting?

Could you lead someone else through such an experience?

Could you imagine taking a psalm and creating a similar experience for someone else?

Come back together and share one thing



What was a major challenge in ministry or in home life this past year?

Think/Pair/Share

Who blessed and supported you (sources of grounding and co-regulation)?

How did you respond? Can you see elements of your WOT being open or closed?

Did you get pushed out of your WOT? If so, what helped you get back into your relational zone?

How did you make sense of what happened?

Were you able to resolve the situation in a meaningful way?

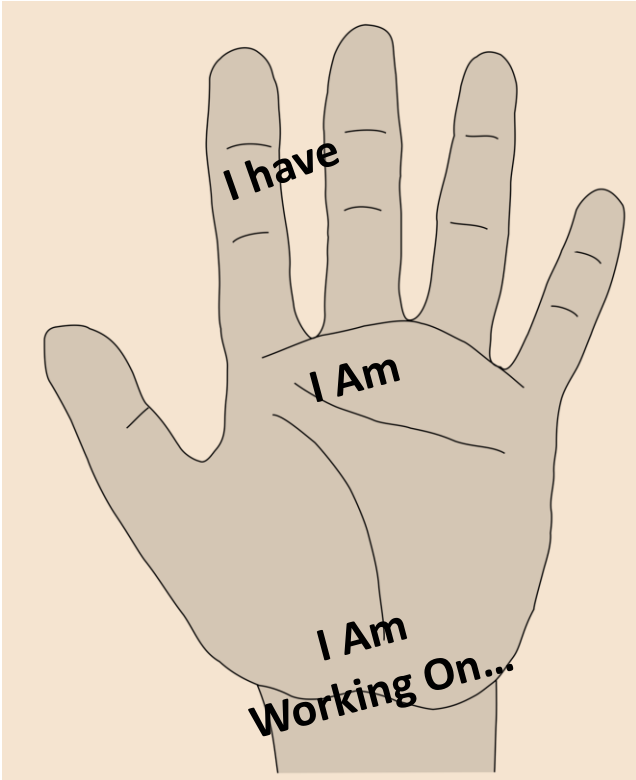
How did you take care of yourself?

What positive qualities do you see in yourself in the midst of that challenge?



Report In

Window of Tolerance Activity: Resource Hand Trace Around Your Hand



Fingers I Have This To

Turn To:

Names

Phone numbers

Places

Animals

Symbols

Images

Words

The places, people and things you can call, rely upon for support and help you feel safe and connected

Upper Palm: I Am

Things You are Proud of About Yourself...

Values

Accomplishments

Strengths

Personality Traits

Beliefs

Lower palm: I Am Working on Self Care

For example...Consistently go to my AA meeting
Meet with my small group
Take my dog for a daily walk
Call my brother monthly

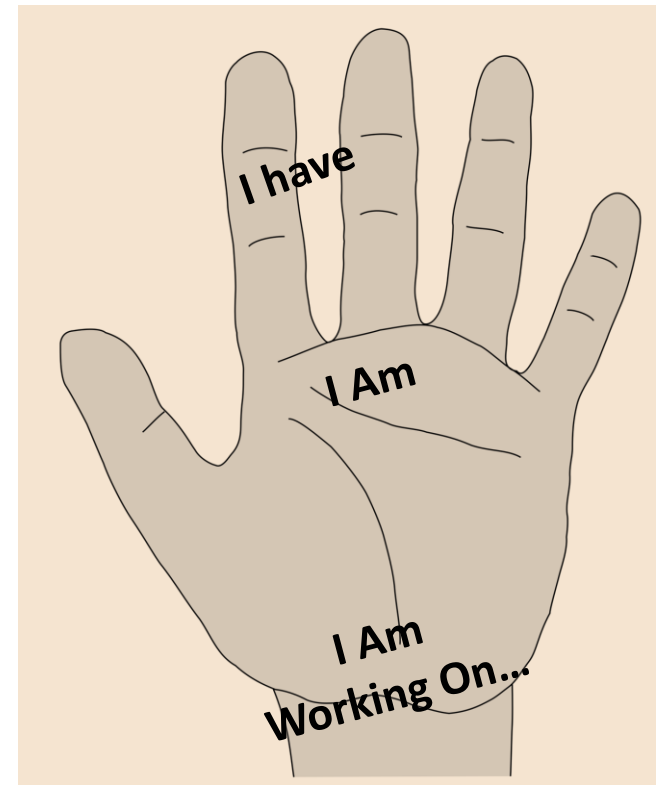
Feel Free to Decorate the Page if you have time to do so

Why the hand activity can help:

Oxytocin

Creating a visual representation of available resources provides a tangible tool for self-regulation which can be turned to when we are struggling to cope

The process of creating engages the kinesthetic-sensory qualities of art-making that can calm the nervous system down and help to regulate lower brain functions such as heart rate and respiration.



Returning To The Window Of Tolerance—How Activities Help

Breath/Movement/Dance

- Increased body awareness
- Increased sense of connecting to others
- Activates mirror neurons
- Reduces anxiety

Craft/Handiwork

- Increases functional connectivity in the brain/across hemispheres
- Helps reduce negative emotions
- Engages the mind in positive, creative experiences

Music/Rhythm/Song

- Lowers anxiety
- Reduces feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Releases oxytocin which increases a sense of connectedness to others
- Enhances within body sensations/returning to the self

Expressive Writing

- Eases intense emotions/helps organize traumatized memory
- Assists in meaning making process of recovery
- Is self soothing
- Decreases depressive symptoms and impact of intrusive thinking

Summary

God has equipped us with a tremendous brain and body that seek out safety from early days (around 9 months) and move away from or challenge harm. The challenge is ours to notice, to move towards safety, to ask for support, and then to move inward. To care ourselves and others in ways that allow us to heal even from the most damaging experiences.

Through connection with ourselves and movement towards others and God, we can find new pathways to wholeness and health. The journey is challenging but very possible and the plasticity of the brain underlies our ability to heal.