

Polyvagal Theory in Action

Harnessing the Healing Potential of the Autonomic Nervous System

DEB DANA

At its most basic level, human communication is one nervous system responding to another, searching for signals that it's safe to connect and flooding us with distress responses when it's not. Polyvagal Theory has revolutionized our understanding of the complex, unconscious forces at play in therapeutic interactions, offering a road map to help us navigate and engage this deeply embodied system. Learn how to use the five pathways of the Social Engagement System to regulate your own states and enter into fuller autonomic attunement with your clients. You'll explore how to:

- Use your own autonomic nervous system to create an environment of safety for your clients
- Develop the expressive range of your eyes, voice, breath, and body to enrich your nonverbal attunement skills
- Help your clients listen to their internal state and let go of their problem stories
- Reliably guide your clients from state to state and enhance their capacity for self-regulation

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Learning Objectives:

1. Employ exercises designed to engage the neural circuits of your client's Social Engagement System to improve clinical outcomes.
2. Evaluate and track moments of autonomic disconnection and find the right repair in sessions.
3. Create an environment of autonomic safety using the "inside, outside, and between" guide.
4. Use your own Social Engagement System to effectively coregulate with clients.

Outline:

1. Employ exercises designed to engage the neural circuits of your client's Social Engagement System to improve clinical outcomes.
 - Present the architecture of the Social Engagement System with an overview of the function of cranial nerves V, VII, IX, X, XI describing the impact on relationships and autonomic regulation
 - Teach specific exercises to activate each cranial nerve and ways to track the response
 - Identify actions of the Social Engagement System in specific clinical issues and ways to engage the system to shape specific clinical outcomes
2. Identify and track moments of autonomic disconnection and find the right repair in sessions.
 - Present ways to map clinician autonomic response patterns
 - Learn what constitutes an autonomic rupture and an effective autonomic repair
 - Present ways to track levels of attunement and provide guided exercises to practice the repair process
3. Create an environment of autonomic safety using the "inside, outside, and between" guide.
 - Teach the organizing principle of neuroception
 - Present ways to track visceral, environmental, and relational cues of safety and danger within the autonomic response system
 - Practice ways to reduce cues of danger and create cues of safety using the autonomic experience of neuroception
4. Use your own Social Engagement System to effectively coregulate with clients.
 - Present a live demo to illustrate application of skills in a clinical session
 - Offer guided dyadic practice
 - Create personalized ways to use the five elements of the Social Engagement System as co-regulating resources

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