

# Sensory Interventions for Trauma and Loss

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# Objectives

- Attendees will:
  - 1) Understand how trauma memory is stored in the brain.
  - 2) Be able to distinguish the various nervous system reactions.
  - 3) Will have an overview of current trauma interventions.
  - 4) Will learn a number of sensory interventions to help clients calm the sympathetic nervous system response.

# Trauma and the Brain

*There is evidence that trauma is stored in the part of the brain called the limbic system, which processes emotions and sensations, but not language or speech. For this reason, people who have been traumatized may live with implicit memories of the terror, anger, and sadness generated by the trauma, but with few or no explicit memories to explain the feelings.*

-<https://www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/what-are-traumatic-memories/>

# Trauma and the Body

*“Trauma treatment starts at the foundation of a body that can sleep, a body that can rest, a body that feels safe, a body that can move.”*

*-Bessel van der Kolk*

# Trauma and the Body

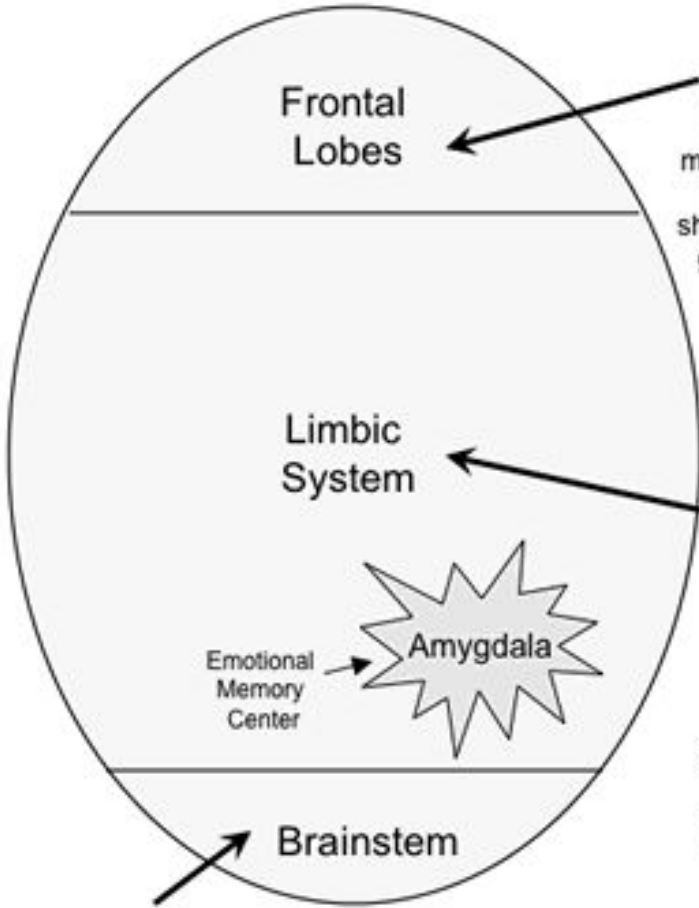
<https://www.youtube.com/embed/ByalBx85iC8>



# We remember trauma less in words and more with our feelings and our bodies

[van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995]

# Trauma and Memory



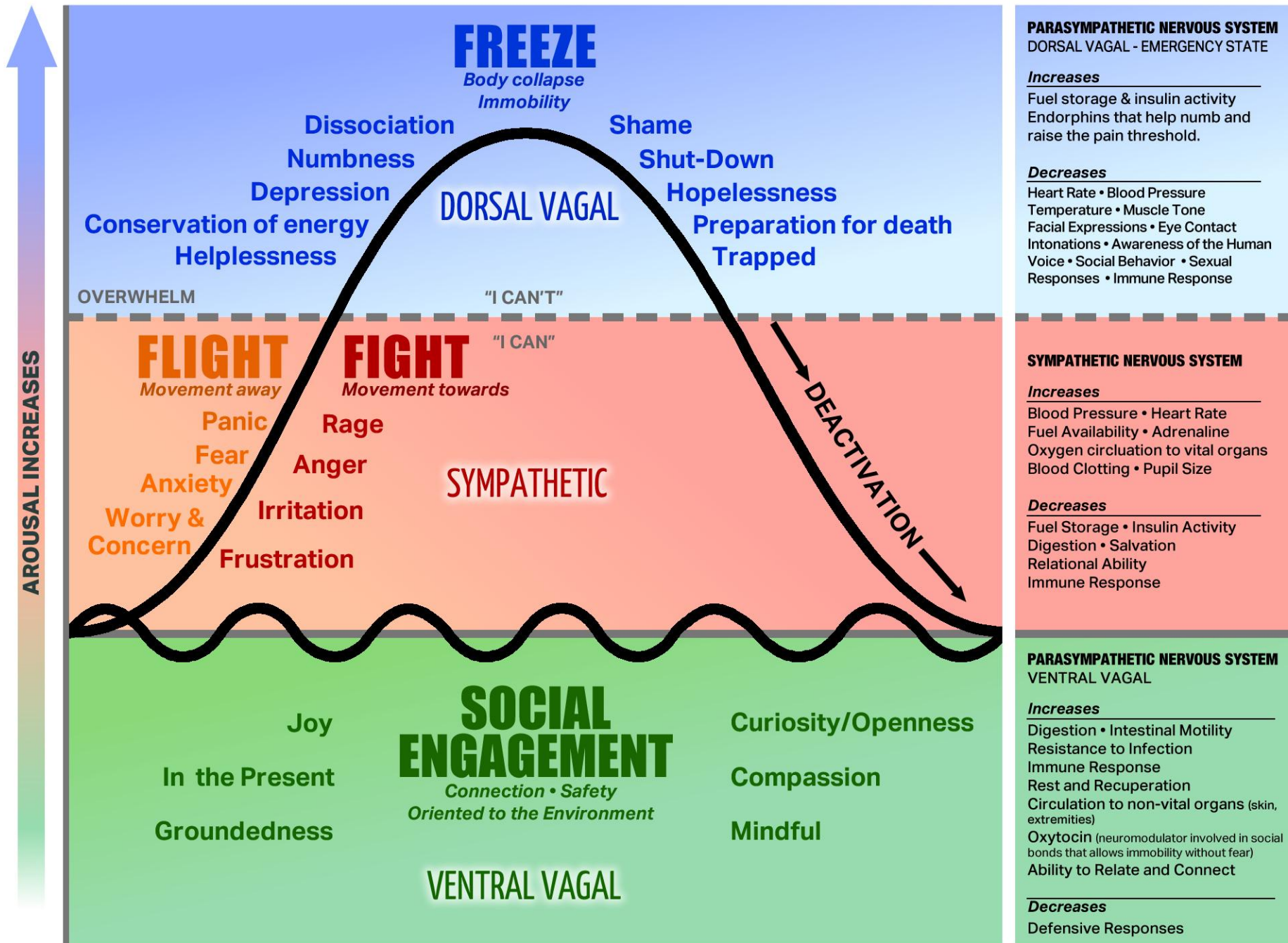
Brain scan research shows that, when we remember a traumatic event, memory centers in the frontal lobes shut down, and we get overwhelmed by feelings and impulses or driven to action.

The limbic system responds to memories with increased activity, especially in the **amygdala**, the brain's and emotional memory center. The amygdala "sounds the alarm" as if we were in danger right now.

The reptilian brain reacts instinctively to the amygdala's 'alarm.' Heart rate increases. We stop breathing or hyperventilate. Muscles tense. We either speed up or shut down.

# Polyvagal Theory

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKkDAOW2yd4>



Adapted by Ruby Jo Walker from: Cheryl Sanders, Steve Hoskinson, Steven Porges and Peter Levine



# Developmental Trauma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxPAt-Esv8Q>

# Treating Trauma

## **#1 Trauma Intervention is YOU!**

- The safety you create
- The sense of calm you exude
  - Acceptance
  - Validation
- Compassionate Curiosity
  - Knowledge

# Trauma Treatments

*Most trauma treatments focus on creating a calm narrative from the chaos of limbic memory.*

# Trauma Treatments

- TF-CBT
- EMDR/Brainspotting
- Somatic Experiencing
- SITCAP
- Biofeedback/Neurofeedback

## Trauma Treatments

- Systems Interventions
- Play Therapy
- EFT - Emotional Freedom Technique
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- DBT

# Sensory Interventions

*Sensory Interventions focus on the dysregulation brought about by trauma memory.*

# Creating Safety

- Physical Safety
  - Internal - suicidality, self-harm, risk-taking
  - External - physical violence, trauma triggers
- Emotional Safety
  - External - emotional abuse, harassment
  - Internal - intrusive thoughts, diminishing

# Sensory Interventions

*Sensory Interventions focus on the dysregulation brought about by trauma memory.*

*“The lynchpin that connects treatment of both traumatic stress and addiction is the development and maintenance of safety and stability. Without the ability to self-rescue, one is at great risk for being overwhelmed by memories or resuming addictive behaviors.” - Eric Gentry*



# Sensory Interventions to Calm

- Taking **Ten Deep Breaths** through your nose and out of your mouth
- Drinking from a **Straw**
- Giving and Receiving **Hugs (Ask first!)**
- **Heavy Blankets**
- Warm, Weighted Compresses
- Slowly tapping your finger to the second hand on a clock.
- **Hand-held Manipulative Toys** such as Stress Balls, Magic Loops, Hoberman Spheres, Tangle Relaxers and Op-Yops
- **Chewing Gum Slooowly.**

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# Sensory Interventions to Calm

- Sitting in a **Bean Bag Chair**
- **Exercise Balls** – Place your feet flat on floor, while calmly sitting.
- **EFT** which stands for Emotional Freedom Techniques. This involves repeating & orienting affirmation while tapping specific points on the body.
- **Watching liquid toys** such as lava lamps, oil & water drippers, spiral liquid timer toys and Galileo thermometers
- **Soothing Music** (Pachelbel, Baroque)
- **Isometrics**- strength training exercises mainly used for rehabilitation of muscles and joints. Some examples are the wall squat hold, planks and crunches.
- **Pushing, Pulling** and **Lifting**

# Sensory Interventions to Calm

- **Playing with, or in, Water** by swimming, taking a bath or splashing water on your face.
- **Yoga, Tai Chi**
- **Dancing**
- **Exercising**
- **Guided Imagery** - Directed thoughts and suggestions that guide your imagination toward a relaxed, focused state. You can achieve a relaxed state when you imagine all the details of a safe, comfortable place, such as a beach or a garden.
- **Positive Self Talk** is the dialogue that goes on in your mind. It is where you believe in yourself and are confident in your capabilities to the point that you are certain that you will succeed.

# Sensory Interventions to Calm & Stimulate

Sensory activities fall into different categories. Perhaps the most useful one for self-regulation is Proprioceptive Input. That is a fancy word for “heavy work” that engages your joints. These activities make you feel grounded and can be calming or invigorating. Some will require a very loving, silly friend:

- Jump (on a mini-trampoline, from a chair to a sofa, on the bed, etc.)
- Pushups (On the floor or against a wall. Do ABC pushups trying to find obscure words)
- Crab walk
- Play leap frog
- Hammer ice cubes in a plastic bag (then use them for lemonade!)

# Sensory Interventions to Calm & Stimulate

- Pillow Fight
- Tug-of-war
- Hopscotch
- Drumming
- Banging on pots and pans
- Spinning
- Hang upside down
- Rock in a rocking chair
- Housework (Think 50's housewives.)
- Water balloon catch
- Beanbag catch
- Animal footsteps (I've always wanted to be a giraffe.)
- Make your own sandbox with a covered cake pan.

# Sensory Interventions to Calm & Stimulate

- Pour salt on a cookie sheet and paint with your fingers.
- Go on a texture walk.
- Have a texture scavenger hunt at home
- Ladles, cups, strainers, squirters, funnels
- Make play dough

Add food coloring to water, cookie dough, cake batter, taffy, shaving cream, frosting...just fool around with it.

Bubble baths.. use different textures... loofa, sponges, wash clothes, those poofy things.

# Sensory Interventions to Calm & Stimulate

- Lick lemons (That will ignite the senses!)
- Make smoothies and suck through a straw (Use crazy straws)
- Make and blow pinwheels
- Blow feathers or balloons off your hand
- Have a cotton ball race.
- Play a listening game. Sit very quietly and try to guess the sounds you hear.
- Play radio roulette. (Press scan. Stop after a few seconds. You need to listen for a few minutes or until the end of the song.)

# Sensory Interventions to Calm & Stimulate

- Draw by candlelight
- Shadow puppets (Google “shadow puppets with hands” in Google Images)
- Build a fort or tent
- Get those cool polarized sunglasses
- Get a really soft stuffed animal or throw.
- Find 5 smells you like. Make a smell box with a stacking pill container.
- Cook. Enjoy each ingredient’s texture, smell, look and taste.
- Eat crunchy snacks and vegetables
- Make extreme faces



# Sensory Interventions to Calm & Stimulate

Swinging: Try different types of swinging to see how it feels (tire, rope, belly, etc\*)

\*Try not to fall off.



# Resources

- <https://trauma101.com/?pID=2>
- <https://eft.mercola.com/>
- <http://www.emdr.com/>
- <https://www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/what-are-traumatic-memories/>
- <http://nctsnet.org/resources/topics/treatments-that-work/promising-practices#q4>
- [http://www.traumacenter.org/about/about\\_bessel.php](http://www.traumacenter.org/about/about_bessel.php)
- <https://traumahealing.org/>
- <http://stephenporges.com/>
- <https://www.starr.org/training/tlc>
- [https://tfcbt.musc.edu/ceu\\_statement.php](https://tfcbt.musc.edu/ceu_statement.php)