

Major concepts that were discussed included:

The autonomic nervous system: there are two parts of the autonomic nervous system that informs the way that we deal with trauma and stress. They include:

- The sympathetic nervous system: a system that helps us become activated, participate in activity and arousal
- The parasympathetic nervous system: a system that helps us become deactivated, find rest and rejuvenation

The sympathetic nervous system's active states range from normal and attentive to normal and stressed, to irritated and agitated, to angry and finally to mania. Any activity above a normal state of being is uncomfortable and fundamentally feels unsafe. The sympathetic nervous system is related to fight or flight responses in moments of extreme trauma.

The parasympathetic nervous system's states range from blissful rest and relaxation to overly sleepy, disassociation, and coma. Blissful rest is characterized by an attentive mind but otherwise, utter physical safety. Anything beyond that feels fundamentally unsafe. The parasympathetic nervous system is related to the freeze response in moments of extreme trauma.

Our nervous systems' reactions to extreme stress in our environment (flight/fight/freeze) evolved from our experiences living in the wild and were evolutionarily beneficial.

There are three types of the brain that somatic experiencing deals with: the amygdala, the reptilian part of the brain that is intuitive and concerned with keeping us alive, the limbic system, the emotional part of our brain that helps us connect to other humans as a more evolved way of staying alive, and the prefrontal cortex, the newest part of our brain that is responsible for organization, categorization, and most memory.

When you experience trauma, your prefrontal cortex and digestive systems are taken offline so that your body can concentrate on survival. That's why many people may not remember the details of their traumatic experience (or have digestive issues during or after the event).

Occasionally the limbic system will store memories of a trauma, that usually presents as "flashes" of very specific sensory memories that don't give a larger context or meaning. This is why talk therapy, or other kinds of therapies that rely on the prefrontal cortex don't offer relief.

- During traumatic events, you lose the ability to hear high frequency sounds so that you can focus on low-frequencies that predators are more likely to make.

Trauma is defined as anything that is too much, too soon, too fast.

There are three kinds of trauma:

- Acute
- Chronic
- Complex (a mix of acute and chronic)

Traumas build on one another. Neuroconnections are made that associate certain events or people or objects with feeling unsafe. **When we use the word “comfort” we really mean “safety.”**

When you are anxious or stressed out, your body is sensing that something is not safe, often because of something that has happened in your past. Many people deal with those feelings by trying to distract themselves with:

- Watching TV
- Drinking
- Smoking

...but those activities' desired effects don't last too long.

The best and most effective way of dealing with stress is to identify what is happening in your body. People are often scared of focusing on their feelings because they think the pain will be worse, but actually, if you give your body the attention it is asking for, it will relax after having been “listened” to. This exercise also gives your prefrontal cortex something to do other than spin stories about how you are feeling, which can add anxiety.

There are partners in what people describe when they describe the feelings in their body.

- Heat, redness, fireball, in your chest or diaphragm is often anger
- An anvil, cold, or steel is sadness

In therapy, people are asked to “get into a submarine” and evaluate their feelings, and describe them at a distance. Once they do, they often feel better. The biggest thing is that you have to attend to your feelings with curiosity, not with an intent to change anything.

When people aren't able to identify their feelings or don't trust their feelings, therapists work to orient them to the world around them through the senses. The polyvagal nerve is a nerve that runs through your whole body. It is connected to the limbic system and can help you feel connected and safe.

Orienting is very helpful when lowering activation. It involves asking people to look around the room and count or classify outloud what they are seeing. By forcing your prefrontal cortex to come back online, you can signal to your body that it is safe, and everything is okay.

Other methods:

- Doing creative, playful things (it signals to your body you are okay)
- Breathing like you are already at rest, if you are activated, or wiggling your toes and hips if you have gone into a freeze
- Listening to soothing music, soothing sounds, or audio at certain vibrational wavelengths can help

- Smelling things that you associate with pleasure or safety from childhood can help
- Imagining a secret garden that you can decorate anyway you'd like can help people who do not feel safe with sensory input
- Using cold water on your forehead or body can shock the nervous system and "restart it" like you would a computer.
- Massage and touch therapy can sometimes help release trapped traumatic energy
- Heat on your adrenal glands can relax them and pull your body back into regulation
- Co-regulation is a great way to feel safe and connected
- Target your chest or stomach because that's where people feel anxious
- People tend to curl up and protect their inner organs when they want to feel safe or already feel safe
- Humming is soothing

The challenge is that everyone is different, with different associations around what makes them comfortable. If you could design something customizable or personalizable, that would be best.