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TREATING THE CAUSE, NOT JUST THE SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMATIC STRESS

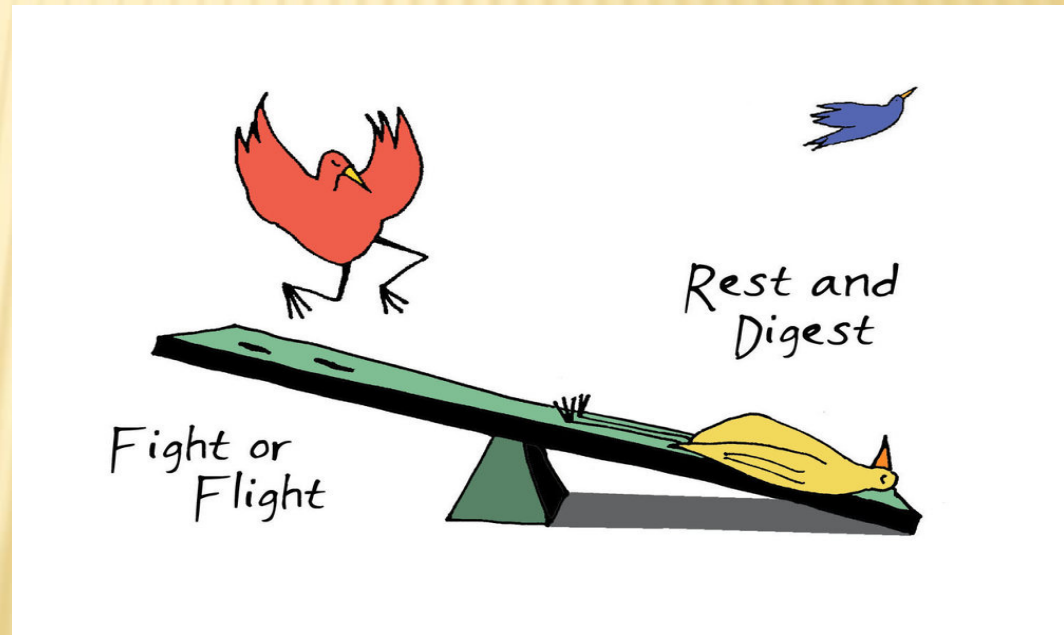
Focusing on the Nervous System

A LITTLE ABOUT THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

**OUR BODIES FUNDAMENTAL GAS AND BREAK
SYSTEM**

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

- ✗ Made up of two branches
 - + Sympathetic
 - ✗ The gas
 - + Parasympathetic
 - ✗ The brake



SYMPATHETIC BRANCH

- ✘ Sympathetic branch
 - + Pathway that prepares us for action
 - + Responds to cues of danger
 - + Triggers the release of adrenaline
 - ✘ Provides the “gas” for our system
 - + Prepares us for fight or flight
 - + May be experienced as “anxiety” or “agitation”
 - + May experience the world as overwhelming and/or chaotic

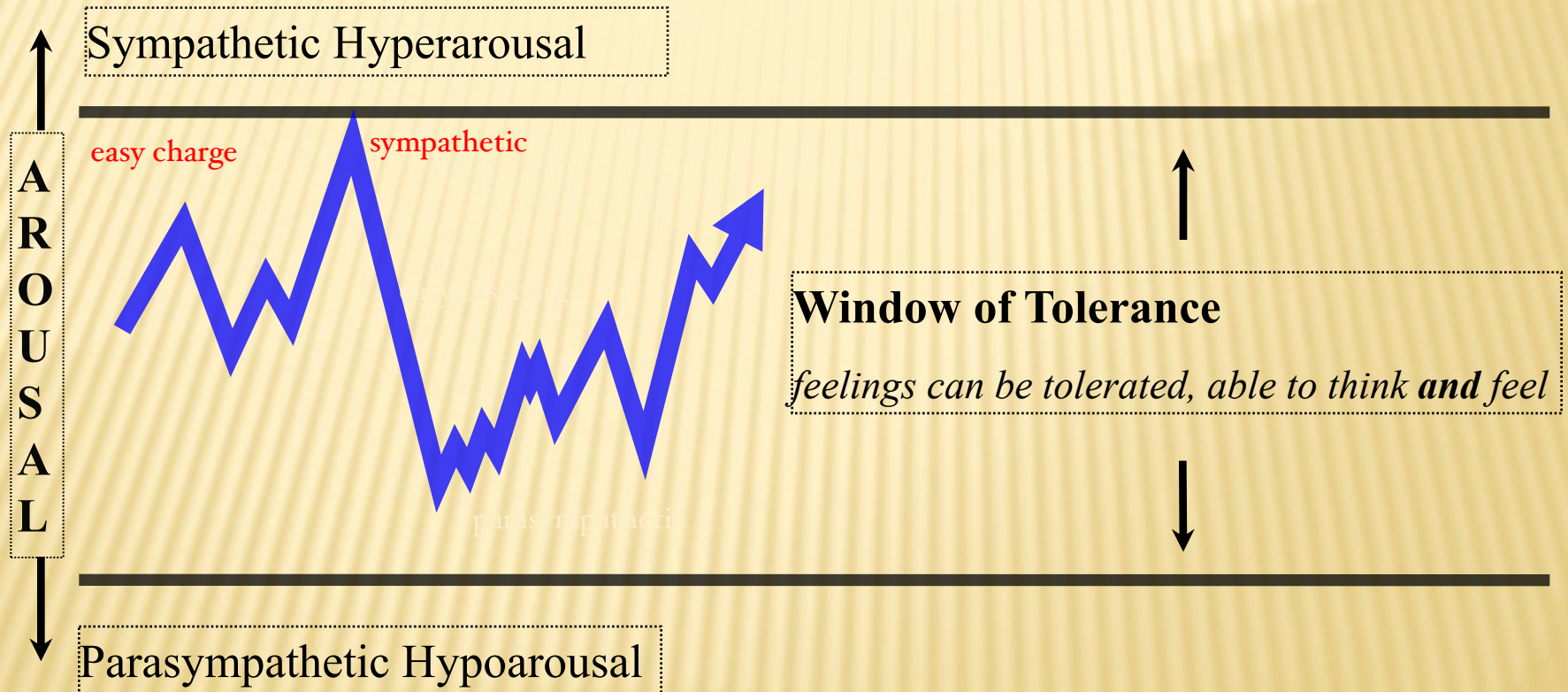
PARASYMPATHETIC BRANCH

✘ Parasympathetic branch

- + “Rest and Digest”
- + In charge when all is well and we feel safe and settled
- + Allows us to rest, relax, eat
- + Promotes digestion and metabolism
- + Chronic stress or childhood trauma can interfere with the bodies ability to access this nervous system state
- + We can teach the body to access more easily

This is the “brake” of our system

Autonomic Arousal is Designed to Adapt to **Brief** Environmental Demands



AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

- + Works almost exclusively out of our awareness
 - × Except for breath
- + Goal #1 – to survive
- + Goal #2 – help the body to deal with stress efficiently and run smoothly
- + Pictures





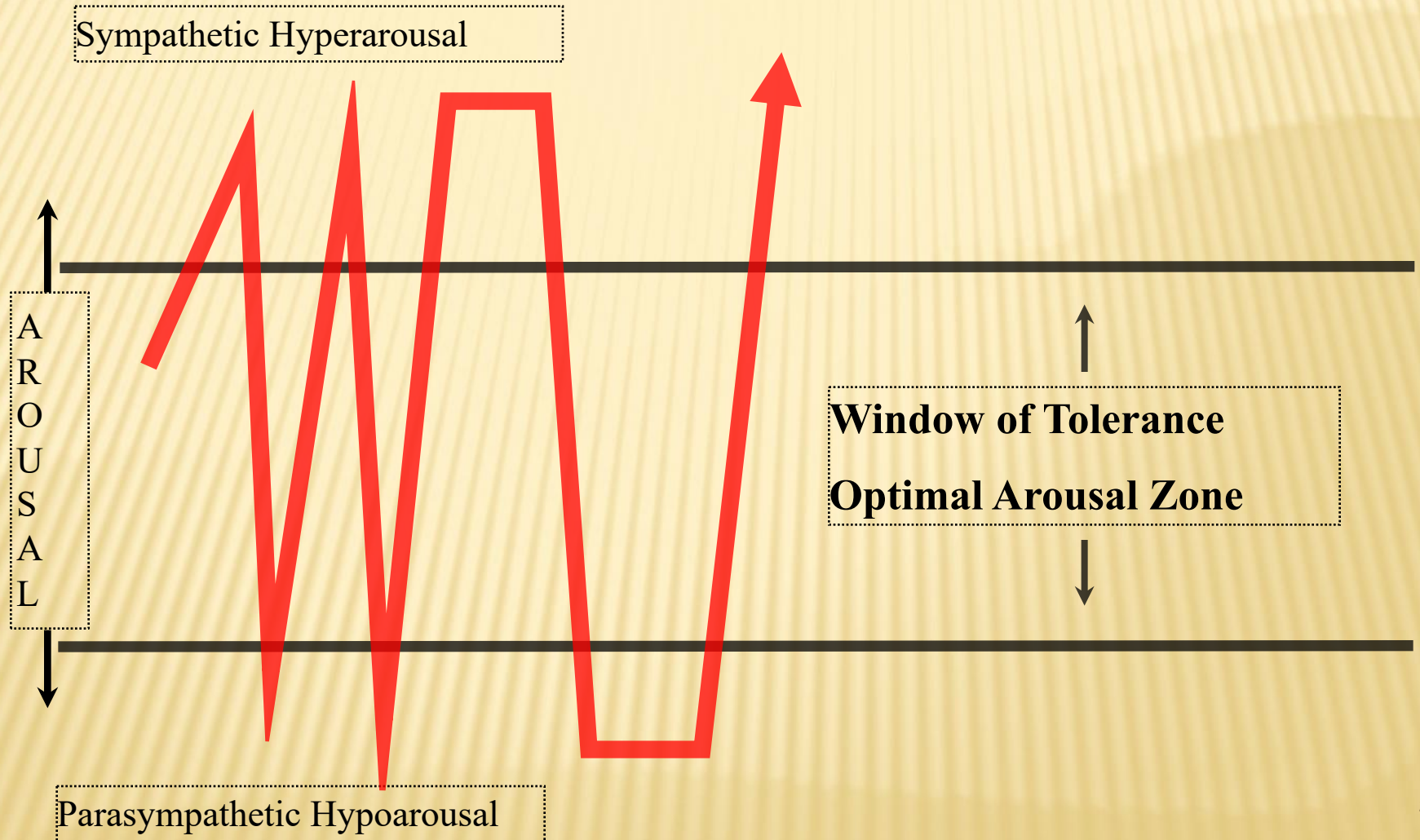
STRESS IMPACTS US PHYSIOLOGICALLY

- ✘ The physiological impact is supposed to be very short term
 - + To get us out of the situation (f/f)
 - + And then very quickly return to baseline

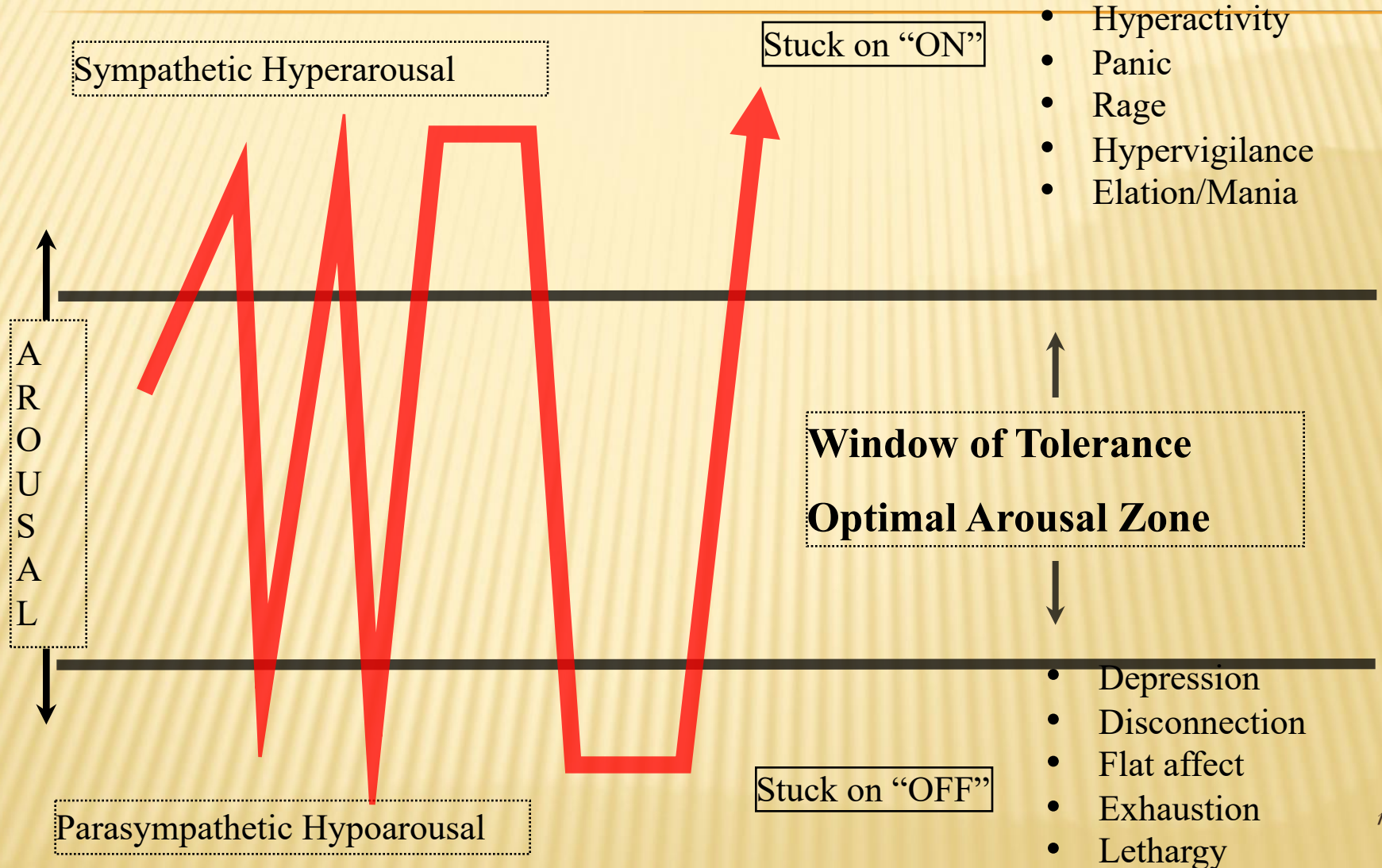


What if stress is ongoing or unrelenting or there is a history of early trauma?

Autonomic Adaptation to a Threatening World



Autonomic Adaptation to a Threatening World



STRESS IMPACTS US PHYSIOLOGICALLY

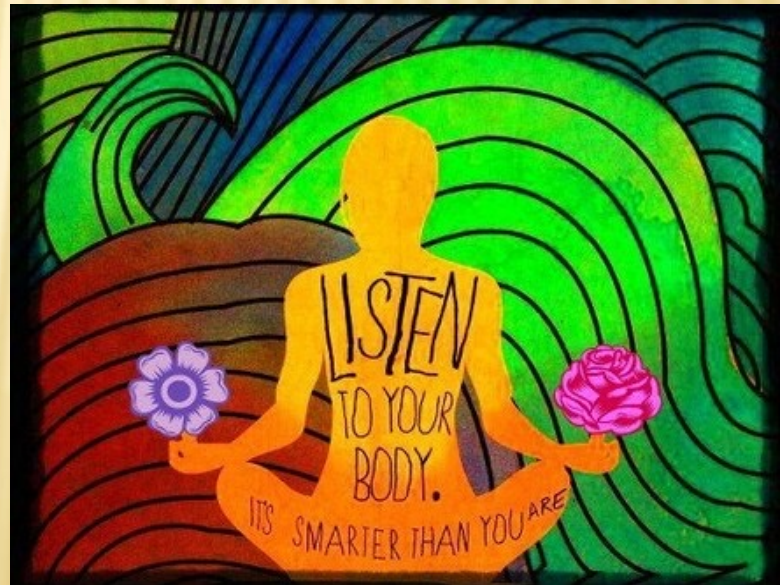
- ✘ If the stress is ongoing
 - + Creates the need for “management strategies” to reduce the distress
 - ✘ Addictions
 - + Long term it results in wear and tear on the body
 - ✘ Autoimmune disorders, cancer, heart disease, “strange” symptoms

SO – WHAT CAN BE DONE?



LEAD WITH THE BODY

- ✘ Because stress and trauma are physiological experiences
- ✘ We have to begin at the beginning –
 - + With the body



LIKE A RIVER – THINGS FLOW DOWNSTREAM

✘ Neuroception



At the top of the river is neuroception

An automatic process of scanning for danger

It happens in a split second and out of our awareness

It can be impacted or distorted by our experiences

Example

LIKE A RIVER – THINGS FLOW DOWNSTREAM

✘ Neuroception



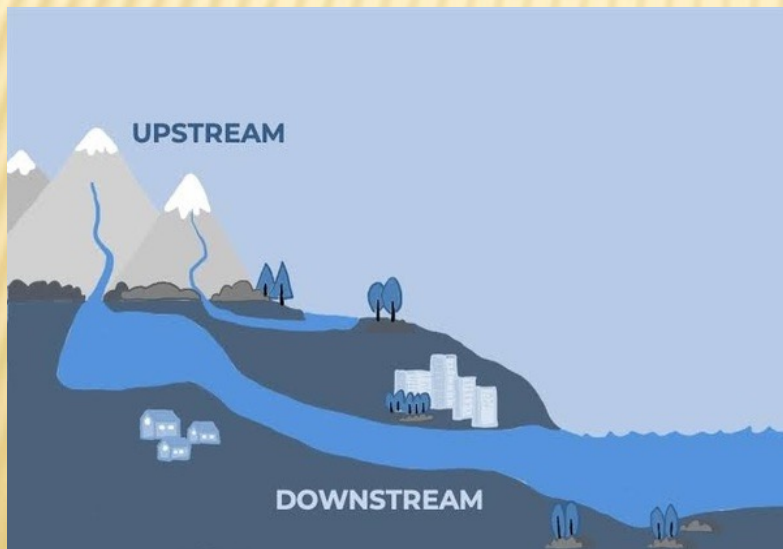
Autonomic State

Neuroception directly impacts our Autonomic state

If we sense the world to be safe – we will be in a parasympathetic state

But if we sense the world to be dangerous – we will be in a sympathetic state

Often this is out of our awareness unless the danger is obvious



LIKE A RIVER – THINGS FLOW DOWNSTREAM

✘ Neuroception



Autonomic State

Our autonomic state creates
Sensations – (constriction, hot)

This is the direct result of the
impact of adrenaline on our system



Sensations



When adrenaline leaves our
system – our body relaxes, resulting in
different sensations (opening, tingling)

LIKE A RIVER – THINGS FLOW DOWNSTREAM

✘ Neuroception



Autonomic State

Because this happens out of our awareness, we develop stories that match how we feel; we act on those stories – automatically and unconsciously

Example



Sensations

However, if we can intervene at the level of sensation and help the Nervous system to settle – we may be able to change the story and prevent the behaviors



Thoughts

Feelings

Behaviors

“FELT SENSE OR VIBES”

- ✘ Interoception – mindful body awareness
 - + Learning to become aware of sensations
- ✘ Developing interoception is our #1 treatment plan goal in somatic work.



DEVELOPING INTEROCEPTION

Starts with noticing and describing
“sensations”

Similar to noticing and describing
emotions – but remember that
sensations occur **BEFORE** emotions

**IN ORDER TO DEVELOP INTEROCEPTION –
WE MUST LEARN THE LANGUAGE OF THE
NERVOUS SYSTEM**



DEVELOPING INTEROCEPTION

Sensations are experienced as shapes, colors, texture, space, temperature, constriction, opening, etc.

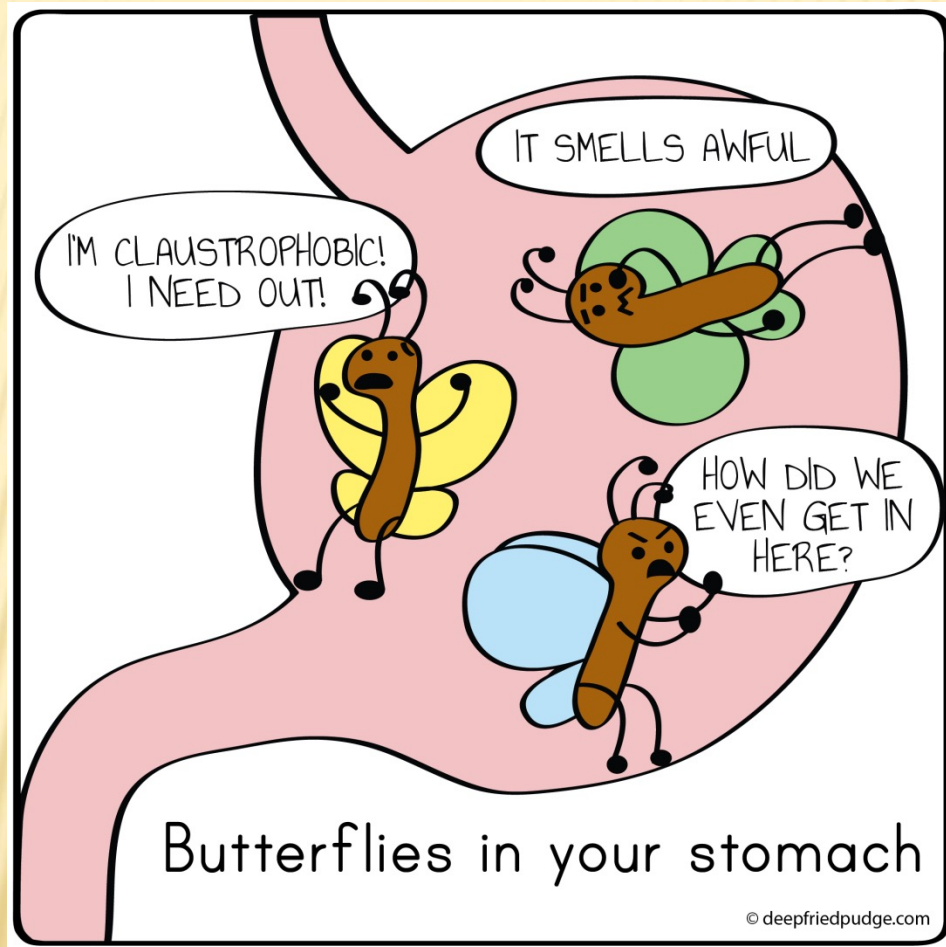
“Butterflies in my stomach”

“ Tightening in my chest”

“ Shoulders feel like they are dropping”

“Cold in my core”

We often need lots of practice at noticing and describing sensations because we are not taught to do that – lots of practice and patience



I'M CLAUSTROPHOBIC!
I NEED OUT!

IT SMELLS AWFUL

HOW DID WE
EVEN GET IN
HERE?

Butterflies in your stomach

SENSATION WORDS

- × Open
- × Firm
- × Jittery
- × Expansive
- × Loose
- × Warm
- × Hollow
- × Settled
- × Cool
- × Tight
- × Dense
- × Tender
- × Light
- × Constricted
- × Tight
- × Hot
- × Light
- × Flowing

INTERVENTION

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CAVEATS

- ✘ What follows is reasonable and safe to do with most everyone.
- ✘ However some people can become overwhelmed very quickly when bringing attention to the body
- ✘ So it is always best to seek out training and supervision in this area before doing the work.

**What
Goes
Up . . .**



**Must
Come
Down!**

SO HOW DO YOU HELP THE NERVOUS SYSTEM TO SETTLE?

- ✘ Developing interoception is our #1 treatment plan goal in somatic work.
- ✘ 3 ways to do this: Practice identifying sensations when:
 1. Things are good (a lot!)
 2. Things are slightly stressful (this won't be covered today)
 3. After a stressful event has resolved (this won't be covered today)

PRACTICE A LOT WHEN THINGS ARE GOOD



TREATING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

#1. It starts when things are good.

Paying attention to when we are **NOT** stressed.

We have a bias for noticing things that are wrong
that is often what is reinforced to our brain – “danger”

We **HAVE** to bring more awareness to feelings of calm, safe, connected.

Resourcing, resourcing resourcing

Practice

STEPS FOR NOTICING POSITIVE OR NEUTRAL SENSATIONS

- ✘ 1. Become familiar with the language and feeling of sensation.
- ✘ 2. Check in with yourself at random times when things are easy or pleasant
 - + Especially when you are with a pet, with a favorite blanket, looking at something of beauty
- ✘ 3. Ask yourself what do I notice internally?
- ✘ 4. Use a sensation (not feeling) word list to help with describing.
- ✘ 5. Watch that sensation as it “sinks in”

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

✘ Other techniques that can help you to notice pleasant or neutral sensations:

- + Find something pleasant or orderly to look at.
- + Notice your feet
- + Soft gaze
- + Lower jaw
- + Look outside

Then find the sensations! Let them sink in!

PREFERENCES ARE ANOTHER WAY TO POSITIVE OR NEUTRAL

- ✘ A preference is automatically a shift into parasympathetic
- ✘ We are often completely unaware of something that we don't prefer
- ✘ Noticing preferences
 - + Lights on or off?
 - + Seating
 - + Pillow or weight in your lap or not?

A WORD ABOUT BREATH

- ✘ “Take a deep breath” is often a suggestion to someone who is stressed
 - + However, breathing in actually increases activation slightly
 - + Breathing out decreases activation

- + “Take a slow easy breath and then blow it out slowly for just slightly longer”

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

- ✘ Your own nervous system regulation is the most important place to start – practice, practice
- ✘ In your office, have tools that can bring about positive or neutral experiences
 - + Examples: pleasant art on the walls, sensory items, pillows, blankets, pets

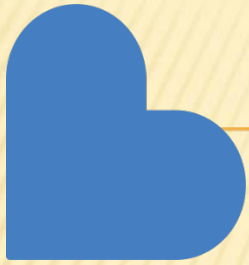
RESILIENCE AND TRAUMATIC STRESS

- ✘ Resilience is all about the nervous system
 - + Best case scenario is to have a nervous system that stays within a healthy range of arousal and settling without getting stuck in over or under-activation
 - + Our job is to teach ourselves how to notice when we are outside our window and develop tools to bring ourselves back in.
 - + And then teach our clients

#1 TAKE HOME

- ✘ Find activities, visuals, tactile things that are pleasant to you
- ✘ Practice noticing the sensations
- ✘ Then let them “sink in”
- ✘ Over and over and over

- ✘ This is an unfamiliar process for all of us
- ✘ It can be learned with training and support
- ✘ Contact us for more information about that.



HEARTSPACE CLINIC

- ✘ Nonprofit whose mission is to educate and treat trauma and stress through the body and the nervous system.
- ✘ Offer individual coaching, group trainings and practice sessions
- ✘ Email:
help@heartspaceclinic.org
- ✘ www.heartspaceclinic.org
- ✘ **Free or low cost interventions:**
 - ✘ HeartMath and Safe and Sound
 - + For Boone County residents who are children or parents of minors
 - ✘ Nervous System Resilience Sessions
 - + For anyone in the medical, mental health or educational fields

SUGGESTED READINGS

- ✘ Trauma is Really Strange – Stephen Haines
- ✘ Anxiety is Really Strange – Stephen Haines
- ✘ The Mind-Body Stress Reset – Rebekkah Ladyne
- ✘ The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy – Deb Dana