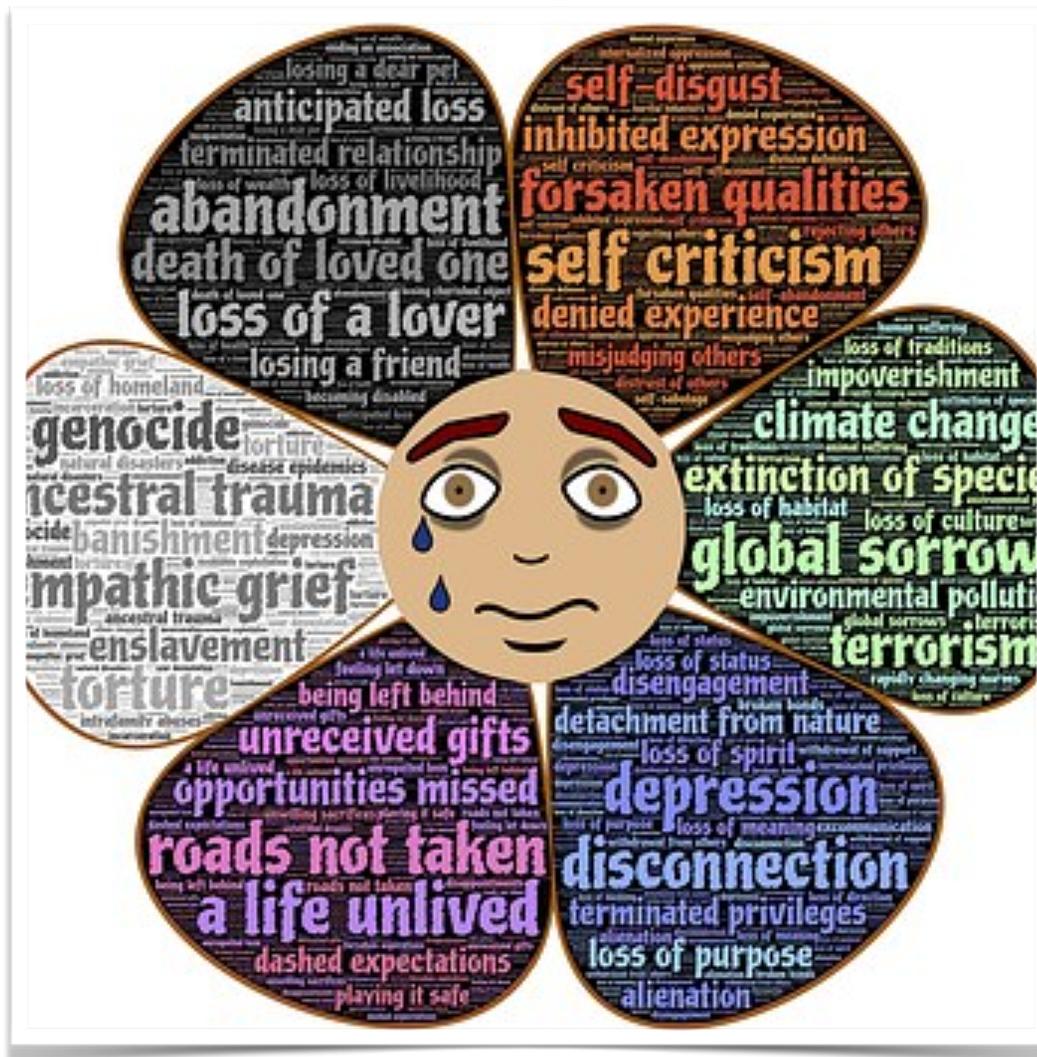




# WHAT IS TRAUMA?



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# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

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Importance of being a trauma-sensitive practitioner...

An estimated 90% of the population (US study) has been exposed to a traumatic event

8-20% will develop PTSD. Many more will struggle with traumatic stress without an “official” PTSD diagnosis

Therefore any setting where you are working with people there is a high probability that someone has a history of trauma

By recognizing symptoms you can help prevent re-traumatization

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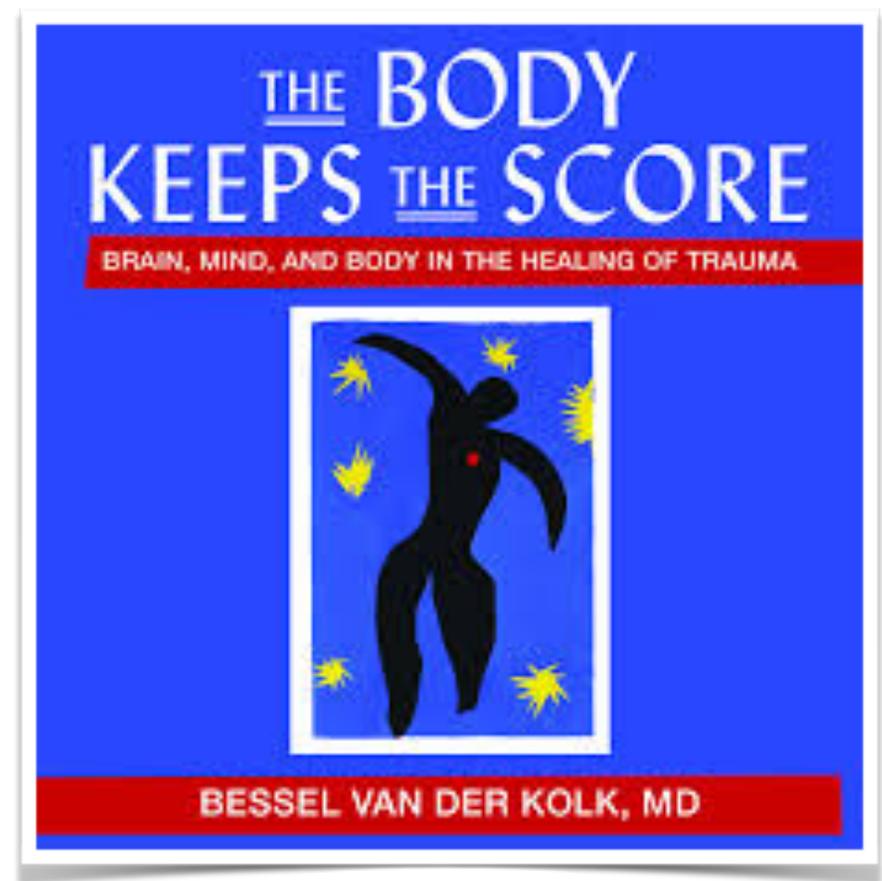
# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

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Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD -  
leading researcher in the field of  
trauma and author of:

“THE BODY KEEPS THE  
SCORE - Brain, Body and Mind  
in the Healing Of Trauma”

“Trauma is fundamentally a  
disruption in our ability to be in  
the here and now”



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# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

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Traditionally - our coping mechanisms are overwhelmed.

We often think about trauma as a shocking, horrible event and that certainly can be true.

But more often, what shows up is an accumulation of traumatic events or highly-stressful events that we haven't been able to fully metabolize to digest.

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# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

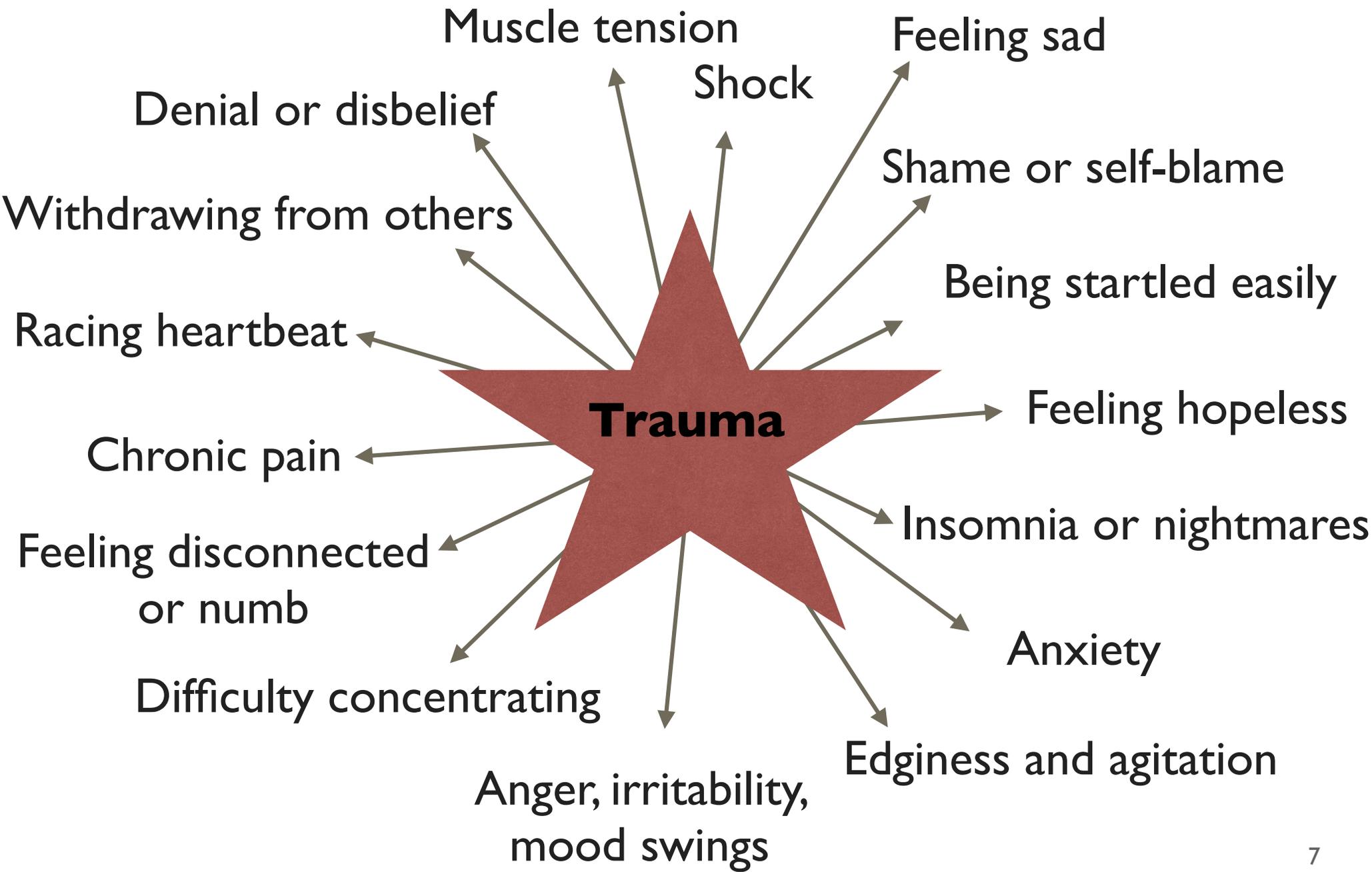
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## “Too Much Too Fast”

When we have experiences that there is ‘too much’ for to handle - it's coming too fast and I have no way of metabolizing, digesting, integrating the experience.

Causes “dis-integration” of our experiences - feel out of balance, not trusting our emotions or senses, panic attacks, anxiety, thoughts and emotions can be unpredictable or chaotic

Re-integration needs to take place somatically & emotionally, and for many of us spiritually as well.



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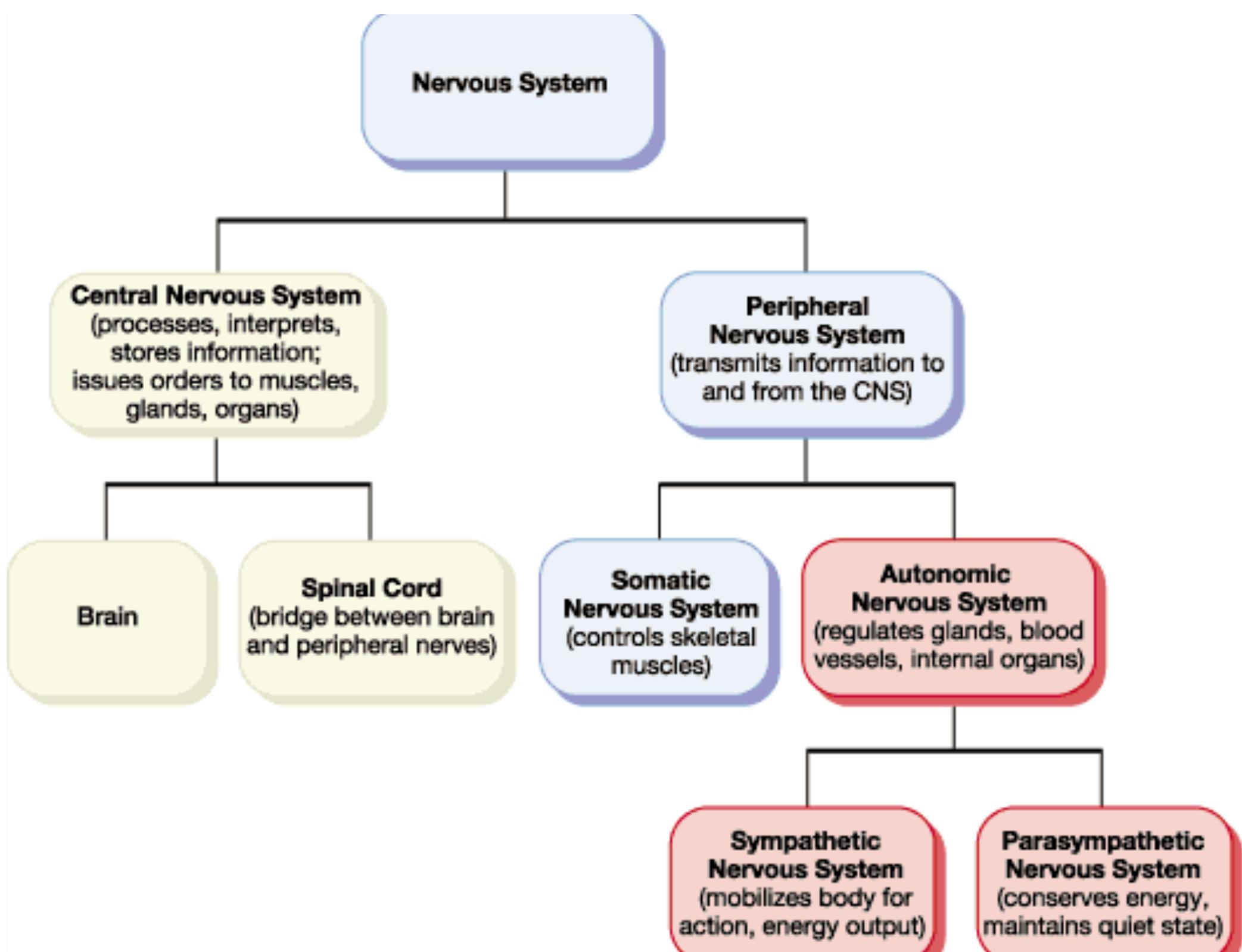
**Trauma is not the thing that  
happened to us but **the effect left  
within us** by our experiences....**

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# NERVOUS SYSTEM

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# AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

---

ANS regulates the functioning of our internal organs and many other body systems like our hormonal and endocrine systems.

Autonomic also means self-regulating and this is a key principle - depends on constant feedback in order to maintain homeostasis. There are multiple feedback loops in the body which continually send and receive information about what's going on.

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These feedback loops can be severely impaired by trauma

# PARASYMPATHETIC

## NERVOUS SYSTEM

"rest and digest" response

Constricts pupils



Increases saliva production



Decreases heart rate



Indirectly dilates blood vessels



Constricts bronchi



Decreases blood flow to skeletal muscles



Increases stomach and intestine motility, increases blood flow to GI tract, and increases digestive enzyme secretion



No involvement



No involvement



Contracts bladder



# SYMPATHETIC

## NERVOUS SYSTEM

"fight or flight" response

Dilates pupils to enhance far vision



Decreases saliva production



Increases heart rate



Constricts blood vessels, increases blood pressure



Dilates bronchi to allow more air into lungs



Increases blood flow to skeletal muscles



Reduces stomach and intestine motility, diverts blood flow away from GI tract, and reduces digestive enzyme secretion



Release glucose to increase blood sugar



Stimulate adrenal glands to secrete stress hormones



Relaxes bladder



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# PARASYMPATHETIC- SYMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIP

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- The sympathetic nervous system is like the gas pedal for our nervous system. It gives us energy for any action we plan, and will help us respond to stress and threat.

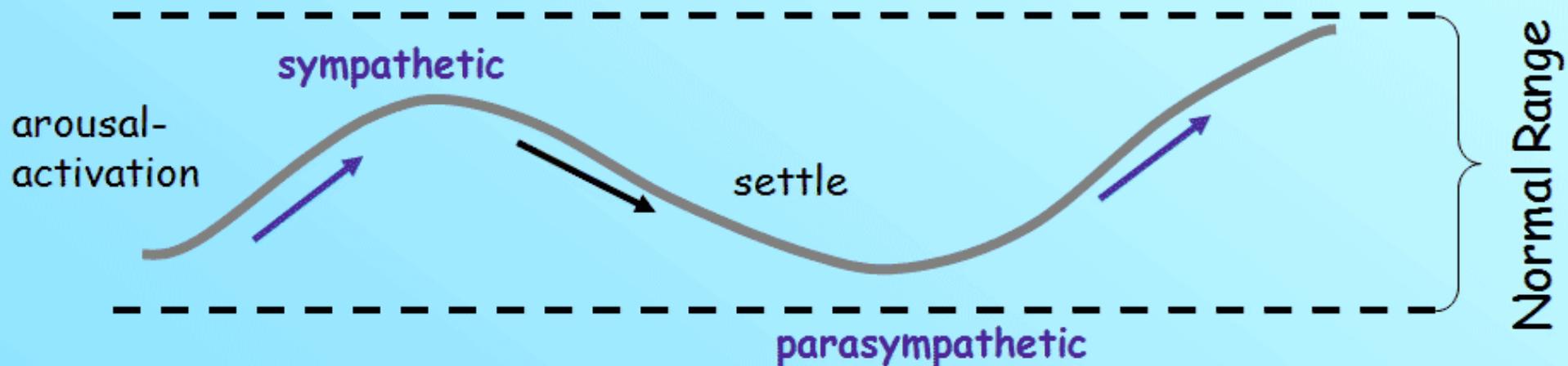
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# PARASYMPATHETIC- SYMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIP

---

- The sympathetic nervous system is like the gas pedal for our nervous system. It gives us energy for any action we plan, and will help us respond to stress and threat.
- The parasympathetic nervous system acts like the brake pedal for our nervous system.

# A Healthy Nervous System



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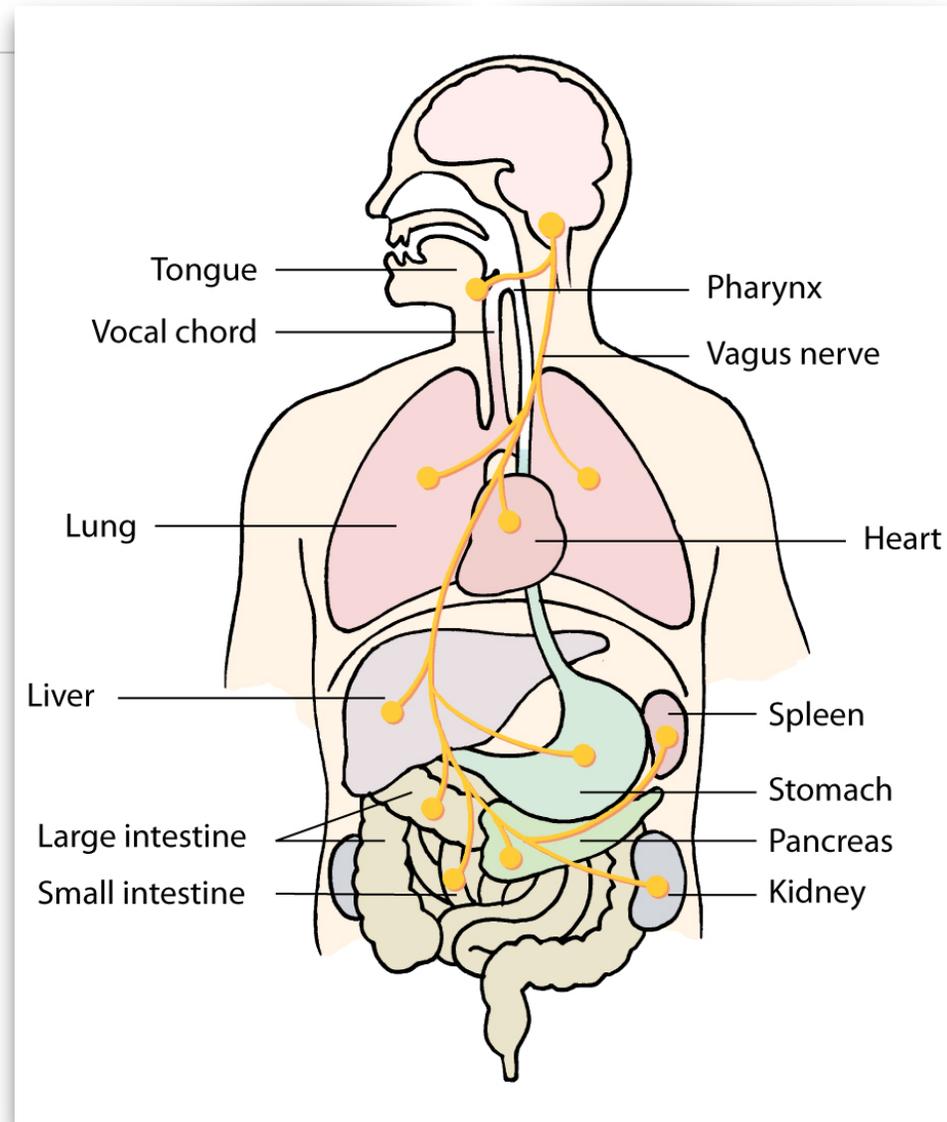
# PARASYMPATHETIC- SYMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIP

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- The parasympathetic nervous system acts like the brake pedal for our nervous system. It has 2 branches:
  - The Ventral Vagal Complex: helps us to relax, unwind and ultimately discharge the arousal of sympathetic activation
  - The Dorsal Vagal Complex: controls the freeze response that can happen during traumatic events.

# VAGUS NERVE

- The vagus nerve ('wandering' from Latin) starts in our brain and winds through many important organs.
- Primary component of the parasympathetic nervous system
- Two branches:
  - Dorsal (old vagus) dates from the reptilian era - freeze under threat
  - Ventral (new vagus) is a newer branch and helps us to interact socially and regulate our emotions



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# POLYVAGAL THEORY

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Safe → Social Engagement

Danger → Fight/ Flight

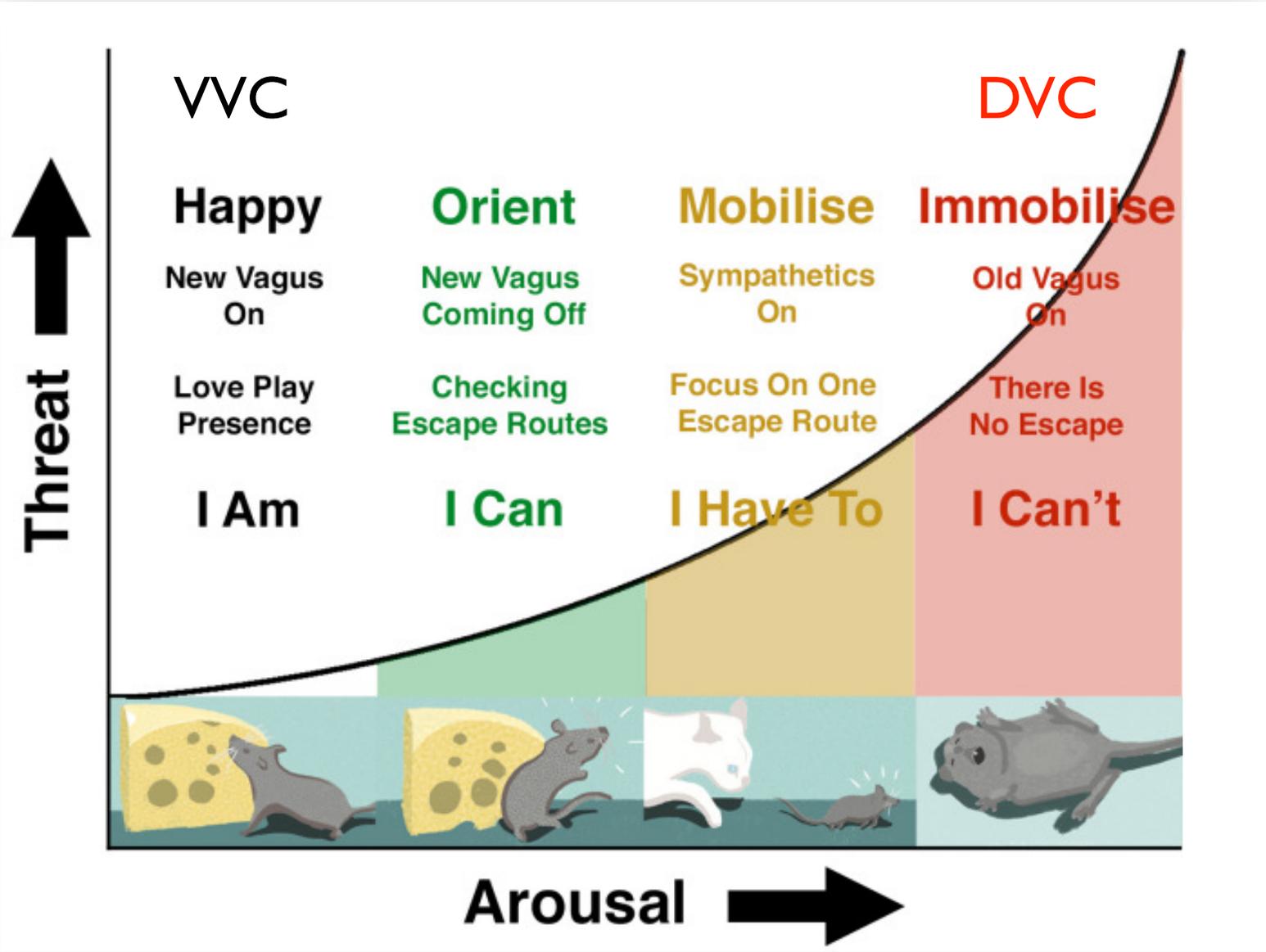
Life threat → Shutdown/ Freeze

Ventral Vagal  
(VVC)

Sympathetic  
(SNS)

Dorsal Vagal  
(DVC)

# POLYVAGAL THEORY



# Living Within The Window of Tolerance: The Different Zones of Arousal

## HYPERAROUSAL ZONE

Sympathetic "Fight or Flight Response"  
(Too much arousal)



Signs of being here:

- Tension, shaking
- Emotional reactivity
- Defensiveness
- Racing thoughts
- Flashbacks
- Emotional overwhelm
- Feeling unsafe
- Hyper-vigilance

## OPTIMAL AROUSAL ZONE

Ventral Vagal "Window of Tolerance"



Signs of being here:

- Feel & think simultaneously
- Experience empathy
- Feelings are tolerable
- Present moment awareness
- Awareness of boundaries
- Feel safe
- Feel open & curious

## HYPOAROUSAL ZONE

Parasympathetic "Immobilization Response"  
(Too little arousal)

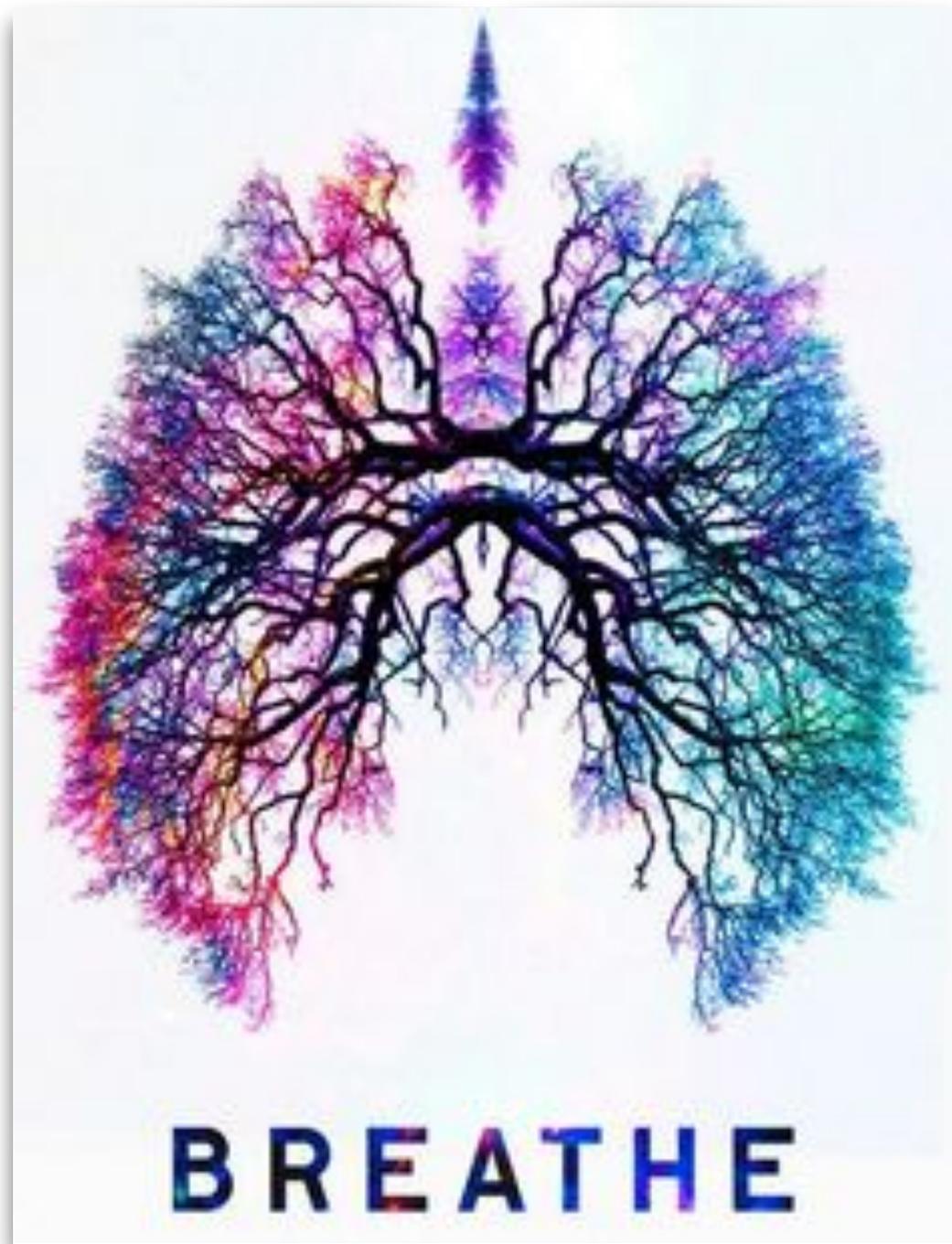


Signs of being here:

- Relative absence of sensations
- No energy
- Can't think
- Emotions are numb
- Disconnected
- Ashamed
- Shut down
- Can't say no

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The window of tolerance is a zone where our nervous system experiences CARE (calmness, alertness, relaxed, engaged). When we are in our window of tolerance, we feel centered and balanced.



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# “TUNING” OF OUR SYSTEM

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Some people easily move between parasympathetic-sympathetic and that's what we want.

Each state gets “tuned” - our nervous system is a learning system based on use. The nervous system will become “tuned” to respond more with ventral vagal (social engagement), sympathetic (fight/flight), or dorsal vagal (freeze) when faced with stressful or threatening situations.

This tuning indicates a loss of regulatory flow between SNS and PNS.

With each new stressor a feedback loop is created which further entrenches the stress response.

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# TRAUMA & ANS DYSREGULATION

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- Trauma symptoms arise when the normal regulatory flow between the PNS & SNS (brake/gas pedal) is interrupted.
- Nervous system becomes over-activated when there is too much or too fast activation
- Fight/Flight/Freeze are all automatic survival responses
- Like a car driven with both brake and gas pedals fully engaged - resilience and ability to cope with new stressors is greatly compromised.

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# TRAUMA & ANS DYSREGULATION

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When the nervous system becomes “DYSREGULATED” for prolonged periods of time it leads to 1 of 3 things:

A) Being stuck “ON” - scattered, chaotic, anxious, can’t focus, hypersensitive

B) Being stuck “OFF” - rigid, shut down, brain fog, spaced out, no motivation, lethargic

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# TRAUMA & ANS DYSREGULATION

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C) BOTH

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# TRAUMA & ANS DYSREGULATION

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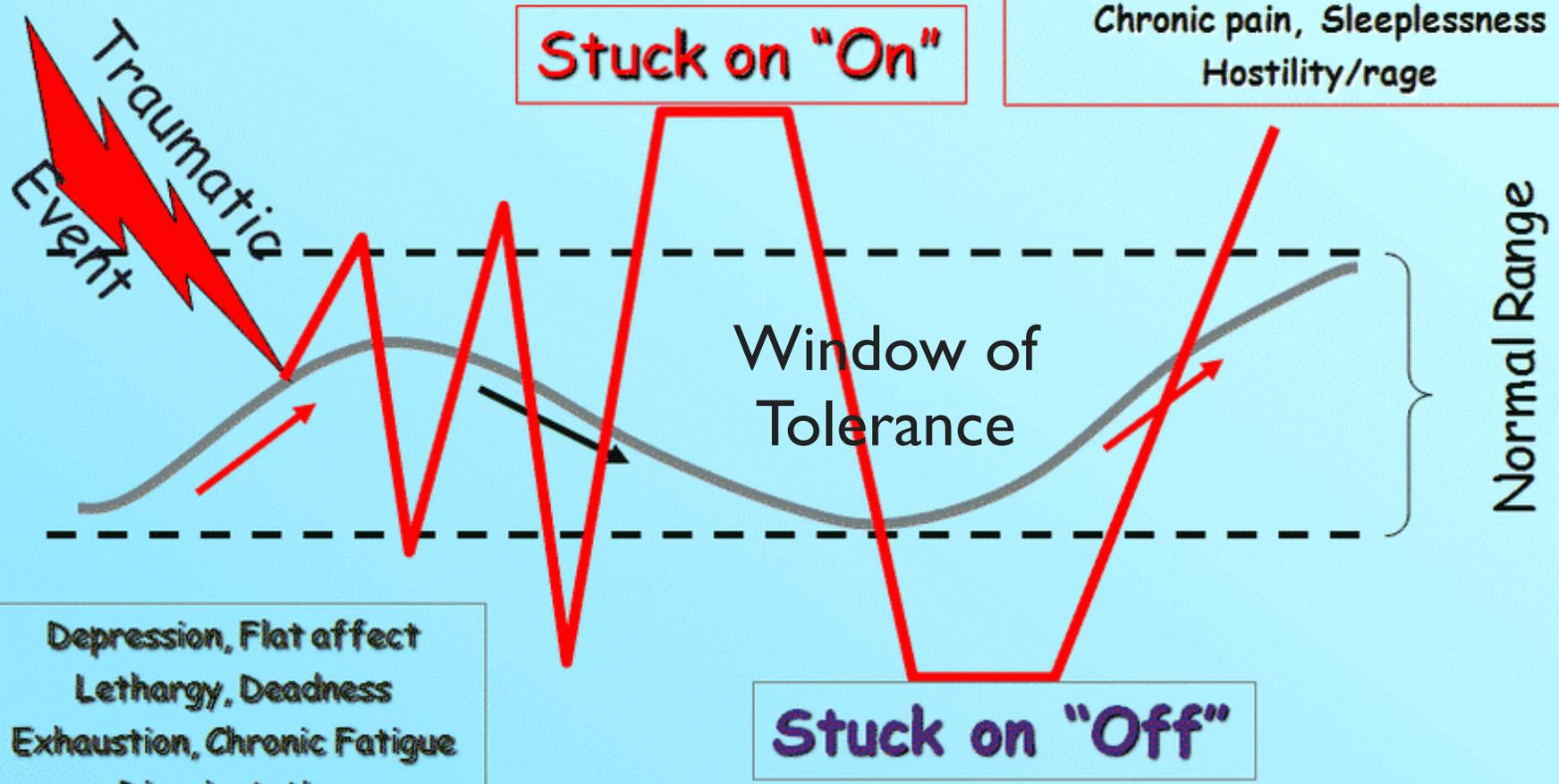
Unresolved trauma - we stay in freeze - AKA a “FUNCTIONAL  
FREEZE” state

We are “FUNCTIONING”, but also have internal systems stuck in  
conservation mode - low oxygen & low metabolism

It takes a lot of energy to stay stuck even though we are,  
paradoxically, SHUTDOWN AND FROZEN

# Symptoms of Un-Discharged Traumatic Stress

Anxiety, Panic, Hyperactivity  
Exaggerated Startle  
Inability to relax, Restlessness  
Hyper-vigilance, Digestive problems  
Emotional flooding  
Chronic pain, Sleeplessness  
Hostility/rage



Depression, Flat affect  
Lethargy, Deadness  
Exhaustion, Chronic Fatigue  
Disorientation  
Disconnection, Dissociation  
Complex syndromes, Pain  
Low Blood Pressure  
Poor digestion

## Peter Levine, PhD

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Traumatic symptoms are not caused by the “triggering” event itself. They stem from the frozen residue of energy that had not been resolved or discharged; this residue remains trapped in the nervous system where it can wreck havoc on our bodies and spirits.

From *Waking the Tiger*

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# COMMON SIGNS OF ANS DYSREGULATION

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- migraine headaches
- vertigo
- rapid heart rate
- heart arrhythmias, POTS (rapid heartbeat and fainting)
- chronic pain
- fibromyalgia
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)
- asthma
- autoimmune diseases

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THE END.....

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