

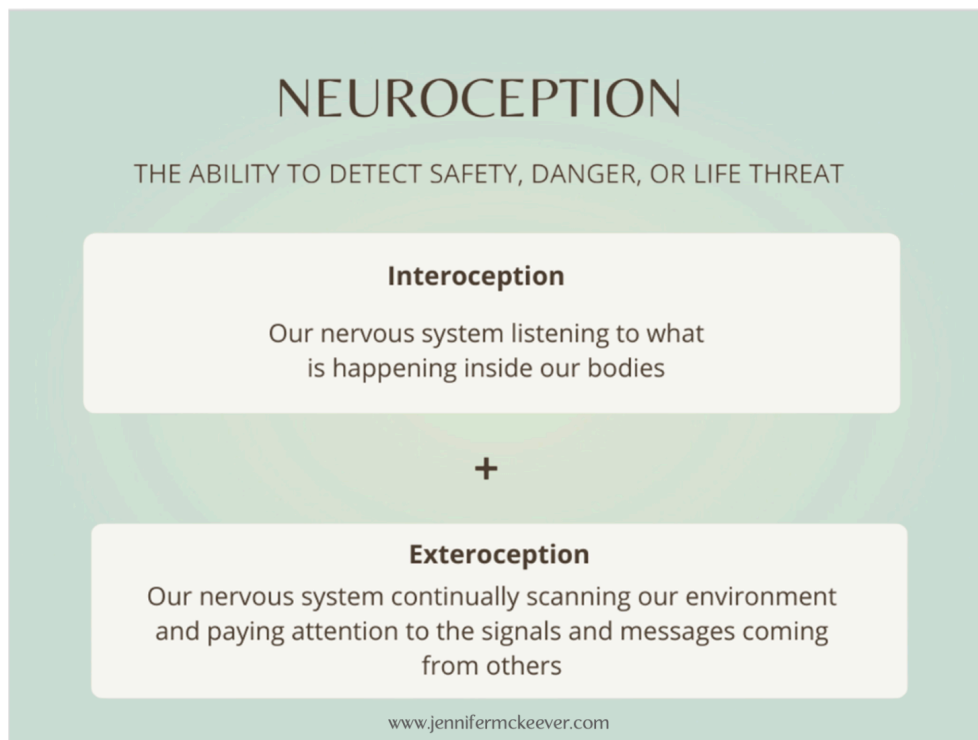
# Welcome to The Vagus Nerve & Healing Trauma

## Part 2 of a 3-Part Video Training

In Part 2 of this series, we take a close look at the **Polyvagal Theory**.

### Neuroception (Safety Detection System)

We began with the critical concept of “**neuroception**.” Neuroception is a subconscious, automatic process through which our nervous system detects and evaluates **cues of safety, danger, or threat** via **interoception** and **exteroception**.



Neuroception is your body’s built-in system for detecting safety or danger, without you even thinking about it. It works through your autonomic nervous system (ANS), which includes the **sympathetic branch** (activates fight-or-flight) and the **parasympathetic branch** (supports rest and digestion).

Your nervous system is always scanning your environment. It looks for signs of safety or threat, like facial expressions, tone of voice, and your surroundings, through a process called **exteroception** (sensing the outside world).

**When someone has experienced trauma**, this system can get thrown off. Their system might signal danger where there isn't any, making it hard to relax or feel safe. This can lead to **hypervigilance**, anxiety, and reacting strongly to neutral situations.

## Interoception (Listening to the Inside)

Interoception is your body's way of sensing what's going on **inside**, like your heartbeat, breathing, digestion, or muscle tension. Most of this happens automatically, but you can also become aware of it, like noticing butterflies in your stomach or feeling thirsty.

Your brain uses these inner signals to help you **understand your emotions**. People with strong interoception are better at recognizing how they feel (e.g., sad, angry, excited) and can manage their emotions in healthier ways.

**Trauma can disconnect people from their body's internal signals**, making it harder to know when they're tired, hungry, overwhelmed, or need comfort. Long-term trauma (like neglect or abuse) can dull this internal awareness.

Improving interoception helps people **feel more connected to their body**, which supports emotional regulation, better relationships, and overall well-being.

## Polyvagal Theory (How the Nervous System Reacts)

The Polyvagal Theory helps explain how your **nervous system responds to safety or danger**. It focuses on the **vagus nerve**, a crucial component of the parasympathetic nervous system.

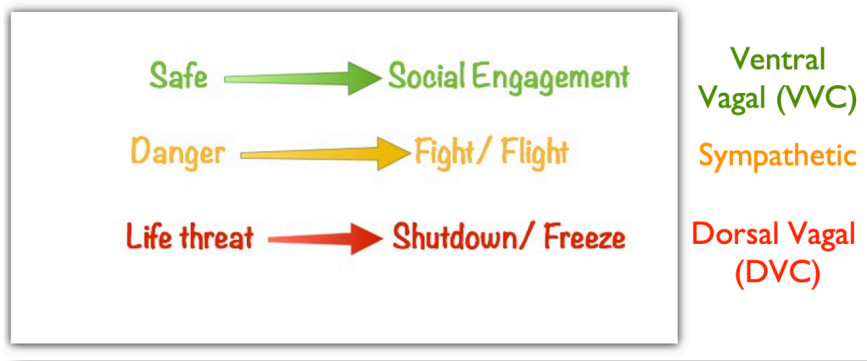
Understanding Polyvagal Theory helps us make sense of why we sometimes feel anxious, shut down, or socially open, and how we can support our nervous system to feel more regulated and safe.

This theory shows how your body can shift between different states:

**Feeling safe and connected** (social engagement)

**Feeling threatened** (fight-or-flight)

**Shutting down** (freeze or collapse)



**Dorsal Vagal (Shutdown & Rest):** This is the oldest part of the vagus nerve, dating back to early vertebrate life.

- When **high-tone dorsal vagal** is activated, the body may **shut down or collapse**—you might feel numb, frozen, or disconnected.
- When **low-tone dorsal vagal** is active in a healthy way, it supports **deep rest, digestion, and recovery**.

**Sympathetic (Mobilization & Action):** This part of the nervous system prepares you for action.

- It **increases heart rate, blood flow, and energy**, helping you respond to stress, danger, or challenges.
- It's what powers the **fight-or-flight** response and keeps you moving and alert when needed

**Ventral Vagal (Safety & Connection):** This is the newest and most evolved part of the vagal system.

- When **ventral vagal** is active, you feel **safe, calm, and socially connected**.
- It helps you engage with others and shows up through **eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice**.
- This state supports **relational warmth, presence, and regulation**.

## Window of Tolerance

This video ends with an introduction to the Window of Tolerance model:

# Window of Tolerance

## Hyperarousal ~ High Sympathetic Influence

- Anxiety
- Panic
- Fear
- Hypervigilance
- Defensive
- Angry
- Overwhelmed
- Body wants to run or fight
- Faster breathing, heart rate increases

*Dysregulation Zone: Irritable, anxious, agitated, uncomfortable*

## Window of Tolerance - Enough Ventral Vagal Influence

- Calm, but not tired
- Feeling present and in control
- Able to function & communicate effectively
- Intense emotional arousal can be processed in a healthy way
- Have the ability to self-soothe and self-regulate

*Dysregulation Zone: Start shutting down, uncomfortable, poor concentration*

## Hypoarousal ~ High Dorsal Vagal Influence

- Numbness
- No feelings
- Lack of energy
- Feeling frozen
- Spacey
- Body wants to shut down
- Inability to think or respond
- Reduced physical movement
- Ashamed

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When we are within our window of tolerance, there is enough ventral vagal influence, allowing us to be present in our experience, sense our body and feelings, and self-regulate.

**Dysregulation** manifests when we begin to exceed our window of tolerance and move into **hyperarousal** or **hypoarousal**. When we move to the edges of our window of tolerance (into the “**dysregulation zone**”), our body's defences kick in, triggering symptoms like **heightened agitation, feeling uncomfortable, poor concentration**, or the **urge to shut down**. These symptoms mark the onset of the fight, flight, or freeze responses.

And finally, be sure to check out the *Window of Tolerance Checklist* - it's a great tool for building more nervous system capacity and awareness!

See you in the third video!

Be well,

Jennifer



Jennifer McKeever

*From Trauma to Trust*