

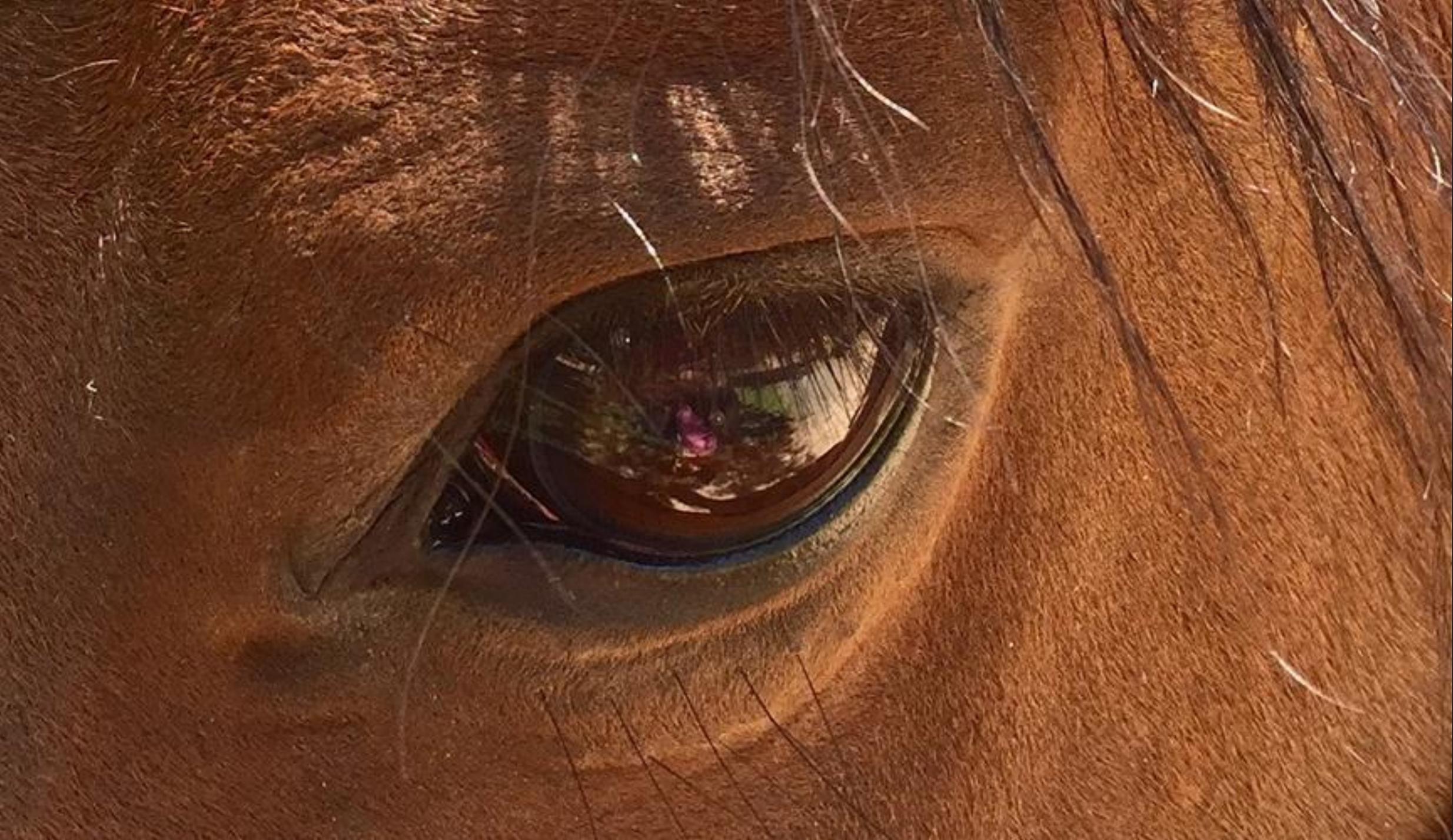
INTIMACY FROM THE INSIDE OUT

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS
SYSTEM AND
CO-REGULATION

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BASIC TRAINING: MODULE 8





Why the autonomic nervous system (ANS) in couple therapy?

The ANS signals
“first responding”
Protectors

Emotion is
contagious as is the
activation of the ANS.
This is relevant to
the therapeutic
relationship as well
as a couple’s level
of activation

When we
have a greater
understanding of
the ANS we can
intervene accordingly

Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)

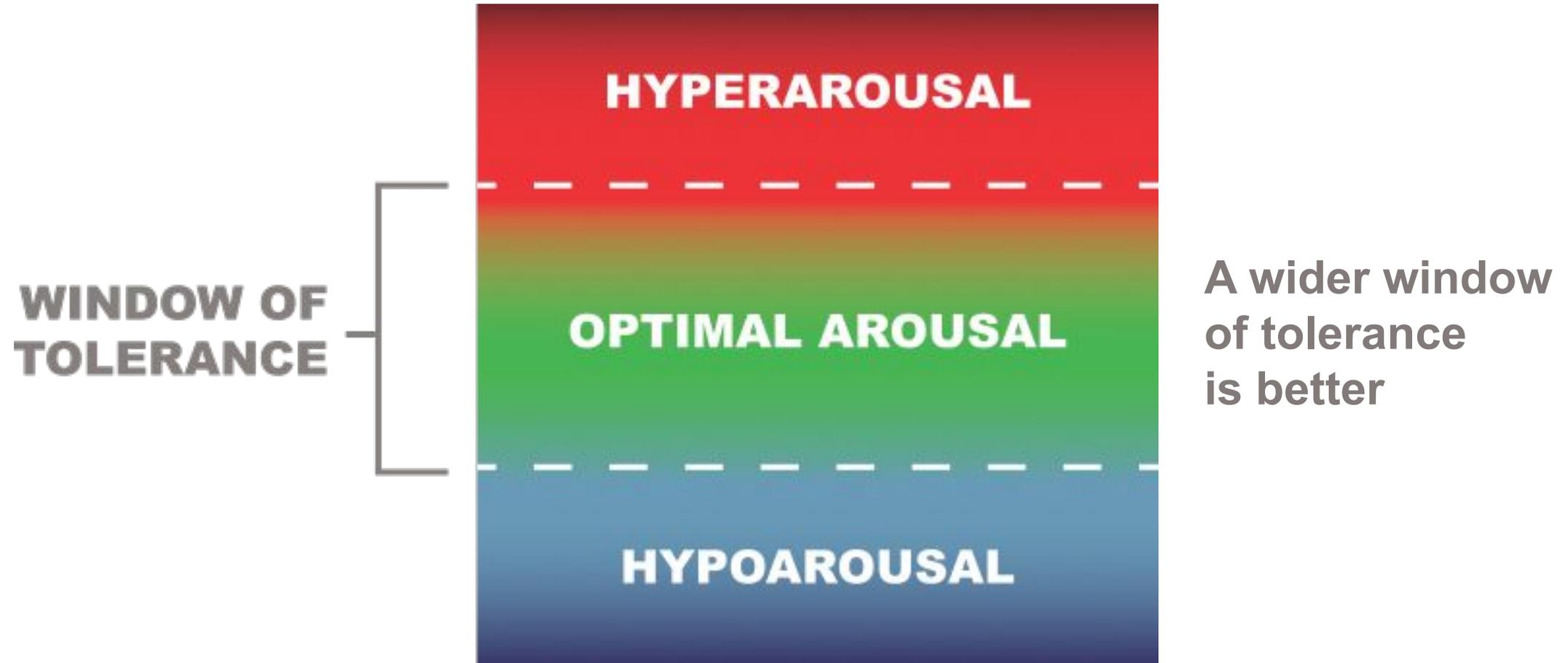
MOBILIZE: Fight or flight, high emotion, high sensation.
In IFS we see these as a set of threatened Protectors

Regulated

Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

IMMOBILIZE: Shut down, freeze, withdraw.
In IFS we see these as a set of threatened Protectors
“When all else fails”

Arousal: Window of tolerance



Interventions

TOP DOWN

**FOR SOMEONE STUCK IN A
SYMPATHETIC RESPONSE:**

DANGER • DANGER • DANGER

- Meet them on a cognitive level first
Match their energy
- Validate their experience, make sense of history, help them put feelings into words. Move from the cognitive to feelings and then to sensation.
- Direct access

BOTTOM UP

**FOR SOMEONE STUCK IN A
PARASYMPATHETIC
RESPONSE:**

LIFE THREATENING

- Begin gently and with the body
- Eye contact
- Lots of time and space
- Direct access

> Social animals seek safety

> What we experience, real or perceived, affects the ANS

> The fluctuations of the ANS affect the body, the mind and behavior
this is the body's brilliant response to challenge

The Polyvagal Theory

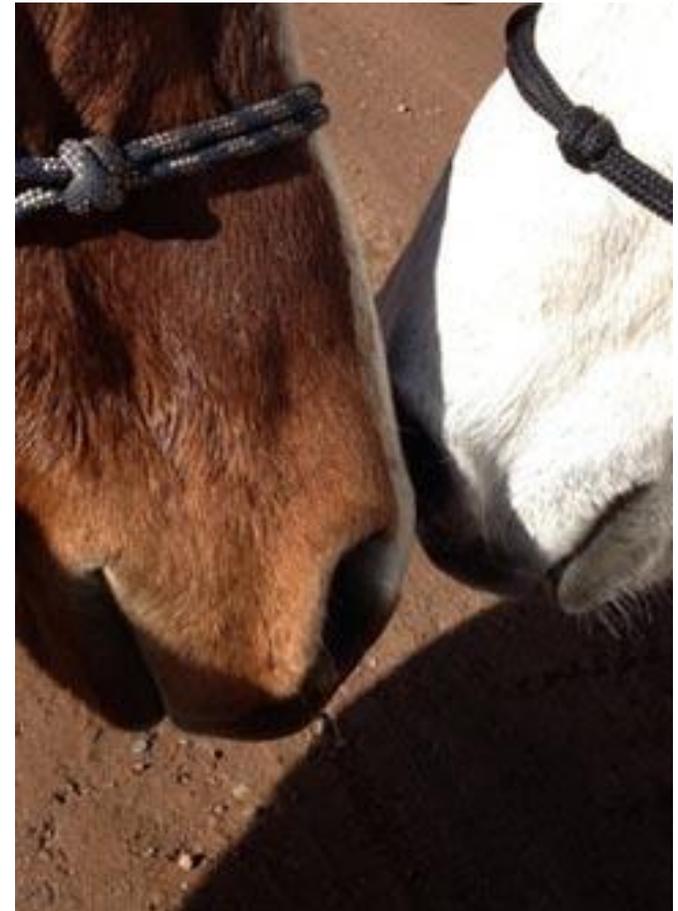
—STEPHEN PORGES

The theory suggest 2 branches of the PNS

1. The dorsal vagal branch (most primitive)

2. The ventral vagal branch

- Most readily accessed with eye contact, gaze, voice tone, pace and rhythm of speech, safe touch
- The body's natural ability to calm and regulate
- It quiets protective responses so we can move from habitual patterns of protection to connected responses



Are Self-energy and Ventral Vagus Activation the Same?





Neuroception

Detection without
conscious awareness

Misattuned Neuroception

- A look, a critical statement, misattuned interactions can evoke a sense of unsafety
- It takes the amygdala, a core part of our fear circuitry, 100 milliseconds to process an event. The incident has been processed and reprocessed by Exiles and Protectors long before it registers in conscious awareness.
- This activates implicit memory and triggers childhood patterns of coping
- The stories of protectors becomes the “truth”
- Explicit memory goes offline

**> Heartfelt connection is lost.
The ability to negotiate or
validate Self or other based
on present day circumstances
is impossible.**





Protector Interactions Signal the ANS

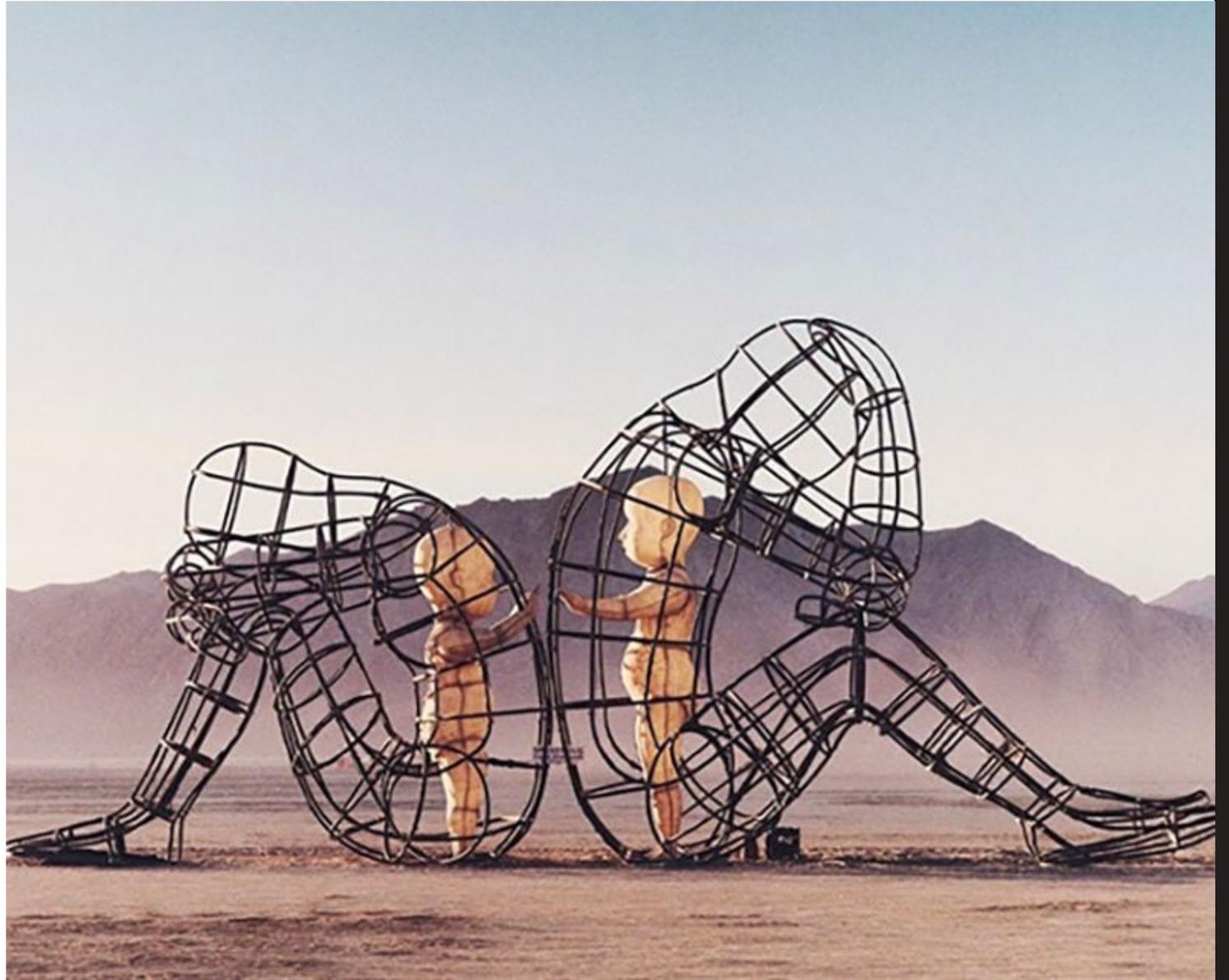
Once the **old brain is triggered**,
memory about the **current event is lost**

ANS operates as though **danger is real**
and present

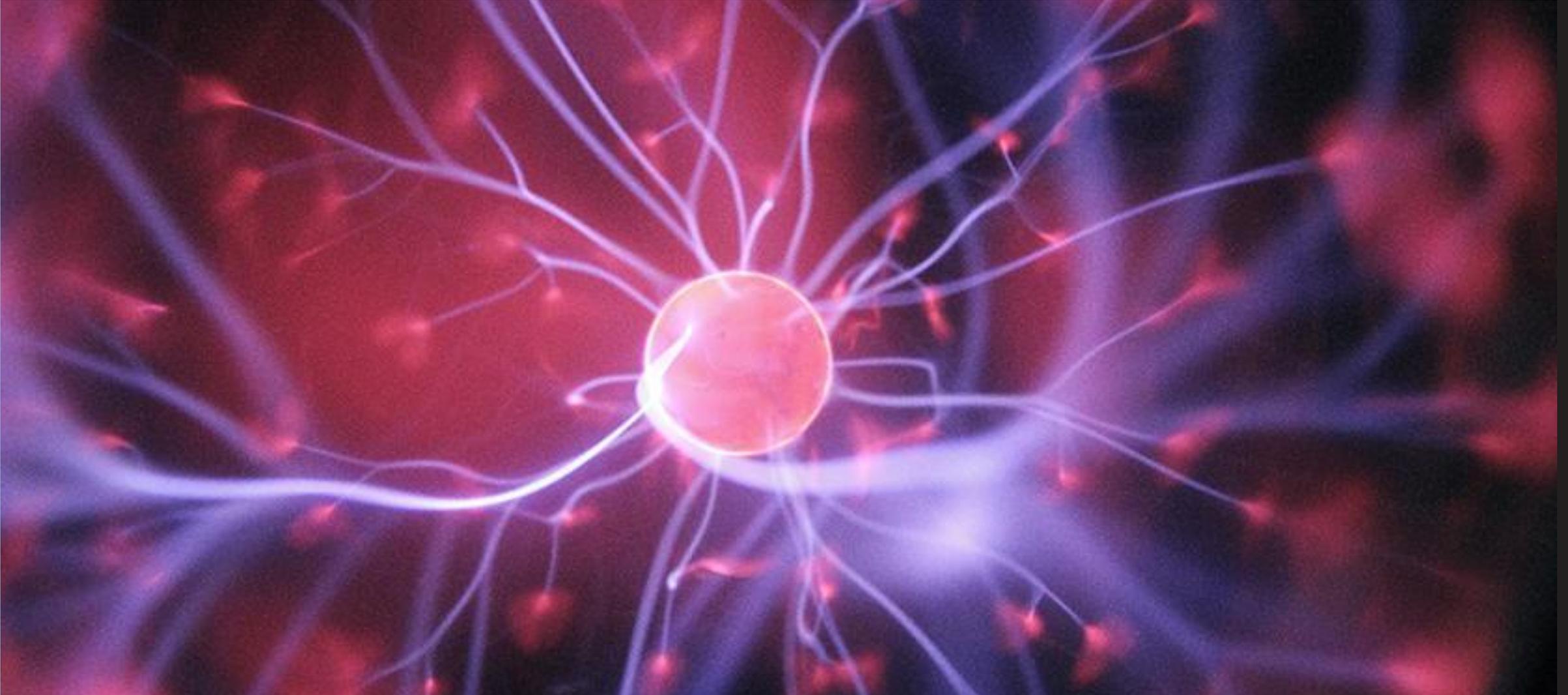
The choice to **respond** instead of **react**
is limited

When **Exiles** resonate with **Exiles** (without the Self or the pre-frontal cortex available) their sense of fear and isolation increases.

Protectors then become more frantic and take more action. **Exiles** are further exiled. This causes a destructive looping inside and out.

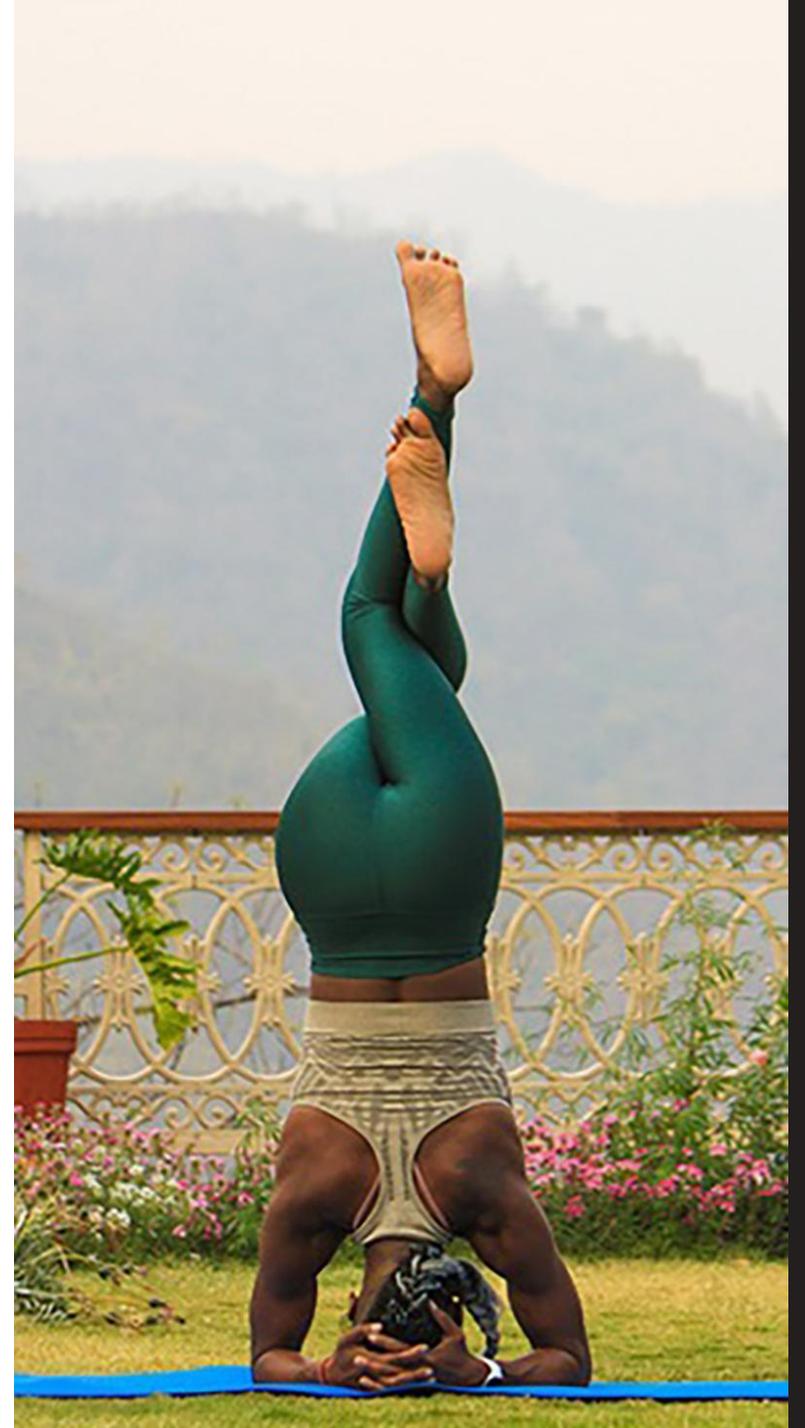


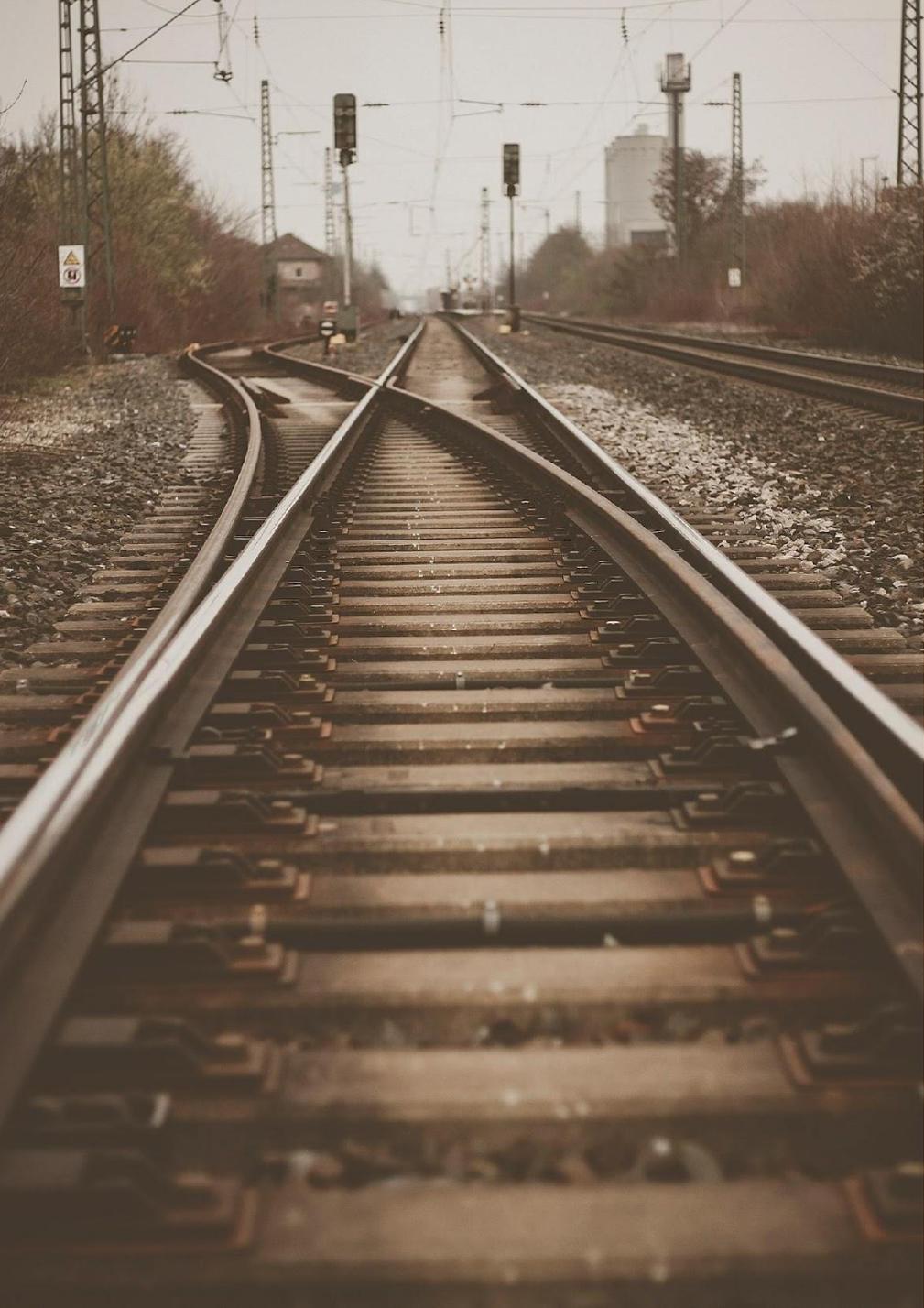
> When we are chronically disconnected, we carry distress in the ANS (as well as other structures in the brain)



Our Goal is a Flexible Nervous System

- We can learn to map our nervous system. And we can learn to understand its fluctuations without being taken over by it.
- We can help re-shape a nervous system that is on chronic alert.





The Path

- > Unblend to affect regulation
- > Expand the window of tolerance
- > Shift patterns of reactivity

How?

Self-regulation (IFS)

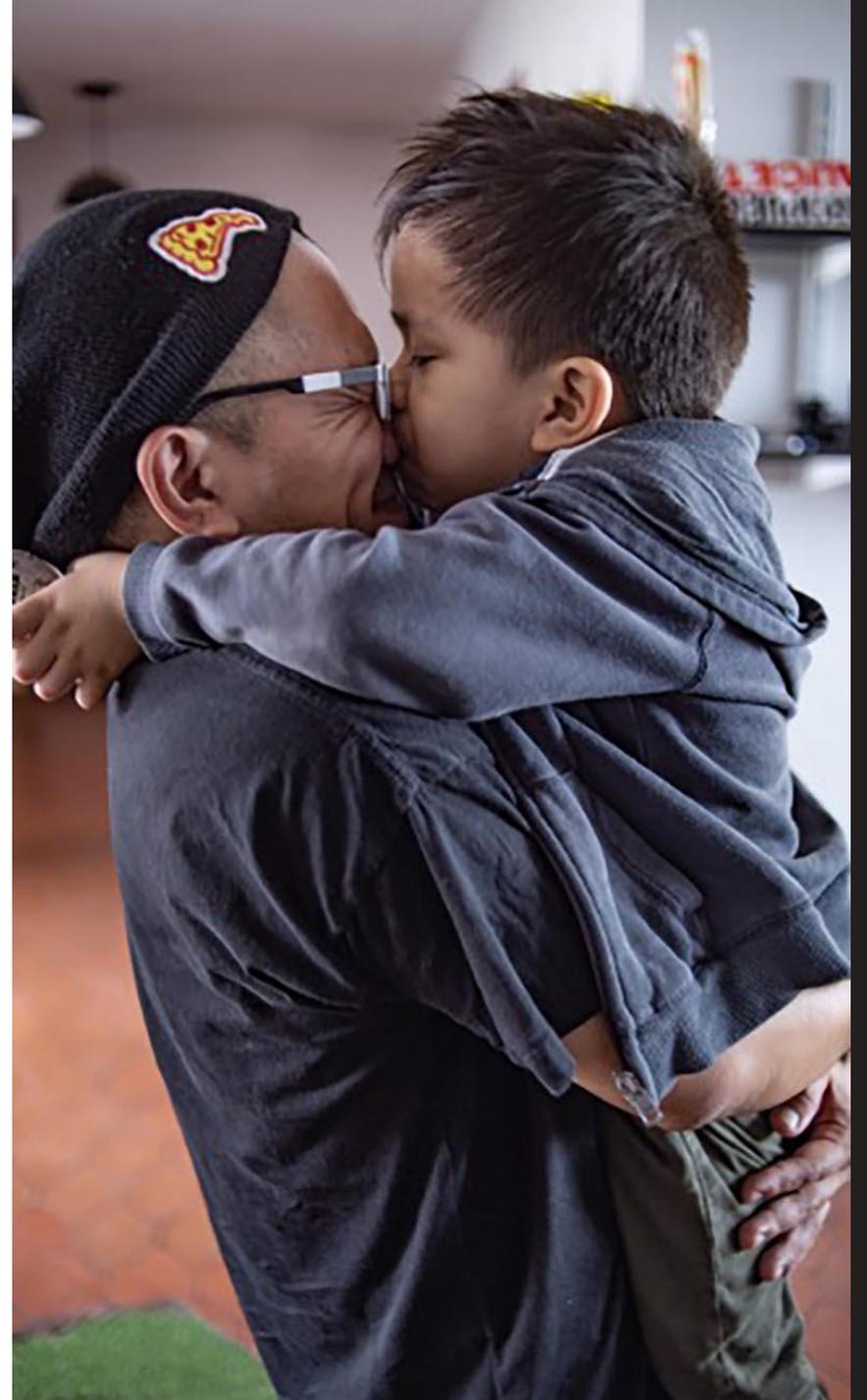
Co-regulation

Self to Self, Self to Part in
relationship





**Human beings
instinctively
turn toward
each other
seeking
connection**



Ventral Vagus Activation IN COUPLE THERAPY

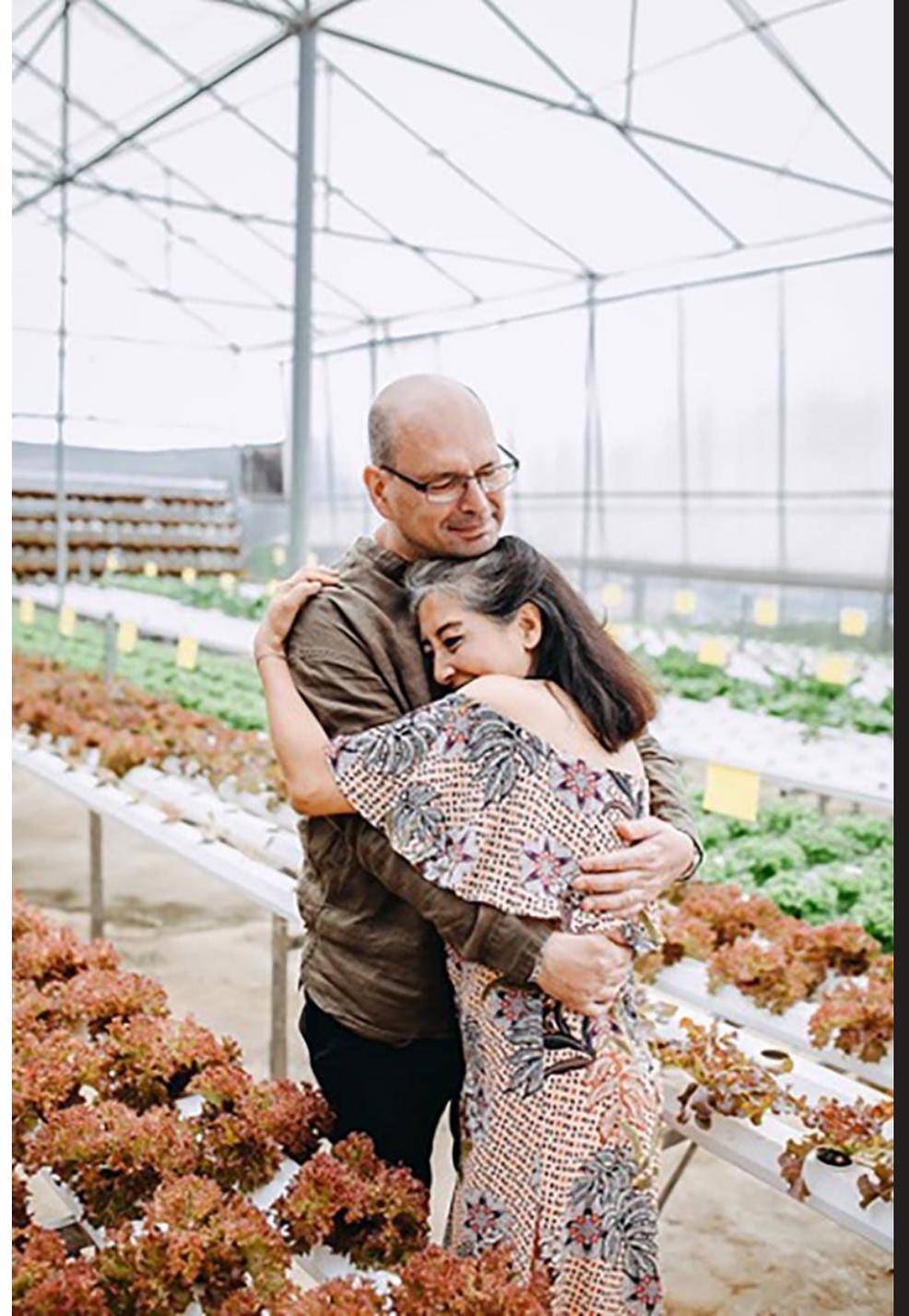


When accessed, human beings can offer each other:

- Agenda-less attention
- Receptivity
- A sense of being safely connected
- Reciprocity and repair
- Safe touch

Co-Regulation

- A process between two social animals in which there becomes an oscillating pattern of emotion that maintains an optimal state of regulation
- A communication between two nervous systems
- ANS states are contagious
- Self and the activation of Parts are contagious
- **We can help each other**



How Can We Support Partners?



Good IFIO Therapy:

- Education
- Unblending
- Courageous Communication
- Play
- Eye contact
- Safe touch
- Reciprocity and repair



**Intimacy**
from the
Inside Out®

ToniHerbineBlank.com

