

# Using Stress as Force to Transform: Stress-management with Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)<sup>1</sup>



Picture: Lidia Moor, iStock



Picture: Shutter2U, iStock

## Workbook

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<sup>1</sup> This in hand working book is based on the „Stress Reducation Programm“, which is developed by Prof. Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn and his team at the „Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society“ in the medical faculty of the university of Massachusetts in Worcester, MA USA. It refers to the course book from: Woodward, B.: 2019: Course Workbook Mindfulness MBSR, Mindful Academy Solterreno.

## Arriving at your own Door

**It is indeed a radical act of love  
just to sit down and  
be quiet for a time  
by yourself**

Jon Kabat-Zinn

## *Content*

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# *1. Session :*

## *What is Mindfulness?*

*There is more right with us than  
wrong*



*Picture: Colourbox.de*

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is an eight-week course developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. MBSR is an intensive training in mindfulness, which Kabat-Zinn has defined as

*“the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.”<sup>2</sup>*

Mindfulness is the capacity to be in the present moment without judgment. In daily lives, our minds are caught up in some aspects of past experiences or future plans. We construct stories in our minds as to how things should be or not be, remembering, worrying or hoping about somethings that might occur. Mindfulness teaches us how to observe these thoughts in the mind, not to identify with them. It is reminding us that we can chose to being more present experiencing fully each moment of our live, rather than being imprisoned by the dramas and thoughts we create in our minds. We learn to become more aware about our thoughts and our emotions without being subjected to them and learn to inhabit our body. Mindfulness is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding, breaking through destructive patterns of reaction to our experiences we have to face in live. We often cannot choose what happens to us. Yet, there is a choice in how we respond to it.

From the beginning, Kabat-Zinn and his co-workers did accompany his practice with research. MBSR has proven to be helpful in reducing symptoms and improving the quality of life for people experiencing a wide range of conditions, both physical and mental, including irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, psoriasis, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In the key areas — including depression, chronic pain, and anxiety — well-designed, well-run studies have shown very strong benefits for patients engaging in a mindfulness meditation program.

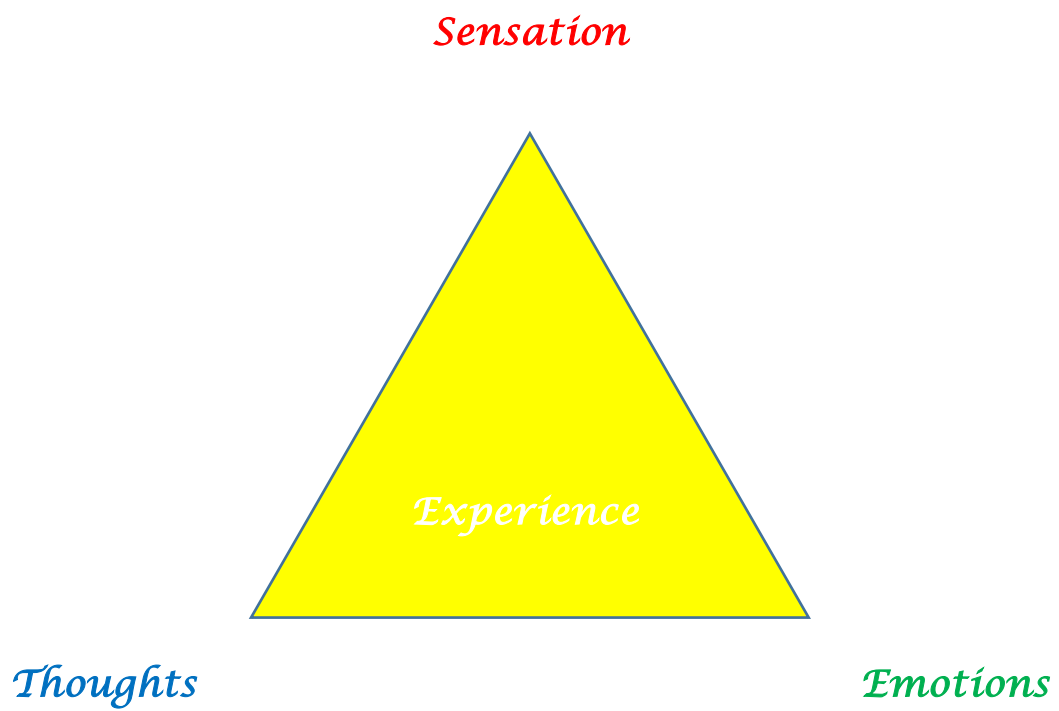
### *Mindfulness is not:*

- It is not a relaxation exercise, although during or after the practice we may experience relaxation is not the aim.
- Mindfulness meditation is not an imaginative journey into dreams and fantasy and not about seeking enlightenment.
- It is also not about escaping from the world and our everyday reality. Rather, we practice being fully present in our lives as it occurs, even if it is uncomfortable or painful.

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<sup>2</sup> Kabat-Zinn J. Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. 2003;10:144–156, p.145.

*The triangle of awareness:*



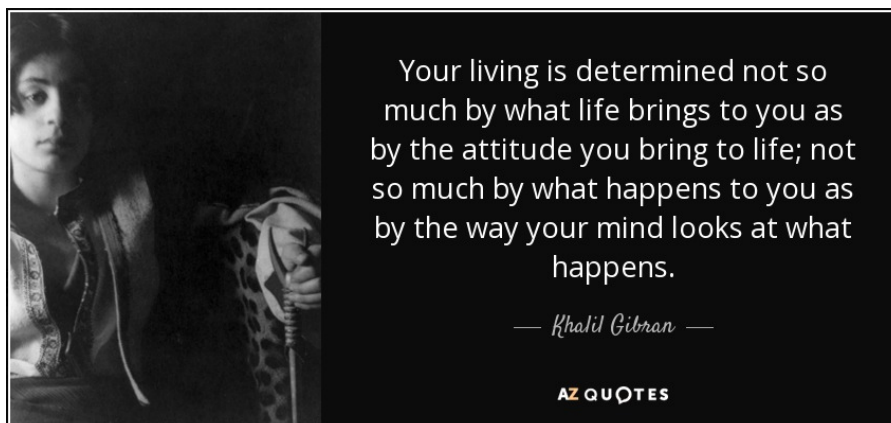
### *The Indian and two wolves in his heart*

An old Indian told his grandson about a tragedy that happened to his tribe some time ago and the grandson asked him: "How do you feel when you talk about it today?"

The old man replied, "It is as if two wolves are fighting in my heart. One wolf is revengeful and violent. He blames himself and the other, is very hurt and feels very angry. The other wolf is magnanimous, recognizes his pain and his feelings without blaming himself or the other, but is accepting what was happening as it happened and learns from it, full of belief in the good. Both wolves are very strong in their emotions"

The grandson asked, "Which wolf will win the battle in your heart?"

"The wolf that I feed most with my attention and with my thoughts!" said the old man.

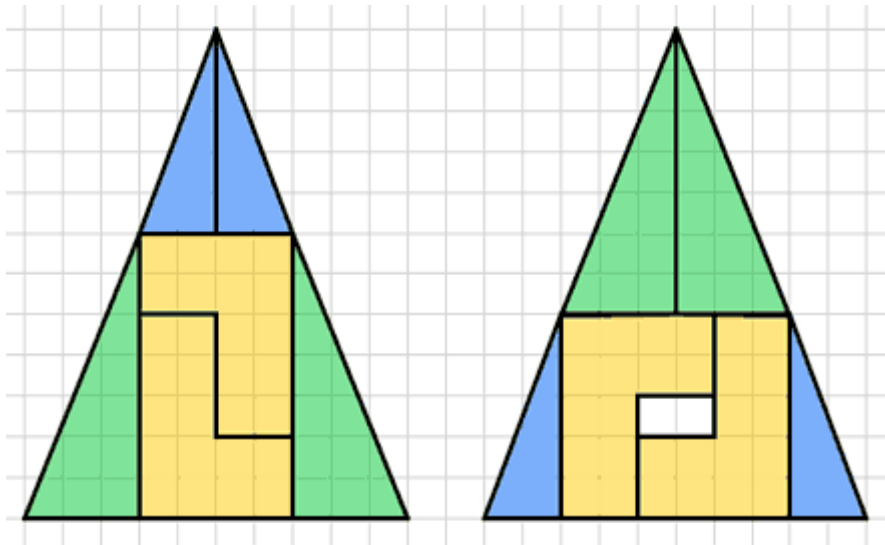


## *Homework after the Session 1:*

- 1. Practicing Body-Scan with the recording (or another recording at hand) for 6 from 7 days*
- 2. Practice eating one meal mindfully & choose one routine activity and make a deliberate effort to bring moment to moment awareness to that activity each time you do it.*
- 3. Meet once with your Buddy for 20 min “walk & talk” and share your experience about the practice!*

## *2. Session: Perception*

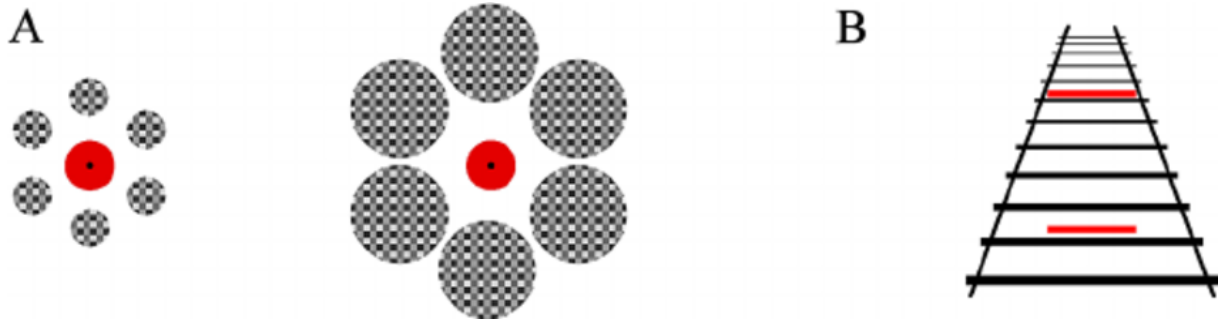
*How we perceive the world and ourselves*



*Picture: The Curry Triangle*

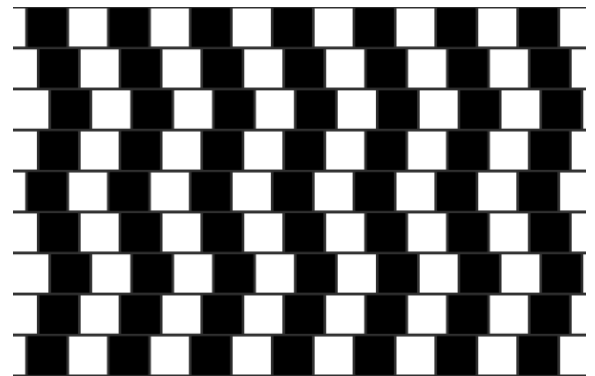
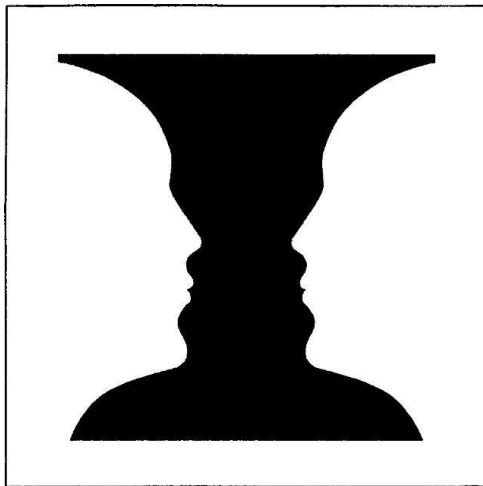


## Perception 1 and 2:



Picture: Irene Sperandio; Researchgate

## Perception 3 and 4:



Picture: Vecteezy

Picture: Can Stock Photo

## Perception 5:



Picture: Jonathan Schooler, Researchgate

## *The 8 foundational Attitudes of mindfulness:*

1. Non-judging

2. Patience

3. Beginner's mind

4. Trust

5. Non- Striving

6. Acceptance

7. Letting go

8. Kindness and Self-compassion

In addition, humour, playfulness, generosity and gratitude are mentioned.

## *Pleasant events calender:*

<i>What was the experience?</i>	<i>Have you been aware, that it was a pleasant experience?</i>	<i>Body sensations, what did you notice?</i>	<i>Thoughts, what were you thinking?</i>	<i>Emotions, what moods and feelings did you notice?</i>	<i>What thoughts, feelings are in your mind now as you write about this event?</i>
<i>Day 1</i>					
<i>Day 2</i>					
<i>Day 3</i>					
<i>Day 4</i>					
<i>Day 5</i>					
<i>Day 6</i>					
<i>Day 7</i>					

*One can't stop the waves of life, but one can learn to surf on them!*

*Indian proverb*

### *Homework after Session 2:*

1. *Body- Scan (with recording or without) **Body & Breath** meditation on 6 of 7 days or*
2. *Completing the **pleasant events** calendar*
3. *Meet up with **your Buddy** and share: **What did you noticed**, while filling in the pleasant events calendar so far? Is it possible for you to remember body sensations? Or thoughts? Or feelings? What can you do to notice them in the moment they occur?*

### 3. Session: Mindfulness of the Breath and Body in Movement

*There is both pleasure and power in  
being present*



*Picture: Klaus Wiemann (CC BY-SA 3.0 DE)*

## *Mindful Movement:*

### The **intention** is:

- To become aware of how it feels when we are not moving in the automatic pilot
- To keep coming back to the mountain position (sitting or standing) to feel the stillness, to be more in the state of BEING than in the state of DOING
- Do as many or as few exercises as you feel; preferably with one of the 8 + 2 attitudes of mindfulness

### The **attention** is:

- Pause at the ends of the movement, explore personal boundaries and find a middle path
- Step out of the automatic pilot and into the experience of the movement itself
- Mindful movement is not about movement, even if it is the focus of consideration: It is about what body perceptions you become aware of, what feelings and thoughts.

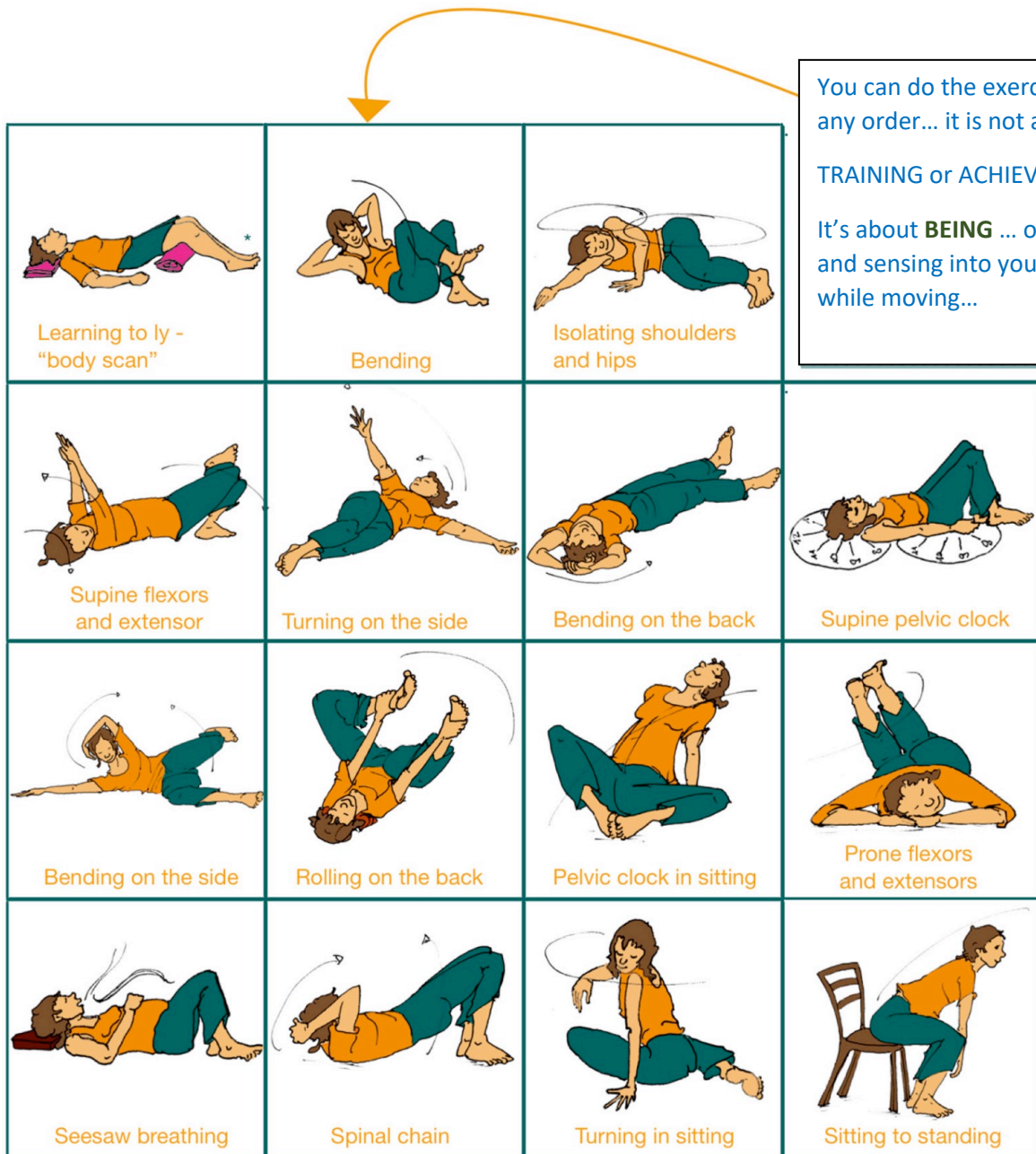
### The **attitude** is:

- Curious, tender and loving without having to achieve anything specific

## Unpleasant events Calendar:

<i>What was the experience?</i>	<i>Have you been aware, that it was an unpleasant experience?</i>	<i>Body sensations, what did you notice?</i>	<i>Thoughts, what were you thinking?</i>	<i>Emotions, what moods and feelings did you notice?</i>	<i>What thoughts, feelings are in your mind now as you write about this event?</i>
<i>Day 1</i>					
<i>Day 2</i>					
<i>Day 3</i>					
<i>Day 4</i>					
<i>Day 5</i>					
<i>Day 6</i>					
<i>Day 7</i>					

## Mindful Movement



© 2014 Roger Russell and Susanne Mertner

Source: Clark, D., Schuman, F. 2014: Mindful Movement and Skilled Attention; June 2015, in: [Frontiers in Human Neuroscience](https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00297) 9:297; DOI:[10.3389/fnhum.2015.00297](https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00297)

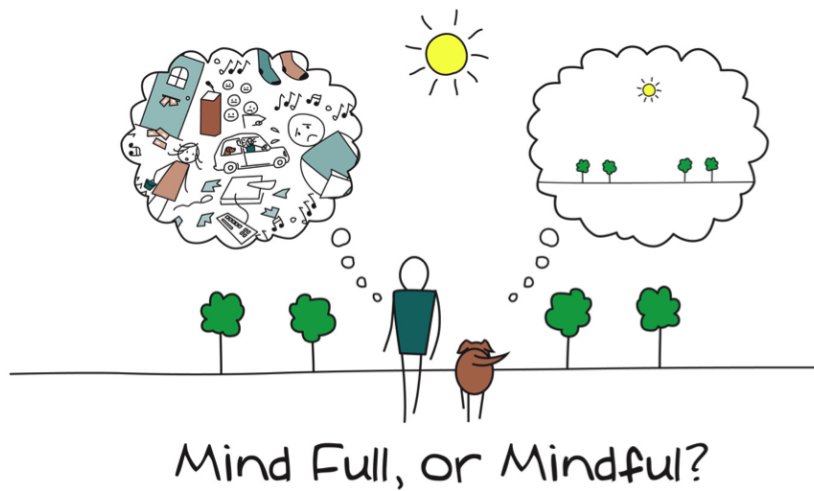


## *Homework after Session 3:*

1. Mindful **walking** exercise (20min) or **mindful movement** (20 min) or **5 times** a day **BreathingSpace** Meditation
2. Meet once and **walk or move mindfully together** with **your Buddy** Just start together, do it for 20min and then share your experience for 10min
3. Completing **unpleasant** events calendar

## 4. Session: Learning about our patterns of Reactivity to Stress:

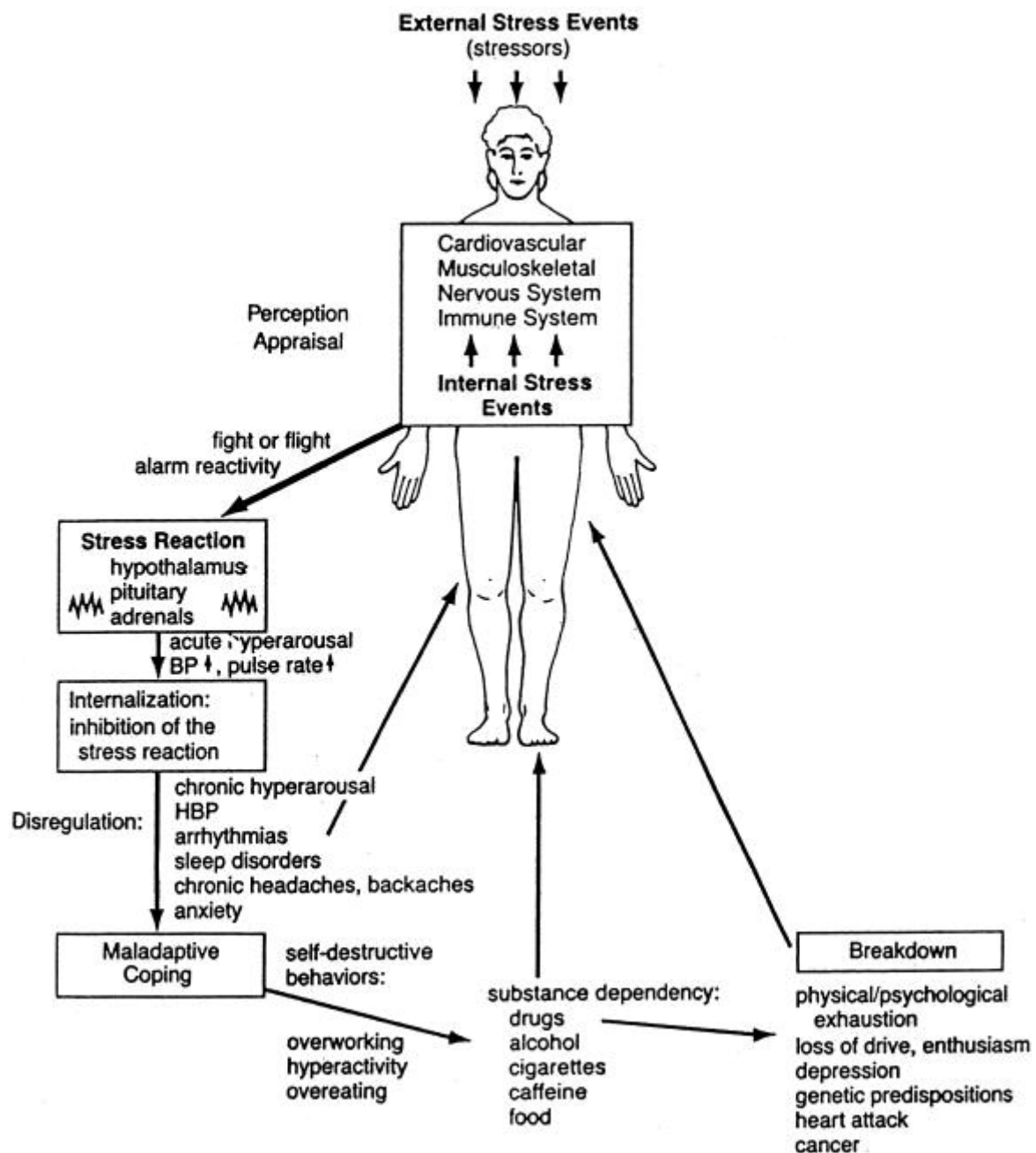
*Wherever you go, there you are...*



*PICTURE: THERES LORENZ, ODYSSEY*

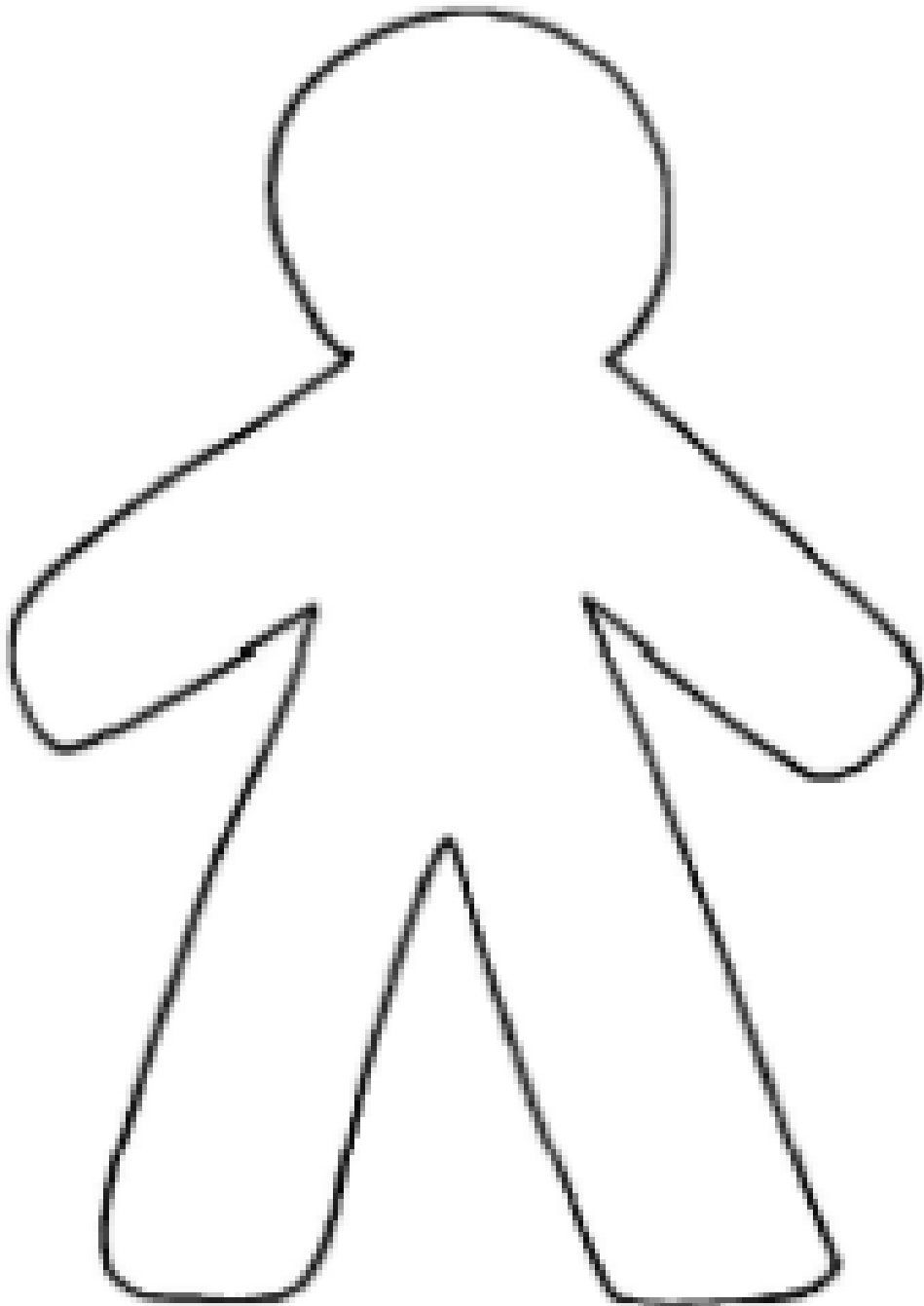
**What is stress?** In a medical or biological context stress is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stress can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness, or from a medical procedure). All external and internal factors that represent a potential threat, including physical pain and difficult emotions are called stressors or stress trigger. In situations we are confronted with a stress trigger, it activates the so-called **stress reaction**. Stress can initiate the "fight or flight" response, a complex reaction of neurologic and endocrinologic systems. Catecholamine hormones, such as adrenaline or noradrenaline, facilitate immediate physical reactions associated with a preparation for violent muscular action.

These include the following: Acceleration of heart and lung action, paling or flushing, or alternating between both, inhibition of stomach and upper-intestinal action to the point where digestion slows down or stops, constriction of blood vessels in many parts of the body etc. What is very important to note, that our bodies don't know the difference between a real threat and an imagined threat so that scary movie is causing a very similar chemical reaction in our bodies as if we would be there!



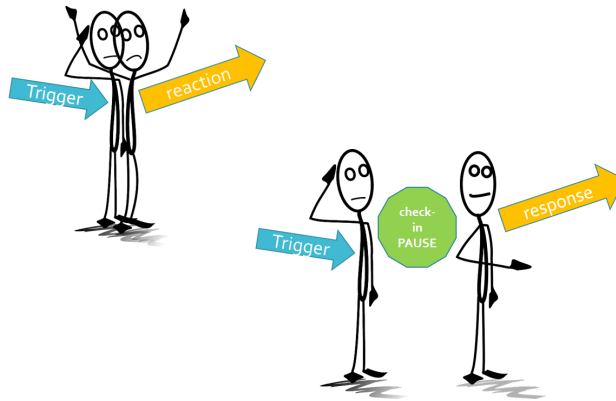
Source: Kabat-Zinn, Jon: 2013: Full catastrophe living, p.308

*Gingerbread man:  
My personal stress reactions*



*PICTURE: CLIP ART MAG*

## Reacting vs. Responding




### *Paradox of Mindfulness:* **Acceptance brings Change!**

#### *Homework Session 4:*

1. 3-5 min **shaking** and then: **Sitting Meditation** 20min (Body & Breath. Turning to the difficult or your own) on 6 of 7 days! Or **5times per day** BreathingSpace and shaking before!
2. **Meet up with your buddy** & discuss: **How does the movement** before the sitting impact your meditation? What are your **body sensations**? Are they different or you have some in common?
3. **Noticing automatic** stress reactions – without the intension to change them; **only observing** one's reaction to stress: What happens?

## *5. Session: Working with Stress*

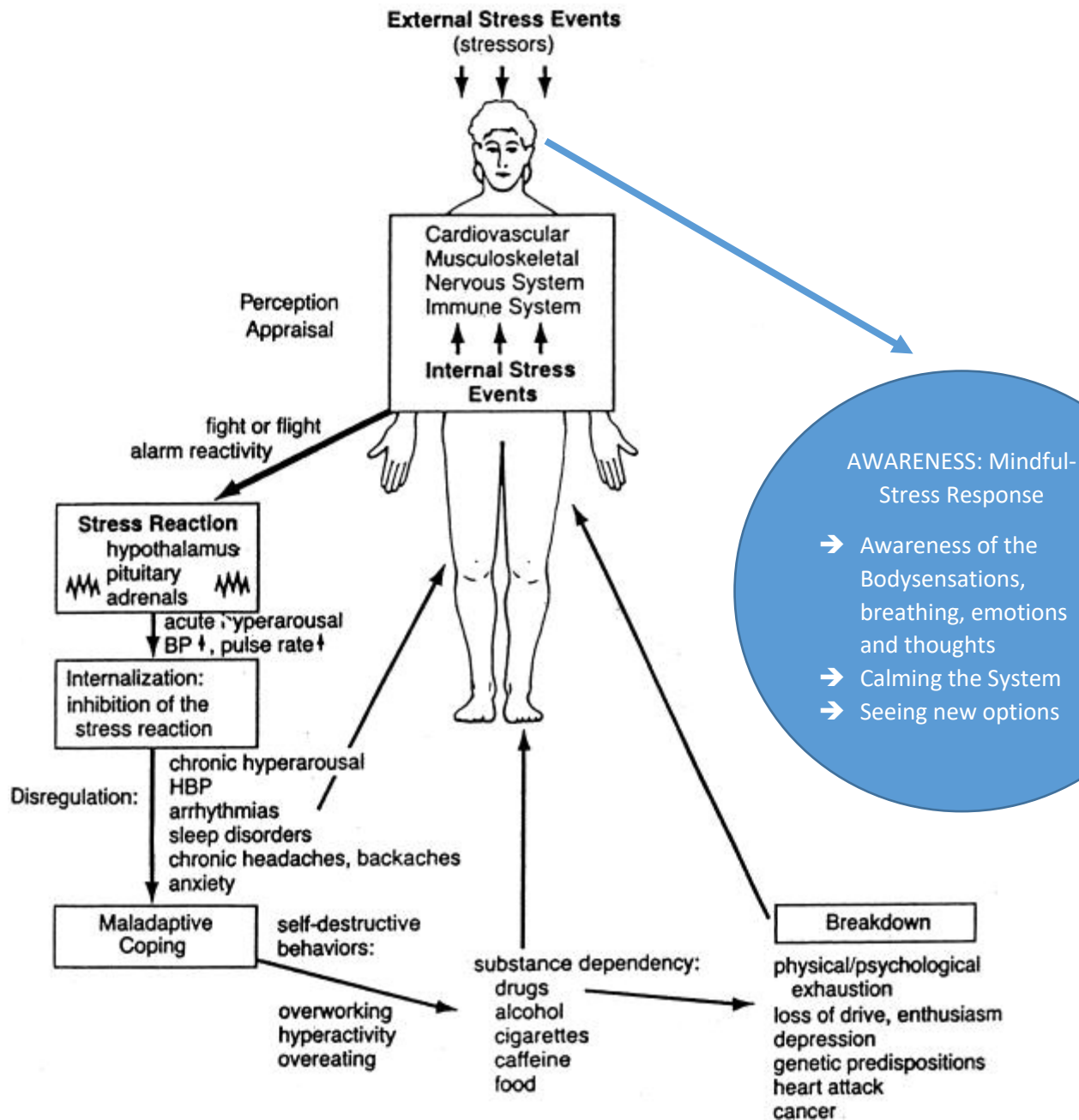
*Mindful Responding instead of  
reacting*



We cannot solve  
our problems with  
the same thinking  
we used when we  
created them.

- Albert Einstein

[www.inblix.com](http://www.inblix.com)



Source: Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, J.2013: The full catastrophe living, p.337

## *Stress, the Stress Reaction, and Stress Symptoms<sup>3</sup>*

- Stress is a dynamic event whose effects on an individual differ considerably.
- A distinction must be made between stress triggers (stressors) and a stress reaction.
- The stress reaction occurs on four levels: physiological, emotional, mental, and behavioral.
- Coping well with stress through activation of the stress response calls for addressing stress at all levels: physiological, emotional, mental, and behavioral.
- The physiological stress reaction — fight or flight — is an evolutionary response automatically triggered by a stressor.
- The intensity of the stress reaction depends largely on our assessment of the stressor — whether conscious or subconscious — and our stress-amplifying thoughts.

## *Coping with Stress: The Stress Response*

- An effective stress response requires a balance between activity and relaxation, meaning both physical relaxation (e.g., exercise) and mental (e.g., meditation).
- It is important to be aware of our stress-amplifying thoughts and the accompanying feelings, to find a way out of the stress spiral. This is where mindfulness can help.
- By practicing mindfulness, we can create space between a stress trigger and a stress reaction as we interrupt the process of going on automatic pilot and losing contact with the present moment. This allows for a conscious and wise choice rather than an unconscious, automatic reaction.

“A man is but a product of his thoughts. What he thinks he becomes!”

Mahatma Gandhi

Brain Integration Explanation by Tara Brach, PhD, gets into how mindfulness disrupts the neurobiology of fear <https://www.nicabm.com/the-neuroscience-of-mindfulness-and-fear/>

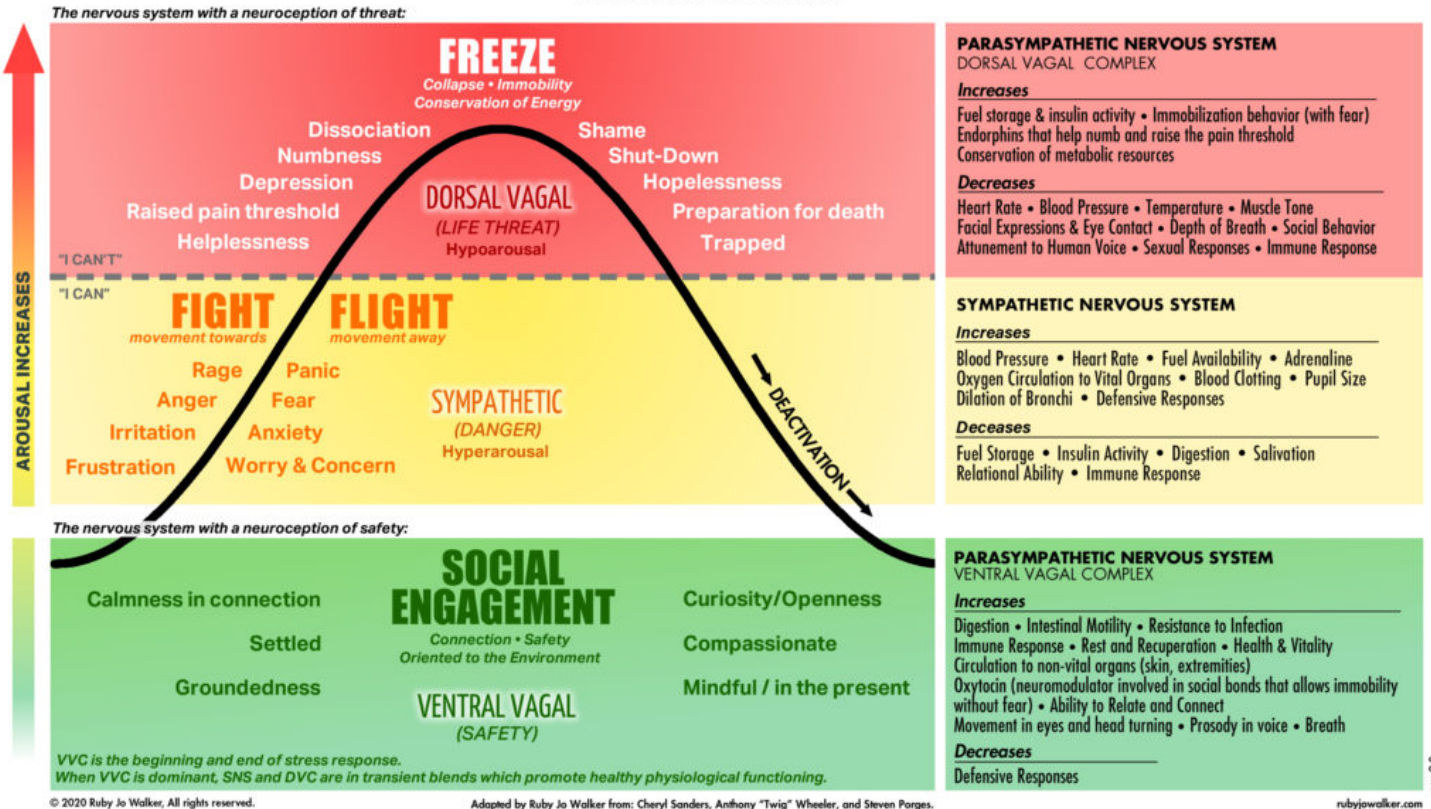
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<sup>3</sup> Lehrhaupt, L., Meibert, P. 2017: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: The MBSR Program for Enhancing Health and Vitality, New World Library, p.37



# Polyvagal Theory (Stephen Porges)

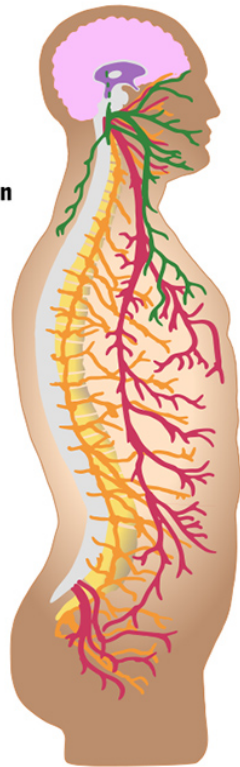
## POLYVAGAL CHART



**VENTRAL VAGAL:**  
Social Engagement  
Breath, Heartbeat,  
Facial & Vocal Expression

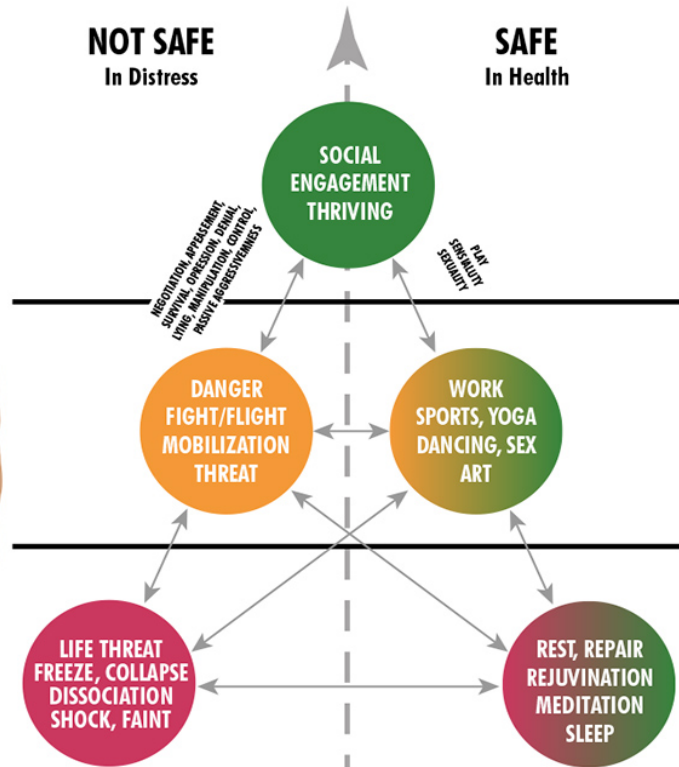
**SYMPATHETIC:**  
Mobilization  
Torso, Limbs

**PARASYMPATHETIC:**  
Immobilization



**NOT SAFE**  
In Distress

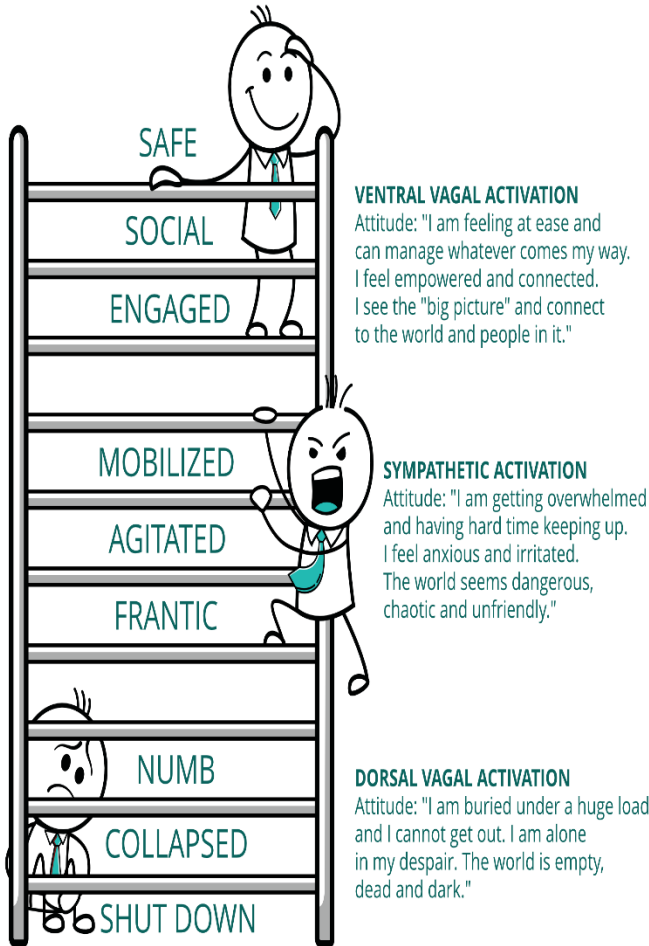
**SAFE**  
In Health



©2019 Glen Weimer  
Chart based on Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory  
from illustrations by Matthias Schwentek

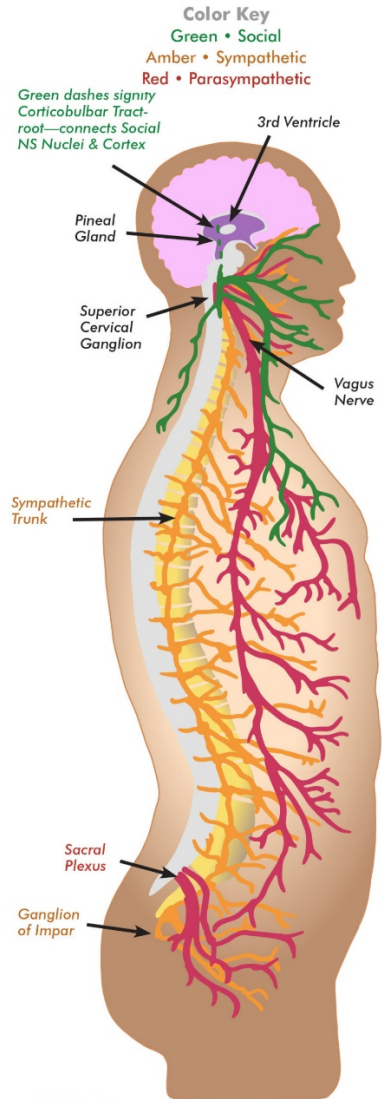
Porges, Stephen W., *The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe* (2017)

## AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER



Adapted from *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy* by Deb Dana

## Polyvagal ANS Model



©2019 Glen Weimer  
 Charts are based on Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory from illustrations & information by John Chitty & Renee Peterson.

Our 10th cranial nerve is the Vagus nerve, which creates a direct line of communication between the brain and body. It is the crucial nerve for the switch in our *Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)*. Dr. Stephen Porges described two separate vagal conduits: *Ventral Vagal (green)* which controls facial muscles, hearing, voice, heart and lungs (generally front of the body above the diaphragm); *Dorsal Vagal (red)* which controls brain stem, digestion and reproduction (generally below the diaphragm governing core survival functions). The third conduit is the *Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS – orange)* which comes off of a trunk or chain of nerves running alongside the spine at the level of the chest and low back (controlling mobilization of the torso, arms and legs to fight and flee). Dr. Porges, termed the the Ventral Vagal Complex (VVC) our *Social Nervous System* as it is **only through our experience of safety** that we are able to connect to our world. Safety is essential! Safety allows us to get close to others; proximity enables us to interact; that connection enables bonding; and this nexus empowers us to THRIVE!

**Poly- vagal circle** explained by Matthias Thimm:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovirbFIOArw>



### How to map my nervous system?

1. What **state I am in right now**? Give it your own name or a colour!
2. What are **the safety cues** available HERE and NOW? (Exhale slowly; drinking warm water; sensing your body and the feet on the floor; smelling sth. nice, touching sth)

## Permission Sentences

Inner drivers / thoughts that increase stress are beliefs that run like a red thread through our lives and relationships. Although they have a great impact on our lives, we are usually not aware of them and therefore they have an even stronger effect. If we recognize our inner drivers/thoughts, we can counteract them with “permissible sentences” and weaken them.

### “You need to be strong”:

- I can be strong and have needs at the same time
- I can trust my feelings and let them guide me
- I can express feelings, or keep them to myself
- I don't have to impress anyone to be liked
- I can get help and ask for help

### “You need to work hard”:

- I can accept my limits
- I can look forward to what I have achieved and relax
- I can get help
- I can proceed calmly and with a clear mind for what is necessary

### “I have to be perfect to be loved/ respected”:

- I can sometimes make mistakes without feeling inadequate, and I can learn from them
- I am allowed to show myself as I am and develop my own style
- I don't always have to justify myself
- I can be forgiving when others make mistakes

### “I have to please the others”:

- I can take myself seriously and find out what I want myself
- I have the right to my own opinion
- I am allowed to think before doing it my way
- I am also okay when others are not satisfied with me
- I can do things the way I want to

### “Hurry up”:

- I can take my time and then do it my way
- I can get involved and enjoy
- I am allowed to observe my own rhythm

Pick a permission sentence or two that are particularly good for you. Then rephrase the sentence so that it fits your situation exactly and you really enjoy hearing it. You can also write the sentence on a piece of paper and hang it somewhere ... yet, be careful not to do this with appreciation and kindness towards yourself.

## *Hand Aikido:*

### *Different reactions / responses towards stress*

- *Ignoring the hit, taking the hit*
- *Curl into a ball*
- *Run away*
- *Fight back*
- *Deflect the hit*
- *Dance*



*Picture: Aikido Journal*



## *Difficult Communication Calendar*

<i>Briefly describe the situation:</i>	<i>What emotions were present for you?</i>	<i>What thoughts were present for you?</i>	<i>What body sensations were present for you?</i>	<i>What were your reactions?</i>	<i>What is here for you as you write this?</i>

## *Homework after Session 5:*

1. *Sitting Meditation: „Turning towards the difficult“ in 6 of 7 days (40 Min) or 5 times breathingSpace*
2. *Meet up with **your buddy** and discuss (20min):*
  - a. *What do you remember from Poly-vagal Theory and why is it good to know about it? (Maybe watch the video before!)*
  - b. *Discuss: Is it possible for you –in a stressful situation- to **create a space** between **the stimulus** and **the reaction**, to discover possibilities for conscious and creative responses. When did it work when not? What might help to create the pause?*
  - c. *Discuss: Why can a **regular mindfulness practice** (walking, bodyscan, movement, sitting etc) help? Take a look at the in-between exercises (p.40)!!*
3. *Complete the “Difficult communication Calendar”*

## 6. Session: Stressful communication

### Interpersonal mindfulness



Picture: John Hain, Pixabay



## *Elements of a mindful communication:*

- 1. I - Speech*
- 2. Silence*
- 3. Empathy*
- 4. Deep listening*
- 5. Gentle language*
- 6. Truthful*

....

Be aware about your own emotions and body sensations, while communicating with others. Labelling emotions is a powerful way to manage them and to behave skilfully in relationships. It helps to stay calm. E.g. if a man cannot say – at least to himself- : “I feel ashamed” then it’s more likely to get angry and behave irrationally. The same with anger, if it’s named, it’s often easier not to become physically involved. Brain research has revealed that finding words for feelings deactivates the part of the brain that initiates a stress response.

*“Once you communicate with yourself, you’ll be able to communicate outwardly with more clarity” Thích Nhất Hạnh*

## *Homework after Session 6:*

1. *Choose your own daily Sittingmeditation, Bodyscan or mindful movement, with a recording or without guidance (20 Min)*
2. ***Meet with your buddy*** and do an active listening practice about a stressfull communication

A speaks for 4 minutes:

If I imagine the situation, I feel .... (what? emotion) ... and I think...and I think... Now, I sense in my body something in my (body part: through/tummy/stomach/head/eyes... )... This makes me feel....

If I imagine the situation, I feel ... (what? emotion) ... and I think... and I think Now, I sense in my body something in my (body part...)... This makes me feel...

If I imagine the situation, I feel.... (what ? emotion) and I think.... And I think... **repeat again like above until ... 4 minutes are over!**

B gives feedback, what he has understood (4 minutes):

I felt that ... I have understood that... to me it feels like... I noticed that...

A gives feedback to what B has said. (2min)

Drop- in (2 times breathing –in, breathing-out)

Change roles

3. *Become aware, what you are taking into your body and mind through all your senses in your daily life (light, smell, taste, noises, atmospheres....). What is nourishing you, and what not??*

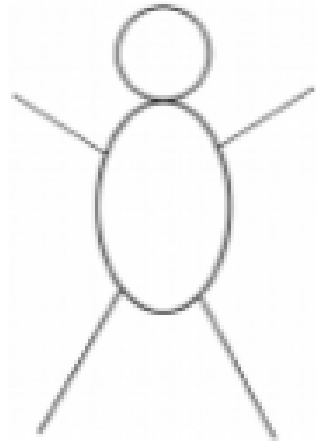
## *7. Session : Lifestyle Choices*

*How can I best take care of myself?*



*Picture: iStock- Photo*

*What do we take in?*



<i>Unhelpful strategies</i>	<i>Helpful strategies</i>

### *Homework after Session 7:*

1. Establish your daily 40 min meditation practice: Sitting-meditation, Bodyscan, mindful movement, mindful routines or walking (with or without recording)
2. Meet with your buddy and share: **What is good for you and what not?** Which practices are good for you own regulation? What are your first warning signs that you are stressed? **What helps you in the communication with others?** How can you stay grounded in the communication with others and stay connected with your own feelings while also observing the others? Do you have some “thought” that help you? Some habits?
3. Build into your daily rituals some BreatingSpace Moments and mark some places to regularly pause and contemplate

## *8. Session: A mindful life*

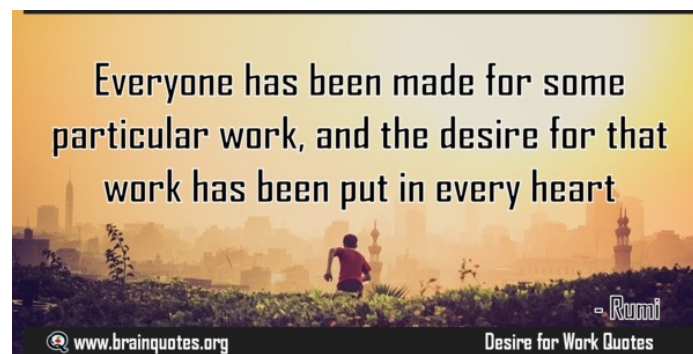
### *Farewell and New Beginning*



*Picture: Alexas Fotos, Pixabay*

## *Exercises for home:*

1. Create your routine and give them relevance & importance (Sitting meditation, Bodyscan, mindful movement, with or without recording); the effects will be nourishing your whole family! Patience!
2. Create spaces, for you to breathe, to be alone with yourself, to contemplate ... to fully be present....in your own life!



## Exercises for in-between:

### BreathingSpace Exercise:

The image of the breathing space exercise is that of an hourglass:

1. One becomes aware of the situation and comes to the present moment, perceiving everything in the here and now (openly). What are you thinking? What are emotions? What are the body sensations? (Awareness)
2. Then one gathers the scattered mind by focusing on the breath, feeling the breath. Here you can take a few inhalations and exhalations to collect the scattered mind. Focussing, calming.
3. You open your awareness of breathing to feeling the body as a whole, feeling your feet on the ground. Open yourself to all your senses. Watch your experience as best you can with curiosity and friendliness.



### RAIN

**R - Recognise / Realize:** What is going on with you right now? What are you thinking? What do you feel right now? And what do you sense in your body?

**A- Acceptance / Acknowledge** all, what is here with your right now? Open yourself to experiencing it fully, just how it is.

**I-Interest** / Become interested to look deeper into the experience: What happens in my body? Is this changing? Where do I feel it? If I have noticed an emotion, where precisely do I sense it in my body and how?

**N-Non-Identify** / Become aware, that you are not these emotions, you are not these thoughts; you simply experience these thoughts or emotions right now...

### GLAD

**G – Grateful:** Become aware, what are you grateful for?

**L – Learning:** What have you been learning today or the last days?

**A – Accomplishment:** Become aware, that you have for sure accomplished something... What was this? What did you accomplish today or the last days?

**D – Delight:** Become aware about something, that makes you feel delight... it can be something very small, but somehow it feels good to think about it...

### 5 SENSES

Identify **5 things** you can see and look at them with fresh eyes. Close your eyes and identify **4 different sounds** around you and listen to them with new ears. Discover **3 things** you can touch, with different texture and explore them. Identify **2 different smells** and explore them. Discover one taste in your mouth, without judgement and explore that!





## S.T.O.P.

**S top:** Stop and become aware

**T une in:** Take a couple of breaths to tune into the present moment

**O pportunity:** Become aware, that you have the possibility, the opportunity to react differently, e.g. It's ok to feel hurt... and I breath into it... Or: Yes, it's ok that he thinks this way... that this is his opinion...

**P ossibility:** Congratulation! With mindfulness, you will make use of the possibilities to identify your patters of reaction. Knowing, that you can change yourself, but not the others. And here you will find many possibilities: So you can liberate yourself to act freely – not automatic- and create spaces for creative action, true self-expression and well-being.

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