

Exploring the Zones of Regulation, Understanding Emotional Regulation

With
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Aims...

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand emotional regulation through the Zones of Regulation framework
- Recognise how the nervous system influences behaviour, using a polyvagal-informed approach
- Apply the Window of Tolerance to support secondary pupils' wellbeing and learning
- Use simple, practical strategies to promote regulation and engagement in everyday classroom practice



WHAT IS THE ONE QUESTION CHILDREN ARE CONSTANTLY TRYING TO WORK OUT?

Do people like
me?

How do I fit in?

Am I doing the
right thing?

Am I in trouble?

What will
happen next?



AM I SAFE?





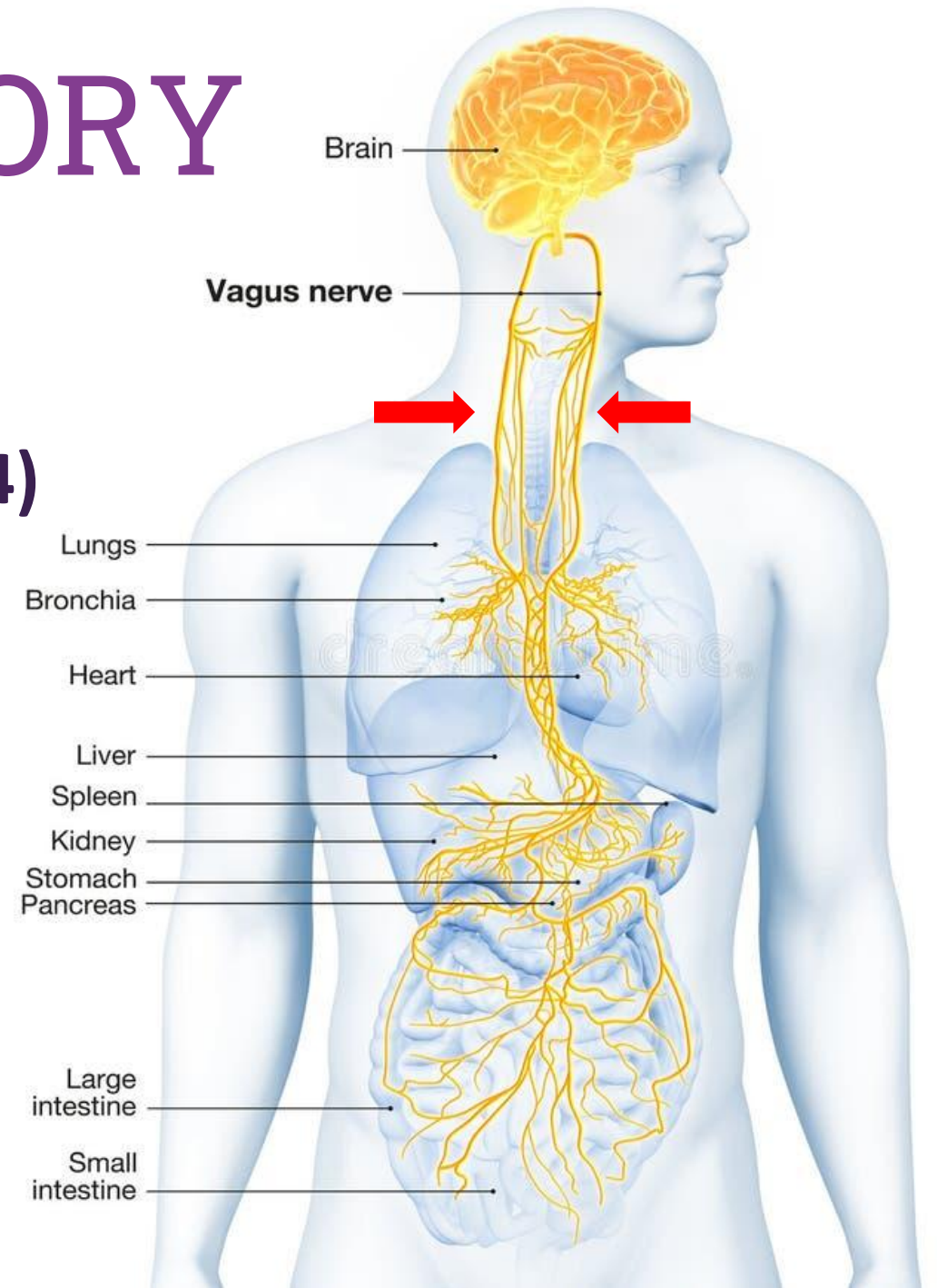




Neuroception

POLYVAGAL THEORY

Introduced by Dr Stephen Porges (1994)

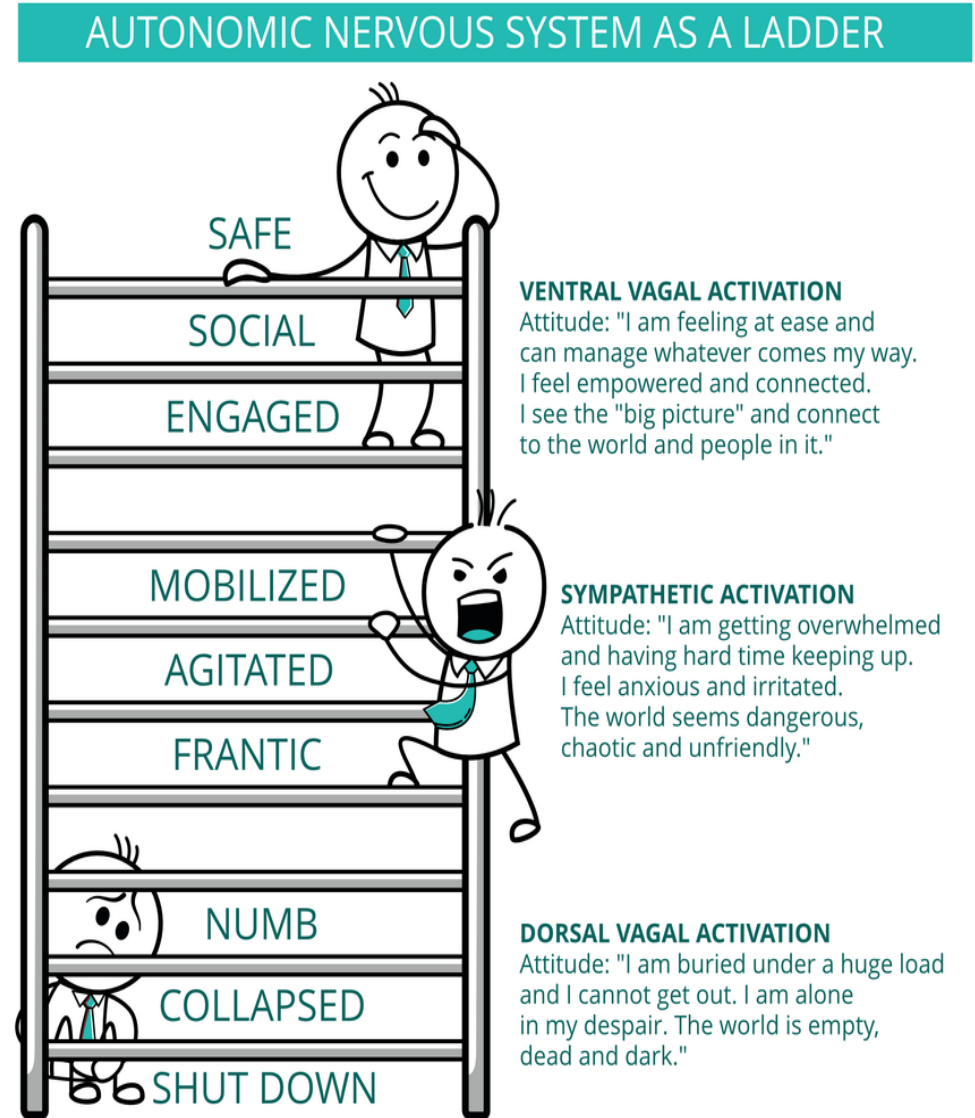


POLYVAGAL THEORY

Ventral Vagal

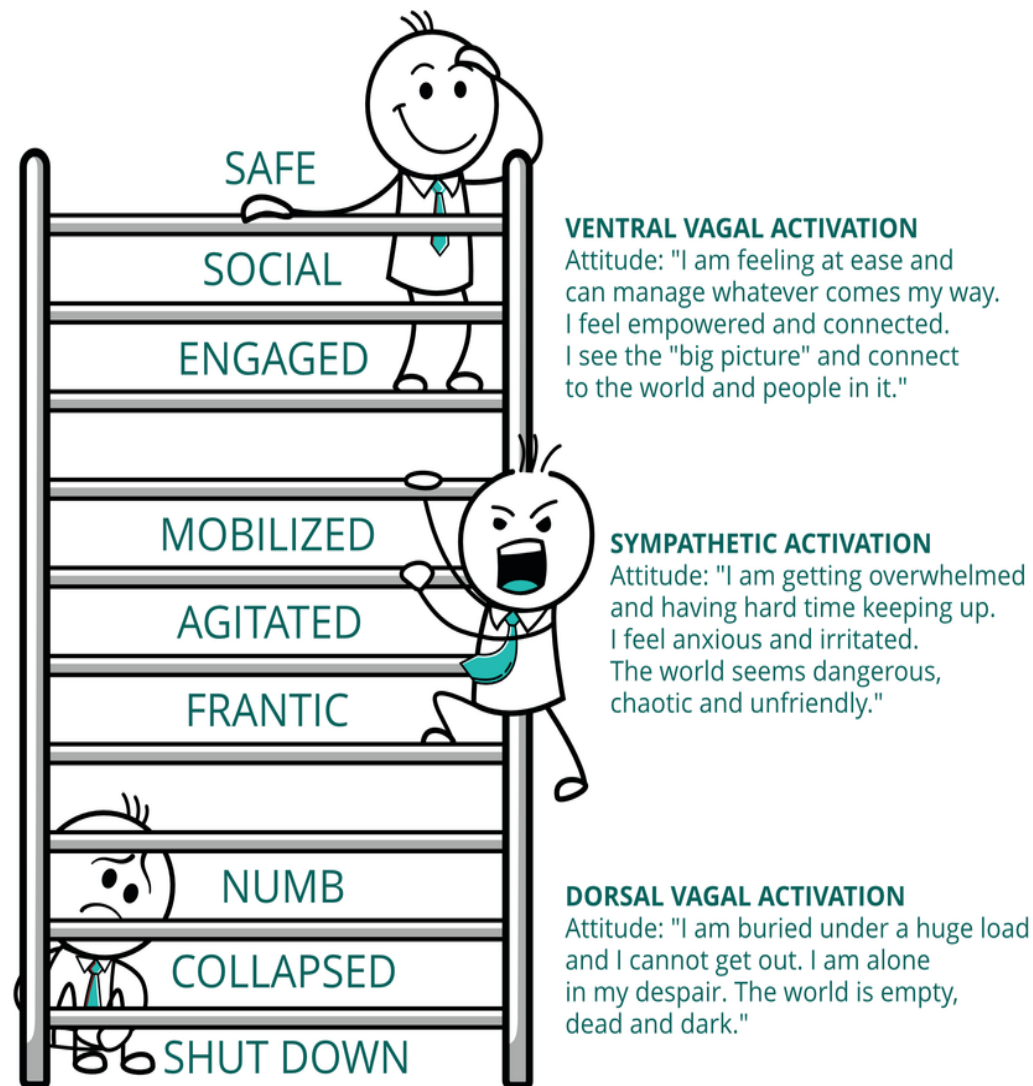
Sympathetic

Dorsal Vagal - Shutdown



AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER

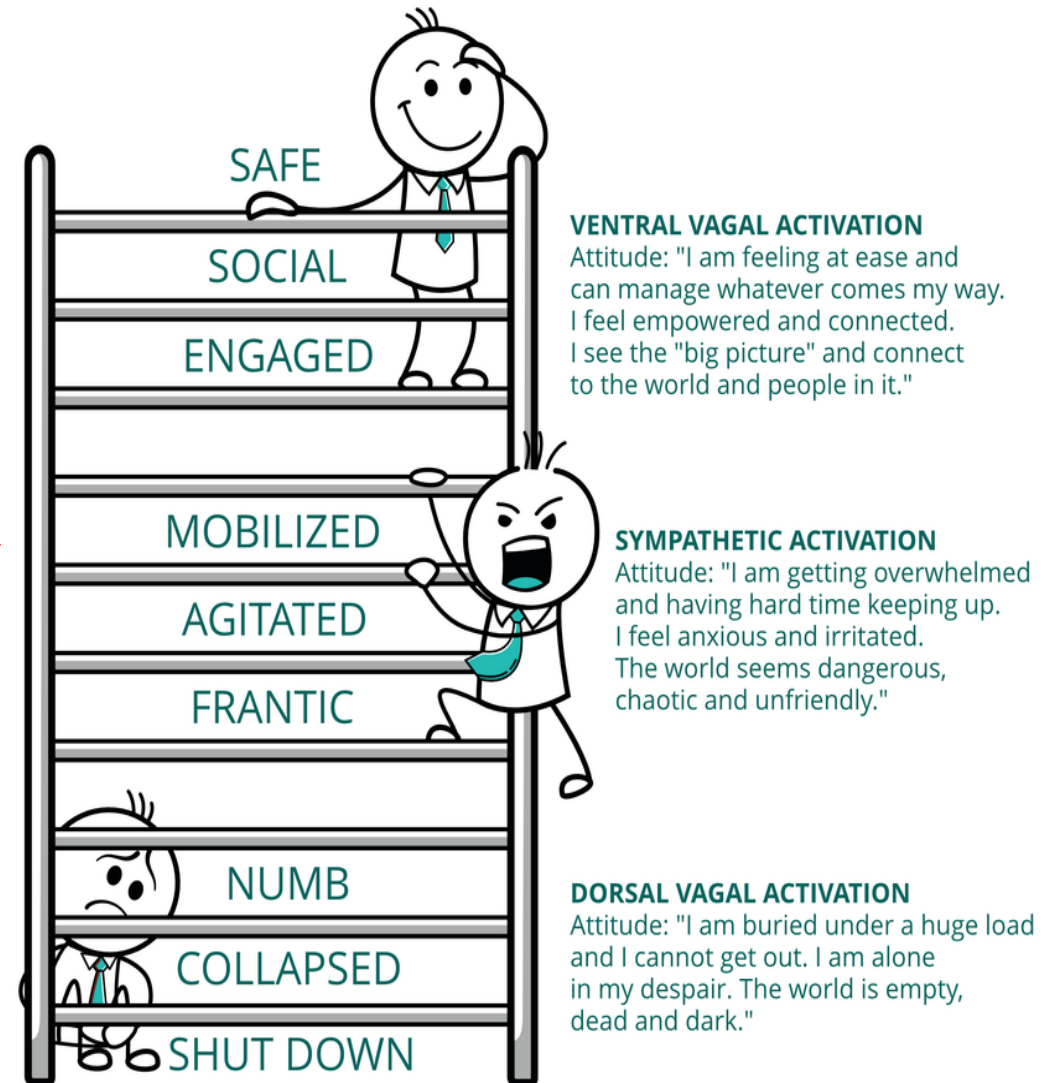
Ventral Vagal - Safe & Social
Calm, connected, ready to learn.



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

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER

Sympathetic - Fight or Flight
Agitated, defensive, restless, angry.

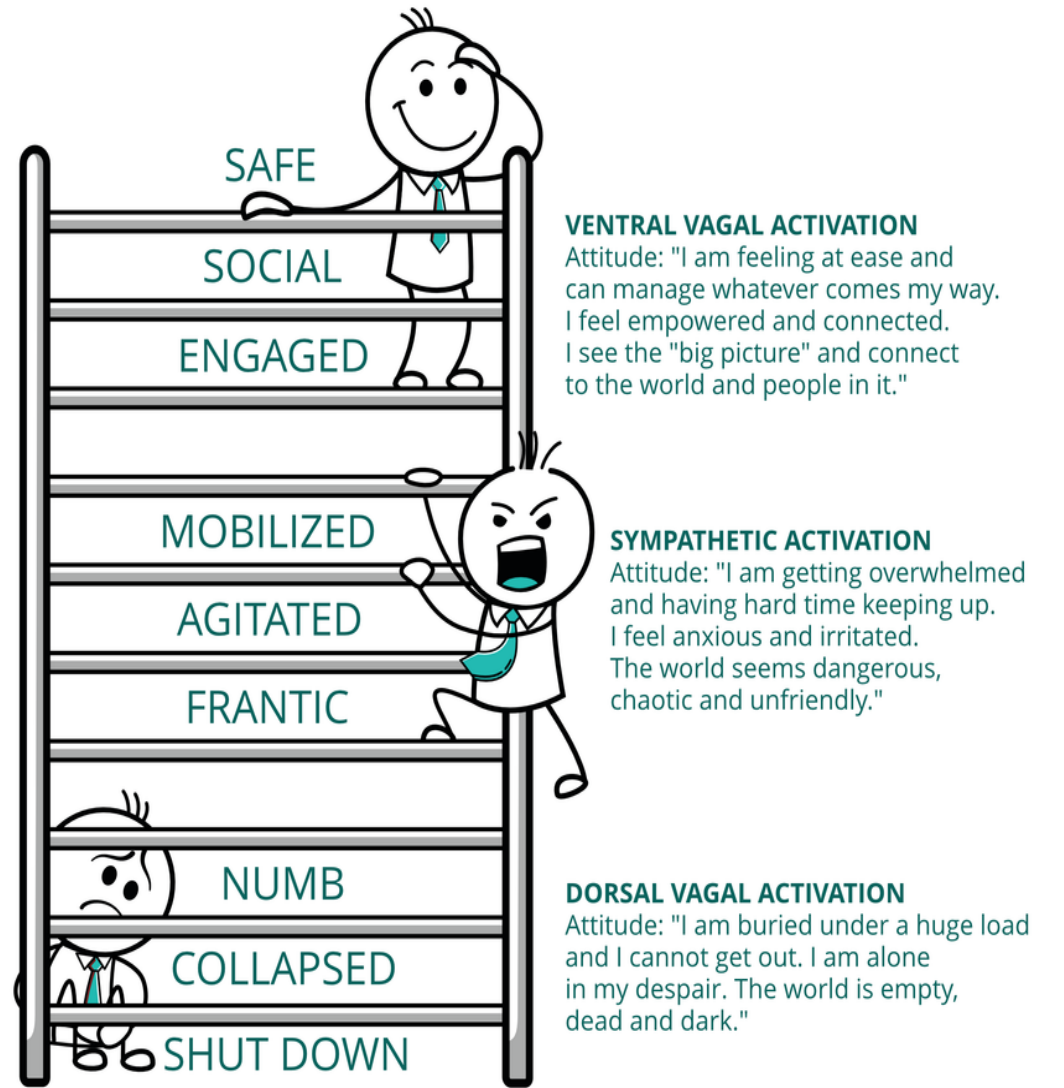


Adapted from *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy* by Deb Dana

Dorsal Vagal - Shutdown
Withdrawn, numb, "I don't care"

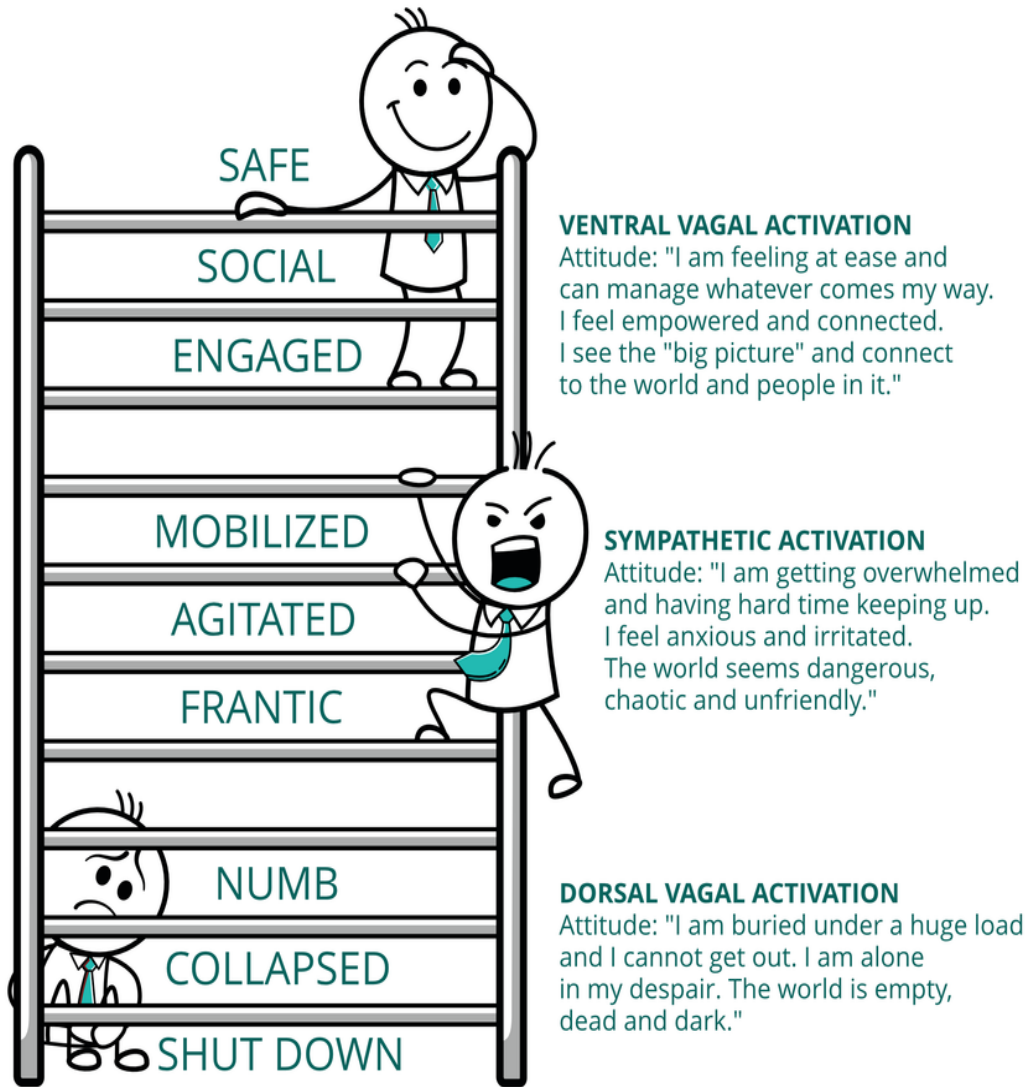


AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER



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

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER



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

The nervous system moves step by step, safety builds gradually

Co-Regulation/Self-regulation

Co-regulation comes first.

Co-Regulation is connecting with others to help each other manage emotions and reach goals when self-regulation is not yet possible or sufficient.



Through consistent co-regulation from trusted adults children learn:

- How to recognise their feelings
- Strategies to calm, focus, and problem-solve

Co-regulation leads to the self-regulation. Children are not born with self-regulation skills. These skills develop over time through experience and support from trusted adults

Self-regulation is the ability to manage your own emotions and behaviours to achieve what you need.



Witherslack Group's Therapeutic Practice Model

Our therapeutic model aims to support children and young people to live healthy and happy lives, establish meaningful relationships and achieve their full potential. We recognise that when a child actually feels safe living and learning with us, they will be able to begin to explore the possibility of developing new connections and relationships. These are the foundations from which they will develop the ability to regulate and understand their emotions, and the capacity to access opportunities for learning and further development.

Stage 1: Safety & Containment

Our first therapeutic focus with all our children and young people is to re-establish or indeed establish a feeling of physical & emotional safety and containment. We do this by:

- Providing specialist therapeutic living and learning environments
- Creating an atmosphere of safety, security and nurture around each child
- Establishing trust, routine and boundaries
- Adapting the physical environment to the individual's needs
- Personalising the curriculum and learning approaches
- Implementing our Internal Team Around the Child (ITAC) meetings
- If appropriate, providing advice and guidance to the child's parent/carer

During this settling period we undertake an initial clinical assessment which will help identify individual needs, areas for further assessment and shape our initial therapeutic goals.



Stage 2: Relationships & Connections

Once Stage 1 is achieved and the child feels a sense of stability, safety and support our therapeutic focus moves to the development of engagement, connections and relationships with others. We do this by:

- Supporting children and young people to communicate their emotions and regulate their behaviour
- Helping them identify and reduce unsafe or unhelpful behaviours
- Delivering clinically supervised key worker sessions
- Implementing clinically developed and monitored support programmes
- Providing targeted small group work and parent engagement, where appropriate
- Delivering child focused and reflective practice meetings

During this time some children may have further assessments, but as relationships, understanding and trust are built, we can now start to accelerate the support and in turn each child's progression and development.



Stage 4: A Platform to Achieve

This unique approach to supporting young people provides them with the platform to achieve uniquely outstanding outcomes, which in turn enables each young person to go on to realise a future filled with aspiration and achievement.



Stage 3: Experiences & Learning

Now that we have built stronger relationships and levels of trust, our children & young people will be able to begin to engage in new therapeutic experiences and learning opportunities. We do this by:

- Identifying and removing any remaining barriers to learning
- Offering bespoke and individualised therapeutic support as they engage further with their education
- Constantly reviewing progress and behaviour and adapting our focus to changing needs
- Providing group therapy and targeted family work, as appropriate
- Supporting through one to one interventions, as required
- Conducting targeted and ongoing clinical assessment to inform future support

Stage 3 will continue to adapt and respond to both the individual's needs and progress.





THE
ZONES
OF REGULATION



What are the 'Zones'?



Blue Zone

Sad • Bored •
Tired • Sick



Green Zone

Happy • Focused •
Calm • Proud



Yellow Zone

Worried • Frustrated •
Silly • Excited



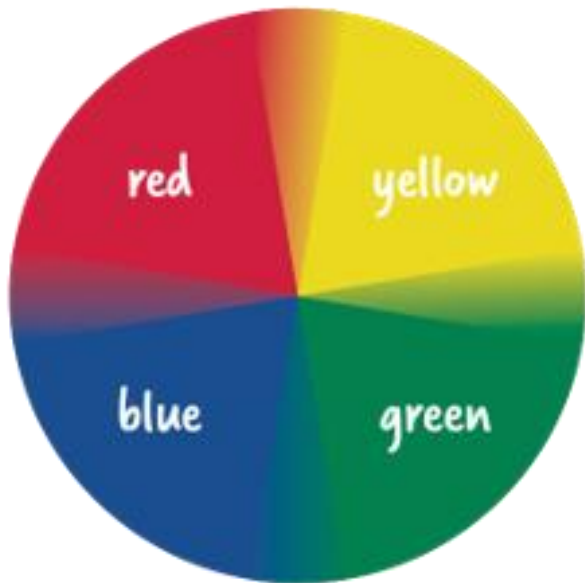
Red Zone

Overjoyed/Elated •
Panicked • Angry •
Terrified



All zones are okay

What **ZONE**
are you in?



In The Zone!



Every zone can be useful -
does your zone match the
task you want to complete?

Warns us that we
need help



For high energy tasks like running,
dancing, celebrating

For focus and thinking tasks like
gaming, learning, chatting



zzz
Resting tasks like sleeping,
relaxing, napping



Why Zones work for both primary and secondary



Simple,
Visual,
Non-
shaming



Helps pupils
identify early
signs of
dysregulation




Creates a
shared
emotional
vocabulary
across the
school



Supports
restorative
behaviour
approaches

When the Zones do not fit

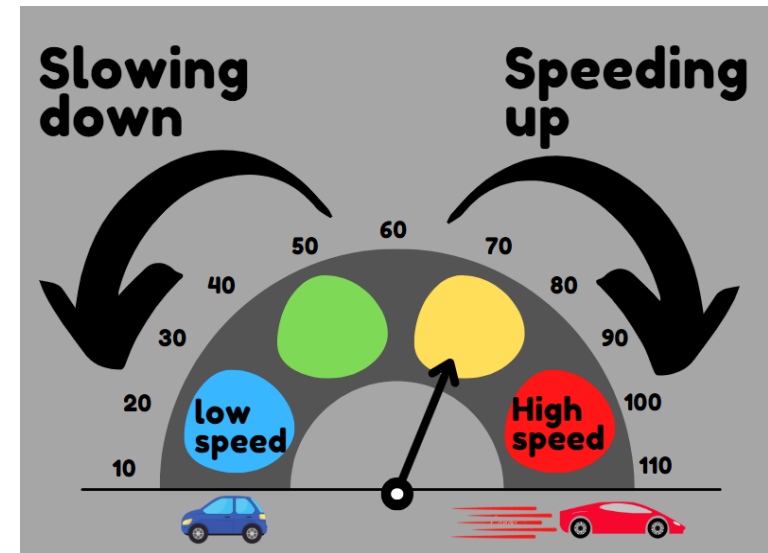
- Not one size fits all
- We adapt language and approaches
- Focus on safety and regulation



*"All feelings are
okay, we are
helping your body
feel safe again"*

Alternative approaches we use

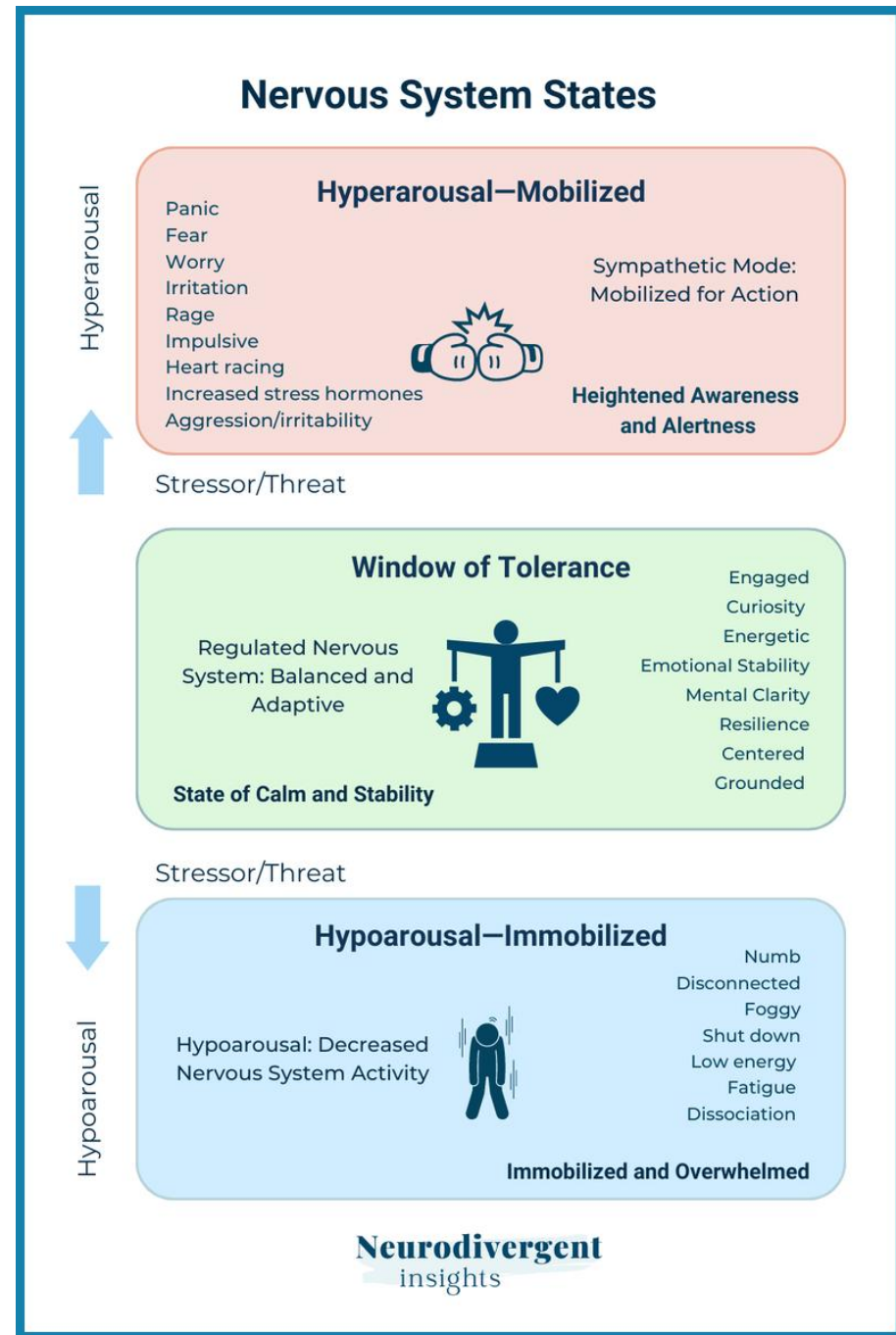
- *“How full or empty is your battery right now?”*
- *“Your system is running low.”*
- *“Your engine is revving high.”*



My body feels...



Window of Tolerance

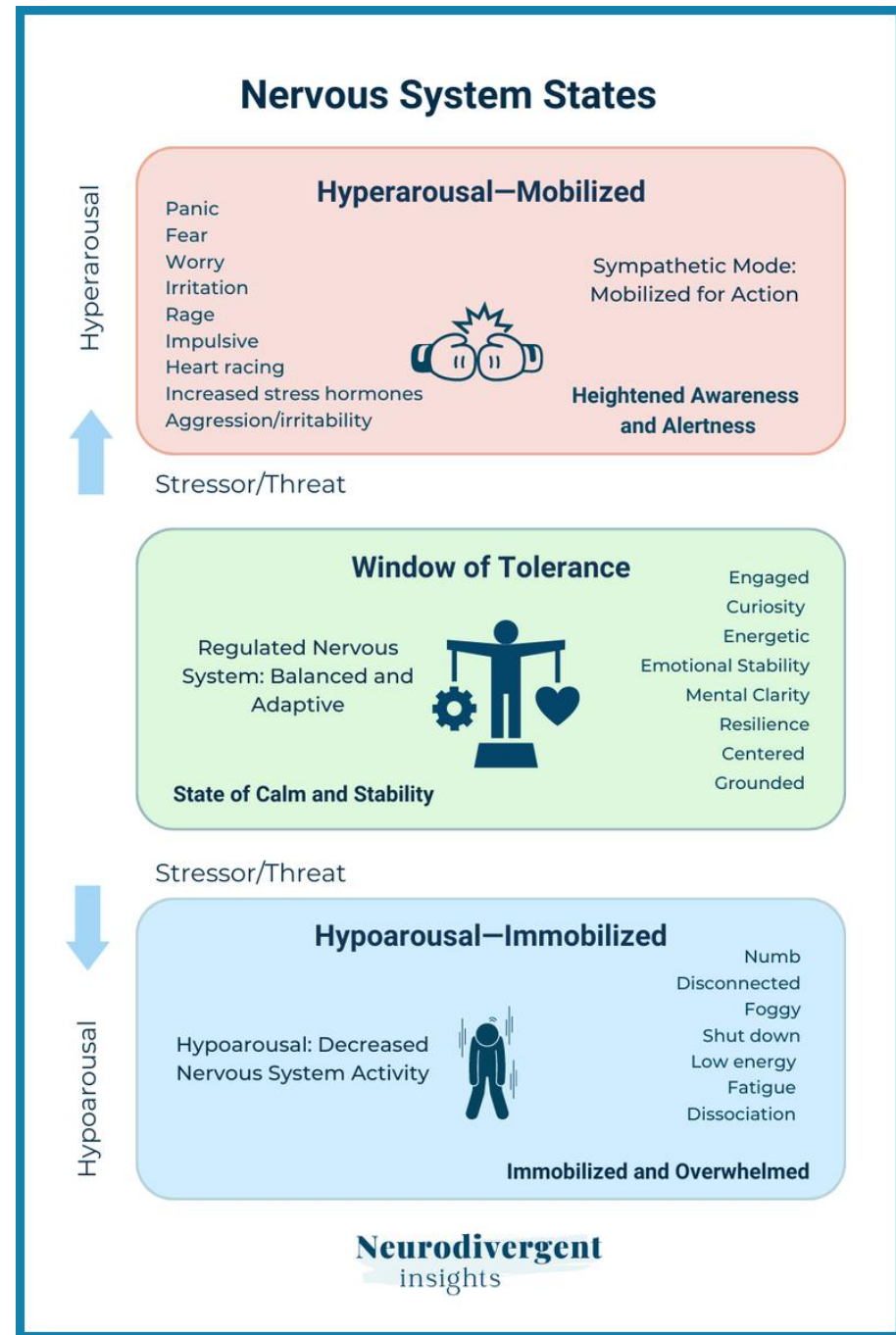


Window of Tolerance

The Zones help pupils identify how they feel, but the Window of Tolerance takes this a step further. It helps them understand how much emotional intensity they can manage before they become overwhelmed or shut down.

Language we can use:

- 'You're in your learning window,'
- 'It looks like your body isn't quite ready to learn yet.'



Personalised toolkit

FEEL IT use our senses to support regulation and modulation

MOVE IT tools integrate physical activity to impact regulation

THINK IT provide thought based strategies to help us regulate

DO IT task and goal orientated tools involve taking action

CONNECT encourage empathy, thinking of others and accessing relationships for support

What can I do to regulate?

Higher energy

Calm and connected

What can I do to regulate in each zone?

Blue Zone

Name:

Green Zone

Yellow Zone

Red Zone



A Whole-School Approach: The Zones of Regulation and Window of Tolerance

Witherslack Group's Three Waves Model

This holistic therapeutic support and intervention service provided by our multi-disciplinary teams can be mapped onto the **Witherslack Group's Three Waves Model**



Wave 1: Clinically Informed & Supported Specialist Living & Learning Environments

- Therapeutic Milieu
- Whole school/home developments and focus
- Curriculum adaptations and class initiatives
- Staff training
- Internal Team Around the Child meetings
- Generic parental advice and guidance

Wave 2: Targeted Clinically Led Therapeutic Intervention

- Clinically supervised keywork sessions
- Clinically developed and monitored targeted programmes
- Targeted small group work
- Targeted parental engagement
- Child/young person specific training sessions
- Child focus and reflective practice meetings

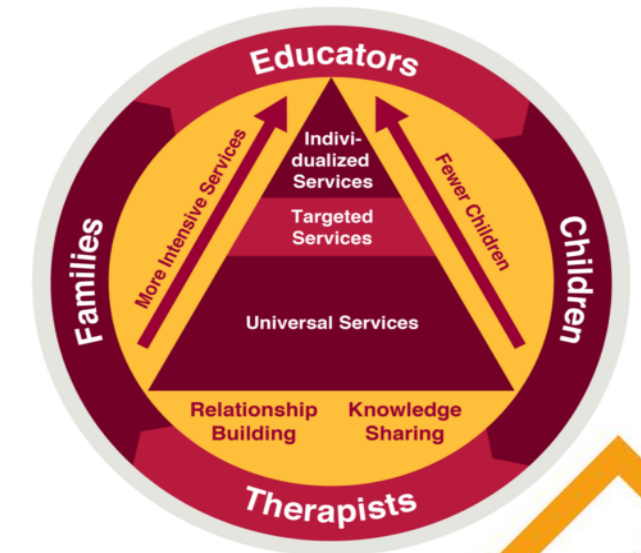
Wave 3: Direct Clinical Engagement

- Individual Therapy
- Group Therapy
- 1 to 1 Direct Interventions
- Targeted family work
- Targeted clinical assessment



PARTNERING FOR CHANGE: P4C

Building Capacity through Collaboration and Coaching in Context



© Missiuna, Pollock, Campbell, Levac and Whalen, *CanChild*, McMaster University, 2016

Our School's Journey...

**Sept 2024-
Rebrand
Zones**

**March 2025- Parent
workshop**

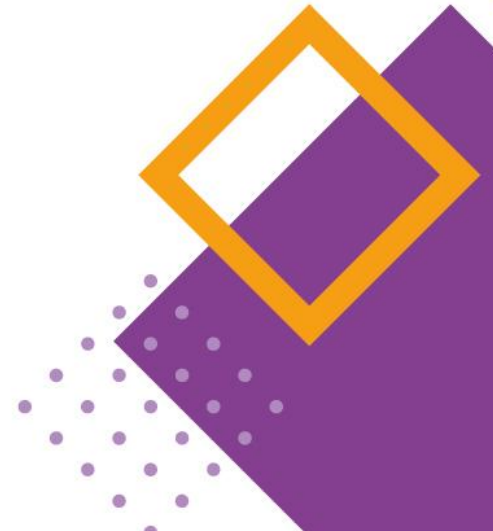
**Sept 25-
Training for whole
school on ZoR**



- **Timetabled**
- **Clinical working party formed**
- **Displays rolled out**
- **Weekly activities created**

**May 2025-
Wider Regulation
group formed with
education and
pastoral**

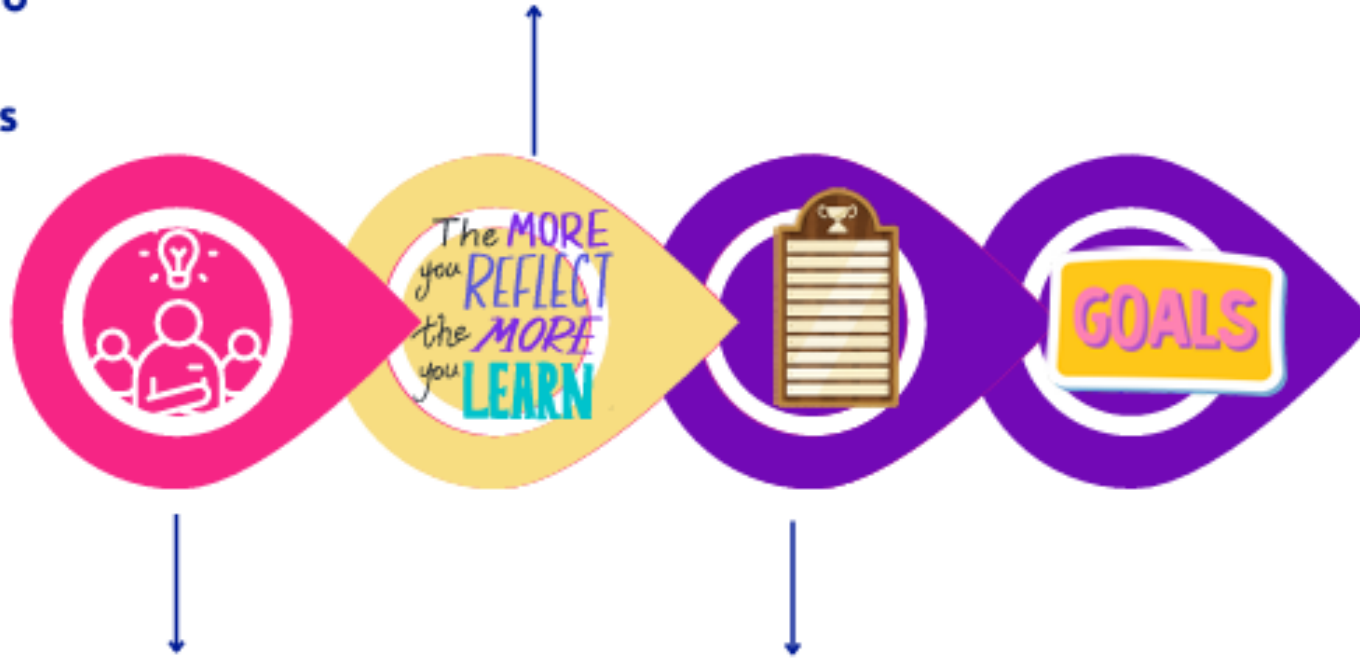
**Jan 26-
Further training
linking to
Polyvagal and WoT**



Our Journey Continued...

Sept 2026
SLT to drive forward.

Summer Term-
APRIL 2026
Roll out
Toolboxes



SLT to announce and hold expectations in place - that each child should have a toolbox

Regulation walks SLT & Regulation member
Regulation leader board?

- Staff using regulation language ZoR/WoT throughout the day
- Staff to be using this to reflect and to record work where appropriate

A Shared Language for Nervous System States

Felt Experience	Polyvagal State	Window of Tolerance	Zones of Regulation
Fight/flight, stress, anger	Sympathetic	Outside your Window of Tolerance	Yellow → Red Zone
Safe, calm, connected	Ventral Vagal	Within your Window of tolerance	Green Zone
Shutdown, low energy	Dorsal Vagal	Outside your Window of Tolerance	Blue Zone

Summary

- The Zones of Regulation framework helps support children to understand emotional regulation visually
- The Polyvagal Theory can help us recognise how the nervous system influences behaviour
- The Window of Tolerance can help support secondary students understand their emotions based on 'capacity'
- There are examples of simple, practical strategies to promote regulation and engagement in everyday classroom practice



