

Facts About Trauma & the Nervous System

...Part I



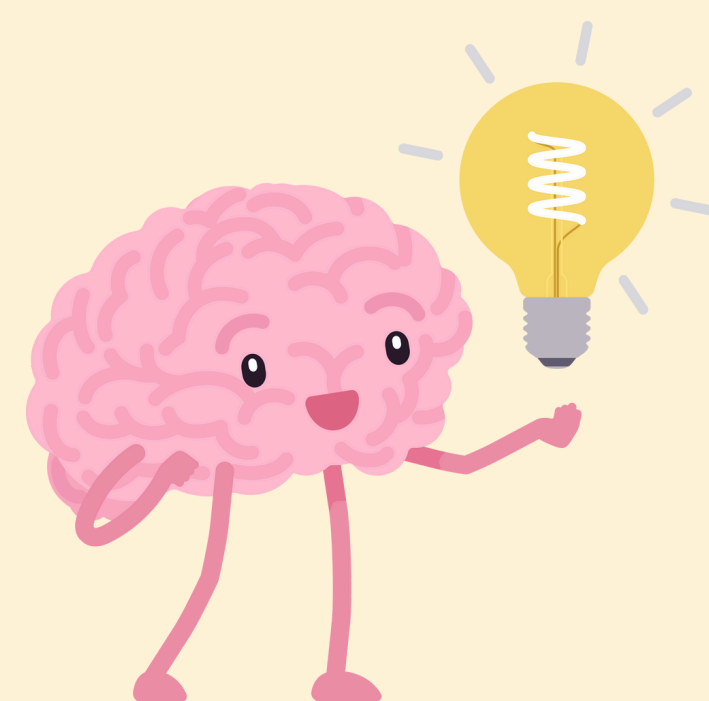
"Resilient strength is the opposite of helplessness. The tree is made strong and resilient by its grounded root system"
— Peter A. Levine, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*

1 Trauma and Survival

Trauma is stored in the survival and emotional areas of the brain—not the thinking area of the brain. That's why simply saying, "I'm safe now," or "you're safe now" doesn't always work. ***Your body still reacts as if the past threat is happening right now. It only needs a hint of the same theme or experience to sense threat.***

2 Survival Patterns

When we experience trauma, our body learns survival patterns —fight, flight, freeze, or fawn—to cope. These coping responses stay in the nervous system and continue playing out even when we're no longer in danger. ***Our experiences are about a perception of danger. When it perceives threat—real or not, imminent or not—we shift into our survival responses.***



3 Neuroception

Our autonomic nervous system is a self-protective system that comes with a threat detector called 'Neuroception'. Every millisecond of our lives, this threat detector looks inside and to the outside world to decide if we are safe, in danger, or in life-threatening danger. It decides safety based on our database that holds all of our lived experiences. Our database holds information about the days of our lives. We don't even have to remember or know they are there for them to pop up. ***Neuroception is not conscious. It lives in the part of our brain that is below conscious awareness; our subconscious.***

Let's talk brain some more...

Our nervous system operates from the subconscious part of the brain

🧠 Neocortex is the 'Thinking Brain'. This area develops last, allowing us to think, reason, and problem-solve

🧠 Limbic System is the 'Emotional Brain'. This area responds with emotion & feeling

🧠 Reptilian Brain is the 'Survival Brain'. This area responds with impulse & sensation

^neuroception lives in the brainstem

...and that database!

Your body holds onto patterns until it has a new experience of safety.

If you learned that anger was unsafe



You might shut down or avoid conflict or expressions of anger.

If you've been in chaotic environments



You might stay hyper-alert or react defensively, even in safe spaces.

If your body learned to dissociate



You might struggle to feel present even with good stuff like socialising, compliments, kindness etc.

If you learned being seen, noticed or supported was met with hostility, inconsistency or abuse



You might find care, nurture, warmth and validation overwhelming.



How we release stuck trauma

We need to show, not tell our nervous system what was once dangerous is now safe - we have to show it.

We do this by using regulating resources regularly, as well as co-regulating, which can be things like:

Noticing what is safe in the environment - warmth, nature, sounds
Engaging your senses - smells, feeling the breeze, listening to soft music
Spending time in nature
Playing with an animal
Movement
Humming or singing
Letting your body move in whatever way it wants
Breathing exercises
Talking with a friend

Healing isn't about getting rid of triggers—it's about growing our ability to handle emotions and sensations.

For many, emotion regulation has been taught as "calming down" or "controlling" how we feel.

True regulation isn't about pushing emotions away—it's about developing the capacity to stay with them.

This means, gently noticing and tolerating small doses of emotion rather than pushing them away, and using regulating resources to work through them.