

Stuck in Survival

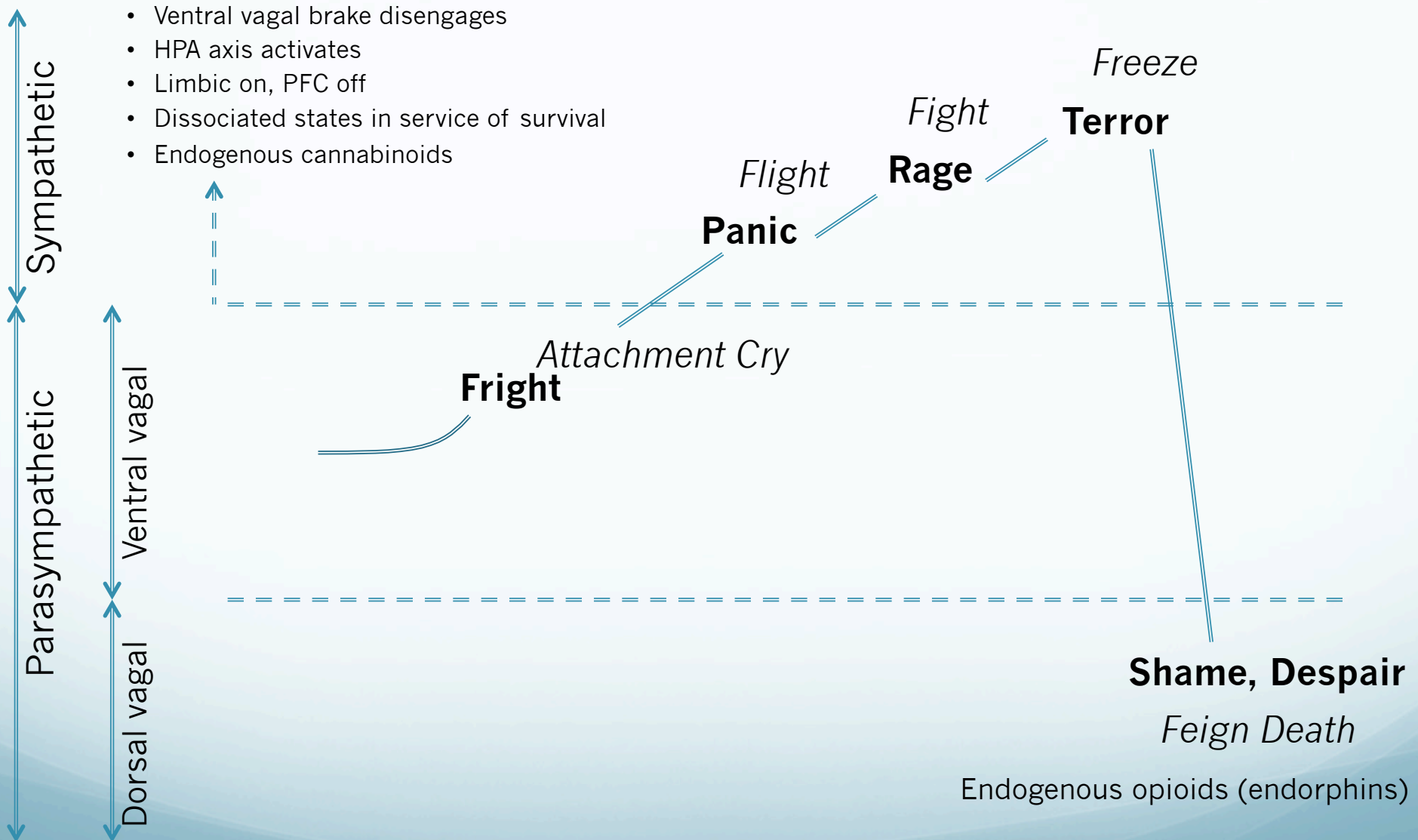
Somatic Experiments Towards Embodied Safeness

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Overview

- Inspiration:
 - Neuroception of Danger & Life Threat: Animal Survival Responses
 - Videos
 - Case presentation
- Educational tools:
 - Traumatic Stress and the Nervous System
 - Window of Arousal
- A gentle path forward:
 - Polyvagal Theory and Therapeutic Presence
- Skills:
 - Self-regulation tools

Neuroception of Danger & Life Threat: Animal Defenses



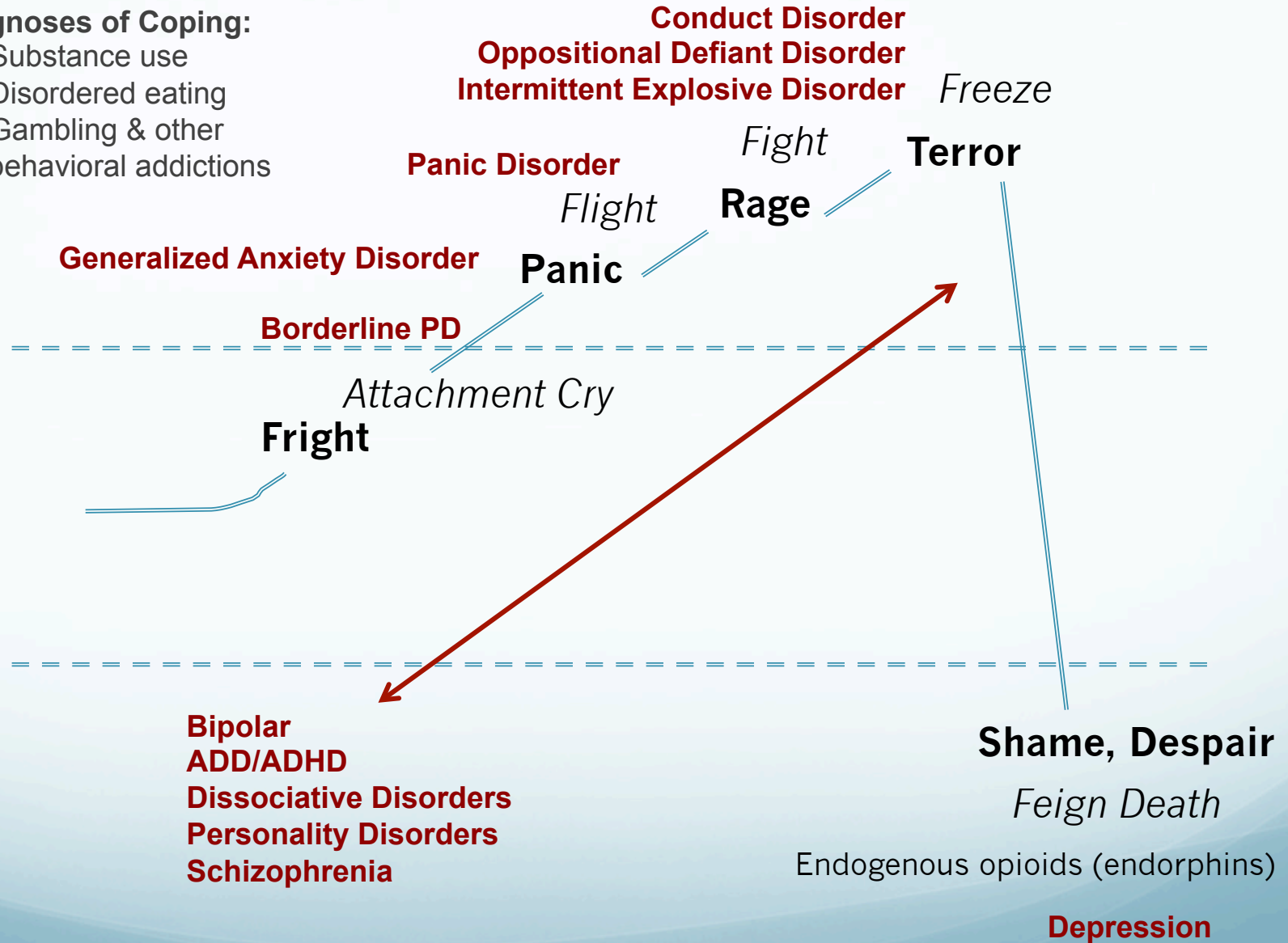
Playing Opossum: Inescapable Threat

**"Discharging"
survival activation**

Stuck in Survival: Possible DSM Diagnoses

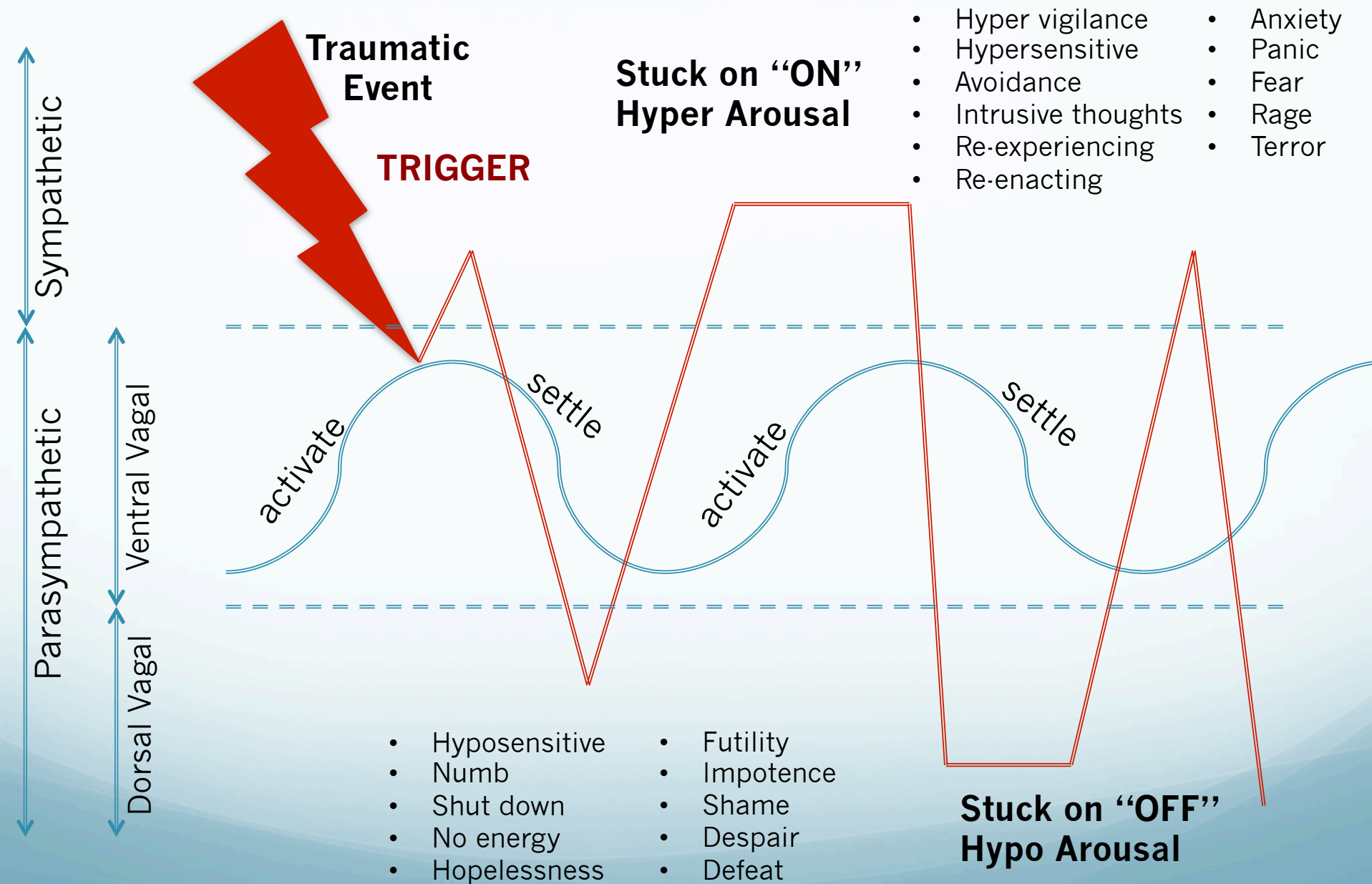
Diagnoses of Coping:

- Substance use
- Disordered eating
- Gambling & other behavioral addictions



Case presentation 1: Carolyn

Traumatic Stress & The Nervous System



Window of Arousal (Window of Tolerance)

Hyper Arousal (Fight-Flight-Freeze)

Hyper vigilance, hypersensitive, avoidance, intrusive thoughts, re-experiencing, re-enacting, anxiety, panic, fear, rage, terror

Survival

Fidgeting, anxiety, irritation, frustration, impatience, impulsivity, jumbled/looping thoughts, defensive, feeling attacked

Too much energy

Safety in connection in action

**Safe
Social
Engaged**

- Can think and feel simultaneously w/o overwhelm
- Capacity for self-reflection & perspective-taking
- Capacity for patience, empathy & compassion
- Capacity for connection to self and others
- Curiosity, wonder, imagination, awe

Safety in connection in stillness

Too little energy

Lights are on but no one's home, it's all too much....why bother...it'll be over soon...we're all going to die anyway

Hypo Arousal (Feign Death)

Hyposensitive, numb, shut down, no energy, hopelessness, futility, impotence, shame, despair, defeat

Survival

Polyvagal Theory & Therapeutic Presence

(Geller & Porges, 2014)

How Does Therapeutic Presence Promote Safety and Therapy Effectiveness?

Therapist Attunement to Self



Therapist Attunement to Client



Client feeling felt, calming, becoming present within (safety)



- Client feeling safe and open to engage in therapeutic work
 - Strengthening of therapeutic relationship
- Therapist responses and interventions attuned to the optimal moment for client to receive

Note: Repeated engagement and presence from therapist also exercises neural regulation of the muscles involved in the client's experience of safety in self and in relationship.

Somatic techniques for self-regulation

- Proximity, placement of self and furniture
- Grounding through the spine
- Breathing techniques:
 - Yogic three-part breathing
 - Brahmari (Kuppusamy, 2020)
 - Nadi shodana (Telles, Sharma, & Balkrishna, 2014)
 - 4-7-8 breathing (Dr Andrew Weil)
 - Box breathing 4-4-4 x 4 times
 - Long exhale 4-8
- Releasing with sound:
 - Humming (Weitzberg & Lundberg, 2002)
 - Singing (Olsson, von Schéele & Theorell, 2013)
- Eyes: passive & active tension release, orienting
- Jaw: chewing gum, tacky foods, hard crunchy foods
- Hands: fidget toys, stuffies, certain fabrics, crafting, adult thumb suckling

Somatic techniques for self-regulation

- Pressure: weighted blankets, sandbags, compression clothing
- Rhythmic movements
 - Rocking chair, swings, bouncy balls
- Vestibular system
 - Slowly lift alternate heel
- Bilateral movement
 - Arm scissoring
 - Cross body tapping
 - Cross body marching
 - Cross body reaching
- Pushing
 - Against a wall
 - Opposite hand into opposite thigh with counterforce
- Stretching and lengthening the side body
- Legs up the wall/on a chair/over a pillow

Sympathetic mobilization: Working with the Fright response

- Neck stiffens, tightening in the jaw, ears perk, eyes tighten, orient towards (fight), orient away (flight), show no response (immobilization response)
- Reach hands into the air + wave them around (releases the diaphragm)
- Fright breath in + any sound on the exhale
- Embodied sounding
- Pull on the ears in all directions while releasing the jaw
- Eye rolling (active stretch of ocular nerve) + orienting

Techniques for Co-regulation

- Self-holding + imagining
 - Hands
 - Thumbs
 - One hand on heart, one hand on belly
 - Hands on heart
 - Face
 - Head
 - One hand on face, one hand/arm on torso

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