

Parenting Neurodiverse Teens and Young Adults: Finding Peace and Patience Within the Chaos

Rick Silver, MD

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THRIVE EMERGE



Polyvagal Theory and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy: Seeking and Mastering Productive Discomfort

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THRIVE EMERGE



Thank You!!

-- to each parent -- for taking time out of a busy day to learn how to best support your wonderful child!

-- to my staff -- for their time, patience and expertise in making this training available!



SPEAKERS

Rick Silver, MD

Polyvagal Theory and Application

Kyle Richardson, LCSW

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

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MODERATOR

Arianna Rose

* Put your **questions** in the **chat**

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FORMAT

- Presentations – 1st part recorded
- Questions – put in chat
- Open discussion at end

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Opportunity!
15 min Free Consult

Get personalized help

re:

Speak with Kyle or Rick

https://forms.gle/TSmEg1cT89gPxxsNA

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UPCOMING PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS

High School and Beyond: Transitioning Your Neurodivergent Child to College, Gap Year or…?

March

April

Tennis Anyone?:

How to Connect Socially (Young Adults with ASD and Social Anxiety)

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OUR NEUODIVERGENT CHILDREN ARE A CHALLENGE TO RAISE

High functioning autism spectrum disorder/ Asperger's

ADHD/ Executive Dysfunction

Born with multiple “dysregulated” systems in the brain

Unable to process huge amounts of data needed to function in life

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THE *NEURODIVERGENT* BRAIN (ADHD/ ASD) IS THE *DYSREGULATED* BRAIN

- Sensory
- Physiologic
- Sleep
- Emotion
- Identity
- Impulse Control
- Attention – Poor Focus/ Distraction < > Rigidity/Hyperfocus

OUR NEUODIVERGENT CHILDREN ARE A CHALLENGE TO RAISE

The impact on the child

- Chronically elevated stress
- Develop threat-based rather than growth (safety)-based coping patterns
- Missed developmental opportunities

The impact on the family system

- Disruption, exhaustion, unpredictability
- The “chaos” of neurodysregulation > toll on family

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WHY ARE WE HERE TODAY?

- Neurodivergence/ neurodysregulation is hard – for the kids and the families
- We need a PRACTICE (siga siga) to build, bit by bit, over time, a brain that is better able to modulate itself -- and so approach life with a growth mindset and resilience
- Both Polyvagal Theory and Dialectical Behavior Therapy provide excellent tools for our practice of good mental health.

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WHY ARE WE HERE TODAY?

- Remember: there are no quick answers to these complex problems and or to the distress of life.
- We find our way in this long journey through the diligent practice over many years of mental, physical and spiritual health approaches

THRIVE EMERGE

GROWTH VS THREAT MINDSET

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH A LIFE CHALLENGE?

GROWTH MINDSET (ROOTED IN SAFETY)

- Solution-focused perspective
- Curious/ Think outside the box
- Flexible
- Cooperative
- Calm
- Problem solving rooted balancing heart and mind > effective solution
- Sense of growth, learning, skill development, fulfillment, satisfaction, development of identity/ self

THRIVE EMERGE

GROWTH VS THREAT MINDSET

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH A LIFE CHALLENGE?

THREAT MINDSET

- Problem- or complaint-focused perspective
- Stuck in the old way of perceiving the situation
- Rigid thinking
- Defensive/ threatened
- Angry, hurt, overwhelmed
- Problem may not be solved
- Feel thwarted -- sense of frustration, hopelessness, helplessness, discouragement = loss of chance to develop a deeper, stronger self

THRIVE EMERGE

WHO	DX	TRAUMA	PSYCHOLOGICAL QUALITY	TRIGGER/ THREAT	SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM RESPONSE	DORSAL VAGAL RESPONSE
Young woman, 1st semester at college	ASD	Small t	Emotional rigidity	Dealing with social, school, independent living demands	Overwhelm	Drop out, move home
High School student	ADHD	Emotionally controlling parent	Self-critical/ anxious	Repeated criticism from parent	Fear	Give in/ collapse/ retreat
Young man	ASD	Emotional abuse/ Big T	Depressed	"I'm not being listened to."	Anger/ hurt	Suicidal, isolation
Older man	ADHD	Small t	Emotional over-reactivity	Fight with daughter	Shame, anger, loneliness	Fled social situation

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COMMON ELEMENTS

- Innate dysregulation from neurodivergent brain – ASD, ADHD, sensory sensitivities, emotional dysregulation
- Overlay of childhood trauma > decreased ability to self-regulate
- Excessive emotional reactions based on perceived high level of threat
- Unable to modulate these reactions
- Coping by fight, flight, shutdown

- RESULT: inability to create productive outcomes from distress

THRIVE EMERGE



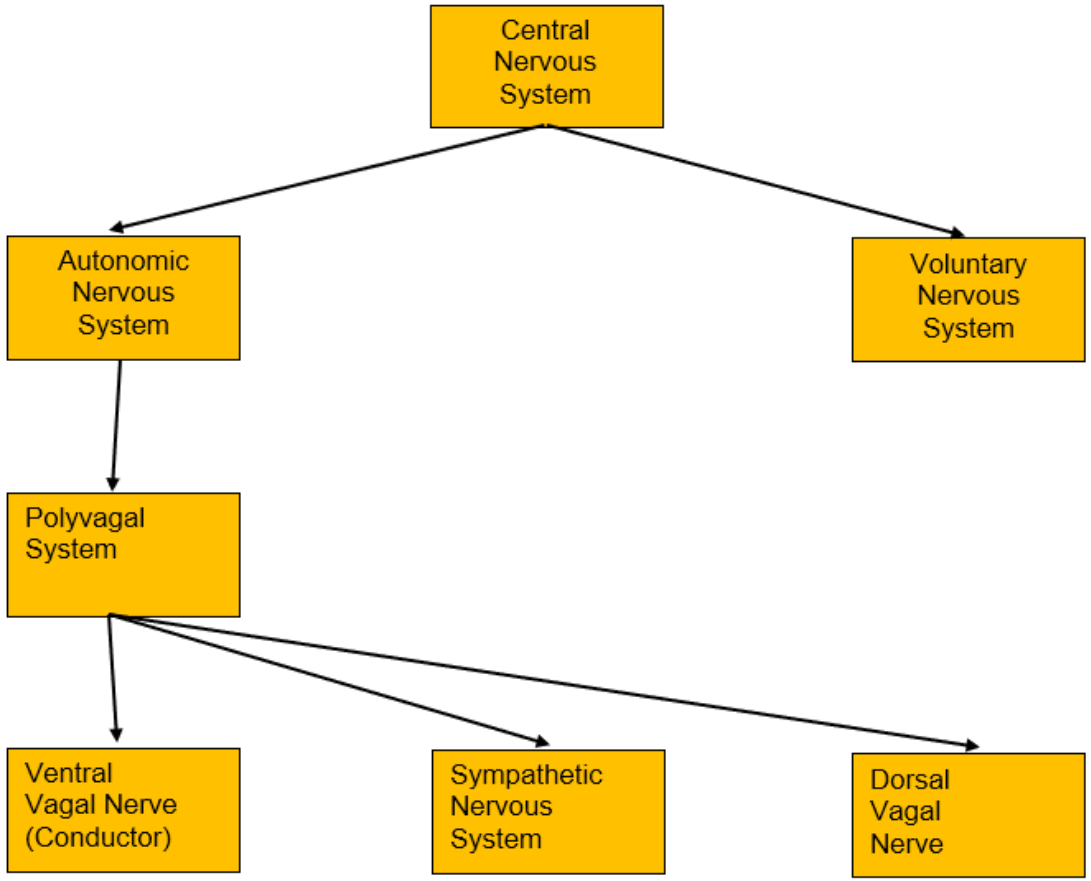
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GROWTH MINDSET = RESILIENCE

"The ability to respond to and recover
from the challenges of daily living …
depends on the actions of
the autonomic nervous system."

Deb Dana
Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection
https://www.rhythmofregulation.com/

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THREE POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO LIFE'S DEMANDS AS SEEN FROM AN AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

- Ventral Vagal Nerve
  - Creates "growth mindset" – calm, curious, compassionate, connected with others
  - Activates the Social Engagement system/ Co-regulation
  - Acts as the Polyvagal Conductor: balances the threat and growth/ safety responses

- Sympathetic Nervous System – mobilization/ activation
  - Meet the threat or demand head on
  - If TOO activated: fear, panic, overwhelm

- Dorsal Vagal – shut down, immobilize, hopeless, suicidal

HOW DO OUR BRAINS KNOW WHAT TO DO?

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NEUROCEPTION – “THE INNER EYE”

- Vigilantly scans external environment, social environment, internal environment
- Decides: Is a particular stimulus a friend or foe? Safety vs threat?
- Triggers the appropriate response – ventral vagal, sympathetic nervous system, dorsal vagal?

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NEUROCEPTION – "THE INNER EYE"

IN OUR NEURODYSREGULATED KIDS

The most typical patterned responses are threat,

not growth, responses – SNS, dorsal vagal

BY YOUNG ADULTHOOD

A sufficient number and types of growth opportunities

(social, identity, emotional, academic)

have been hijacked by threat responses

that our kids lack the requisite resilience and life skills

to successfully negotiate the demands of independent adulthood.

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THIS IS THE CRUX OF STRUGGLING TO LAUNCH

- Our kids are not lazy
- They are not trying to disappoint us or shame us
- They are not deserving of criticism as the primary motivational tool

- Development has been hijacked by neurodysregulation
- They are not happy with their lots in life
- They want to be able to do everything that everyone else – the neurotypical world – does
- They are good kids who deserve a shot at a good life

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HOW DO WE MODIFY

THE POYVAGAL SYSTEM

TO MORE CONSISTENTLY RESPOND TO LIFE

WITH A GROWTH MINDSET?



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TO MODIFY THE POLYVAGAL SYSTEM

We engage in activities that:

- Root us in safety (we learn healthy habits only when safe)
- Bring neuroception to a more conscious level
- Allow us to practice vagal awareness and anchoring
- Create Productive Discomfort: stretch into new experiences
  - “ouch” becomes “ohhhh” becomes “ahhhhhh”

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BY DOING THIS, WE ARE LITERALLY PHYSICALLY RESTRUCTURING THE BRAIN – GROWTH “MIND” SET = GROWTH “BRAIN” SET



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PATIENT STORY

- HS student
- ASD, social anxiety, extreme visual and tactile sensory sensitives
- Need to please others, worried about disappointing parents
- Trigger: people feel and look too close at school
- Sympathetic Nervous System response: panic attack
- Dorsal Vagal response: hopelessness, suicidal, complete emotional withdrawal,

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THRIVE EMERGE

CO-REGULATION = CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

- Directed by the ventral vagal nerve through the Social Engagement System
- In a social encounter: data from the other person's voice tone, words, head tilt, facial expressions are picked up by our neuroception
- If deemed "safe", ventral vagal tone increases >
  - We feel calm
  - Our brains are trained to be a just a bit more self-regulating
- THINK: BABE IN ARMS

THRIVE EMERGE

CO-REGULATION = CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

"A reliable, regulating other …

Creates a shared sense of **safety**…

And a rhythm of reciprocity …

That builds the ability to self-regulate."

-- Deb Dana

- THINK: BABE IN ARMS

THRIVE EMERGE

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ROOT OURSELVES IN SAFETY

CONNECT > CO-REGULATE

1. Set up safe place
2. Convey a sense of holding your child emotionally
   - tone of voice -- gentle
   - non-judgmental
   - curious
   - open
   - supportive
   - facial expressions reflect this

THRIVE EMERGE

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BRING NEUROCEPTION TO A MORE CONSCIOUS LEVEL

1. Describe the threat (sympathetic/ dorsal vagal) responses:
   - How do you feel? What did you do?
   - Panic, body contorted, short of breath > spiral into hopeless feeling > negative self-talk began: worthless > suicidal > I left, didn't talk, let it build up > felt suicidal
2. "Walk back" to triggering situation: When did the response start?
3. Name neuroceptive reactions:
   - What was your Inner Eye telling you?
   - That I felt really threatened and unsafe
4. Rate level of threat – 0-10

THRIVE EMERGE

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PRACTICE VAGAL AWARENESS AND ANCHORING

1. What did you do to feel better in the moment (glimmers)?
   - Breathing, went to VP office but he wasn't there; at home – read book, took a hot shower, took rescue meds
2. Reinforce/ co-regulate – train the brain – "You tried to do some really good things to help yourself!" – tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions
3. Anchor the ventral vagal experience: what did you feel when you did these things?
   - Calmer for a little, got away from intrusive thoughts a little, breathing slower
4. Ventral vagal scale: 1-10 – how did you feel after you did these things?

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PRACTICE VAGAL AWARENESS AND ANCHORING

1. Visualize the situation in the future > imagine the following
   - Try breathing, distancing, sensory calming (fidget), go outside
   - Change self-talk: message rooted in resilience: I can do this, I've gotten through before, I can ask for help if it gets really bad
   - Seek co-regulation – VP, call/ text tx team, crisis text thread
2. Seek glimmers of ventral vagal – what calms you?
3. Practice activities that connect you to ventral vagal
   1. Music, mvmt, breath, outdoor space, meditation, prayer
   2. Connect with others who feel safe

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PRACTICE VAGAL AWARENESS AND ANCHORING

5. Sensory techniques – heavy blanket, heavy keys on chest, fidgets
6. Practice curiosity about self – “I wonder what this feeling is? What made me feel this way?”
7. Practice compassion, gratefulness
8. Practice curiosity about others
9. Do a crisis “walk through” – compare your programmed threat response to an imagined/ practiced response anchored in ventral vagal – how were they different? How did they serve you?

THRIVE EMERGE

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THE VALUE OF PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT

- Life is fluid – full of the unknown, the unpredictable
- Unknown produces distress (sympathetic nervous system)
- Distress leads to avoidance and numbing
- Chronic anchoring in the SNS > unable to be in restoration growth, unable to problem solve, unable to feel calm, unable to let go, unable to use our deepest innate wisdom to survive and thrive

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THE VALUE OF PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT

- KEY: develop the tools that allow us to manage discomfort so that it is a pond, not an ocean
- From that place, we can ally with it and make it a state of productive discomfort: a tolerable emotional charge that motivates, allows us to be creative and to seek new solutions

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FROM “OUCH” TO “OHH”

A GOOD STRETCH IS A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE

AND LEADS TO **PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT**

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FROM “OUCH” TO “OHH”: A GOOD STRETCH IS A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE

- Life challenge > distress
- At the “ouch point”: sympathetic activation
- Modulate distress through ventral vagal anchoring > milder discomfort
- “Ouch” becomes “ohhh”: curious, open, observant
- Our case: Stretch: What if you sat in your chair for an extra 30 seconds and did breathing?

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Good self-regulation

and co-regulation

encourages the shift to

a state of productive discomfort

in which learning can take place

Key: pacing: finding the balance between push and relax

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CHANGE?

- Learning new behaviors = modifying/ reshaping brain structures
- Reorganizing the brain is an incremental process
- "Incremental change leads to transformational change" – Deb Dana

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WHAT DOES INCREMENTAL CHANGE LOOK LIKE?

- “Glimmers”
- “Small, fleeting moments of ventral vagal regulation accumulate and compound over time leading to increased autonomic flexibility.”
- “The micro-moments…build the foundation for…psychological well-being.”

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Opportunity!
15 min Free Consult

Get personalized help

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THANK YOU.