


The Body's Expression of Safety in a Global Pandemic: Dancing the Language of the Nervous System

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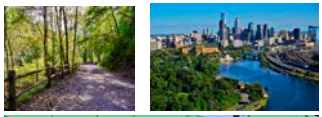
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Christina Devereaux
(she/her/hers)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA



Land Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that the land on which I present this webinar are the ancestral lands of the Lenni Lenape people, whose presence and resilience in Pennsylvania continues to this day. I take this opportunity to honor the original caretakers of this land and recognize the histories of land theft, violence, erasure, and oppression that has brought the institution which I am affiliated and myself here.




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In one or two words, what has been the hardest part about being in this pandemic?

To answer, go to <https://www.menti.com/>
Enter Code: 18 25 61

3



This pandemic is hard....

for *all* of us


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Objectives


1. Neurophysiology of safety
2. Influences of experiences like COVID-19 on children
3. Understand the emotional communication through the body
4. Discuss practical dance and movement experiences to explore with children.

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Pre-traumatic Conditions



PHYSICAL SAFETY

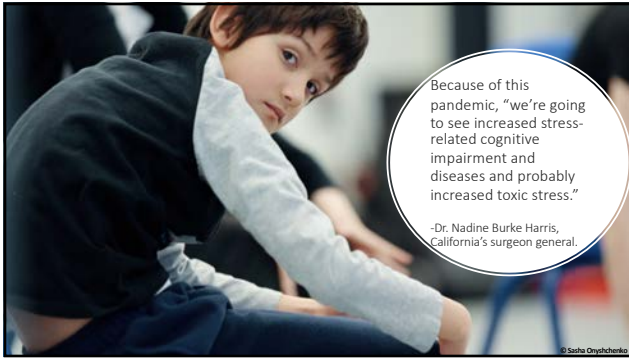


ECONOMY

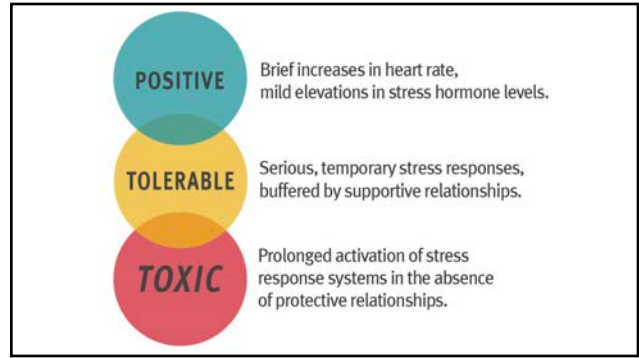


PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL

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Watch for behavior changes in your child:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting).
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.
- Irritability and "acting out" behaviors in teens.
- Poor school performance or avoiding school.
- Difficulty with attention and concentration.
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.
- Unexplained headaches or body pain.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

(Center for Disease Control, 2020)

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When children are out of school they are:

- physically less active,
- have longer screen time,
- irregular sleep patterns,
- less favorable diets, resulting in weight gain and a loss of cardiorespiratory fitness.

These effects are likely to be much worse when children are confined to their homes without outdoor activities and interaction with friends during the outbreak.

(Brooks, Webster, & Smith, 2019; Wang, Zhang, Lam, et al., 2020)

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Why is pandemic so psychologically stressful?

- Loss of connection
- Lack of predictability
- Loss of sense of time and sequences
- Loss of safety
- Immobility
- Numbing/spacing out

(van der Kolk, 2020)

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Take Away #1:
 Since it affects the body,
 we need to *engage* the
 body

"You cannot effectively
 mediate trauma unless the
 body is involved"




— (Bessel van der Kolk, 2005)

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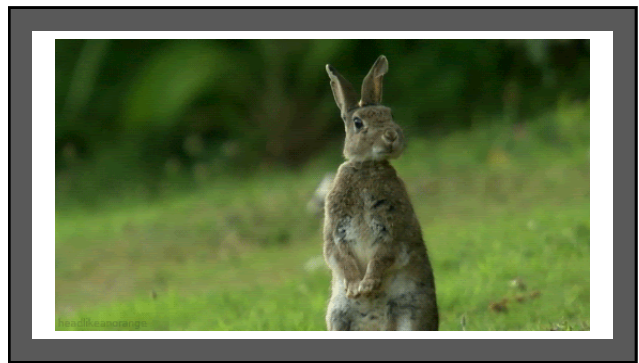
What information are you getting *from the environment* or *within your body* that is telling you whether this is a safe place to be (or not)?

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Safety is a
 Visceral
 Experience

-  It is felt in our hearts
-  Held in our lungs as we breathe
-  Connected experience
-  Lies in the familiar tone of voice of those who love us
-  Found in their gaze and hand gestures
-  Associated with autonomic homeostasis

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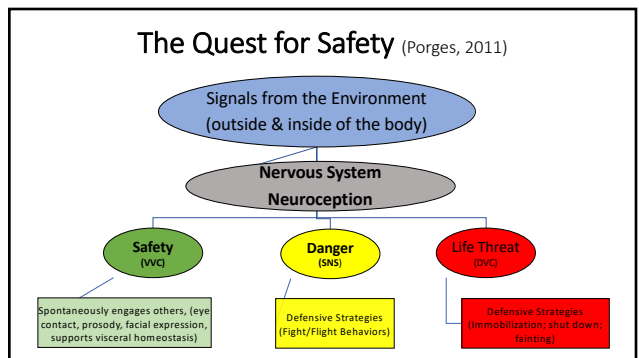
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Neuroception

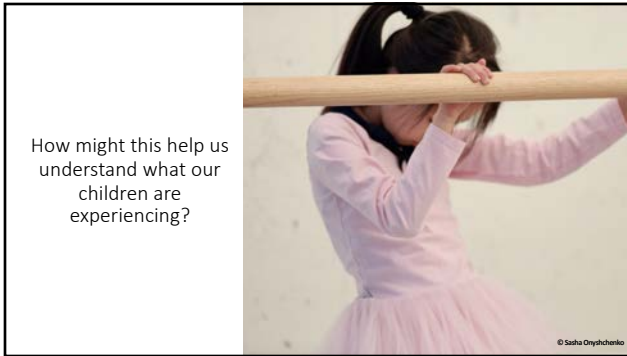


The nervous system's
 evaluation of safety and danger.

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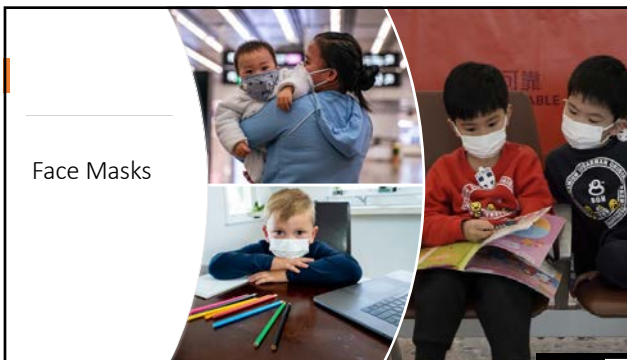
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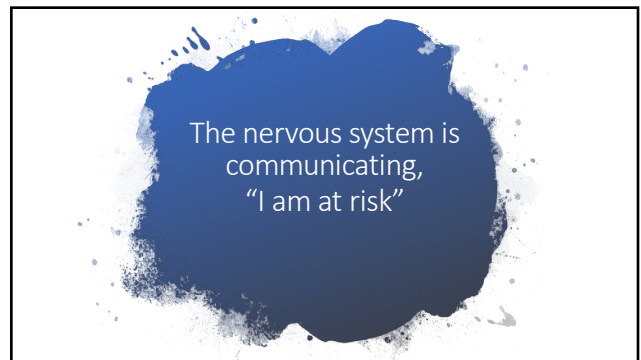
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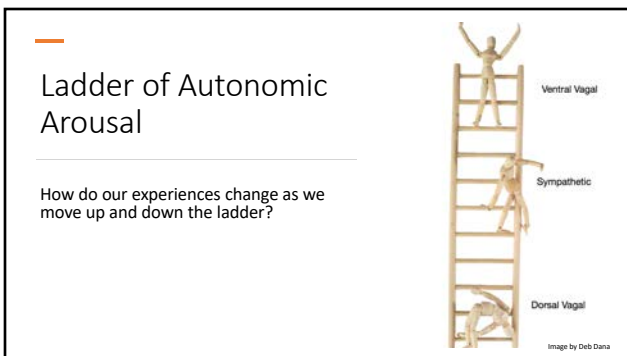
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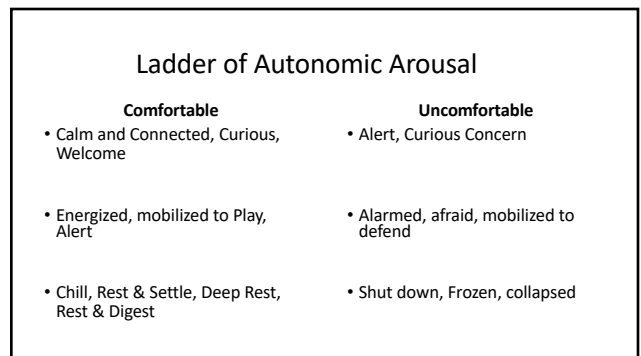
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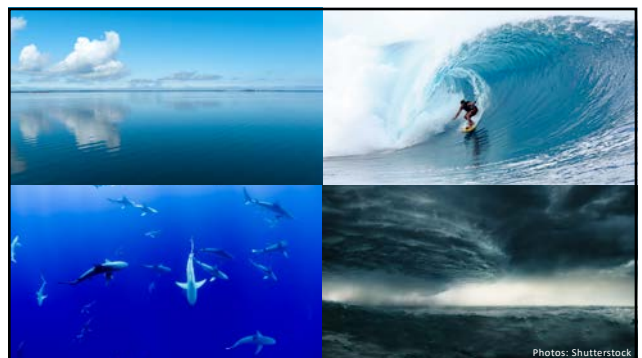


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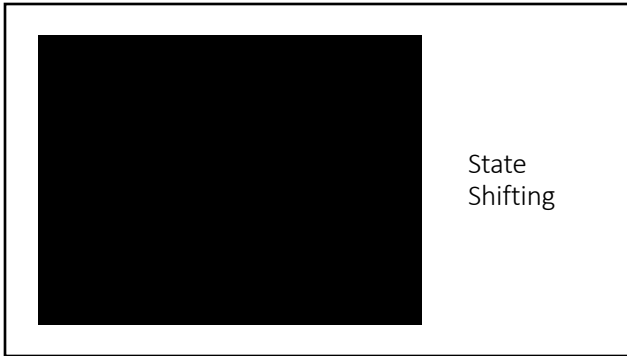
The Ladder of Autonomic Arousal

Comfortable	Uncomfortable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm and Connected, Curious, Welcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert, Curious Concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energized, mobilized to Play, Alert 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alarmed, afraid, mobilized to defend
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chill, Rest & Settle, Deep Rest, Rest & Digest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shut down, Frozen, collapsed

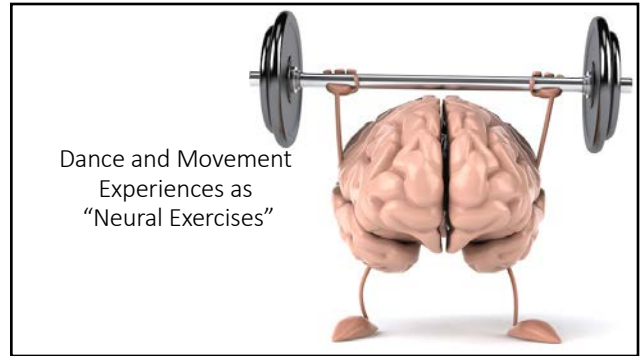
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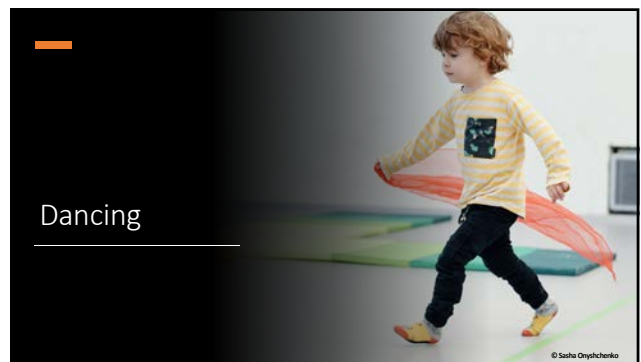
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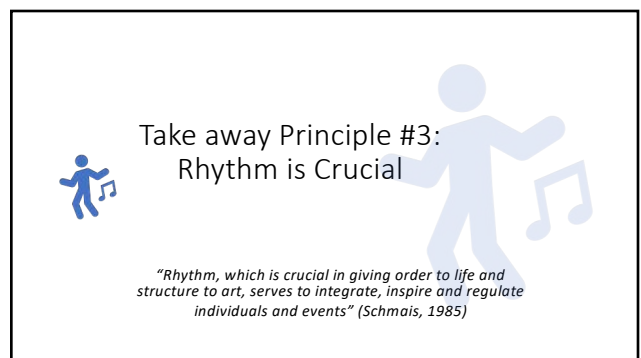
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Rhythm and the Body


- The circulatory system and other major bodily functions, including brain waves, and muscle action, can be characterized by rhythm.
- Some anthropologists believe that primitive (in the sense of first) dance was an external response to internal rhythms (Hanna, 1970).



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Lack of Predictability


- Create a schedule
- Make plans
- Calendar of connections and activities



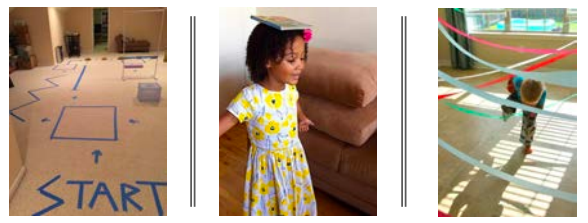
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Lack of Predictability needs Rhythm

“The body so inherently needs movement and rhythm that when it is denied, we may pace like a tiger in a cage.”
(Carter, 2017)



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Indoor Obstacle Courses


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Take Away Principle #3: Body Connectivity/ Body Awareness



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“As a therapeutic tool, simple body awareness makes it possible to gauge, slow down, and halt traumatic hyperarousal and separate past and present” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 101).



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Breathing

- Blowing bubbles
- Playing a wind instrument
- Singing
- Chanting

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Hot Chocolate Meditation
(or some other yummy warm drink)

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Face-to-Face Social Interactions

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Zoom Fatigue

Video chats mean we need to work harder to process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, and body language.

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The importance of building a fort

Forts can help kids regulate their bodies and emotions. Being in an enclosed, dark space with buffered sound and tactile sensations can be especially therapeutic for children with . . . anxiety.

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Why kids love building forts – and why experts say they might need them more than ever

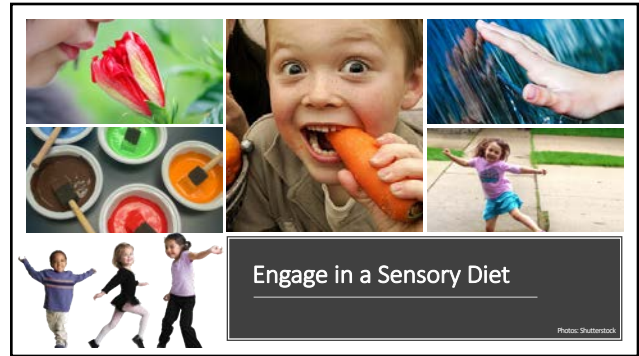
“Metaphorically and physically, building forts reflects children’s growth as individuals. . . they create a ‘home away from home,’ free from parental control. Forts also foster creativity.”
—David Sobel, Antioch University

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“Forts help children reset their stressed bodies and brains. The darkness inside a fort eliminates the stimulus they *do not* need and intensifies what they *do* need — such as physical comfort and solitude.”

- Carol Stock Kranowitz, Author of *The Out-of-Sync-Child*

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A Day-in-the-Life of a Sensory Diet

- Morning:** Wake up to music (hearing)
- Afternoon:** Pick fresh flowers with a walk with nature (visual, smell, tactile)
- Evening:** Light a scented candle (smell); build a fort (tactile)
- Bedtime:** Nighttime story (visual), audiobook/music (hearing)

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Navigating Psychological Stressors

Stressor	Movement Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of predictability - Loss of Safety - Loss of Sense of Time and Sequences - Immobility - Numbing/Spacing Out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythm • State shifting, social engagement • Rhythm • State Shifting/Body Connectivity/Social Engagement • body connectivity

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- ### Supporting Bodily Safety in a Global Pandemic
1. Since it affects the body, we need to *engage* the body
 2. State Shifting
 3. Rhythm is Crucial
 4. Body connectivity/Body Awareness

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