



Beacon House

Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team

The Polyvagal Theory

Stephen Porges' innovative research into the autonomic nervous system has shown us how we have evolved to cope with threat. His Polyvagal Theory shows us that when faced with threat or danger, we first turn to our social engagement system to re-establish safety (we turn to trusted others). If that does not bring us into safety or if the danger is severe and immediate, we turn to our fight/flight response. If that does not bring us safety then our mind and body move into collapse and shut down.

People who experience social engagement as repeatedly unsuccessful at keeping them safe become 'hardwired' to move straight into fight/flight or collapse.

