

Polyvagal Ladder

POLYVAGAL LADDER

Ventral vagal state (social engagement) This is the optimal state for social interaction and connection. In this state, the body feels safe, and the individual can engage with others, communicate effectively, and experience positive emotions. The ventral vagal system promotes calmness and social behavior.

Sympathetic state (fight or flight) When faced with perceived danger, the body shifts to the sympathetic state, activating the fight-or-flight response. This state is characterized by increased heart rate, heightened alertness, and readiness to respond to threats. While it can be adaptive in emergencies, prolonged sympathetic activation can lead to stress and anxiety.

Dorsal vagal state (shutdown) In extreme stress or when feeling overwhelmed, the body may enter the dorsal vagal state, leading to a shutdown response. This state is associated with feelings of numbness, dissociation, and a lack of energy. It is a protective mechanism that can occur in response to trauma or overwhelming situations.